

ETHNOGRAPHY, THEORY, EXPERIMENT

# Going to Pentecost

*An Experimental Approach to  
Studies in Pentecostalism*



Annelin Eriksen, Ruy Llera Blanes  
and Michelle MacCarthy



## **GOING TO PENTECOST**

## **Ethnography, Theory, Experiment**

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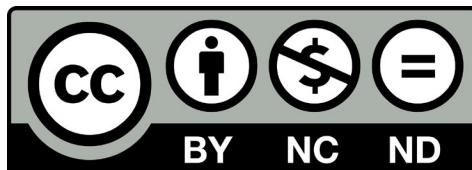
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**Part I**



# **Introductions**



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# Introduction

## Going to 'Pentecost'

### ■ Outline of an Experiment

This book is a comparative study of Pentecostalism in Africa and Melanesia, focusing on the key issues of healing, economy and urban sociality. However, this is not an ordinary comparative book. Rather, this is an experimental approach to the study of global religious movements in general and Pentecostalism in particular.

Why do we need a new approach to religion? Because religion is no longer what it used to be. In his recent book *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*, Olivier Roy (2014) argues that an understanding of the role of religion in the contemporary world must start with the recognition of the fundamentally transformed *form* of religion we are witnessing. Religion is no longer a matter of culture, of place, of territory. Religion no longer adapts to specific situations, to particular faith communities. Religion no longer takes the form of definitive, cultural versions. Religion is non-territorial. One of Roy's examples is Hindu communities in the West that abandon caste systems; Hinduism becomes non-territorial and disconnected from local places, histories, cultures etc.

In this book we argue that as anthropologists seeking to understand contemporary religious forms, we need to accept the methodological and theoretical consequence of this transformation. Oliver Roy's analysis is made with very broad brush strokes and with no eye for variation. Not all contemporary (global) religious forms are necessarily de-cultural. Furthermore, religions can be non-territorial to a certain degree, and not necessarily in an absolute sense. In this book, however, we will exploit

the analytical insight of this perhaps too general analysis to push our anthropological methodologies with an experiment. Thus, we do not discuss so much the degree to which Roy's analysis is correct, or 'true'. Rather, we ask: let us say that Roy is right, what would this then imply for anthropological methodologies? We claim that this implies a need to study religion, especially the forms that are growing most extensively, in new ways. To understand the new forms of religion we need a non-territorial methodology. This book is an effort at developing such a non-territorial methodology for the discipline of anthropology – the discipline of place-oriented methodologies *par excellence*. We thus take from Roy (2014) the impetus to rethink the relation between the local and the global, the territorial and the non-territorial.

How do we study Pentecostalism then? Since it is a global movement, do we need to understand what Pentecostalism is before we can understand how it operates in a local context? When we write about Pentecostalism in Port Vila, Vanuatu, or in the Trobriand Islands (two of the places we visit in this book), should it be a study of Melanesia, where an increasing number of Pentecostals are part of the context, or a study of Pentecostals that emphasizes the context of Melanesia? Equally, in Africa, when we study the locally originated Tokoist movement or the UCKG (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God) in Luanda, Angola (the third place we visit in this book), should the former be understood as a local prophetic movement (see Blanes 2014) and the latter as a global, neo-Pentecostal movement? The first territorial and the second non-territorial? The first local and the second global? A lot of the anthropology of Pentecostalism has focused on the scaling between the local and the global (Anderson et al. 2010; Coleman 2000; Coleman and Hackett 2015; Csordas 2007, 2015; Poewe 1994; Robbins and Engelke 2010). This literature has in many ways transcended the tradition of studying Christianity as local phenomena, establishing a space for critique in which one can understand what global culture is and how we can approach it. These studies have also to a certain extent pioneered transnational studies, at least within the anthropology of religion (but see Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996; T.H. Eriksen 2003).

Much of this literature is based on an idea that some religious forms are globally driven whereas others are locally driven. Pentecostalism is often connected to specific forms of organization, to specific ways of understanding denominationalism (see also Bialecki 2014) that are considered to be generated more from the global level than from the local or at least that one can pinpoint aspects that are more global and aspects that are more local. Of course, Pentecostal movements are usually



understood as both (local and global): they can never be anything but locally driven, in the sense that the movement consists of people in local communities who engage in a shared religious experience. They are global as well, of course, in the sense that people read, engage and reflect on phenomena originating outside their own locality and follow discourses, ideas, images and values that travel globally. In this book we want to understand the local in a different way, and not as opposed to the global. When the local becomes the opposite of the global, it often becomes a matter of history, genealogy and cultural continuity. We want to understand the local that does not rely on an understanding of cultural continuity. Therefore, we suggest structuring our analysis on the distinction between the territorial and non-territorial. By non-territorial here, we imply movements that are local (in the sense explained above: operated by people who engage together in a given locality) but do not require roots in local histories, and often related to problems and issues that originate elsewhere. As we will show in the next chapters of this book, the ideas, concepts, discourses and practices that define these religious movements work equally well in Angola, in Vanuatu and in Papua New Guinea. In other words, we focus on religious movements that are local and non-territorial.

We will suggest one specific way in which we can approach non-territorial religion in anthropology while retaining the basic anthropological method of place-based fieldwork. This does not mean studying Pentecostalism by simply going anywhere a Pentecostal church is located. One cannot go, for instance, to Melanesia to study Pentecostalism. The claim that this form of religion is local and non-territorial does not imply that one (as an anthropologist) can access it equally well in whichever locality one visits. Rather, we need to take the non-territorial aspect as literally as possible and thus rethink the meaning of the local. When we visit a place to study Pentecostalism, we need to make sure that we are accessing the same place as our interlocutors (the Pentecostals), remembering that although practices are local, Pentecostalism is non-territorial. Our impetus is perhaps almost automatically to connect the local to the territorial. A ritual of initiation in Port Vila, for instance, might automatically be related to traditions of initiation in Vanuatu or Melanesia. The territorial becomes primary when we understand the local. We therefore suggest here an approach that 'forces' us to think differently. Our experiment implies that we can still go to Melanesia, or to Africa, but we need to think of this place differently if we are to study Pentecostalism. We need to think of the place itself in a non-territorial sense. This might seem self-contradictory (going to Melanesia but not going to Melanesia), but the main aim in this chapter is to argue exactly this.

With the approach we will suggest here, we want to achieve three objectives. Firstly, to get beyond what we can call a regional, contextual methodology or a territorial methodology (which automatically connects local with territorial), so as to gain an anthropological understanding of religion in a non-territorial sense. Secondly, to study a religious movement in a holistic way. Thirdly, to rethink anthropological ways of making connections between contexts – i.e. doing comparisons. We will explain these one at a time.

## **Challenging the Territorial Methodology**

The common, general definition of Pentecostalism is the recognition and immediate experience of the Holy Spirit (Robbins 2004; Yong 2005). On the one hand, we have no problem identifying the kinds of Christian movements we can tag as Pentecostal, and often key identifying markers such as ‘prosperity gospel’, global awareness (Meyer 2002, 2004), breaking with the past and new ‘born again’ identities (Engelke 2010; Meyer 1998) point to important common traits. However, sometimes ‘Holy Spirit movements’ also seem to include aspects that are far more local. Here, Pentecostal ideas about breaking with the past, healing in the spirit etc. are developed in relation to local independence movements, for instance. The Tokoist movement in Angola (Blanes 2014) and the Kimbanguist movement in the DR Congo (Sarró and Santos 2011) are examples of the latter and are commonly referred to as Prophetic movements (Blanes 2012) or African Independent Churches (Fernandez 1978). These movements might be equally concerned with the presence of the Holy Spirit but in slightly (or significantly) different ways (see Blanes 2014; Eriksen 2009; Kalu 2008; Maxwell 2006; Meyer 2004). To a lesser degree they are identified as Pentecostal and to a larger degree as part of a territorial religious scene. In this book we will not focus on the differentiations of Pentecostal forms, or arguments about their origins and genealogies. Rather, in an effort to understand the methodological consequence of our ambition to analytically access the non-territorial dimension of religion, we will operate with what one might call a ‘minimum definition’ of Pentecostalism – that is, the direct experience of the Holy Spirit<sup>1</sup> (Yong 2005). The purpose is to avoid a discussion of where the specific forms of Pentecostalism emerge from, whether they are ‘local’ or ‘global’, Pentecostal or non-Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal or Prophetic etc. – and thus avoid what Fardon (1990) has described as the anthropologist’s ‘localizing strategies’, which we might also call ‘territorializing strategies’.

Let us try to make this point clearer. Usually, in anthropology, we understand Pentecostalism from the background of a local or regional context; a territorial context. This can imply both an historical and a cultural dimension. We tend to look for historical and cultural continuities when we understand Christianity in general and the Pentecostal movements in particular, perhaps more so in Melanesia (Eriksen 2005, 2008; Mosko 2010) than elsewhere. This is part of what we call a territorial methodology. In Melanesia, for instance, new religious movements are often compared to early cargo cults or to other ritual cults formerly known in the area (see, for instance, Eriksen 2009). Part of this is tied to what Robbins (2007) has identified as ‘continuity thinking’, which describes how we as analysts are unwilling to recognize cultural breaks because we tend to look at cultural and historical continuities. We claim that it is also related to the question: what is context? In anthropology, we argue, it is common to privilege the idea of a specific, territorial frame. This, we suggest, is foundational for anthropology as a discipline because of its methodology of fieldwork. We go *somewhere*. It is exactly this place we can experience, and this becomes the contextual frame for any analysis, whether of Pentecostalism or anything else. However, this is only partially true. We usually go to study something. Thus, the context is also one of (in the case of Pentecostalism) religion. Going to Melanesia to study Pentecostalism challenges our hermeneutical habits and the relationship between the site of fieldwork and the object of study (see also Heywood 2015). We need to rethink both what place means and what the idea of a contemporary religion implies.

Multisited ethnography (Marcus 1995) was a methodological approach tailored to deal with these challenges. This approach was based on the assumption that contexts are connected, and this is increasingly the case the more ‘globalized’ the world becomes. Thus, by following the object, the analyst can get a fuller understanding of the phenomenon/the object in question. In a study of Pentecostalism in Vanuatu, for instance, we can follow the preachers as they travel from Australia and through Fiji, PNG and Vanuatu. Or we could follow specific prayers, or a specific international church with headquarters in Nigeria or in the US and its many local affiliations. As Cook, Laidlaw and Mair (2009) have pointed out, multisited ethnography assumes that there is a transcendent, global scale that is graspable if we do not remain locked within a partial (local) perspective. In the case of Pentecostalism, it assumes that there is a higher level of the religion that can be found in its ‘pure’ or absolute form. However, by asking whether there is such a scale and whether the higher level of the global can be taken for granted, the authors propose ‘that by conceptualising the ethnographic field in a way

that detaches it from the concepts of space and place, and thus making available the concept of an un-sited field, we can rescue the possibility of comparison across theoretically relevant boundaries in space ...' (2009: 48). In other words, by not localizing the object of study in the first place, we can move beyond the idea of the multisited and towards that of an un-sited field. This is a useful first step in our approach to the study of Pentecostalism in order to avoid the 'siting strategy'. It allows us to get the non-territorial aspect of Pentecostalism into focus. Instead of seeing the relation between what is going on in Nigeria or the US and Fiji or Vanuatu for our understanding of Pentecostalism, we can see it as the same field.

### **Re-siting: The Holistic Study of Religion**

In order to achieve the second goal of this experiment, a holistic understanding of Pentecostalism, we need a perspective on this religion as fully integrated in social life and not as a separate, un-sited sphere. For Pentecostals, Pentecostalism is not a context-bound phenomenon. It is not detached from the totality of local, social life. It is an integrated part of everyday life. There is thus a dimension of Pentecostalism that is removed if we think of it as only non-territorial and un-sited. Therefore, we need to add a second methodological step to the un-siting strategy: a *re-siting*. This *re-siting*, however, needs to be done in a non-territorial sense (it needs to be local but non-territorial, as argued above). In order to overcome the paradox of both negating and needing context, we suggest an experiment where we artificially construct a context.

We can turn the object we study (Pentecostalism) into the context, thus making 'Pentecostalism' into 'Pentecost' as a place. 'Pentecost' represents the non-territorial but is still local – in the sense that it is engaged with in local communities. This also allows for us, as anthropologists, to access Pentecostal perspectives: it allows us to see how Pentecostalism as a non-territorial movement becomes local. It becomes local in a very specific way. As the chapters in the book will show, Pentecostalism becomes local by not becoming Melanesian, for instance, but by becoming 'Pentecost'. Pentecostals live in a Pentecostal world, a world locally defined by Pentecostal ideas, images, practices, values etc. Thus, as anthropologists, if we 'visit Pentecost' we can 'see' a world that is local in a very specific sense. This also allows us to see that 'Pentecost' is wider than just the activities of the Pentecostals.

As we will show in the following chapters, the local context of 'Pentecost' becomes an encompassing context for other parts of social

life as well. The context of 'Pentecost' is thus, of course, not a 'place' in the conventional sense. It is not a reference to a geographical location, although the island of Pentecost is a very real place just north of the capital Port Vila in Vanuatu. The 'Pentecost' (in quotation marks) we talk about in this book, however, is an analytical construction. It is a 'place' where the Holy Spirit is a defining feature of everyday life. Therefore, instead of defining Pentecostalism as a specific religious movement, emphasizing the specific churches in which we do fieldwork and the level of religious conversion of our interlocutors, we 'go to Pentecost'. From this perspective, we see the world as fully Pentecostal, as our interlocutors do. In this world, it is not only the Pentecostals that can see and feel the Spirit. Rather, the Spirit is already there, a taken-for-granted part of this 'place', and some engage with it and others do not. The distance between the materially real and the spiritually 'real' is negated analytically. This requires a little explanation. By 'fully Pentecostal', we imply that from the perspective of a Pentecostal, there is nothing outside the Pentecostal world; everything is Pentecostal. In other words, the Holy Spirit is relevant for any context, not only in specific prayer or church-related contexts. Of course, this is true for most religious perspectives (a believer does not, usually, switch on and off a religious perspective), but it is even more pressing when it comes to Pentecostalism because the doctrine fuses into every aspect of everyday life. For instance, Robbins argues that rituals are fundamental in Pentecostalism and practised in all social settings, creating what he calls 'Pentecostal social productivity' (2009: 58). Pentecostals do not hide, or keep to the 'private sphere', what they do. Pentecostalism encompasses all aspects of social life. In this way, when there are a number of Pentecostals in a neighbourhood and their worldview is constantly being made relevant in any kind of discourse (about sorcery, economy, architecture or politics, to name a few examples we describe in the chapters of Part II of this book), the world of those who are not directly part of the Pentecostal churches is also deeply affected. This implies that not only the converted are part of 'Pentecost'. Rather, 'Pentecost' is present for everyone.

This argument has been made by Meyer (2002, 2015) in the case of Ghana, where the public sphere is 'Pentecostally-infused'. She calls it a 'Pentecostalite' public culture. In this way, Pentecostalism has become generalized in some sense. This is not only the case for the public sphere, as the chapters of this book give evidence to, but also for social life in general. When shopping, when going to bed at night, when sending off children to school in the morning, the presence of the Holy Spirit and its negative counterpart, evil, is always considered. The 'cosmology' of Pentecostalism – the values, ideas, structures of meaning etc. – has

become a generalized social condition. Meyer (2015) describes the ways in which the sensational movie industry in Ghana in the last couple of decades has been key to the mediation of this Pentecostal cosmology. Getting an analytical 'grip on' the ways in which Pentecostalism 'moves' in social life is important for a full understanding of the implication of this movement and how and why it grows. Thus, as Meyer argues, we need to move beyond a study of Pentecostalism as primarily a study of 'deep, inner change on the level of the person' (2015: xx). The project of this book echoes this in many ways. However, whereas Meyer's primary focus is on public culture, we want to capture a more general cultural condition.

In the anthropological literature on Pentecostalism, there are several theoretical pushes to move beyond the 'locality' approach, which can give us analytic access to alternative social spaces, in particular in the study of transnational migration (see, for instance, Coleman and Maier 2011; Knibbe 2009; Krause 2014; Maskens 2012; Van Dijk 1997). In this literature, focus has been on the ways in which Pentecostalism creates alternative spaces and even alternative geographies. As Knibbe (2009) points out, Pentecostal geographies created in the context of transnational migration challenge other geographies that map and classify actors and flows between them, creating 'a force-field of contradictory geographies' (2009: 137). For instance, as Knibbe outlines, in Amsterdam, Nigerian Pentecostals, from the RCCG<sup>2</sup> are constantly confronted with the geography of state actors (the police in particular) and the wider public, where their particular neighbourhood is mapped as one of crime and illegal immigrants. This racialized, urban geography is challenged by the Pentecostal geography, where the same neighbourhood is one of 'a territory for conversion and expansion in preparation of the end of time' (2009: 148). Knibbe points out that the alternative geography created by Nigerian, or West Africans, Pentecostals in Amsterdam can be seen as a new layer of spatial geography: it adds onto, and challenges, those of the state. This challenge is one that alters structures of domination and the power to create identity. Others have pointed to a similar process, the creation of a 'heterotopia' (Bochow and Van Dijk 2012), where Pentecostals can challenge established social orders. Coleman and Maier (2013) have in a similar manner pointed to how Nigerian migrants in London create an alternative social geography where they as much connect to Lagos as to London but at the same time challenge the boundaries between them. London-Lagos is an alternative geography, an alternative space.

In our approach to 'Pentecost' here, we also direct attention to another, and alternative, way of creating social space. However, our approach is

slightly different than those mentioned above. Pentecost is not necessarily a 'layering' that challenges social structures and challenges the relations of power. In the description of Nigerians in Amsterdam and in London (Coleman and Maier 2013; Knibbe 2009), there is an explicit dialogue between the competing or alternate geographies; the one is in many ways a response to the other, and it is exactly relations of power (power to 'name', to 'map' and to 'categorize') that are challenged. With 'Pentecost' as a heuristic device, we seek to do something different: we seek to privilege completely the space that Pentecostals create, not as an alternative, or as a layer, but as the total space. Perhaps the difference between our approach and the approaches described above is the context of the transnational and the role of migration. The latter is the key contextual factor for the analysis of the moral and religious geographies. The alternative geography is thus an alternative social space creating alternative social categories and alternative power relations.

Another way in which the religious experience has been approached as an alternative space – which might not be easily accessible from a social science perspective, at least one based on methodological atheism (Bialecki 2014) – is the invitation to think about Christianity in terms of virtuality. This is, for instance, what Jon Bialecki has recently proposed (2012, 2017), in his suggestion to think of Christianity through Deleuze, as a space of multiplicity and generativity in which what we observe is equally determined by its potentiality – i.e. by the different possibilities that it allows for in terms of significance and experience. Thus, we would no longer need to take the Christian narrative as a single, located matter of fact but instead as an assemblage and articulation with unquantifiable limits. In this sense, our Pentecost is also virtual, because it does not restrict itself to the face value of things and exposes a 'field of generative potential' (Bialecki 2012: 308) in terms of how people relate to things, places and each other. It becomes, following Bruce Kapferer (2006), an 'imaginal space' through which certain articulations – e.g. between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals, between different modalities of Christianity, between 'locals' and 'non-locals', etc. – are possible and therefore 'real'. This explains precisely how Pentecostal discourses of belonging can simultaneously claim local, global, transnational and deterritorialized forms.

Focusing on the virtual in the study of Pentecostal experiences is helpful. However, this approach still retains an idea of a starting point: the ethnography starts out from an understanding of 'it', whether it is the Vineyard in California or the Redeemed Christian church of God in Nigeria as Pentecostal, and from there the virtual is outlined. In 'Pentecost' we can study Pentecostalism in a different way because we

do not need to define the religious affiliations of those we engage with beforehand. Our only 'map' to 'where' 'Pentecost' is, is people's discourse and experience of the Holy Spirit. As will become clear in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, this allows us as ethnographers to look for Pentecostalism in places where one usually does not. For instance, let us look at how Annelin Eriksen in her earlier studies of Pentecostalism in Vanuatu, and in the capital Port Vila in particular, has worked. In order to be clear about the 'object' of ethnography, she has distinguished between those who belonged to the mainline churches (Presbyterian, Anglican, Catholic), the new Pentecostal churches, and the more hybrid churches that have their local prophets and operate through and with the Holy Spirit, often called healing churches. She has talked to pastors and prophets, visited church services and meetings, but she always thought she was making differentiations that were slightly random. For instance, when she visited a Presbyterian prayer group, she realized that there was not much distinguishing it from the self-declared Pentecostal one she usually visited. Furthermore, they did not even call themselves a prayer group. They were just youth gathering around a person they believed had extraordinary gifts in the backyard of a house after church service (in the Presbyterian Church) in the neighbourhood where she was visiting. They were as much 'drunk in the Spirit' as the other self-declared Pentecostal prayer groups.

It was one of Annelin's long-time Port Vila-based Ambrym friends, who knew about Annelin's interest in healing, who directed her attention towards a young boy in the neighbouring house who had 'strong gifts', as she said. She also said: 'The power has started to move now; it is no longer only people in the new churches (i.e. the Pentecostal churches) who have the power. The power is everywhere.' This generalization of Pentecostal trends is in the literature often talked about as the Charismatic and revival/renewal movements and signals the way in which established churches become 'pentecostalized'. The effects are, however, even stronger: it has effects in everyday life, in sociality itself. It is this kind of 'charismatic sociality' the 'going to Pentecost' methodology seeks to capture – the generalization of a key dimension of Pentecostalism. Several other incidents during Annelin's fieldwork in 2010 and 2014 made her increasingly aware of this charismatic sociality. When she was visiting friends in the neighbourhoods around Port Vila, she realized that what the women gossiped about, and what they listened to on the radio when they were doing housework, the TV series they gathered together to see in the afternoon, the explanations they had for the lack of good grades in school among their children, as well as their husbands' drinking habits, was as much part of a Pentecostal



universe as their church activities, *independently* of whether they had any 'Pentecostal-like' church membership. To analytically capture what this charismatic sociality is about, and to understand it, we need methodologies and analytical perspectives that cast a wider net than the concepts we traditionally use to understand the growth of Pentecostalism or the Charismatic movement. Thus, we need concepts and methods that challenge us to see a little differently. Where one finds the charismatic sociality (i.e. experiences of the Holy Spirit) is not given. By 'going to Pentecost' we are open to finding 'it' everywhere, and not only in specified places. We are also able to see the whole context as a 'pentecostalized' one, which is also what our interlocutors do.

However, when we argue that Pentecostalism can, analytically, be turned into a 'place', this is perhaps counter-intuitive. Pentecost is, in its most literal sense, the name of an event, an annual specific day commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Christ, and the expectation of the return of this event. Thus, 'Pentecost' is more a dimension of time than space. In other words, our analytical experiment involves the turning of time into space. We want to 'see' how this time/event affects space. Signs of this time are present in space; space is a 'map' to the event and time (second coming) of Pentecost. The focus on Pentecost as a time dimension creates, as is pointed out above and described throughout the book, a specific perspective of the world, a specific culture, if you will (see Robbins 2004), or what we above referred to as a 'charismatic sociality'.

What we do in this experiment is not radically different from what anthropologists have always done: create a label – for instance, categories like 'Melanesia' or 'Africa' – for a group of people they for different purposes find useful to categorize under one label. One might argue that 'Melanesia' is just as arbitrary as 'Pentecost' to categorize a 'culture'. The most important methodological point, however, is that the presence of the Holy Spirit affects social relations and perspectives on the landscape, on economy, on material production, on rituals etc. In other words, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and expectations of its arrival, affects the totality of social life (or of culture, if you will), so let us look at this as 'one place'. This allows for a methodological and analytical openness towards what the phenomena is; we need to 'go there' to understand it. It is particularly useful for a movement like Pentecostalism, which should be understood as a web of ongoing entanglements, rhizomic in its character. We will argue that this might be analytically useful in spite of the apparent contradiction emerging from what we just stated – that Pentecostalism is rhizomic in its character and therefore has no boundaries (and can thus not be 'bound' to a 'place'). As a heuristic device,

we can construct it as if it has such boundaries, as a 'place', in order to overcome the predefined idea of what Pentecostalism is and where it can be found. In short, in this book we suggest that in order to study 'global religion' we must turn the object into the context (thus un-siting the field) and turn the object into a 'place' to make it local (re-siting the field), as a heuristic device.

To sum up, the re-siting strategy ('going to Pentecost') enables a holistic approach to Pentecostalism in two senses: it allows us to take the 'religious' life of our interlocutors as primary (as they do), as well as to 'see' the landscape as they do, an overcoming of a distance between the 'real' and the 'spiritual'. It also allows us to include all aspects of their day-to-day social life in the study of religion – the workplace, cooking, shopping and childrearing – as part of the study of Pentecostalism. Social life in general is 'pentecostally-infused' (Meyer 2002).

So far we have outlined two reasons why the 'going to Pentecost' experiment might be a good idea. There is also a third reason: to enable a direct comparison between the three geographically separated field sites in this book (Luanda in Angola, Port Vila in Vanuatu and Kiriwina in the Trobriand Islands) as well as a comparison between 'Pentecost' and anthropology. In this book we will follow two lines of comparative investigation, the first between three local places (the three locations in 'Pentecost') and the second between perspectives in 'Pentecost' and the perspectives in anthropology. This argument is given some context below.

## **Rethinking Comparison**

Anthropology is, basically, about comparison. Comparison is about setting things in relation to one another. This is done by identifying two or more entities that are to be compared, thus creating separation (between A and B, which is to be compared), and then by making a connection between them. The separation and connection can be created in different ways, reflecting different anthropological paradigms. Most anthropologists, across very different schools and traditions, will agree that this method is foundational for anthropology. What kind of comparative relations one creates and the purpose for them, however, is quite a different matter. One might say that the kind of comparison one engages in reflects the kind of anthropology one wants to produce. When we talk about comparison here, we imply the explicit and conscious methodology of making comparative relations, in one form or the other, and not the implicit form of comparison that we all engage

in by the very act of description. By using the term 'cross-cousin marriage', for instance, one immediately sets the ethnographic description in a comparative relation, one of identification, with other instances of 'cross-cousin marriage'. The explicit method of comparison, however, is something more. Here we will delineate some of the major traditions in anthropological comparison, focusing in more detail on recent contributions, but also giving brief descriptions of classical perspectives. Then we will outline the comparative element in the 'going to Pentecost' experiment that responds directly to what we here will identify as problems and challenges in anthropological forms of comparison.

Presently, one of the major divisions in anthropology is the one between what we might call 'representational' anthropology and 'non-representational' anthropology. These different epistemological traditions reflect very different goals and ideas of what kind of knowledge and effects anthropology produces. They are also based on very different forms of comparison. The first refers to the specific knowledge ideology in which anthropologists describe phenomena and relate these phenomena to what happens elsewhere and thereby classify the phenomena. This is a kind of knowledge ideology that was stronger in the early phase of the discipline's history than today. However, this does not mean that the paradigm does not still hold. Although perhaps few anthropologists today will explicitly identify with the positivist idea that we can describe and understand phenomena in an objective manner, many are very critical of an absolute break with the idea of striving towards this ideal. The other direction or paradigm has unequivocally moved away from the first. It is explicitly non-representational. Marilyn Strathern's 'Partial Connections' is perhaps the best example. Here she argues that ethnography is evocative rather than representational (1991: 7). Viveiros de Castro (2004) has made a similar claim in his argument that comparisons are always based on 'misunderstandings' (or 'equivocations'). Our anthropological concepts can never really represent the perspective of that which is described. Rather, in this latter paradigm, anthropology has become something else; it is not about understanding human cultures and societies in general but understanding ourselves. Anthropology is about confronting our assumptions and challenging our concepts.

This distinction between the two paradigms in anthropology can be mapped onto what Candea (2016) calls the heuristics of frontal and lateral comparison. However, Candea rightly points out that these heuristics (as opposed to the paradigms) are not mutually exclusive. Rather, in earlier phases of anthropology they operated in tandem in many ways. Candea explains the two different heuristics in the following way after

quoting a passage from Evans-Pritchard (1951): 'At this level of abstraction, one can say that Evans-Pritchard's account begins with a frontal comparison between an ethnographic "other" and the ethnographer's own "background". It ends with a lateral comparison in which different anthropological cases are confronted to each other' (2016: 185).

Here we can see that the frontal approach entails setting what one observes in explicit relation to what one takes for granted – what one knows from one's 'own society'. The lateral comparative relation, however, is based on what one, in the time of Evans-Pritchard, would perceive as the 'proper comparison', the outline of a specific case in relation to other similar or different cases. The former approach has gained in prominence in the past few years as the non-representational paradigm has won ground. It is still true that many anthropologists work with them both, but one might also claim that there is always a hierarchy between them: if the lateral approach is centre stage, the frontal one is, as in Evans-Pritchard's case, mentioned more in passing. And the reverse is the case for frontal comparison. When the goal for an anthropological analysis is to challenge our own concepts, lateral comparison is often in the background.

Let us now look more closely at the forms of comparison Candea calls frontal and lateral. Fred Eggan's (1954) well-known call for a controlled comparison in anthropology is perhaps a prototypical example of the lateral form of comparison. Eggan's aim is to 'formulate and validate statements about the conditions of existence of social systems ... and the regularities that are observable in social change' (Radcliffe-Brown 1951: 21 in Eggan 1954). The comparison needs to be controlled in the sense that the context for the comparison should be carefully delineated to make sure one does not compare phenomena of a very different kind. Making identifications, or contrasts, needs careful contextual work. The aim is to understand social phenomena in general. The world is perceived as *one*, and it is graspable through the method of controlled comparison.

A very different version of the lateral comparison is outlined by De Coppet (2008) in his call for a comparative method that is informed by Dumont's model of value hierarchies. De Coppet argues that one cannot compare 'the same' in different societies. For instance, the 'body' in the West cannot be uncritically compared to the 'body' elsewhere, let us say in Melanesia. Rather, the concept of the body has a specific place in Western cosmology; it represents a specific place in a value hierarchy. In particular, it refers to a specific body – of the sovereign, of the nation and of Christ. Ultimately, the body refers to a primary value in Western sociality; the indivisible individual. When setting up a comparative relation

to Melanesia, one needs to find the value that occupies the same place in the value hierarchy as the body in the West. These are then comparable categories. As De Coppet points out, one can only compare entities of the same 'value-magnitude'. In the Solomon Islands' case of the Are'are that he describes, the Western body is thus comparable to shell money. Shell money for the Are'are is a representation of the ultimate value of relationships. The body and shell money are thus comparable entities in a lateral comparison.

### *Symmetrical Comparison*

For both Eggan and De Coppet, but in very different ways, context is crucial before the comparative relation can be established. For Eggan this will make it possible to compare the same. For De Coppet the context (the value hierarchy) makes it possible to compare phenomena of the same order. Using Candea's terminology, these are both examples of comparative approaches in which the lateral heuristics are of major importance. For both of them the comparative methodology is a technology for classification.

For the proponents of what Candea calls the frontal approach the goal is rather different. It is the relation between 'us' and 'them', between what 'we' think and what 'they' think, that is the focus. This contrast is worked on systematically—for instance, by 'controlling' the 'equivocation' (Viveiros de Castro 2004) or by working 'recursively' (Holbraad 2012). This (re-)turn to a frontal heuristics, as Candea also points out, reflects a major shift in the anthropological knowledge paradigm. However, we will claim that this shift is not only one in a 'horizontal' direction (which the distinction between frontal and lateral points to) but also one in a 'vertical direction'. The frontal approach involves a radical 'levelling' of perspectives. The lateral approach relies on a privileged concept that created the comparative relation between the contexts, for instance the idea of the value or the more directly comparable concept of 'moiety' or 'kin group', or 'descent'. These concepts created the comparative relation, but the relation was, in itself, above the concepts.

Although in some instances, as in Schneider's (1984) reanalysis of his Yap material, there is a form of 'feedback loop' to the anthropological model and concepts, most forms of lateral comparison elevated anthropological concepts to an almost *a priori* level. For instance, the concept of 'patrilineal descent' or 'moiety system' sets two cases in a comparative relation to each other without looking so much at how the empirical material can inform the concepts. Either one identifies the concept in

the material or one does not. In some sense, one might argue that the lateral comparison relied on an asymmetry between anthropology and the comparative relation. In most lateral approaches, the anthropological concepts or models are tools for the comparative relation and are not in themselves objects for scrutiny.

In the 'new' frontal approach, anthropology is set in a symmetrical relation to that which is compared. Anthropology is in itself a context of comparison. It is not above comparison or the technology of the comparison. In many ways this frontal approach involves a turn to what we can call 'symmetrical comparison'. The idea is that the concepts and models themselves are being focused upon in a direct way. Thus, anthropology will, following the ideal of the symmetrical model, enable ongoing conceptual innovation (see, for instance, Holbraad 2012). Ideas and concepts from empirical cases can be directed at the analytical level, thus challenging our own ideas much more effectively. Strathern's (1988) analysis of gift relations in Melanesia is perhaps the ideal model for this. In her analysis of the split agency, for example (based on material from Battaglia 1983 on mortuary ceremonies in the Trobriand Islands), she employs local conceptual models, which distinguish between a person and an agent to challenge anthropological models of agency. For Holbraad (2012) this is the ideal for what he calls 'the recursive methodology'.

Still, there are some major difficulties with the new symmetrical approach in anthropology. First, as Candea (2016) also points out, the perpetual innovation that the 'recursive' or 'ontographic' (Holbraad 2012) methodology promises seems hard to achieve. There might be a tendency to constantly set up some very established contrasts. Difference is a key logic for this form of comparison, and difference is most effectively achieved when it is radical. This has been a major critique against, for instance, Strathern (see Carrier 1995; Josephides 1991 etc.), and it has also been renewed in the critique against the 'ontological turn' in general and against Holbraad and Viveiros de Castro in particular (see, for instance, Vigh and Sausdal 2014). Furthermore, and following the same line of thought, the symmetrical, or frontal, approach is more developed in anthropology from places that are geographically distant from the West – typically Melanesia and Amazonia, or Mongolia (Pedersen 2011), or Siberia (Willerslev 2007). The frontal approach thus requires a distance, or an 'exotification' (Kapferer 2013) of some sort before the comparative relation is established. This is in itself not so problematic, but it might result in a reproduction of typical patterns concerning where the exotic can be found. How can we study a non-territorial movement, for instance, applying the frontal approach?

The above-mentioned critique is based on what we see as a misunderstanding; the move from a lateral to a frontal comparison follows a paradigmatic shift in anthropology as outlined above. The critics, however, do not take this into consideration. They do not consider the full project of the 'frontal turn'. The 'non-representational' form of anthropology has been foundational for the move towards the new form of frontal comparison. Strathern (1988) is explicit on this. The *Gender of the Gift* is not a description of Melanesia; it is an inverted mirror image of anthropology. Thus, the frontal methodology is just that; it is an inversion method. The goal is not a more realistic description of the world but more critical self-awareness. This has, of course, huge implications for the discipline and for the kind of knowledge we produce.

For the purpose of this book, it is the focus on the heuristics and methodology that we want to emphasize. The frontal approach, relieved of its representational ambition, can be more open to experiments and conceptual innovation. It can also explicitly seek to challenge the established perspectives in anthropology and social science in general. This does not mean that one will not seek to give ethnographic accounts that as closely as possible reflect the kinds of experiences one has in the field. In this sense, one still works with forms of representation but these are non-exclusive representations – they are not evaluated on their 'truth-value'.

Let us now turn more concretely to the topic of this book: Pentecostalism and the forms of comparison involved in the 'going to Pentecost' experiment. Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religious movement in the contemporary world (Anderson 2013). Yet the study of this movement is not easily compatible with either the lateral or the frontal/symmetrical approach, not only because it is non-territorial but also because it is often understood as just a reflection of the contemporary social system. It is, for instance, the religious answer to present-day capitalism (see, for instance, Robbins' 2007 critique of Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). Thus, in Pentecostalism one cannot find the neatly circumscribed empirical case one can set side by side with other cases in a lateral kind of comparison (where does one case end and the other begin when the movement is non-territorial?), nor can we immediately find the kind of radical difference that the frontal approach is dependent upon. Pentecostalism is usually understood as modernity, capitalism, global flow etc. The 'going to Pentecost' methodology allows, however, for both a lateral and a frontal comparison of Pentecostalism. Below is a more concrete explanation of how we engage in comparison at two different levels in this book.

## *The Lateral Approach*

In Part II of this book we engage in a specific variant of the lateral comparative approach. We have already established that ‘Pentecost’ is a ‘place/space’ (although only heuristically so). However, as in any other place, such as in Melanesia or Africa, there are regional variations between different areas. Thus, what we do in Part II is to start each chapter in one specific locality of ‘Pentecost’ and identify a specific ‘trait’, a specific idea or concept, so we can then move on to the other two areas of ‘Pentecost’ to see if there we can find the same trait, or some variation of it. The next chapter starts in the second area, performing the same exercise. Then, of course, the third chapter starts in the last of the three areas. What we achieve with this exercise, we hope, is to engage in a more direct comparison of specific phenomena in ‘Pentecost’ in order to establish whether this is of significance or not. The ‘Pentecost’ device gives us the opportunity to bypass the more geographically regional questions and debates that perhaps would have tied up our discussions instead. Thus, our representation of the places we describe are explicitly focused on a holistic understanding of a key dimension of Pentecostalism, understood here through a ‘minimum definition’ of engagement with the Holy Spirit, instead of, as is more common, a holistic understanding of social life in a geographical locality.

In Chapter 1 we start in Port Vila with the healers in the squatter neighbourhoods. We identify a key logic that we find also in other social contexts, that of borders between an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’. Moving this concept on to Luanda and Kiriwina, we can identify the logic of the healers, although in slightly different forms and in slightly different parts of social life. In the next chapter we start in Kiriwina, where Michelle has noticed the almost obsessive focus on keeping the village clean and free from the ‘rotten banana leaf bundles’ that traditionally have been so valuable. This move from ‘wealth’ to ‘waste’ signifies a major shift in this area of ‘Pentecost’, one that signals a fundamental shift in cosmic order – from the cyclical renewal of life to a major life versus death divide. This is ‘echoed’ in the other two localities. Chapter 3 starts in Luanda, where Ruy identifies the significance of what he calls ‘anti-relativism’. This implies a turn to order, and predictability that can be found also in Port Vila and in Kiriwina but, again, in slightly different ways. In order to achieve a comparison between the three contexts of ‘Pentecost’ that is as direct as possible, we co-author this book throughout (save, of course, the responses in Part IV). This has also had its methodological advantages because it has forced us to directly deal with



the ethnography of the other two authors and to relate directly to the experiment of the book, which we are working on in the same context. However, each chapter has a 'lead' author who has done the ethnography with which the chapter starts.

This form of lateral comparison is not significantly different from what we would have done had we 'just' gone to Luanda, Port Vila and Kiriwina. However, it is different in one important sense. We take for granted that we are looking at the same context instead of the reverse. This, again, enables the next level of comparison carried out in Part III of the book, where we engage in a frontal form of comparison.

### *The Frontal Approach*

Since the chapters in Part II are not 'only' specific regional descriptions but descriptions of major characteristics of 'Pentecost', we can delineate, in the mode of symmetric comparison, ethnographic 'theories' from 'Pentecost'. Each chapter in Part III starts out with an articulation of this theory from 'Pentecost', which is then set up against major theories in anthropology and social science in general. In the first chapter of Part III, we set the theory about borders in a comparative relation to major theories of individualism in the anthropology of Christianity and, more importantly, in philosophy. This chapter illustrates the complexity of individualism, and it shows that 'Pentecost' is 'producing' an individual whose primary goal is protection from evil, which is *external*. In the next chapter, from the Trobriand Islands, the idea of waste and this new significance of death are set in a comparative relation to theories of economic prosperity, which has been central for an anthropological understanding of Pentecostalism. The argument is that in 'Pentecost' the prosperity gospel might not necessarily be about wealth in a narrow sense but rather about 'life' – a vitality turn, in other words. In the last chapter of this section, the theory on anti-relativism and the need to engage with what is perceived as a chaotic world is set in a comparative relation to major theories about Pentecostalism and its focus on the significance of breaks with the past. What is at stake in 'Pentecost' is not breaks with what has been but what is ongoing – with the chaos of the present.

## What Is Gained?

The question, of course, is what has the ‘going to Pentecost’ experiment enabled us to see that we could not have seen otherwise? Is this just much ado about nothing? Are we not simply discovering what we would have discovered anyway? Is it possible that the ideas of anti-relativism or borders or ‘life-centeredness’ would have been as much present in the ethnography and analysis if we had not ‘gone to Pentecost’? On the one hand, and as we pointed out in the opening of this introduction, the methodology of doing fieldwork and engaging in participant observation in many ways guarantees that one gets a holistic impression of what social life in a locality is about and not just social life in a singled-out context – for example, that of a church or a prayer group. When living with people every day, every week, one usually discovers their general concern and interests. One will discover the work of healers, the gossip in the market place etc. by ‘just’ going to Port Vila, for instance. On the other hand, ethnography is not just description (Ingold 2014). It involves an analytical effort. What we see during fieldwork is also already set in an interpretative frame. We think in categories that are hard to ‘neutralize’. This experiment has pushed us explicitly to think differently. In the end, we think we have described processes that are not initially thought of as part of a Pentecostal universe. Our description of boundaries and protection (Chapter 1), order (Chapter 2) and life-centeredness (Chapter 3) are in many ways giving a quite different picture than the most dominant theories of Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism is often understood as a movement that creates global awareness (Coleman 2002; Eves 2011, 2012; Meyer 2004; Poewe 1994; Schaefer 2002; Van Dijk 1999), although perhaps of a varying kind (Coleman 2013), and a movement that reproduces the capitalist logic of growth and prosperity (Coleman 2004; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; but see Haynes 2012). The conscious effort of not operating with a very well worked out definition and thus not focusing as closely and clearly on Pentecostalism as we could have done has allowed us to see what is more at the periphery of the phenomenon and what is characteristic of the context in which Pentecostalism thrives. By ‘blurring’ the focus on the specifics of Pentecostalism, we have gained a clearer understanding of that which might not always be clearly articulated and most prominent in debates. We have, perhaps, disturbed the picture of what Pentecostalism is about at its most basic level. Or, at least, we have painted a portrait of what Pentecostalism is *also* about. We have produced a slightly different picture of what goes on in contexts where Holy Spirit churches grow in popularity.

In sum, the chapters of this book portray places where the need for protection and security and an absolutist perspective on the world is necessary. We describe places where people are creating small, controlled and ordered communities, places where the idea of wealth and productivity is more connected to vitality and a form of life-centeredness than to the immediacy of moneymaking and prosperity.

## **Where Is ‘Pentecost’?**

We end this introduction by pointing out the obvious. The three actual places we have visited and turned into ‘Pentecost’ – Luanda, Port Vila and Kiriwina – are all geographically situated in the ‘global south’. Is ‘Pentecost’ therefore in the South? We think the most obvious answer is that we cannot know, since our research has been focused on these particular localities. However, this might not be a sufficient answer. There is, of course, literature that may be consulted. The mode of lateral comparison could give us some answers. It could show us the sense in which ‘Pentecost’ is as much in Uppsala in Sweden (Coleman 2004) as in Chicago or California (Bialecki 2017; Luhrmann 2012) as in Luanda, Port Vila or Kiriwina (i.e. places in Africa and Melanesia). Can the (new?) form of individualism we are describing be found also in ethnographies from elsewhere, from Europe or the US? What about the idea of anti-relativism, or the search for absolute truths?

Our hypothesis is that the phenomenon we have ‘found’ in ‘Pentecost’ is a ‘global south’ phenomenon. Maybe it is a case of a ‘theory from the South’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012), a phenomenon developed not at the periphery of the world, in a disadvantaged ‘global south’, but in the new centres. Maybe ‘Pentecost’ is most visible for us in the ‘global south’ because it is here that it is developing and thus more clearly articulated. In many ways, the global south is in the forefront of social development, in the forefront of experiencing new forms of capitalism, in thinking and conceptualizing what these forms are, of understanding new social conditions. ‘The West’ is no longer the centre of significant innovations, neither intellectually nor politically or economically (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). When we understand what Pentecostalism is about in our ‘going to Pentecost’ experiment, it is exactly to the global south we should go. What ‘Pentecost’ is might be better articulated in the global south because it is here that it is experienced first. Instead of trying to understand what Pentecostalism is by following the social and theological genealogies back to Europe or the US (depending on what ‘waves’ one focuses on), one might start the thinking from the new centres, from

the global south. It is here that new ideas and theories of the individual and the social is developed and later, in a reversed geopolitical order, transported to the North.

This book is an experiment that more explicitly turns our attentions towards the new and perhaps not-so-expected social phenomena we can observe in regions like Melanesia and Africa. Building on the new frontal approaches (Candea 2016) to comparison (as Holbraad 2012; Strathern 1988; Viveiros de Castro 2004 etc.), this book attempts to look for other kinds of theories. The experiment is not intended as an absolute form; it is neither a programmatic declaration nor a manifest but an effort at rethinking methodologies. It is an attempt to try an alternative approach, which might be useful for some purposes, sometimes.

## Notes

1. One might, of course, ask whether it is at all Pentecostalism that we are describing because we operate with such a 'loose' definition. Perhaps we are describing 'charisma'. To be clearer, it would perhaps be better to use a slightly broader term – for example, Pentecostal charismatic churches – to make it more obvious that we are including churches and religious perspectives that are not Pentecostal in a narrow sense but part of a broader charismatic wave. However, we do think that the experience of the Holy Spirit is the most important, and foundational, aspect of Pentecostalism (see, for example, Robbins 2004 for a similar general definition); the experience of the Holy Spirit is indeed at the core of the matter. We hope the reader, therefore, can excuse the lack of focus on what makes Pentecostals different from other charismatic churches.
2. Redeemed Christian Church of God, a Nigerian mega-church with global presence.

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# Interlude

## Locations in 'Pentecost'

The reader may wonder why we have chosen such disparate ethnographic locations for our endeavour of 'locating Pentecost': Luanda (Angola), Port Vila (Vanuatu) and Kiriwina (Trobriand Islands). They are not even the 'classic' sites usually approached to study Pentecostalism – Brazil, Nigeria, North America etc. Beyond the fact that they are geographically set in coastal regions of the global south, they seem to have very little in common. Indeed, they represent very distinct geographical scenarios – from the hyper-urban configuration of the postcolonial African city of Luanda to the rural/urban confluence of Port Vila and finally to the rural, insular landscape of Kiriwina. Furthermore, they bear distinct histories and relationships with the European and Western colonial endeavours and, particularly, with Western Christian mission. Luanda harbours a long, century-old history of both contact with Christian missions, the emergence of 'African Independent Churches' and participation in the transnationalization of southern Christianities (Sarró and Blanes 2009). Kiriwina likewise has a century of contact with missionaries, both European and Polynesian, with the more recent arrival of a 'revival' Christianity. Similarly, Port Vila (and Vanuatu more broadly) has its own distinct history of missionary encounters and conversion.

This diversity, however, is a case in point: we believe that this contextual heterogeneity is a necessary challenge to overarching assumptions concerning the phenomenon of Pentecostalism as a unified 'global movement' (Anderson et al. 2010). The anthropology of Christianity, and Pentecostalism in particular, has debated the way in which

Pentecostalism, as an ideological narrative or social critique (Eriksen 2009), relies upon a globalizing, transcultural (or often supra-cultural) configuration yet is simultaneously able to identify and address specific localized problems, thus becoming ‘local’ in its refashioning of social relations, without losing its universalizing stance (see e.g. Anderson 2004; Coleman and Hackett 2015; Poewe 1994; Sanneh 1993; Robbins and Engelke 2010). In fact, as has been argued elsewhere, part of Pentecostalism’s success can be credited to its plasticity, its pragmatic unfolding of morality, or its lack of theological discipline due to the new covenantal approach it often conveys. This makes Pentecostalism, in a way, the epitome of globalization: an example of circulation, re-territorialization, acceleration and positioning (see Aasmundsen 2013 for an example). But, as emphasized in the previous chapter, it is also local in its pragmatic unfolding and locating of community and in its identifying of alterity and foreign-ness. Recent arguments in this direction, for instance, speak about the ‘ethnification of Pentecostalism’ in contexts of migration (e.g. Griera 2013), its production of religious strangerhood (Van Dijk 1997) or its production of and participation in ‘micropolitics’ (Lindhardt 2011). This alterity will necessarily shift according to the context: it can be secularism (Europe), Catholicism (Brazil), witchcraft (Africa) etc.

In our three locations we travel through movements and sites that have diverse institutional histories, and we respond differently to the category of ‘church’ as an institution. While some of the sites we mention may respond to recognizable ‘Pentecostal forms’ such as Assembly of God or the (neo-Pentecostal) Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, other spaces and movements do not necessarily comply with the paradigm and may not even be considered churches *per se*. But they all share the importance given of the charismatic attribution – i.e. the presence and role of the Holy Spirit – and its effects in their existence as a community. More than identifying a specific pneumatology, these are lived spaces, where our interlocutors somehow relate to the effects of the Holy Spirit.

In what follows we will perform historical and geographical descriptions of our ethnographic sites and the particular churches we present in the following chapters, in order to help the reader visualize and grasp the particularities, similarities and (mostly) differences between them.

## *Luanda*

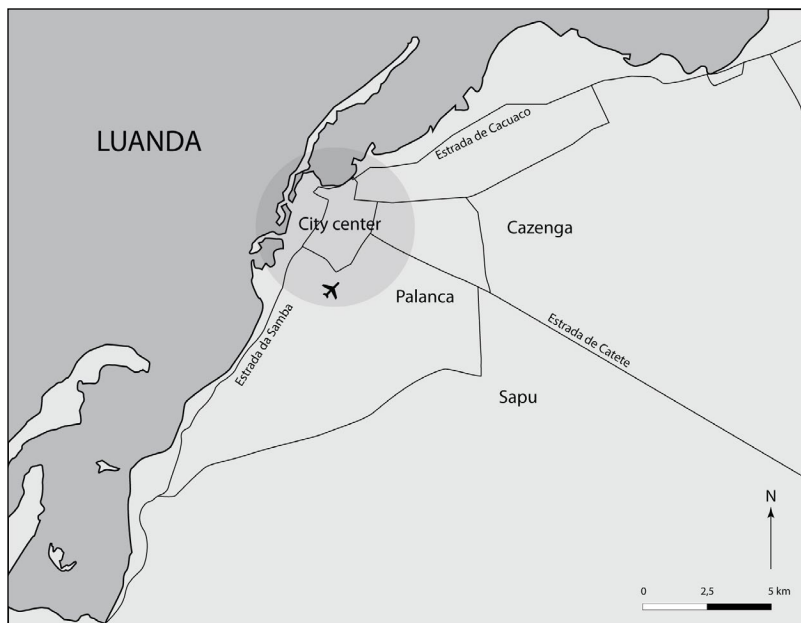
Luanda is a coastline southern African metropolis of about five million people of multiple ethnic backgrounds (the locals, kaluandas,

are very few) and a growing expat community – most commonly Portuguese, Cuban, Brazilian, Congolese, Chinese etc. – fuelled by an oil and diamond economy that, since the armistice of 2002 that ended a thirty-plus-year-old civil war, has made the city one of the most expensive in the world. The city conjugates several movements that make it particularly complex from an urban design point of view. If the bay and downtown areas are the traditional locations of the colonial (pre-1975) Luanda, the surrounding areas witnessed a dramatic growth of so-called *musseques* ('red sands', i.e. slums) in the late colonial and postcolonial periods. After 2002, both the old colonial town and the areas beyond the *musseques*, to the east and south of the city, became progressively known as the areas of the New Luanda, where expensive condos and middle-class neighbourhoods sprouted thanks to Chinese construction.

Traditionally, Luanda was a Catholic town – a fact that can be ascertained by the multiple Catholic churches and cathedrals that are part of the city's heritage. The Protestant missions that entered the Angolan territory in the late nineteenth century worked mostly in the hinterland. However, since the late 1990s – when the regime began accommodating religious institutions and developing strategic collaborations with them – a new form of religious architecture began to emerge, due to the installation of new branches of Christianity in the city – i.e. Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal arriving from the Lusophone Atlantic space (Brazil, Portugal) and from the DR Congo. Many such churches made public statements in the Luanda landscape, building massive cathedrals and worship centres. In the meantime, several autochthon religious movements also appeared, namely of a prophetic/messianic and 'holy spirit' type.

Within this framework, the Tokoist Church – one of the movements we will read about more often in this book – appears as a unique yet relevant case in point. Founded in the late colonial period by Simão Gonçalves Toko (1918–1984), a former student of the Baptist Missionary Society, it quickly became a beacon of anticolonial resistance, due to the persecution that the colonial authorities effected upon the followers. While being founded in 1949 as what is described as a Pentecostal moment (the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Toko and thirty-five of his followers), throughout its history it cultivated a prophetic culture of spiritual inhabitation that is subject to ritual discipline and seclusion. The church's services are known for their aesthetic formalism, predetermination and discipline.

Today, the Tokoist Church is one of the main religious actors in the country, with an estimated one million followers throughout the country and transcending ethnic allegiances that often characterize



**Figure 0.1** Map of Luanda, Angola. Created by Nina Bergheim Dahl (University of Bergen), used with permission.

many churches in this country. In 2012, it inaugurated what is claimed to be the biggest Christian cathedral in Africa, in the eastern part of Luanda. From this perspective, religion is a very public issue in a city like Luanda. Beyond the above-mentioned architectural developments, religion is present in the local media and locally in the neighbourhoods.

The neighbourhood Ruy Blanes works in is located on the outskirts of the 'old Luanda', the traditional colonial centre that covered the coastline. It is also on the other side of the 'new Luanda', the new, modern neighbourhoods mushrooming outside the new expressway that encircles the city. What lies in between both these Luandas is, generally speaking, the musseque Luanda, or in other words, the slum and settler areas that emerged in the decades after independence in 1975, mostly due to refugee movements produced out of the decade-long civil war that lasted until 2002. Most of these neighbourhoods respond to the stereotype of informality, precariousness, chaos, dust, noise and so on.

Regarding the Palanca in particular, although it is usually referred to as a musseque, it has distinctive features that make it a singular neighbourhood: firstly, its linear and perpendicular urban grid, originally planned by the Portuguese colonial authorities as a semi-urban neighbourhood; secondly, its homogenous ethnic composition of Bakongo

families and networks that started occupying the area in the 1980s. Thirdly, and related to the prior statement, its reputation as a 'super-market' ('everything can be bought or sold in the Palanca') and as a religious and spiritual centre, with a multiplicity of movements and churches that compete side by side in the already burgeoning streets of the neighbourhood.

It is mostly in neighbourhoods like Palanca or Cazenga that we find the so-called *mpeve ya nlongo* ('Holy Spirit') movements, more or less informal churches of Bakongo ethnicity, led by prophets or charismatic leaders that in most cases arrive from the DR Congo and convey a theology of deliverance, while placing healing activities at the centre of their ritual and liturgical displays. Many such churches operate in makeshift and somewhat reclusive locations of these neighbourhoods and are often externally framed as resulting from a process of conversion of former 'traditional witchdoctors' (*feiticeiros* or *kimbandeiros*) into a Christian template. In this framework, the EKWESA (or ICUES, Igreja Cristã de União do Espírito Santo – Christian Church of the Union of the Holy Spirit) appears as an interesting case in point. While framing itself as a deliverance-based holy spirit church, it bears a more institutional and public history than many of its counterparts. Founded in the DRC by prophet Ngonda Wassilu Wangitukulu, a former member of the Kimbanguist Church, it became known for cultivating a tradition of spiritual inhabitation and healing ministry – which, unlike the more 'disciplined' Kimbanguist Church, often occurs in the context of their weekly services. The movement arrived in Angola in 1976 by the hands of Angolan members of the church, such as pastor Nunes Sungo, the current leader.

### *Port Vila*

Port Vila is the capital of Vanuatu, on the island of Efate, in the central part of the Vanuatu archipelago in the South West Pacific. The archipelago consists of about eighty bigger and smaller islands dispersed over a distance of 850 kilometres in a Y formation (Figure 0.2). It is situated east of Australia and north of New Caledonia and south of the Solomon Islands. Vanuatu was the former New Hebrides under the colonial rule of the joint English and French condominium. The colony was created in 1906, which is fairly late compared to other European colonies in the region.

At the end of the nineteenth century, when European nations were controlling the Pacific, and had annexed all the islands, Vanuatu

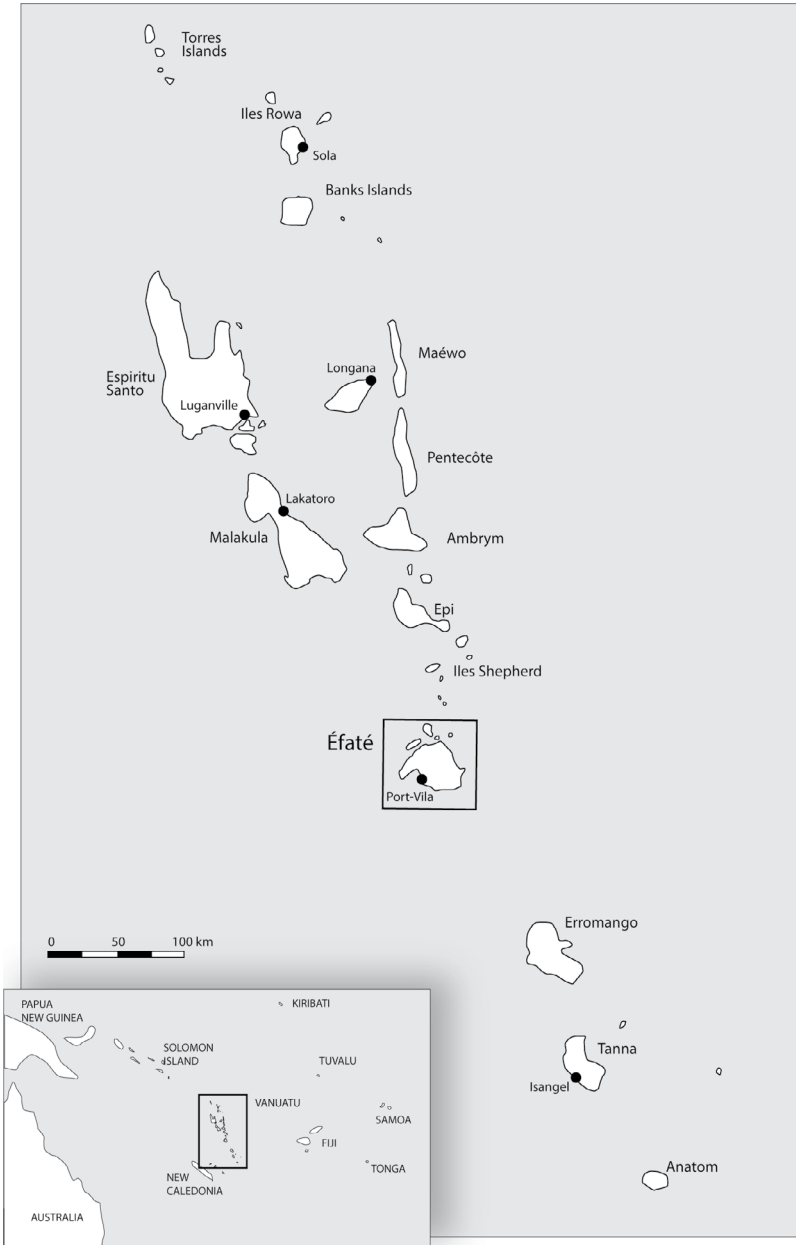


Figure 0.2 Map of Vanuatu and relative location of Port Vila. Created by Nina Bergheim Dahl (University of Bergen), used with permission.

remained outside any sovereign jurisdiction. Both Great Britain as well as France had economic interests in the archipelago, and both English and French settlers were expanding their land interests on the islands. The British and the French nationals pressured their respective governments to annex the archipelago as a colony and thereby secure their economic interest. On the British side, it was mainly Australian business interests that were being defended by preventing the French sovereign control in the archipelago. In 1906 a condominium of joint government was agreed upon between Britain and France, establishing a joint court, which had jurisdiction over land matters.

The period around Independence in 1980 clearly divided the population of Vanuatu into an either Francophone or an Anglophone side, and thus polarized the population along condominium lines. There was much turbulence during the decade before independence and the first years proceeding it. The first wave of Pentecostalism arrived in Vanuatu around this time, in the early 1970s; for instance, the Assemblies of God (see also Eriksen 2008 and 2009). After decades of independent government, the colonial churches still have a strong position in Vanuatu and are among the churches with the largest congregations. However, new Pentecostal-inspired churches, explicitly emphasizing their independent status in relation to the colonially established churches, are steadily growing (see also Eriksen 2008). The common characteristic of these new churches is their emphasis on speaking in tongues and healing.

Today the new nation state is divided into six administrative units; Malampa, Penama, Sanma, Shefa, Tafea, Torba, and local councils administer the relation between the local and regional level. A national council of chiefs was installed around independence and operates as an advisory body to the Parliament, in particular on matters relating to *kastom* (in brief: customary matters).

The capital Port Vila has today about fifty thousand inhabitants, most of them from the different islands of the archipelago, but there are also Chinese entrepreneurs, workers and businessmen as well as an expat colonial population from mainly Australian and New Zealand, mostly in the main city centre areas of Port Vila. The neighbourhoods we visit frequently in this book, Fresh Wota and Ohlen (which are actually connected and feel and seem like the same neighbourhood), were constructed for the 'indigenous population' by the colonial authorities in the late sixties and seventies. Part of the area was initially a plantation, and the houses were built for labourers from around Efate as well as elsewhere in the archipelago. In the period leading up to independence, and continuing into the post-independence period, houses were set up in this area for the migrant population from other islands in the



**Figure 0.3** Typical household in Ohlen neighbourhood, Port Vila. Photo by Annelin Eriksen.

archipelago. The idea was that the large migrant population from the different islands should live in Western-style houses, with kitchens and small gardens. Today, only some of these original, colonial houses exist, and most houses are more temporary buildings, built mostly from corrugated iron.

Figure 0.3 is a typical household in Ohlen. The green hedge separates the house from the main street. The household consists of a kitchen house and a sleeping house, and most cooking and social activities take place in the areas between these houses.

## *Kiriwina*

The Trobriand Islands (see map below) are comprised of nine inhabited islands and over one hundred small uninhabited islands and islets in the Solomon Sea, about 160 km from the east coast of mainland PNG. The total population of the Trobriand rural district was 37,511 according to a 2011 census, with this population spread across thirty-three wards and over ninety villages. The largest island, Kiriwina, is 43 km long and between 3 and 13 km wide and is home to more than thirty thousand people, about 80 per cent of the total population within the Kiriwina Local Level Government (LLG). The next three most populous



islands – Kitava, Kaileuna and Vakuta – have a total population of about five thousand, with no more than eight villages on any one of the islands. The rest of the islands have only one or very few villages each. The Trobriands are located in Milne Bay Province and they, along with the neighbouring islands of the d'Entrecasteaux group, Marshall-Bennett, Muyua and the Louisiades, make up an area known collectively (by anthropologists and other scholars, more so than by the inhabitants themselves) as the Massim.

The flat coral islands of the Trobriands are covered with a rich soil, well suited for the cultivation of yams and taro. Other crops include sweet potatoes, bananas, sugar cane, leafy greens, beans, tapioca, squash, coconuts and areca (betel nut) palms. Hamlet, garden, bush and beach lands are held by various founding *dala* (matrilineages) and are controlled by the lineage's chief or hamlet leader (Weiner 1976; Malinowski 1984 [1922]). Trobrianders keep small numbers of pigs, but pork is eaten only on special occasions. Fish are the major protein source and are abundant in coastal villages. Canned fish and meat from trade stores supplement the local protein sources but are infrequent inclusions in the diets of subsistence farmers; only those working for money (for example, public servants) can regularly afford such luxuries. Participation in the cash economy is limited to involvement in tourism, a few small business ventures, public service, mission stations and receiving remittances from kin working elsewhere in PNG or overseas. Much exchange activity also takes place outside the cash economy. Shell valuables, yams, pigs, stone axes, cloth, tobacco, betel nut, cooking pots, banana leaf bundles and trade store foods supplement cash as forms of wealth, although not all can be used interchangeably, and some are gender-specific. For example, stone axe blades are men's wealth, while banana leaf bundles are women's wealth (Hermkens 2013; MacCarthy 2017; Weiner 1976).

Yalumgwa village, where Michelle was based for most of her nearly twenty-four months of fieldwork since 2009, is one of three large villages that make up Yalumgwa Ward, along with Mweligilagi (to the south) and Obwelia (to the north). The ward is administered by an elected ward councillor, who reports to the Kiriwina Rural Local Level Government (KRLLG) President. The north-western section of Kiriwina stretching from Mweligilagi village to Kaibola on the northern coast, where Yalumgwa village is located, is in the region referred to as Kilivila. Its residents consider it the home of 'real' Trobriand culture, as here one finds Omarakana, the village of the Paramount Chief of the Trobriand Islands. The language spoken is also often referred to as Kilivila, sometimes Kiriwina or, more colloquially, *biga yakidasi* (our language).

Methodists (now the United Church) established the first mission here in 1894, and a Catholic mission followed in the 1930s. The arrival of Pentecostalism, or Revival Christianity (Trobrianders use these terms interchangeably), in the Trobriand Islands began in the mid 1980s. According to Kulaleku, the ward councillor for Kwebwaga (the first village on Kiriwina to build a Pentecostal church), a need for a new and stronger faith had been locally identified in part because of the number of sorcery deaths. People were ready to embrace a change and bring relief to villagers who lived in fear of *bwagau* (black magic, sorcery). When a few Kwebwaga men went to Moresby, they were introduced to the Christian Revival Church (CRC) and Rhema churches and felt that this ‘strong’ faith (*peula tapwaroru*) was needed back at home. An American pastor came to preach in 1986, and those suspected of being sorcerers were encouraged to pray and join the new church and to



Figure 0.4 Map of Kiriwina and other major islands in the Trobriand Islands, Papua New Guinea. Created by Nina Bergheim Dahl (University of Bergen), used with permission.

renounce old ways. Sylvester, a Kwebwaga man, went to Bible College in Port Moresby and returned as the new CRC church's first pastor in 1989. People quickly joined the new church in great numbers; Kulaleku estimates 80 to 85 per cent of the village's population left the United Church to join CRC, while the current pastor of the church, Rodney, suggests that the number is over 90 per cent. This caused a rift between the two churches, but people say that because the sorcery deaths were seen to diminish rapidly with the arrival of the new church, people believed in the efficacy of the new faith and the church remained strong.

Once the new, 'Revived' churches were established on the island, there was a good deal of movement back and forth, in which people tried out the new churches, and in some cases returned to the longer-established United or Catholic congregations. Even today, marriages or disputes with church leaders can encourage people to begin attending services of a different denomination. This is not seen as problematic, since, as people say: '*komwedodasi tadubumisa yaubada tetala/we all believe in one God*'. While the Catholic Church continues to be set apart in its highly hierarchical structure and more sedate hymns and prayers, most United Churches now practise a 'Revival' form of Christianity, which is scantily differentiable from the Pentecostal (in the theological sense) beliefs and styles of worship (e.g. Van Heekeren 2014).

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# Reading Guide

In this book we experiment with a new way of approaching religion. Considering the heterodox, perhaps even peculiar, structure and organization of this book, we offer here a short reading guide.

In many ways, this book can be read similarly to Julio Cortázar's famous novel *Hopscotch*: either in linear fashion, from page 1 until the end, or through alternative orders. For instance, this book can be read section by section: firstly, reading Part II as a 'collective ethnography' of sorts, in which the three authors offer empirical descriptions of their field sites and also experimentally engage with each other's fieldworks by detecting continuities, similarities and differences in regards to the different issues raised in Port Vila, Kiriwina and Luanda – the space we experimentally call in this book 'Pentecost'. This engagement appears in the book as a narrative strategy, but in fact is the result of countless workshops and round tables that the main authors of the book held in the periods in between their fieldworks, in which they presented their notes and ongoing findings, and discussed them critically, seeking points of connection and mutual inspiration. Secondly, the three chapters in Part III can be read together as theoretical engagements that stem from the underlying empirical work, and in which we address several relevant debates in the anthropology of Christianity, and Pentecostalism in particular. By confronting the ethnographic theories with the established debates, the authors explore three different avenues through which the prevailing interpretations could be somehow challenged and new ways of thinking about Christianity and Pentecostalism could be explored.

Finally, Part IV offers an assembly of debates, in which several authors, who have followed the research activities throughout the duration of the project and commented on previous versions of the chapters, reflect upon our results and discuss their potentials and limitations vis-à-vis the current debates in the field.

Alternatively, this book can be read ‘vertically’, following the individual itineraries ‘suggested’ by each of the main authors, from their ethnographic description in Part II into the theoretical debate that stems from it in Part III, and finally seeking the interlocution that the authors/readers of their chapters have produced in Part IV. For instance, the reader can choose to start reading Chapter 1, primarily authored by Annelin Eriksen, in which we observe a description of ‘Pentecost’ as a production of boundaries and ‘protected spaces’ in places like Port Vila. After interlocutions with Luanda and Kiriwina, Annelin Eriksen concludes that this social production implies a theory of personhood and the body. In Chapter 4 of Part III, she engages in a theoretical discussion concerning the problem of individualism in Christianity and the composite moral border work that it entails, suggesting a redefinition of how anthropologists can approach the debates. Finally, in Part IV, we can follow the reflections on this by Joel Robbins. Similarly, one can start with Chapter 2, move onto Chapter 5 and then onto the comments by Rio and Bertelsen, in order to focus explicitly on a discussion of wealth, waste and Pentecostalism. Or, one can choose to read Chapter 3, Chapter 6 and the comment by Meyer, to engage in a continuation, or even a redirection, of the debate about ‘breaking with the past’ (Meyer 1998) – a well-known debate for students of the anthropology of Christianity.

Finally, each of the three sections of the book can be read independently, as either ethnographic descriptions of Christian life in the global south (Part II), contemporary critical debates in the anthropology of Christianity (Part III) or a round table on possible advances in such debates (Part IV). Furthermore, the reader may choose to focus on the methodological aspects of the book, by engaging with the introduction and the comment by Candea in Part IV of the book.

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**Part II**

**Presentations  
from  
'Pentecost'**



**Figure 1.1** 'Keep Out!' Fresh Wota, Port Vila. Photo by Annelin Eriksen.



# 1

## Borders in 'Pentecost'

### Creating Protected Spaces

#### The Point of Departure

Walking through the streets in Fresh Wota and Ohlen, settlements close to the city centre of Port Vila, you are immediately struck by the way in which the neighbourhoods seem to be closed off. The architecture of most of the houses, with outdoor areas for cooking and eating hidden at the back within fenced-in yards, seems to signal a need for protection from city life. Fresh Wota and Ohlen are typical ni-Vanuatu<sup>1</sup> urban settlements, where people either squat, rent or have paid for small pieces of ground where they put up temporary houses of corrugated iron or brick. These are *not* neighbourhoods where people have a lot of material wealth to protect. Quite the contrary. This chapter will look at this process of 'closing off' and try to make sense of it as part of how 'Pentecost' as a place is created. It starts out in the neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Port Vila, but we will also look at village life in Kiriwina in the Trobriand Islands as well as the hyper-urban neighbourhood of Palanca in Luanda, Angola. We try to connect what seems to be a key dimension of social life ('the closing off') to fundamental topics in Pentecostalism: healing, confessions and prayer wars. This chapter will thus in a very concrete way turn our analytical gaze to the spatial effects of Pentecostalism – in other words, the way in which Pentecostalism becomes 'Pentecost' as much in Vanuatu as in the Trobriand Islands or in Angola. We will also look at how protection and borders are reflected in wider social practices. In 'Pentecost', closing off and borders are key

values reflected in a number of different ways. Let us start our journey in Fresh Wota, Port Vila.

In July 2014 on a hot and sunny afternoon, Annelin was walking with her long-time Ambrym friend Rosemary<sup>2</sup>, who lives with her husband and two children in a temporary building in Fresh Wota 5, on their way back from church. As they passed a yard where a crowd of young boys were sitting, smoking and chatting, Rosemary pointed out that the neighbourhood was not safe for her daughter. She had grown up on the island of Ambrym with her grandparents and had just recently moved to the city to continue her secondary education. 'She cannot be allowed to just walk around in these streets,' Rosemary pointed out. 'Here, anything can happen.' Fresh Wota is seen as a dangerous place, where people from different islands live side by side. This place is not like other places in Vanuatu, people will point out. No taboo relations are honoured here, as people sleep in small houses and live with relatives with whom, in a village context, they might have an avoidance relationship. Therefore, people often say that there is a lack of respect in these neighbourhoods. People do not uphold some of the basic social principles that order life in a village context.

However, there is also an intense liveliness and generosity in this neighbourhood. Children run in crowds up and down the streets, playing and laughing. Young boys eat in each other's houses and spend the afternoon together on the street corners. On the one hand, these are areas where tagging like 'Keep Out' and 'Private' have been put on fences, protecting the households from the main street. On the other hand, people seem to move quite freely between the households. Furthermore, women will talk to their children about their neighbours as 'your auntie' and 'your uncle' but will also caution them about the witch around the corner. These are neighbourhoods where the endless rows of buses that pass by on the main road every hour of the day are decorated with both crosses and 'Jesus banners' as well as reggae music symbols and icons. Loudspeakers next to the daily market will play American gospel music at full volume, while the young boys smoke marijuana in the shade of a tree. In the shop on the corner, where groceries are sold 24/7, the shopkeeper has an extra chair in the back room where you can be healed after paying for the groceries. There seems, in sum, to be a presence of contrasts; simultaneously there is a sense of 'the big (even though it is rather small) city' with its 'bright lights' with the need to control and protect from dangers.

Rosemary, Annelin's Ambrym friend and interlocutor in Fresh Wota, spends her days washing and cleaning, cooking and gossiping with neighbours. She walks every day to the local market, a five-minute

stroll from the house. Here a number of her neighbours sell vegetables they have either received from the village (sent by relatives on the cargo boats) or have grown themselves in gardens outside the city centre. Rosemary herself has no paid work, but most people in Fresh Wota, perhaps with the exception of older women, work in the service sector, as bus drivers (usually men), dressmakers or cleaners (usually women), or in the hotels or Chinese stores. Surviving on what one can earn in town is close to impossible, and one relies on family on the islands to send baskets of garden produce. However, this reliance relationship is never articulated, and prayer is the means through which the scarcity is most commonly addressed. The last initiative from the workers union entailed a '24/7 prayer' campaign.

Within just a few blocks of these neighbourhoods you will find a number of churches, both so-called mainline churches, such as the Presbyterian and the Anglican, and newer, 'independent' churches (see Eriksen 2009, 2012). Some of the churches were established in a charismatic wave in the 1970/80s (see Eriksen 2012, 2014), such as Assemblies of God, but most of the churches can be placed within a standard definition of 'Pentecostalism', emphasizing the immediate experience of the Spirit (for instance, Anderson 2004).

In these neighbourhoods, the focus on the power of prayer and the presence of the Spirit can be observed in different ways and in different contexts, from everyday prayer in workplaces and lunch prayer before eating to morning hymns in schools and also in people's reasoning ('it is up to God', 'God will provide'). However, the most striking example is perhaps what we might call the 'healing scene'. In the settlements of Fresh Wota and Ohlen there is a healer in every second yard, locally known as 'a woman who prays'. The Holy Spirit is called upon every morning and every night. There are prayer rooms filled with people who come together to seek comfort and protection against what they perceive to be the dangerous power of witchcraft and sorcery. Excepting a few men, the large majority of these healers are women (see Eriksen 2012). They receive clients every night and on Sundays after church service. People seek their help for a number of reasons, be it sickness, marriage problems, employment issues or career advice. There are also a growing number of people who come because they claim to be possessed by demons. They are usually brought to the healers by close relatives. The healers, who work through the power of the Holy Spirit, pray while placing their hands on the possessed body and demanding the spirit, in the name of God, to leave.

## Talking with the Healers

Throughout six months of 2010, and in July and August of 2014, Annelin followed the work of five healers in Fresh Wota and Ohlen. The healers were all women and had received their healing power through God. They had all experienced a remarkable turning point in life, recovering from severe sickness or facing other major problems. Finding these healers was not hard. One would hear about them almost constantly. Healing is a very frequent topic of conversation between the women at the market or in stories shared between neighbours in the streets. Annelin heard about Monique from one of her Ambrym friends whose brother had been healed by her a couple of months earlier. As Annelin entered her yard in Ohlen, a young woman was hanging laundry to dry in the sun. 'Are you here to see my mother?' she asked at once, obviously used to strangers arriving. 'She is inside, but I will get her for you,' she said. 'You can wait in her "prayer room".' This room was a tiny room next to the main house, which itself was not much more than a shed with a corrugated iron roof. There were two extensions from the shed – the prayer room and a small store facing the main street. The house was separated from the street by a large hedge. You could hear the noise from people and cars passing by but you could not see the street..

Monique arrived. When she saw her guest, she smiled and picked up her Bible. Annelin quickly said that she was not there for healing but just to talk. She smiled again and said that talking was fine. 'I also always talk,' she said. 'This is how I work,' she pointed out. 'While talking I can figure out what people carry in their hearts.' Annelin explained to Monique that she was just interested in learning about her work, to look and watch, observe and ask. Monique was very interested in conveying her gifts and her work. She immediately started explaining how she had received the special ability to heal after enduring a severe sickness. She had been fatally ill with cancer. Doctors and hospitals had given up on her. She was in bed, ready to die, when one night she was woken by a gentle wind brushing her cheek. She had been sleeping with the Bible next to her. As she woke she could see the Bible had been opened, and her eyes immediately fell on Matthew 5:8: 'Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.' She understood, beyond doubt, that this was a message for her. She was to be healed. She was not only spiritually reborn, with a new faith in God, but also physically felt she was reborn; she felt she was given a new heart and a new life. She was to work for God and to use her heart to 'see' other people. As she recovered physically, Monique was very clear about the true gift she had been

given – this pure heart. She now can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, see what others cannot.

Monique explained to Annelin that when she receives clients, and before healing can take place, a diagnosis must be set. This is the process of *discernment*. The ability to discern is in itself a special gift from God. In order to understand what is wrong with a patient, Monique needs to make the person talk, to 'open up'. However, very often the person 'hides' what is really wrong or what they truly fear. The patient might come for one particular problem but end up admitting that something completely different is the real issue. For instance, a young girl, along with her grandmother, sought help from Monique to get treatment for sleeplessness. Her grandmother told the healer that they had been working hard to put the young girl through secondary school and were now paying school fees for her college education. However, for lack of sleep, her grades were getting worse. The healer sensed very quickly that the lack of good work at school had little to do with sleeplessness and much more to do with the fact that she was seeing a boyfriend every night in secret. Monique thus confronted the girl with this: 'You have a boyfriend, don't you? And he lives nearby? You see him every night when your parents think you are asleep? Is this not so?' The girl immediately admitted the truth to her grandmother: 'It is the boy in the next yard.'

The other healers Annelin talked to also underlined the necessity of 'seeing'. They all have an ability to see what others cannot. Although the healers use slightly different techniques, there is a clear pattern. They either hear God speaking to them while the patient is talking or they see images or receive specific sensations. Sarah, for instance, can feel a thumping pain in her forehead and in her palms when, in certain cases, the patient has caused someone harm. This reflects what she sees as her special connection to Jesus (see also Eriksen 2014). When a patient is talking, the healers, through their bodies, sense what the cause of illness or misfortune is. The patient is often 'covering up' (*kaveremap*) in his or her talk. Usually they are afraid of telling the real truth, one of the healers pointed out. For example, very often when a mother comes, she might complain about pain in the back and the feeling of being tired all the time, lacking energy. However, one healer pointed out that, typically, while the women talk, she will quickly sense that this is really about a problem in their relationship with their husband, for instance. Sometimes, this specific gift of seeing past the obvious takes a very concrete form. One of the healers in Fresh Wota has a specific version of the gift of discernment. She has what she calls "X-ray sight". She can see 'through' things – not only the patient's body and mind but also through

walls, beneath the ground and so on. This makes her a particularly efficient healer for detecting sorcerers, and their remedies, hidden out of obvious sight.

## The Border between the 'Inside' and the 'Outside'

In the different healers' accounts of the techniques they apply and the rationale of 'discernment', one can detect a theory of the dynamics between 'covering' or 'closing' and 'opening'. The process of discernment is the key to a movement between 'the hidden' (*oli hidem*) and 'the truth' (*tru samting*), between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. Discernment turns what is 'covered' into the open. All the healers Annelin talked to and observed were in some way or another focusing on a 'border' but without necessarily articulating the border. In other words, the notion of a significant border is implied in their discourse and practices. In order to challenge the 'truth', to find what is 'hidden', they challenge a border – to get beyond 'the cover' (*oli kaveremap*). Thus, the transgression of borders is a theme that is crucial for the healing practice. These borders can operate on different levels and in different ways, but most importantly they create 'insides' and 'outsides'. The border is not just a demarcation of different sides. The divisions are not neutral. Rather, they emphasize a crucial distinction between an inner 'saved' (or potentially saved, after healing, and pure) quality and the 'threatening outside'. This movement between the borders is the special capacity of the healer. The healers have the ability to identify the border and to challenge that border. They can 'see' through or across the border.

If the architecture and sociality of the neighbourhoods, as described above, reveal the tensions between 'opening up' and 'closing off', between 'inside' and 'outside', this seems also to be reflected in theories of the body and of the person expressed by the healers. Discernment involves, as we have seen, the process of seeing 'behind' and 'opening up'. The proceeding process of healing, of recovering, involves closing the body again after creating purified 'insides'. Protection of the inside is subsequently necessary to stay healthy.

Eve, a charismatic Catholic healer, told Annelin about a case where she had delivered a boy from an evil demon. His family had called her from the island of Aneitium, telling her that their son, a boy of seventeen years, had been fooled by some other young boys to drink the blood of animals. He had then become possessed by an evil animal spirit. They took him to see Eve, arriving by bus in front of her church.<sup>3</sup> She stood in the doorway as they brought the boy to her, two strong men holding

him, as he was screaming and yelling and trying to get away. She could see the animal spirit at once; it had horns and claws. She could not see the face of the boy, only the spirit. She said a prayer, and the animal kicked the ground, as if preparing to run into her, but she only prayed stronger. The boy soon collapsed on the ground. The demon had left him, and he could not remember anything. He did not know where he was or what had happened. He was completely confused and had no memory of the last couple of days, of how he had become possessed, and how he had been released.

Eve explained that the demon had disturbed the boy's awareness of who he was. The demon had taken over his mind, leaving his body intact. Thus, only Eve, as the healer, could see the 'real' – the animal spirit. The others could only see the boy. They saw 'the cover'; she could see the 'real'. Eve's gaze challenged the 'cover' (the appearance of the boy's body hiding the animal spirit), and because of her capacity to see beyond the border of the person she could release the boy from the spirit. Only after Eve had addressed the animal spirit, through prayer, and demanded it to leave the body could the boy gradually recover.

Evelyn, another of the healers in Fresh Wota, told Annelin that danger is everywhere and protection against danger is crucial for survival. Prayer, participation in choirs and blessings by healers and pastors contribute to making this protective border strong. She thus organized prayer groups for short evening gatherings for women and their children in a spare room next to her grocery store. However, there are always threatening forces that seek to penetrate, to open up borders and make people vulnerable, chief among them being the forces of witchcraft and sorcery.

## **Extending the Context: On Confessions and Conversion**

Let us now move to the other contexts of 'Pentecost' identified for this book and see if we can find an 'echo' of the significance of these kinds of borders. As we have seen, in Port Vila borders demarcate an 'inside' on different levels (the self, the house, the yard etc.), and borders also give protection (against external environments). If we move into the context of Kiriwina, in the Trobriand Islands, and specifically into situations where the Holy Spirit 'operates' in order to identify the context of 'Pentecost', borders emerge as significant, especially in practices of conversion and confession.

## *Kiriwina*

In the process of being ‘born again’ (*kalobusivau*, in the Kilivila language), figures of transgression of a border between the insides and the outsides are central. Pastor Michael, who presides over the Revival Church in the government station of Losuia, explained the importance of confession using just these concepts. He told Michelle that many people have demons inside them, which make them spiritually and even physically weak. They can possess the body (though, as in Port Vila, they are not visible from the outside), and they communicate with the spirit world to keep a person from being truly Godly. These demons have to be cast out, whether through the assistance of someone with the gifts of the Holy Spirit or through their own prayer and commitment to being reborn in Christ. By confessing to the demons living inside, they can be cast out of the body.

However, it is important to follow up this casting out of the demons by filling that now vacant ‘space’ in the body with the Holy Spirit. The born-again Christian must read the Bible, pray and engage in daily fellowship activities to ensure that the space remains filled with the Holy Spirit and that the penetration of evil demons is prevented. This metaphor of having a physical space inside the body that potentially can be opened up to demons (if borders are not protected and the space remained filled with the Holy Spirit) was reaffirmed by Esther, a member of the CRC church in the village of Sinaketa. Esther had confessed to being a witch and cast out her own demons when she became born again. Esther told Michelle that with her confession and rebirth she became ‘a new woman’ (*besatuta navau yegu*) and knew that now Jesus lives ‘inside’ her (*Jesu isisu olumwolela*), replacing the spirit of the witch that had previously inhabited that same space (see MacCarthy 2017).

Becoming born again is thus dependent upon becoming conscious of the internal space, an ‘inner self’, which needs to be ‘filled’ (with Jesus and the Holy Spirit). Not being aware of the inner space and the necessity of protecting it can go easily in the wrong direction. In order to remain aware of this, confession is significant. In confession the relation between the inside, as potentially already penetrated by evil, and the outside, as a threatening environment, is often articulated. It is also in confession that the evil already residing inside (as in the witch, for instance) can be cast out. Thus, as in contexts of healing in Port Vila, confession is a key event in Kiriwina in which borders are opened and re-established. Let us now move onto Angola and Luanda and, again, to contexts where the Holy Spirit is thematized.



## *Luanda*

In the neighbourhood of the Palanca in Luanda, Ruy finds a significant contrast between different religious traditions. On the one hand, he finds a focus on the border between the individual and the outside world as we have also seen in Port Vila healings and Kiriwina confessions. This is a key focus in the confession practices in the EKWESA (Christian Church of the Union of the Holy Spirit), for instance. The members of this church gather several days per week to conduct ceremonies for spiritual cleansing and intercession. In such events, those present form a circle – the 'charismatic circle' – in which manifestation and mediation will occur. They summon the Holy Spirit and place their requests. Both men and women are invaded by the spirit and start shaking, dancing and speaking in tongues. Some may fall on the ground; others might begin 'gliding' with their arms open; others still will frantically engage in interlocation. The process will eventually die down, but the effect will not: the feeling of cleanliness, of renewal, of reinforcement.

On these occasions intervention and effect are sought through invocation, treatment and deliverance. Prayer and chants accompany ingestion and expulsion from the body. The charismatic circle enacts a separation between the space of sacred interlocation and passive observation. The new, purified bodies become symbols of a new kind of Christian person in the Palanca, one whose conversion is a matter of cleaning out 'the inside'. This also has another effect. The new body is symbolic of a person who is not necessarily dependent upon a larger network of kinship. Becoming born again and taking on the new body is part of the process of becoming 'one' – of singularization. This creates ruptures in the kinship and group networks, separating members from families as well as disrupting flows of domestic economy. In a sense, the nuclearization of the experience of deliverance into the body provokes a friction with the socializing dimension of the church. Here we can see the significance of borders again, at another level: the cutting of kinship networks and the creation of new, significant divisions.

On the other hand, Ruy finds that borders also work in different ways. In Tokoist churches, the focus is often on what we might call discipline (marching in church, for example) and dress code (wearing only white garments). This, Ruy finds, shows another dimension of the significance of borders. In these contexts, it is not so much a border between the individual person and the (potentially evil) world that is in focus. Rather, focus is on the border between the group (the Tokoists) and the outside world. This border (between those wearing white, those



Figure 1.2 Tokoists in Palanca, Luanda. Photo by Ruy Llera Blanes.

who are marching and others) reveals what we might call an ‘outward order’, emphasizing the Tokoist community in relation to others. These are, however, very different kinds of ‘borders’ than we have seen in the context of healing and confession. Ruy observed how in the Tokoist Church this ‘outward order’ not only produces a socially recognizable posture and behaviour but also a semiotic separation between public and private experiences of Tokoism, which in turn reflect a theological distinction between a ‘physical’ and a ‘spiritual’ body. In other words, in the Palanca it is very unlikely that you would find a Tokoist manifesting contact with the Holy Spirit in the church space, let alone in a public setting. This happens not only because the process of spiritual mediation is circumscribed to specific hallowed grounds within the church (what they call ‘tabernacles’) but also because it is a specialized activity, singled out in specific members of the church (the ‘vates’ or prophets) who are, for the most part, anonymous. From this perspective, if individual spiritual mediation is a non-generalized possibility for the Tokoists, the outward behaviour becomes *the* element signalling purity, identification, allegiance and belonging to the community of the spiritually clean. The border establishes a separation between Tokoists and others. In other words, in this context we can see that the border separates in slightly different ways than in healing and confession contexts. Here focus is on

a border between the inside of a collective body and the outside and not only between an individual body and the external world. The function of the border remains parallel, however, for it separates the internal (of the individual or the community) and the external, and it protects from penetration by threatening, external forces. The colour white, signalling purity and cleanliness, points primarily to the quality of the community but also to the individual person.

The ritual process of conversion to the Tokoist Church is illustrative in this respect. To become a member of the church one has to observe very specific precepts, as per the book of Leviticus. For an adult, to enter the church there has to be a process of confession and conversion with specific restrictions (staying at home for thirty-three days, not sleeping with one's partner etc.), which, if observed, will give one what is known as 'the stamp' (*selo*), a spiritual symbol that protects the Tokoist from Satan. This stamp is necessarily invisible but will tie the new member into the church community and 'separate' him or her from other humans.

Moving the concepts of 'borders', and especially borders between a 'clean inside' and a threatening external world, by examining the neighbourhoods of Port Vila, Kiriwina and Palanca, we can see how the idea of an 'inner self', a contained and separate self, is taking form but also how the technology of both conversion and healing enables a person to cast out that which is not holy and to become clean and purified. In the charismatic circle of the EKWESA, in the tabernacle of the Tokoists, in confession ceremonies of the Kiriwina witches, and in healing sessions in Port Vila, evil is cast out, and the bodies (individual and collective) are purified.

## **Creating Safe 'Insides': The Distinction between Good and Evil**

These processes of creating an inner self, of morally guarding this self and making sure that it is not corrupted by demonic forces, reflects an idea of a dangerous external world. Dangerous predatory forces haunt the Pentecostalized neighbourhoods of Port Vila, Kiriwina and Luanda. Creating the protected 'insides', the spaces for the 'pure', is thus echoed in all three neighbourhoods. The 'outside', where the foreign resides, is always threatening and potentially disruptive. Outside spaces are 'open' to danger, to forces seeking human substances. The binary distinction between good and evil is a key logic underlying these perceptions. This distinction is 'mapped onto' the logic of inside/outside and

the significance of the border between them. To investigate this logic further, let us return to the neighbourhood of Fresh Wota in Pentecostal Port Vila and a story told by the healer Monique.

A man had come by Monique's house in Ohlen one night. He had complained about a series of incidents that had made his life very difficult lately – at work, at home and also with his physical health. He had been sick for a while. He had seen a number of doctors, but no one could find anything. As he sat in her small prayer room, the Holy Spirit revealed to Monique that the man had been bewitched. His neighbour was jealous and had planted bones of a dead human being outside his house to make him sick. In these cases, Monique said, it was necessary that she not only prayed for him in her prayer room but that she also could be present at the place where the black magic (*nakaimas*) had been effected. Thus, she accompanied him to his house. But they had to wait until midnight because it is only at this hour that the evil spirits will reveal themselves (*Long day oli slip nomo, long midnaet oli wakabot'*). During the night they become active, and only then can one neutralize them. As she predicted, she found buried bones of a young child in the entrance to the man's house. As they got rid of the bones, the dogs started barking around them, and Monique knew they were feeling the evil spirits roaming around. She then started praying, loudly and strongly, and thus ridding the place of the malevolent influence. The next day, the man called her and told her that for the first time in a long time he was feeling much better.

When Monique told this story, early in the morning the day after she had delivered the man and his house from the evil spirits, she was eager to point out that one *can* protect oneself against these forces. They are all around, she said. These evil spirits are potentially everywhere. 'Where do they come from?' Annelin asked. Monique explained that they are '*from taem bifo*' (from the past); they are evil because they belong in an era before Christianity. They are spirits residing in the neighbourhoods reflecting the heathen traditions of the forefathers (see Eriksen 2014; Rio and Eriksen 2014). However, they can only be dealt with through the power of God and prayer. The healers are there to detect and to protect. They can channel the Holy Spirit and protect against the 'power of magic and witchcraft' that, as one of the healers expressed it, is all around, all the time.

Although the evil spirits are all around, they do not attack randomly. They are activated by people who want to harm or who are paid to harm. These are the sorcerers. They are also all around, in every neighbourhood. Monique and some of the other healers (but not all) were able to detect these sorcerers. For instance, Monique was able to point

out the man who had bewitched her client. He was the next-door neighbour. Rumour had it that he had been doing this for a long time. '*Hemi spoilem fulap man finis*' (he has already destroyed a lot of people). 'The signs are there, clear for everyone who looks,' Monique said. This man was said to be a '*kastom*' healer, a man with access to traditional knowledge of herbal medicine. He would give people advice on leaves to boil and drink. The man was old and getting thinner. Furthermore, and perhaps the most important piece of evidence, his wife had a big sore on her foot that would not heal. Neighbours talked about the woman who could almost not walk any more and the sore that only got bigger and bigger. According to Monique, this was evidence of evil: the sore was indicative of an evil residing internally. The '*kastom*' healers work through the power of the ancestors and are thus opening up their bodies for evil spirits. The sickness of the old man's wife was proof of both his lack of power to heal (the inefficacy of traditional knowledge) as well as his contact with evil magic.

Evil can thus be identified not only as a dangerous power, omnipresent in the city, but also as internal to a person. If one lacks commitment to God and does not clearly show this commitment by taking part in prayer circles, church services etc., one is regarded as 'open' for evil; evil can easily attack in the form of demons, for instance. This, according to Monique, is the only reason why the '*kastom*' healer cannot heal and why his wife is still sick. If he had come to her she would have asked him to confess and then to commit to God. The evil would then be cast out, and with a 'clean' inside the process of recovering would start. Sometimes patients arrive who are not even aware that they are carrying evil and can potentially inflict harm on others. For healing to take place, they need to become aware of the evil inside them, according to Monique. As the healers see it, when the distinction between good and evil is absolute – and there is no sickness or misfortune that cannot be cured if you are on the right side of this border – seeing evil is easy. Those who do not heal are those who are not committed to God.

No one was in doubt in this case. The lack of healing was proof of the lack of commitment to God. Following logically from this, the man was a manifestation of evil. His knowledge of what people call '*kastom*' medicine was also problematic in this context, because it was another proof of his lack of trust in God. With his work, he was calling on the wrong spirits, the evil spirits – the spirits from before. The work of the healers was therefore to not only identify him as a concrete manifestation of evil but also to protect clients from his harmful influence by creating closed borders and safe 'interiors'.

### *Enclosing Internal Spaces: The Witch in Ohlen*

Thus, as the healers see it: Openness is extremely dangerous because there are spiritual forces that are harmful. The external world (external to the body, the house or the yard, most importantly) is continually threatening. One must always suspect that there are, potentially, violent forces that might access your interior in a harmful way. Too much openness can leave you vulnerable to demons, witches and sorcerers. It is therefore crucial that these borders are constantly policed and protected. In the neighbourhood of Ohlen, close to Fresh Wota in Port Vila, where most residents are still squatters and only a few have bought their own piece of land and set up houses on grounds they legally own, people are constantly on the lookout for threatening forces. They build fences around their temporary houses, and they keep their dogs out at night to warn them, not so much of physical intruders (there is little to steal, and robbers mainly work the wealthier neighbourhoods) but to warn against spiritual danger. There is a constant awareness of invisible forces that will try to get through to your inside – inside your yard, your house or your body. The following case, again from Monique's many stories, indicates the way in which borders are worked with, challenged and re-established.

Monique had woken up in the middle of the night from a dream that had scared her. In her dream she had been walking through the gate in front of her house towards the road, carrying a sleeping baby on her shoulders. She had seen a line of people queuing up in front of her small store that faces the main street. 'What are you all waiting for?' she had asked. 'We are waiting for you,' they said. 'We are afraid of a crazy woman who lives on the other side of your yard. When she sees people, she only sees demons. We have nowhere else to go. You must help us.' In her dream Monique had thought to herself that she would only put down the baby safely in the house before starting a prayer. However, as she turned around to re-enter her gate, there was a black man standing on the corner of her house (Monique made a point of how black he was). He grabbed the wrist of her hand and held her back, preventing her from returning through her gate. She tried and tried but could not move. She suddenly saw a woman approaching her, and she had felt the need to talk to her but was again prevented by the man who held her wrist.

Upon waking, she entered her prayer room, opened her Bible and started to read, think and pray. She prayed for several hours, until daylight, but she could not understand (*discern*) the meaning of her dream.

She was quite sure, however, that she had received a vision about events to come. A day later, a woman arrived at her gate, asking for help with her six-year-old son. The son had been sick and throwing up for some time. He had also had severe pain behind his eyes. Monique was busy with other patients and asked her to come back later. However, the woman did not return that day or the next day. Monique kept thinking about the boy and found no peace. She prayed, and suddenly she became aware that the woman with the boy was the woman who had approached her in her dream but whom she had been unable to talk to. She realized that it was of utmost importance to get to this woman.

She told her daughter to go and look for the mother and the boy and bring them to her. The daughter found the boy at a birthday celebration for one of his schoolmates, not far from the yard where he lived. She brought the boy, along with his mother, to Monique. The mother, the boy and Monique entered the prayer room. Monique asked the boy to tell her about the pain he had. The boy was quiet, not uttering a word. He just silently turned his head downward, not giving her any reply. Monique knew immediately that this was a case of demon possession. His refusal to let her see his face was in itself a strong indicator of the presence of a demon. A malign spirit possessed the boy. She sprinkled anointed oil on him, held the Bible in one hand and put her other hand on the boy, commanding the demon to leave the boy's body at once. She screamed and shouted, 'In the name of the Lord, you will show yourself.' The power of the Holy Spirit worked through her, enabling the penetration of the demons' 'cover', the innocent face of the boy. The power made her hand shake as she screamed to the demon to get out of the boy's body. Suddenly, Monique saw, as clearly as if it were a physical person, a spirit jump out of the boy and hide by the door. As Monique told it to disappear, it ran from her yard. Monique recognized the evil spirit at once as the spirit of an old woman just a couple of yards further down the road, a woman from Tanna (an island further south in the archipelago) who was known for her knowledge of witchcraft and sorcery.

We can see here two ways in which Monique can 'see' beyond the borders, between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. Her dream enables her to see what others cannot, and her ability to work as a channel for the Holy Spirit enables her to neutralize the 'false' cover of the demon and to remove the demon from the innocent child. As a healer, it is this ability to see and to move through the border between the inside and the outside that makes her efficient and powerful. This movement between the inside and the outside of the body reveals the importance of keeping the borders of the body closed to dangerous spiritual

influence yet open to the healing power of the Holy Spirit working through the healers.

However, in 'Pentecost' it is not only the borders of the body that are important to manage. The fundamental distinction between the good and the evil needs to be recognized in every aspect of life – for instance, in the movement of these forces within the neighbourhood of Ohlen. The rest of Monique's story reveals the significance of borders between good and evil and the threats that loom around the corner.

The next day, Monique heard that there had been a big fight in the yard of the Tanna people, and she knew immediately that it was the demon she had driven out of the boy that had tried to hide in the Tanna yard and caused trouble. The fight had been caused by almost 'nothing', observers commented. There had been two groups of Tanna men, from different villages on Tanna, who had been drinking kava (a stimulating drink made from the root of a pepper plant) together. However, one of them had accidentally broken a plate and another man had, accidentally, been cut by one of the pieces of the plate. Blaming the man who had broken the plate, the injured man had started a fight and others had joined in. There was nothing accidental about this, according to Monique; it was the work of the runaway spirit. The spirit sought out these men while they were drinking kava, for through their morally corrupt act they would be easy to influence with malign intentions. There was a lack of a strong moral border around this group of men.

Only regular prayer and awareness of God can protect against the evil. Sorcerers, witchcraft and demons are everywhere and always seeking to get access to your inside, according to Monique. The boy who had been possessed by the spirit of the witch from Tanna had become a victim by accident. As a child, he is vulnerable. Children should not be allowed to move too much beyond the confines of the house and yard, at home and at school, according to the healer. Walking around, playing and running into unknown areas might make them vulnerable to harmful spiritual influence. This boy had been crossing the yard of the old woman from Tanna, who is, according to Monique, well known for her knowledge of evil forces. She had placed leaves and branches on the ground that, to an unknowing person, looked harmless but were in reality powerful instruments for getting access to a person's interior. The old woman had placed this on the ground where she expected the man she had targeted to move. She was probably nearby, watching. However, the boy, running suddenly into her yard on his way to get a ball or searching for his friends, accidentally stepped on the leaves and the branches, and the spirit had entered him. It caused nausea, fever and pain behind the eyes.



According to Monique, only her vision and prayer could see through the old woman's magic and drive the demon out of the boy's body.

We can see how the constant focus on keeping the borders between a pure inside and a dangerous outside is fundamental for social life in these neighbourhoods. Let us now move to Palanca in Luanda again and look at the way in which this theory of social dynamics in 'Pentecost' sheds light on processes and practices observed by Ruy.

## **On Exposure and Concealment**

Returning to Luanda, it is not only the white garments that signify the creation of a 'safe', righteous space. Urban architecture and soundscapes have similar effects, creating logics of exposure and concealment, protection and safety. The neo-Pentecostal church UCKG that arrived in Luanda in the early 1990s exemplifies the way in which certain branches of Pentecostals occupy the city, creating safe and holy spaces of promise and salvation. The church made a great public impact, with the construction of a massive cathedral in the high-class neighbourhood of Alvalade, engaging in public demonstrations and a specific media strategy. In Ruy's first visit to Luanda in 2006, he entered the cathedral – out of curiosity but also because its powerful air conditioning was inviting. He noticed how, unlike other churches he knew, it was an 'open space', surrounded by members/volunteers handing out invitations to passers-by, attempting to lure them into the cool environment and comfortable, cinema chairs.

This urban codification reveals an explicit intentionality of men and women in these churches in terms of claiming the space of negotiation of the borders between the internal and the external, the individual and the collective. This was also the case in another Pentecostal church Ruy encountered, the Igreja do Bom Deus (Church of the Good God). A few years ago, he was walking with a friend in central Luanda and overheard songs coming from one of the local stadiums known as the Estádio dos Coqueiros. They discretely entered the stadium and sat in the middle of the crowd, on the side that was unprotected from the sun. However, as they were the only white people in the whole stadium they were quickly spotted by the ushers and invited to sit in the shade, near the VIPs. There, they were able to watch a culmination of outward, externalizing display: the performance of choirs, healing sessions and even marching bands, until the big moment arrived, the arrival of the church leader, prophet Simão Lutumba, in a Mercedes Benz, directly onto the running track, escorted by ushers and believers.

Not all churches seek this kind of visibility and exposure. In fact, the religious landscape of Luanda is marked, among other things, by a dual dynamic of visibility/occultation in the way churches engage in the city. While some churches (i.e. transnational organizations such as the UCKG, the Tokoist Church and others) have an outward-oriented strategy, performing aesthetic and patrimonial interventions in the city centres and landmarks with ‘cathedral politics’, others prefer to remain ‘undercover’ in the city. For instance, often on his walks through the city, Ruy could hear in the distance the screaming sermon of a male pastor and the cries of the believers, but he could not *see* them. They were audibly present but hidden from sight, inside buildings that did not immediately invite one in as had the stadium or the highly visible power-buildings of the UCKG. Rather, their enclosure from the outside, performing a dramatic separation from ‘the world’, was complete.

Thus, in the Palanca, the creation of ‘safe spaces’ can be elusive, marked only with hand-painted signs in intersections, or posters spread throughout the main arteries, the churches remaining mainly out of sight in the less trafficked streets. One only encounters them when stumbling upon walls painted with colourful letters indicating their name and weekly service schedule, or perhaps if attracted by their singing and praising during such periods. This is the case of the many *mpeve ya nlongo* churches that populate the Palanca, frequently occupying makeshift spaces that appear permanently under construction – perhaps because the churches themselves are in some way under construction. In fact, walking around the Palanca, and in contrast to the flashy cathedrals of the city centre, Ruy only encountered infrastructures that seemed to be in a constant state of construction, casting a sense of incompleteness but also of expectation and promise.

So far we have focused mainly on how borders are created from the inside. In other words, the ethnography shows how healers and believers create their environments in order to feel part of a collective, saved community but also to emphasize the significance of these safe (from evil attacks) and saved (protected by the Holy Spirit) spaces. Let us now move to the ‘outside’ and see what ‘Pentecost’ looks like from the perspective of one who is not committed to being part of the saved ‘spaces’. We will return to Port Vila.

## **The Sorcerer from Ambrym**

In the above cases, the significance of borders is the structuring logic of not only conversion, confession and healing processes but also of

the relationship between a person and the social environment. The fundamental distinction between good and evil orders social life, making borders of different kinds and in different contexts significant. However, some healers in Port Vila do not operate within this logic. Rather, they fundamentally break with it. Their approach to healing is not structured on an idea of a fundamental distinction between good and evil, inside and outside and the creation of protected and saved spaces. They do not call upon the Holy Spirit when they heal but use the power of different kinds of spirits. However, they are as much part of the Pentecostal landscape as are the other healers. One might say that they represent the necessary negative counter image of the 'woman who prays' and thereby make their qualities even more visible. There is, one might argue, a hierarchy of healers based on the degree to which one can manage the social logic of borders and inside/outside. Most 'women who pray' will be absolutely clear in their reasoning. They will, in the process of discernment or diagnosis, point to the lack of strong borders against evil forces. They will also appeal to the power of the good, to the Holy Spirit and its healing force. There are no grey areas; there is only black and white, right and wrong.

However, as we have already seen in this chapter, some healers do not work with the Holy Spirit but with the knowledge of what they will call 'kastom'. These healers do not appeal to absolute borders. Rather, they believe there is neither good and evil nor black and white or right and wrong. Sickness can be caused by a conflict, disagreements, bad feelings or a discontented ancestor's spirit. Sometimes these healers are talked about as '*klevas*' (clever people). They have great knowledge of the use of leaves and plants that can be used in massages or in different kinds of oral treatment. Their most powerful ability, though, is the work of their own spirit. Some of them have a spirit that can move without the physical body. At night, these spirits are often flying in the air, swimming in the ocean or running around in the neighbourhoods. These are the spirits that church-based healers will refer to as evil, as demons and witches. However, when talking to the 'kastom' healers, they will point out that they work in order to achieve healing of sick people. They will tell their clients that their sickness might be caused by the remaining part of something – for instance, the half of the fruit they have left uneaten, part of their hair or nails or a clothing item they used to wear. This part might be lost in a place close to a harmful influence. Having thrown half of an uneaten fruit into the ocean where the black and white snake might eat it can cause stomach pain, for example. Or if a missing part of your clothing is too close to a bush with stringing leaves, your skin might itch. At night, their spirit will travel to retrieve the object that is causing the person to be sick.

In August 2014, Annelin (and her husband, Knut) talked to one of these healers, Gaston, a sixty-year-old Ambrym man who had lived most of his life in Port Vila. We had heard about Gaston for some time. Our Port Vila-based Ambrym friends had talked about him as a very spiritually powerful man. When we met Gaston, he was sitting in front of Port Vila's market house on a bench facing the sea wearing a huge knitted Rastafarian cap, dark sunglasses and drinking his second bottle of Tusker, the local beer. It was around lunchtime. He invited us to sit down. 'I drink every day,' he said, by way of introduction.

All day I drink. I used to work in one of the fancy hotels, but I would drink all day, in between work, on my breaks. Often I sleep outside, because I am too drunk to get home; I sleep on benches, and I sleep on the grass in the parks. No one ever harms me; no one even approaches me. They all know how powerful I am, and they dare not come near me.

After having spent a lot of time with the church-based healers, or 'the women who pray', this healer struck Annelin as very different. This impression was not only created by his attitude to alcohol and his relaxed relationship to sleeping arrangements but also by the way he talked about his healing power: *I have a strong spirit*, he said. *My spirit can heal*. 'When a person is sick,' he said, 'I can usually hold my hand to her or his body and make the cause of sickness disappear.' However, he pointed out, 'if they take a person to the hospital first, I cannot help them. They need to come to me before they seek help from doctors, nurses or hospitals.' In contrast to 'the women who pray', the *kleva* from Ambrym will not point to himself as a mere channel, or vessel, for the healing spirit. Rather, he is the spirit that can heal.

In 'Pentecost' these healers are recognized as powerful, but usually they are recognized because of their negative powers; they represent the evil side. However, much to our surprise, one of our most faithful church friends, who is herself a prophetess in a charismatic church and sincerely engaged in the distinction between good and evil spirits, had, when her daughter was dying, sought help from this healer. Although there is a hierarchy of healers, and most people will think of healers such as Gaston as, in the words of one of the church-based healers, 'idol-worshippers', when desperate and facing serious, life-threatening sickness, healers such as Gaston are also recognized as powerful.

Still, they are considered the outcasts; the ones that have little worth. It is exactly because they do not recognize the fundamental significance of the distinction between good and bad that they are considered of little social significance and of poor social standing. One might argue that they mainly represent the negative counter-image of the morally good

in Pentecostal Port Vila. Yet, while no one will dispute their significance and their powerful presence, few will seek their help. Most people will seek help from 'the women who pray' because they so clearly manage to make a distinction between good and evil and because they so clearly maintain a social order where the evil remains outside and the inside is protected.

## **Models of the Person and of the Social in 'Pentecost'**

In 'Pentecost' we can thus find a specific theory of the social, a theory of how the body works, of what the person is and what the nature of the social is. At the heart of this social theory, from a Pentecostal Port Vila, Kiriwina or Palanca, is the dynamic of creating borders, of creating separation between pure 'insides' and threatening 'outsides' at different levels and in different contexts. For instance, this dynamic establishes the borders of the person when that person has been possessed by demons or affected by witchcraft, or it creates 'safe areas' inside the house or inside the yard, protecting against the dangerous power of witchcraft and sorcery. The healers provide technologies for looking toward the inside, to see 'behind' the false borders of witchcraft to what a person really is – such as a demon with the face of a friendly neighbour. The healers provide technologies for identifying false borders, to cast out the evil and to re-establish new, morally good borders. Sociality is driven by the necessity to keep the 'inside' pure and safe or, rather, to create insides that remain protected. Social life is about keeping in order, and keeping visible, these borders.

This process can be observed on the level of the person and the neighbourhood as well as the city. In this chapter, we have outlined different stories and descriptions from our respective field sites in order to approach an analysis of what is at the core of social life in these Pentecostal contexts. We have seen how the concepts of inside/outside have taken on partly overlapping meaning but also partly separate meaning – from cathedral politics to invisible churches in Luanda, witchcraft confessions in Kiriwina and healing technologies in Port Vila. The ethnographic analyses given in this chapter remain place-bound: it is a description of 'Pentecost' practices. However, in Part III of this book, in Chapter 4, we will bring this ethnography into a wider dialogue with theories and ethnographies from elsewhere.

## Notes

Parts of the ethnography presented in this chapter are also published in Eriksen 2018.

1. 'Ni-Vanuatu' is a term referring to people who live in Vanuatu of indigenous origin.
2. All personal names are changed for anonymity
3. Eve is a 'Pere' in her own church, called 'Eglise St Pierre'. She has been ordained, she told me, by St Peter himself. Her church is located close to the airport, where Evelyn is also building her own residence. The congregation consists of about fifty to seventy members, who come regularly to mass.

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# 2

## Reconfiguring Life and Death

### A New Moral Economy in 'Pentecost'

#### The Point of Departure

The sun had broken briefly through the clouds as Michelle and her adoptive father, Matadoya, made their way to the northern end of Kiriwina Island in late June 2013, but dark skies threatened. After turning off the main road, they first cycled along a rutted airstrip, built by American soldiers during World War II and later abandoned to the elements and overgrown with weeds. Heavy rains the previous days meant that the mud track into Boitavaia, a small village some distance from the main road in northern Kiriwina, was nearly impossible to navigate by bicycle. The track continued past the old airstrip known as the 'North Drome' during the war, through deep mud, and by the time they reached the village of Kaurikwau, they decided to leave the bikes and continue on foot to Boitavaia. They were making the excursion because Michelle was keen to attend a mortuary distribution, the general term for which in the local Kilivila language is *sagali*. After nearly two years of fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, Michelle had attended dozens upon dozens of such events. This one, however, promised to be different from most she had attended. Boitavaia and several neighbouring villages, as well as others scattered across the largest of the Trobriand Islands, Kiriwina, had made collective decisions to change the way such mortuary distributions were done. Specifically, these villages had decided that they would no longer manufacture or exchange *doba*, the bundles and skirts made from banana leaves made famous thanks to Annette Weiner's work

in the 1970s, and which had for generations been the primary object of exchange following a clansperson's death. So far, only a few villages had given up the use of doba wholesale, but many villages throughout Kiriwina regularly debated the merits of continuing the practice.

This debate is a key entry point into understanding what is happening in Pentecostal Kiriwina. Pentecostal churches in Kiriwina and other Trobriand Islands are a relatively recent phenomenon, following a long history of missionization by Methodists (now the United Church) and Catholics. In recent decades, the Pentecostalization of the Trobriands has created new moral as well as economic imperatives to reorient exchange activities and domestic economies. In using the concept of moral economies, we keep the concept intentionally broad, encompassing both economic decisions that consider exchange in evaluative moral terms (that imply a value judgement about what is 'good', what Carrier (2018: 23) refers to as 'economic morality') as well as in the sense of the mutual obligations that a moral economy entails (Carrier 2018). The arrival and establishment of this new form of worship, and the discourses that emerge from it, have had flow-on effects that belie the number of congregants who actually attend churches that are designated 'Pentecostal'. As one United pastor put it, the island has been 'hit by a Pentecostal wave'; most United Churches in the Trobriands now consider themselves to be 'Revival' churches, in contrast to the Catholic Church, which maintains its own discourses and forms of worship (and yet, in many ways, has also been influenced by the so-called Pentecostal 'wave'). People have thus increasingly been concerned with the significance of sagali ceremonies in this new context.

Let us return to the specific event in June 2013. When the distributions got underway, it was easy for Michelle to see the ways in which this sagali differed from others she had attended. The size and scale was much reduced; the only things given away were lengths of fabric (*laplaps* in Pidgin, or *karekwa* in local vernacular), woven mats, a few store goods and cash notes and coins. While women were still the main participants in these distributions, the only goods being exchanged that were actually manufactured by women were mats; the rest either were cash itself or required cash to obtain, unlike the banana leaf textiles that women elsewhere make and exchange in vast quantities, on a scale quite unlike the weaving of mats. It was surprising to see the large amounts of money distributed in the Boitavaia sagali; people carried sticks with kina notes affixed to the branches, often in excess of 200 kina (about USD 75 at the day's exchange rate). It was an easy assumption to make that people in these villages must be high achievers, pursuing work and education in the cities, such that those living in the villages relied heavily on



remittances sent home by employed relatives, but this was not the case. In fact, few residents of these villages are educated beyond elementary school, and village residents receive few remittances. Instead, they rely on their own business sense and ability to save a bit when they find good money – for example, by selling a large carving when a cruise ship arrives. Some Boitavaia women also pointed out that because they no longer ‘waste their time’ making doba, they can sell the *wakaya* leaves (the kind of banana leaves used in their manufacture) that grow in their village for money to those who persist in using doba in sagali, or, better yet, they can exchange these raw leaves directly for calico cloth. What is more, in Boitavaia, the *valova* exchange, which in other villages is a non-cash based direct exchange of small goods for banana leaf bundles, is here replaced with cash transactions. The people of Boitavaia were quick to point out that their lives were better without the drain created by making and exchanging doba, which ‘*gala mokwita ipilasi okauweda*’ (doesn’t really help our households).

### Talking about ‘Waste’

The discourses of Trobrianders about the shift away from the use of doba often revolves around the need to focus not on extended kinship obligations with those clan members who may be more distantly related or geographically situated but on a redirection of resources – time, money, material goods – towards members of the nuclear family. In discussing sagali and the use of doba with Trobriand interlocutors, a number of concepts consistently reappeared in conversations with people who both embraced and eschewed its production and exchange: with pastors or church leaders, with the ‘grass-roots’ people in villages across the islands and with urban-dwelling Trobrianders or those who had spent their entire lives in the islands. Most frequently, the time, energy and material investment required to produce doba is referred to, by men and women alike, as ‘wasteful’ or ‘useless’ – e.g. ‘*sena iyomada taem*’ (it is a real waste of time). In the local vernacular, *yomada* is usually translated as ‘waste’, carrying negative connotations, and the term recurs frequently in discussions about sagali and the use of doba. Doba is often referred to as *pupagatu* (dirty) and *maena gaga* (smelly).

For those in Trobriand villages or clans that have chosen to stop using doba in exchange practices, a similar refrain is reiterated over and over again by almost every Trobriander (male or female, pastor or layperson, urban or rural). The following excerpt is from a conversation with Pastor Steven of the Rhema Church in the village of Obwelia,

but it is almost verbatim what literally dozens of other Trobrianders would say:

It's good, we [in the church] don't say *doba* is demonic. But it's *pupagatu* [dirty]. *Tomota gala bisikamsi, kikoni bimesa bikamsi, bimeyasi maena gaga* [People can't wear it, rats will come and eat it, it smells bad]. And a lot of time is consumed in this process. *Laplap boimeyasi dimdim* [White people already brought cloth pieces], and with this we can sew it, wear it, make pillowcases, or what[ever] – not like *doba*. *Doba* is a waste. It's better we just switch it out with *karekwa* [calico cloth]. (Michelle's field notes, interview in a mix of English and Kilivila, translations Michelle)

The concepts of the *dala* (matriline or sub-clan; relatives on one's mother's side going back to a common female ancestor) and *baloma* (spirits of the ancestors) figure prominently,<sup>1</sup> as people talk about obligations and the need to 'pay' something back (*mapu*), which is often contrasted with 'gift' (*bobwelila*). *Momova* refers to life and *kariga* to death; the latter is much more commonly used in conversations about *sagali*, since it is a feast in honour of a deceased relative, and death is celebrated in more dramatic ritual fashion than virtually any other event in the life course in the Trobriands. But somewhere in all of these conversations emerges, inevitably, a reference to focusing on living a good life and directing resources for the wellbeing of one's family in the here and now, rather than orienting production and exchange towards the deceased.

Based on these perspectives from a Pentecostal Kiriwina, it seems that in 'Pentecost', waste might be a significant concept. We will now look a little closer at what this concept implies.

## Life

If one of the most often repeated terms with regards to the pitfalls of a focus on the production and distribution of *doba* centre around 'waste' or 'wastefulness' (*yomada*), as this chapter will draw out through ethnographic description of contemporary Kiriwina, what does this mean in practice, and, as importantly, what does it mean for people's understanding of what is useful and productive? On a larger scale, can it even tell us something about how people understand what is important in life and death? The rumblings of change in the practice of *sagali* began as early as the mid 1980s, people in Kiriwina say. Within the United Church, there was already discussion about the need to update these old customs, which stood outside of Christian belief and devotion.

In Pentecostal Kiriwina, the focus is on the here and now and the way forward, in keeping with Biblical principles as exemplified in the following verses from Luke: ‘But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God”. Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home”. Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God”.’ (Luke 9:60–62). The discourses and changes in ritual practice in contemporary Kiriwina reflect a literal reaction to the Lord’s message that those who dwell on farewelling the dead, which is an act of looking backward, so to speak, cannot claim to be ‘fit for the Kingdom of God’. If people are to move forward – spiritually but also materially, in terms of development and prosperity or finding a good/better life – they must be fully devoted to discipleship and living in a Godly way. The arrival of a new wave of churches, most of which emphasize direct communication with God, the power of the Holy Spirit and the importance of being born again in the faith, mean that such sentiments are growing in strength and conviction. It is, as this chapter will show, a matter of life over death, as played out through the moral economy and acts of exchange.

### **‘We Can’t Eat Doba’**

George is a highly educated Trobriander who, after many years living and working in Port Moresby, is now living back in his home village of Obwelia, one of the first villages in Kiriwina to completely cease using *nununiga* (banana leaf bundles), now more than twenty years ago. George told Michelle very early on during her first stint of fieldwork about how members of the Revived churches often refuse to support or participate in *sagali*, again because it is seen as wasteful, especially when there is scarcity – that is, during times of the year when food is not plentiful. George explained that the church creates new demands by imposing holidays that do not follow the timetable for traditional feasting. For example, when Easter rolls around and the church calls for a community feast, people may have to harvest their *kaymata* (ceremonial) gardens before they are really ready. Analogously, Christmas falls at a time traditionally marked by food scarcity, which means that today such celebrations demand supplementing with trade store foods, especially rice. And rice can only be obtained with money, so the need to focus on ‘productive’ work becomes more and more linked to that which produces a cash income. Similarly, Annelin reports that in 2014 the village of Ranon, on the island of Ambrym in Vanuatu, decided not

to celebrate Christmas, as so many people had died and death ceremonies had exhausted resources. This made the town migrants in Fresh Wota very upset; how could they not celebrate the birth of Jesus but instead spend their time and garden produce on their dead?

In Boitavaia, the village described at the beginning of this chapter, Michelle was told that people ‘didn’t want/need *doba* because we can’t eat it’ and instead would focus on more ‘useful’ things like money, mats and bolts of fabric. People pointed out, as they did in Obwelia village, that God wanted them to change their ways. God ‘spoke to people’ and revealed his plan. People should stop using magic (*megwa*) of all kinds; ‘*avela bikatoula, bitapwaroru*’ (whoever gets sick should pray), not resort to ‘bush medicine’ or magic. While the entire village of Boitavaia as well as the neighbouring villages of Kaurikwau and Tubuwada have stopped using *doba* completely, they have not actually stopped holding *lisaladabu*, the major mortuary distribution that usually follows many months or even years after a death, so the kinspeople of the deceased have time to amass the great wealth needed to make a good distribution. Instead, they have changed the nature of it. It is no longer compulsory, but for those who wish to honour their deceased relatives with a *lisaladabu sagali*, they will not wait so long after the death. Given the shorter time span between a death and the major mortuary distributions, one has to keep some fabric and money available in case a relative dies, whether by holding it oneself or by having enough other people indebted to oneself that one can quickly claim favours from those who may have such things at the needed time. People will quickly deploy the resources at their disposal – wood carvings, yams, mustard and betel nut, for example – to exchange in the market for cash. Because the ceremony is simplified and does not include the distribution of hundreds or even thousands of bundles of banana leaves, it takes much less time to carry out. The *lisaladabu sagali* described in the opening paragraphs of this chapter took only about an hour, easily accommodating a delay due to a heavy rain shower. Meanwhile, such distributions in other villages that still use *doba* take a full day, with some even continuing on to a second day in ever-escalating competitions to amass and distribute more and more.

No one suggested that participation in *sagali* or the manufacture of banana leaf textiles was in any way evil, sinful or demonic in the way this was described in the context of healing in the previous chapter. Instead, a comparative exercise starting in Kiriwina opens up another dimension of ‘Pentecost’. Here, focus is not so much on good/evil as a key binary but rather productivity/unproductivity or forward-looking/backward-looking. In Pentecostal Kiriwina, where the Holy Spirit is

paramount, it is important to focus attention on providing resources for one's own veranda or household (nuclear family), while it is pointless, useless or unproductive (though not 'evil') to 'waste' time and energy on wide-ranging clan-based obligations. We might further suggest that the perception of *doba* as a rotting, decaying organic material that fills large baskets in small houses or is strewn across the village centre during *sagali* reflects an almost physical presence of the effect of 'Pentecost'. In people's complaints about the dirty, smelly *doba*, we can detect a tangible manifestation of how Pentecostalism becomes 'Pentecost'; how the expectation of a 'Pentecostal world' creates the presence of a moral order that is already here.

Thus, as outlined in the introduction, the coming of the Holy Spirit – that is to say, the expectation of the Pentecost – has visible, social effects: it creates 'Pentecost'. In this world, in 'Pentecost', the unproductivity of *doba* and *sagali* turn into a pungent smell, a distinctive sight: that of rotting banana leaves. Strips of leaves that lie in the road or in peoples' yards while they dry, filling up verandas while new bundles are being made, is a concrete manifestation of a problem in 'Pentecost' – a moral problem of 'waste'. In this chapter we will look at the significance of this focus on 'waste' and the turn towards life and close kin at the cost of a cyclical perspective on life and death that seems to be important for life in 'Pentecost'. Calling something 'wasteful' in Kiriwina is consequently part of a moral discourse that redirects attention away from death and kin obligations and towards life and the 'here and now'. This transformation, from the dead to the living, one might say, is also echoed in Port Vila and the Palanca. In the sections below, we take a few circuits through each field site to compare the specific ways in which such transformations are manifested in each setting and what this can tell us about life in 'Pentecost'. In doing so, we also point to the specific ways the presence and expectation of the Holy Spirit creates social moral imperatives.

## **Extending the Context: Moral Imperatives in Fresh Wota and the Palanca**

In Port Vila, waste is a category in frequent use. '*Yu no wastem taem*' (do not waste your time) is very commonly heard. It refers to the literal meaning of being efficient, but it also connotes a subtler moral attitude of not being lazy. This concept has in more recent times gained another layer of significance. It indicates not only the moral obligation to be efficient, not to be lazy (and thus to work and be productive), but also

the way in which the potential for productivity should be seen and understood as well as grasped. For instance, Annelin was surprised by the growth in numbers of local household stores in Fresh Wota and Ohlen on her visit in 2014. Whereas about a decade ago there might have been a few locally run stores for every block, there is now a store in nearly every other household. There seems to be a moral imperative to have a small shop or store in virtually every household in the Fresh Wota neighbourhood. Rose, one of Annelin's long-time interlocutors, told her, 'To have a store is an easy way to make money. Everyone *should* have a store.' Such stores comprise little more than a shelf in one's kitchen near a window through which one can sell staples like rice, tinned fish and instant noodles to one's own relatives and neighbours and even to members of one's own household. Stocks are small and quickly exhausted, but the potential for a small profit to be made from buying wholesale and reselling at a slight mark-up means that not to do so is lazy, even close to immoral.

Maggio (2016) reports on similar phenomena in peri-urban Honiara in the Solomon Islands. He describes how keeping money inside the household through the sale of store goods, even between husband and wife, avoids the drain of resources outside the household. People will sell goods to themselves in order to clearly conceptualize the obligation to make money. Maggio shows how economic activities in Pentecostal households are not just moneymaking strategies but an example of the redefinition of family relationships in order to overcome the contradictory values of kinship and money, learned through church-sponsored sessions on domestic economy. In the context of Port Vila, and also in Honiara, 'waste' is thus a central category but not in the exact same sense as in Kiriwina. Whereas in Kiriwina waste is primarily understood in its association with *doba* production and implies a 'backward', traditional and even immoral attitude to life (because of its 'death-centrism'), in Port Vila waste is associated with the lack of understanding of the opportunities for potential profit and finding a way to seize these opportunities.

In the Palanca neighbourhood of Luanda, Ruy describes conversion testimonies that invoke an economic argument embedded with ideas of reciprocity and compensation that are moralized in terms of being either purposeful or wasteful. As in Kiriwina and Port Vila, material things become indices of moral righteousness and operate through contrasting ideas of wasteful or purposeful behaviour. For instance, Ruy was confronted with the conversion story of a young man in the Bom Deus, a Bakongo evangelical church, who had been unemployed, smoking marijuana and visiting sorcerers to heal his constant physical and mental

problems. For him there needed to be an explanation for his ailments in the external agency of sorcery or envy. He eventually found Jesus, entered the Bom Deus and was then able to present his own conversion testimony as a process of healing through modification of his conduct from wasteful to purposeful, which in turn found material manifestation in his subsequent acquisition of a house and motorcycle. Ruy heard a similar story from a pastor in the EKWESA church, who explained how, after growing up in the Kimbanguist Church in Kinshasa, in his teenage years he decided to 'stay at home' and live a 'worldly life'. Eventually he began having dreams of a more purposeful life and a vision of a specific church space. After the third dream, he began looking for this space and only stopped when he found it. He made the church his 'home' and is now one of its most prominent pastors, living off the contributions of his followers and patients.

This story suggests that the individual, the household and the public are configured to correspond in terms of moral and ethical behaviour: what a person does, and how one behaves, reflects on the organization of one's household. But if buying and independently managing your own house is indicative of achievement in places like Luanda, this 'achievement' can be a morally double-edged sword because it often implies 'moving away' from the church. Oftentimes, Ruy heard the phrase 'staying at home' as a euphemism for 'not belonging to a church', thus implying ideas of laziness, lack of productivity and so on. Therefore, belonging to church implies 'leaving home' to join in the collective endeavour of church worship and also letting the church 'enter the home' and direct the ways in which family members participate in the domestic economy in a purposeful way. The fact that the young man from the Bom Deus church was able to buy himself a motorcycle might therefore be understood not as a product of professional success and financial accumulation but rather of a rationalizing of time and conduct towards a less wasteful, morally approved situation.

### **The Moral Domestic Economy in 'Pentecost'**

To return to Kiriwina, the concept of waste points to a moral turn towards a specific idea of productivity, as we have seen also in Port Vila and Luanda. Eschewing sagali and doba as wasteful is seen by most Trobrianders as also a move away from looking to the ancestors and the temporally and spatially widespread kin linkages that connect members of the same dala, or matriclan. The focus and concentration of resources and energy are instead directed inwards, such that the nuclear family

is the epicentre, and the significant 'extended family' becomes centred more on one's church congregation or fellowship group than towards obligations to the dala. To extend this a bit further, such a reorientation means no less than a reconfiguration of the meaning of life and death. If the significance of the dala and maintaining links to genealogical ancestors are severed by cutting sagali and forgoing the use of doba, a product of women's labour that symbolically represents the dala and the very milk that links mother to child, what does death mean? Death is no longer understood as the time in which obligations from members of the same clan as the deceased have to make repayments to members of other clans in order to send the spirit of the deceased peacefully to Tuma, the island where all dead ancestors reside. In Pentecostal Kiriwina, death is the end, as the soul goes to heaven at God's discretion based on the deceased's moral behaviour during his or her life; there is nothing a clan member can do once their loved one has passed on except pray for the departed soul. A focus on 'life' instead of 'death', then, means a focus on ensuring material wellbeing and spiritual wholeness in the here and now and looking to the future rather than the past.

Today, some of the social functions of sagali as a communal event of redistribution and sharing are replaced, in a way, with feasts for church events such as Easter or Christmas celebrations, church openings and the like. And rather than clan members coming together after a death to amass resources for distribution to affines and other non-kin at sagali, fundraising events called *semakai*<sup>2</sup> are regularly held at many (primarily United) churches, wherein various groups – women's, men's, youth fellowship groups, Sunday school children as well as groups by hamlet – must give collective donations of cash in support of the church pastors, deacons and general infrastructure. Reminiscent of the part of sagali called *deli*, in which woven mats, cloth and other goods are brought by groups and set down to then be redistributed, in *semakai* a number of people representing one of the groups mentioned above assemble facing the church leadership, who sit at the centre of the proceedings. The group members sing and collectively advance towards the leaders to drop their individual offerings, on behalf of the group they represent in this case, into large dishes or baskets. Each group tries to outdo the next with more generous offerings, and tallies are made for each group and announced so that everyone will know which group has been able to amass the most resources to give away in *semakai*. What is more, I was told that in some parishes, a church leader will sponsor a *kayasa* – a competitive challenge traditionally done when planting new yam gardens, to encourage gardeners to work hard and plant many yams. His immediate family or hamlet will donate



a sizable amount of money in the next semakai and challenge others to beat it, offering a pig, clay pot or money as a prize to whoever can beat him. Trobrianders themselves compare these events and point out that church activities are in many ways constructed as parallels or substitutions for earlier exchange practices, providing new stages for community engagement and directing/redistributing resources. This is in a sense a way in which, as we have argued, the notion of living 'in Pentecost' is played out in a social landscape and permeates many forms of social activity.

### **'Kusapu, Kutayoyowa' (You Sow, You Reap)**

The concept of seed money and the reciprocal returns anticipated from tithes and offerings is part of the Trobriand discourse and demonstrates another way in which people might make better use of their resources than worrying about doba. For example, Thelma, a young woman who leads prayer groups and sing-alongs in her CRC congregation in the village of Kwebwaga, told me, 'Tithing is necessary. You have to give your 10%, but you should try to give as much more as possible as "free offerings", which will be paid back (*mapula*) in blessings from God.' Thelma told her parents and community that she will not participate in *sagali* in any capacity because '*sagali gala yaubada lapaisewa*' (*sagali* is not God's work). Instead, she spoke about how the work she does must be to the glory of God, as she sees her future in God's hands. She claims that she provides 'living testimony' of how a woman can dedicate her life to God and forego traditional obligations.

Similarly, Pastor Michael says not giving tithes and offerings is like 'stealing from God'. And Pastor Cedric of the Restoration Church in Lalela, a village on the island of Kitava, told me that individual offerings are the 'seed' you plant: 'God pays you according to the measure you put into it.' These should be as generous as possible and are given from the heart. One also has an obligation to pay tithes, which should be one tenth of one's earnings. Giving well and freely to the church requires discipline and self-control; one must honestly give as much as one is able, even if that means sacrificing other things. During the church service, two plates are passed around, one for each kind of offering. According to Cedric, '[spiritual] prosperity comes from giving [one's] life [to Christ], being baptized already in the Kingdom of God. To prosper in the physical realm, you need to give something to God. What you give, you receive; what you sow, you reap.' Tithes can (and should) also be given in yams.

They should represent a sacrifice, as it was for Abraham, who gave his son as an offering. God promises wealth, not only in money but in a big family and other ways. Giving ties God's hands to you. If you give from your heart, you will receive a reward. The pastor will pray for those who give freely, and blessings will come from God. (Pastor Cedric as quoted in Michelle's field notes)

This turn away from kinship-based exchange and distribution ceremonies to church-based fundraisings and an importance placed on tithes and offerings has gained significance across 'Pentecost', especially perhaps as fundraising gains a new character, as observed by Annelin in Port Vila. She observed that lotteries are now the new and popular way of fundraising. This is an easy way to make a profit. To make this point more obvious it can be useful to contrast the way in which people in the village of Ranon, on the island of Ambrym in north central Vanuatu, where Annelin did fieldwork in the early 1990s, organized their fundraising activity relative to the way it is done in the urban contexts today. In Ranon, women would to a large extent take charge of the fundraising activity, which was usually organized within the framework of the Presbyterian Church. These fundraising events usually involved a lot of work. Women would work their gardens, collect the harvest, cook meals (for instance, *laplap*, a pudding made from grated starchy vegetables and coconut cream<sup>3</sup>) and bring beautifully decorated puddings to the church (or often the area just outside the church, where these events usually took place). The amount of work the women usually put into these events, however, by far exceeded the kind of money they would bring in to the church. The fundraising would usually consist of women buying food from each other but at so low a price – for instance, 10VT for a piece of *laplap*, which is perhaps about a tenth of the going market price, at least in Port Vila – that selling elsewhere would of course have brought in much more money. In other words, it was clear that profit was not at all the main purpose for these events. Rather, it was the social event itself that was of worth. Bringing people together on the ceremonial ground and eating together was the main purpose.

However, these kinds of events are rarer in the urban context. Lotteries are much more common. For instance, in July 2014 the Bible Church in Port Vila applied to the city council for a lottery permit that would allow them to organize a grand lottery scheme, with the first prize of 200,000VT, the second prize a TV and the third a mobile phone. They sold lottery tickets within and outside of the congregation. Each ticket was sold at 1000VT. The committee in charge of the lottery made sure that enough tickets were distributed among members for them to

sell in work places as well as among neighbours and kin. However, after deducting the cost of the main prizes, not much was left for the church, according to the chairperson of the lottery committee. A couple of years earlier a similar proceeding had brought a lot of money to the church. Lotteries might have become too popular, and too many churches used them as fundraising schemes, he reasoned. In any case, the lottery in Port Vila is radically different from the kinds of fundraising taking place in villages such as Ranon. Whereas the lottery scheme does not involve much social effort, the fundraising activity in the village was almost entirely a social event. The lotteries seem to be purely economic. It is a scheme that allows for profit without much social effort. If the traditional kinship ceremonies were, to some extent, replaced by the fundraising events for the church, the lottery in town marks perhaps a more radical break with the kinship obligations of the past.

Thus, in the new moral economy of 'Pentecost', lotteries have become almost the opposite of 'waste'. Lotteries open up the possibilities for the future. Lotteries represent what kin obligations cannot: the possibility of an immediate, economic return here and now. In Kiriwina, this logic also embraces *doba*, which has become a metaphor of looking backwards, of extended kinship and a lack of development and prosperity. It does not represent 'the good life' in terms of material satisfaction, as preached not only in prosperity gospel theology but in a general sense in Pentecostal Kiriwina. *Doba* is inextricably linked to death while the 'new economy' is focused on life. There must be a clear connection between church and home/hearth, wherein domestic behaviour should reflect church teachings.

In 'Pentecost' economic activity is not separate from Christian life. This is not only the case in Kiriwina and Port Vila but is also evident in the other 'neighbourhood' that comprises this comparative endeavour. Ruy has observed how informal economic networks of small-scale ventures or mutual aid endeavours penetrate the social fabric of church communities in the Palanca in Luanda. These networks are often used as hubs and spaces of exchange beyond the liturgical activity of the church. One such example are the *kixikilas*, informal micro-saving ventures wherein groups of five to ten women associate and create micro-enterprises through mechanisms of small-scale accumulation, investment and the circulation of money and goods. Such informal, grass-root forms of mutualism are visible in pretty much any street in Luanda, where one can see *quitandeiras* (women selling in stalls), *kinguilas* (women who exchange dollars for kwanzas, the local currency) and even small shops. Ruy notes that this focus on mutualism is in many ways engrained in Bakongo culture, but it is also part of a specific

theological understanding that highlights the horizontality of spiritual community organization. In other words, there is a spiritual or moral value in individual labour, and the work one is morally responsible for extends to both obligations to the church and congregation and being financially responsible and caring for one's own domestic sphere with spiritual and material/economic provisions.

## **A Turn to Life**

We have now seen that ideas of waste seem prevalent in all of the areas of 'Pentecost' presented here, although in slightly different ways. The question is whether the idea of waste signals a concern with a greater cosmological shift, one that reflects not only a break with the 'wasteful' but also an absolute break between life and death. We have seen, in all three locations, how ideas about wastefulness might be related to larger cosmological issues of life and death and/or reorientations in terms of kinship obligations. We can begin to see, as we work our way through these varied descriptions of the neighbourhoods, the contours of a theory from 'Pentecost' in which a form of life-centredness is the key. In all three cases, certain moral imperatives are implicit in ideas about waste, especially wasting time on things that are not considered important or productive, however this might be defined. Doba is an obvious material example, but idleness is seen across the neighbourhoods as a recipe for moral failure. Wasting time not only does not bring one results, in terms of spiritual and material rewards either here and now or in the afterlife, but it opens up room for diabolical influences to penetrate the body, the mind or the family hearth.

We can also begin to see, in each of these cases, a certain redefinition of obligations to kin and family organization. In the Trobriands, this may be a refocus on the nuclear family instead of the ancestors, a reorientation of looking forward rather than backwards in terms of both socio-economic development and kinship obligations. In Port Vila, obligations to family change when small stores in each village become the moral imperative, meaning that instead of giving 'freely', one instead buys from and sells to neighbours and even one's own family members. In the Palanca, Ruy describes how church ideals enter the home and restructure domestic life, imposing new schedules and order. Indeed, if believers are now 'children of God', this in itself implies a certain reshuffling of the kinship order.

Let us now make another circuit, so to speak, through these neighbourhoods with an eye to the specific connection between waste and

death. We will try to draw out the way in which waste and productivity signals a turn to life or a 'life-centredness' and therefore a redefined relationship to death in our respective contexts. This time we shall focus on funerary practices.

## Death, Waste and Funerals

### *Sagali (Funeral Feasts) in Kiriwina: 'Death Is the End'*

The 'Pentecostal wave' mentioned earlier in this chapter originated with the arrival of new churches, many of which are identified theologically with Pentecostal denominations, which began to appear on the Trobriand religious landscape in the 1980s. For nearly one hundred years, the Methodist (later United Church) and Catholic faiths were the only church communities. In the late 1980s and through to the present moment, new movements have proliferated, with frequent rifts and breakaways. The first of these was the Christian Revival Church (CRC), which built its first congregation in Kwebwaga village and now has four churches across the island of Kiriwina. Other ministries soon followed, such as Rhema, Four Square, Word of Life Ministry and Assemblies of God. As a variety of new churches arrived in Kiriwina with a focus on engaging the Holy Spirit, the necessity of being born again (*kalobusivau*) and receiving spiritual gifts, the process of establishing 'Pentecost' began, often referred to locally as the 'Revival'.

Pastor Thomas, a Revival United Church pastor, considers himself an 'evangelical', having trained alongside those who are leading more strictly defined Pentecostal churches. He gave me his opinion of sagali as it is presently practised:

Sagali consumes a lot of energy. It looks towards the *baloma* [spirits of ancestors]. In the old days, people believed that without proper sagali, there will be sickness and other problems, because the *baloma* won't be happy. But now, you see that sagali is about pride, fame and status. We have lost the real focus, which was to settle the spirits peacefully in Tuma.<sup>4</sup> Now, sagali has grown out of hand; it affects the local economy. All of these *beku* [stone axe blades], clay pots, pigs, huge baskets of *doba* – it's about outdoing others; it's about each *dala* [matriclan] and their own pride.

Thomas does not suggest that sagali should be abandoned altogether but that people need to set their priorities properly. First, the focus should be on paying children's school fees, having enough to eat and so on. He does not feel that people should be pressured to participate beyond



**Figure 2.1** A *sepwana*, a large and orderly stack of *nununiga* destined for a particular non-dala family member of the deceased, such as his/her father, supplemented with calico and kina notes. Photo by Michelle MacCarthy.

their means or expend the vast resources of time and energy (and even money) that it takes to acquire sufficient *doba* to make a *sagali* (Figure 2.1). Why, Trobrianders say, should they put all of this time, energy and even expense into producing these dirty, smelly bundles only to get such a small return? Better to use those resources – the cash to buy the lollies or balloons, the cooking oil, the betel nut – for one’s own family in the first place. What is more, a day spent travelling to a distant village to collect *nununiga* though *valova* (direct exchange of small goods for banana leaf bundles) is a day that is *not* spent working in one’s garden, cleaning one’s house and yard, cooking for one’s children or sewing or mending clothes. That time is also not spent in any cash-generating activity. It is, in other words, a ‘waste’ and a non-productive use of time.

It should be noted that *sagali* is not a single event. *Sagali* refers in general to feasting, most commonly associated with mourning the dead and making distributions across clans. There are a number of stages of *sagali* for each death, often spanning several years, though these have been condensed in recent years. First, usually on the day following the death, *keymeylu* or cooked food (ideally yams and pork, but alternatively tinned fish, rice and/or biscuits) will be brought by male affines to the clan members of the deceased. This will later be repaid in the form of *doba*, called in the men’s names at *lusaladabu sagali*. On the following day or so, a fairly large distribution called *yawali* will be held with whatever resources can be mustered at short notice, but

they should include all of the elements of the later, larger sagali: doba, yams, betel nut, pork, calico cloth, rice, kina notes and coins and so on, though the amounts available are generally much less due to the short time available to collect them. The yawali is the first of the distributions from clan members of the deceased to non-clan relatives and unrelated individuals who are nonetheless close to the deceased. In times past, though less so today, the yawali would be followed by another distribution called *kitaulaka*, which usually involves only pigs, betel nut, and possibly taro (but no yams). These foods are brought uncooked from the relatives of the widow of the deceased to the deceased's kinsmen, sometimes with banana and sugar cane to supplement the presentation. If the 'real brother' of the widow is still alive, he should bring a live pig to his sister's in-laws. If, however (as is often the case), no pigs are available at such short notice, there may be no *kitaulaka* (Michelle never saw this particular distribution actually happen, in nearly two years), though there is an expectation that it should happen later; in that case, whenever a pig becomes available. It is also possible to use smoked fish as an alternative, though this is not as prestigious as a pig. After this, some months will pass while the clan members work hard to amass the resources they need to give away at *lusaladabu*, the major distribution and the one that is most frequently the target of criticism for its wasteful nature. In many cases, this is effectively the end of obligations on behalf of the deceased, though for high-ranking chiefs or leaders further distributions can reflect the status and wealth of such individuals. This digression serves to emphasize just how onerous the traditional obligations are after the death of a relative, such that the impetus for finding reasons to put them aside perhaps becomes rather clearer to the reader.

Many Trobrianders – women and men, pastors and laypeople – stressed that doba and sagali were no longer of such importance because people had realized that it was more important to focus attention, resources and energy into those in their immediate families and communities rather than looking to ancestors of the *dala* and those who had died. 'Death isn't important. We need to work and use our time and resources for the living, not the dead,' Michelle was told by Cedric, the pastor of the Restoration Church (a Rhema breakaway) on the small island of Kitava. Cedric continued, saying, 'My father already looked after me when I was small. I don't have to pay anything back after I look after him when he is sick. Death is the end [of obligations]. These things [sagali] drain resources from the living.' This echoes almost exactly the sentiments of several women from the village of Obwelia, who told Michelle, 'We prefer to concentrate on the living, not the dead.'



**Figure 2.2** Casket of a deceased girl returned from Port Moresby for burial, and her mourning relatives. Photo by Michelle MacCarthy.

In June of 2013, a young girl who Michelle's adoptive mother, Vero, would call her sister (the granddaughter of one of Vero's mother's sisters) died of leukaemia. As is the custom, the girl, who had lived and died in Port Moresby and rarely (if ever) visited Kiriwina, would have to be buried in her ancestral village, that of her mother's clan. When the coffin arrived at the airstrip, Vero, her sister (by the same mother) Daisy and Michelle were among the mourners ready to 'cry' (*valam*) for the girl. The casket was loaded into the back of a truck and they piled in with the other mourners, wailing and crying for the dead girl (Figure 2.2). Michelle was reminded, listening to (and participating in) this wailing, of hearing the collective prayer and even the speaking in tongues as



practised in many of the 'Revived' churches across the islands. Much of what was being uttered was guttural and nonsensical but expressed clearly the collective anguish of the group. At other times, mourners spoke directly to the girl, calling out their relationship to her and expressing their grief. Vero, for example, wailed with gusto, saying, 'O, *bwadagu, gala lagisi migim!*' (Oh, my small sister, I never even saw your face!). The coffin was taken to Vero's uncle's home, where the yawali – a distribution on a smaller scale than *lisaladabu* that takes place within a day or two of a death or the arrival of the deceased from elsewhere – would take place.

Uncle Isaiah, the one brother in a family with many women, saw his burden in this regard as *mwau*, or heavy. (He was the only male, and as such it was up to him to secure the 'men's wealth' of pigs, yams and rice when a relative died.) He had decided some time earlier, and told his clan members, that there would be no more *lisaladabu* when a family member died, just a short yawali (the first and immediate feast after a death). He had not, so far, decreed entirely against the exchange of *doba*, however. Those who had cried on the truck (Michelle included) would stay at Uncle Isaiah's house for several days as *nigabubu*. *Nigabubu* are close relatives of the deceased who stay inside the mourning house, more or less, for three or four days following a death, taking it in shifts to wail and cry for the dead. While they perform this service, the affines of the deceased, known as *sinvalam*, must collect firewood, cook, clean dishes, make tea and so on to serve the *nigabubu*. The economic burden for feeding the *nigabubu* falls on other relatives of the deceased, who must cook food daily and bring it to the mourners, with an especial burden on the host in whose home the mourning takes place. This responsibility is also seen as *mwau*, or heavy, and is another reason often given for why *sagali* should be eliminated or drastically reduced. Once again, the idea that this practice is a 'waste' of one's resources, and the act of sitting in the house for several days crying instead of working in the garden or taking care of one's own family is not only unproductive but even counterproductive. If, conversely, Trobriand people could follow Jesus' exhortation to 'let the dead bury their own dead', such burdens would be lightened or made 'easy' (*gagabila*), and believers could focus instead on 'proclaim[ing] the kingdom of God' (Luke 9:60).

In the Trobriands we can thus see a radical movement away from extended kin-based obligations following clan lines (honouring one's dead ancestors and the spirit world) in favour of the more immediate concerns of the living and the family hearth and through this the seeds planted to reap material and spiritual blessings. Let us now turn to Port Vila to compare funerary practices in urban Vanuatu to those just

described and see if echoes of this focus on ‘life itself’ might resonate in this instance.

### *Dying in Port Vila: No Time to Cry*

In Port Vila we can observe a move away from the importance of kin obligations in funerals, parallel in many ways to that just described in Kiriwina. Eriksen (2008) has pointed out that in Port Vila obligations to repay an ‘ontological debt’ to relatives – to one’s mother’s brother, for instance – has been replaced with a more direct transaction between sister and brother, thus redirecting kin obligations towards a more household-centred economy. A decade ago, in the village context of Ambrym in Vanuatu, the repayment of one’s mother’s brother was understood as something everybody did, and the lack of fulfilling these obligations was talked about with a certain moral condemnation or even disgust. The mother’s brother was the key to a well-functioning social life. Furthermore, he was the most important person to connect one to future marriage partners. However, in Port Vila, people from Ambrym to a much lesser extent acknowledge the necessity of repaying the ‘debt of life’ to the mother’s brother. These ceremonial payments, which in the past consisted of garden produce and woven mats, and perhaps some pigs, have also to some degree been replaced by consumer items, such as plastic containers, saucepans, mattresses, bed sheets and towels. There is thus a clear parallel to Kiriwina in the way in which people appreciate the use value of objects at the cost of the more symbolic value of regenerating kin relations. Not repaying the mother’s brother indicates both a decrease in importance of the place where your blood comes from (the place of one’s mother’s brother) and less significance in the notion that throughout life, and particularly at death, these relations need to be emphasized. Clearly, there is also in Port Vila a shift in focus towards more immediate concerns – towards the living more than the dead. In Port Vila this is perhaps more of a silent transformation. It is less discussed and possibly less dramatic than in Kiriwina.

Death ceremonies in Fresh Wota or Ohlen are rare events. This does not mean that people are not dying, of course. Rather, it implies that people avoid emphasizing death to the extent they do on the islands. On Ambrym in the mid 1990s, a death would stop everyday life for a long period. It would start by the sudden sound of wailing spreading through the normal soundscape of the village. It would rise and fall with regular intervals for several days as new groups of people arrived and other

groups left the crying area outside of the dead person's house. Cooking would be ongoing, around the clock, to feed relatives arriving to give their respects, in many ways similar to what is described for Kiriwina. When the body was in the ground, a couple of weeks after death, major ceremonies with pigs and garden produce were organized. Men would not shave or cut their hair. This would go on for weeks and months. After the first three months, there would be a new ceremony, again with pigs and yams. This would be repeated after six months, and again, a final ceremony after twelve months. For a major chief, the last ceremony would involve several villages and the exchange of large amounts of yams, taro and several full-circle tusked pigs. In town the contrast is apparent: one will still pay respects for a dead relative, but often only for a short while. The mourning period is significantly shorter. In Fresh Wota and Ohlen Annelin never experienced a death ceremony organized the way it is done in the village.

In Pentecostal Port Vila, the main focus and concern is on everyday life, even when someone dies. Crying is not only time-consuming but non-productive. This might be part of the reason but does not fully capture the sentiments involved. People in 'Pentecost', we might suggest, have not become pure, rational, maximizing actors who are primarily interested in making money. Rather, the move away from the significance of death (or away from large-scale death ceremonies) might also reflect a change in what is important on a wider, cosmological scale – a move from focus on the long-term relationships to kin and the reproduction of the larger kin group to a focus on the living, on life and the here and now.

A short account of a case from Port Vila in 2010 might reveal this logic. William, a man from Ambrym who had lived in Port Vila for at least a decade, was dying. He had been hospitalized for weeks, diagnosed with stomach cancer. He was now being sent back to his house to die. As is normal, he was sent to his matrilineal relatives' place to die. His mother's brother took him in, and a group of relatives gathered around him to pray. One of Annelin's Ambrym friends, a woman in her late thirties, was among them. As the friend and Annelin were approaching the house of the dying, the friend told Annelin that it was essential for her not to become too involved. 'They will probably want me to bring him back to my house, since I am his classificatory mother,' she said. She went on to point out that it would be best for the family to send him back to the village while he was still alive; dying in town is too much of a burden for the family, she said. Annelin asked if this was not slightly cynical (the idea of sending a dying man, in pain, on a very rough journey on a cargo boat, in order to prevent kin in town of

taking on the expenses of his death). She seemed surprised by this. This was not, to her, an economic argument. Rather, it was a clear statement about the lack of significance of a death in town. In a Pentecostal landscape, where the focus on healing, life and commitment to immediate family relations are more important, death no longer signals a regeneration of kinship – the ceremonial giving back of the lost life to the mother's family and thus opening the future possibility of new relations and new births. Death is no longer vital for the regeneration of life. Death has, to some extent, become burdensome, not (only) because it is costly but (mainly) because it is no longer cosmologically important.

We can see a clear pattern here in the accounts from Port Vila and Kiriwina. In 'Pentecost', death is still a significant event but no longer because it represents a context of cosmological significance. In other words: death is no longer an event in which the constitution of life shows itself, where gifts represent the necessity of paying back an ontological debt that secures the regeneration of life. Rather, death is to a greater extent an absolute end. Let us now move into the city of Luanda and see how death is handled there.

### *The Palanca: Funerals for the Living*

As we have pointed out, the Palanca is a place of plurality, which (as we will elaborate on in the next chapter) we can see as a key characteristic of 'Pentecost'. The many different churches and denominations operating in this neighbourhood have somewhat different approaches to death and funerals, some more elaborate than others. The more extensive traditions can be found among the Tokoists. Let us therefore look specifically at Tokoist funerals in the Palanca in order to establish whether denominations that are less concerned with breaks with the past and more focused on local Bakongo traditions are 'life-centred'. In other words, is death in the Palanca also about life and more immediate concerns, and can this thus, on a more general level, indicate that in 'Pentecost' death is losing significance as a cosmological event?

Ruy often heard his friends in the Palanca complain that funerals have become a burdensome endeavour in the urban space, with kin and friends struggling to find time and resources to pay respects and bid farewell to the deceased. He also observed how churches often play a key role in negotiating the concerns for kinship obligations on the one hand and the limitations of the urban condition on the other. For example, funeral liturgies struggle to respect ancient formulas and tend to accommodate current concerns. A focus in the funerals is often the

living 'spiritual community' cultivated among those who lost their kin or friend.

In November 2015, a Bakongo elder living in the Palanca passed away. He was one of the hundreds of inhabitants of the neighbourhood who were born and had kin connections with Ntaya Nova, a small village in the northern province of Uíge known for the fact that its inhabitants belonged exclusively to the Tokoist Church. Like many others of his generation, he grew up in the village but eventually wound up in Luanda to pursue a professional career (he worked for several years in the airline sector). He also lived in Portugal for several years but later returned to the Palanca to work and watch his children and grandchildren grow up.

Ruy had spent some time in Ntaya Nova a few years earlier and had visited the house of the deceased's father-in-law, the elder Moni, in the Palanca. Due to this connection, he was invited to attend the *óbito* (funeral ceremony) and pay his respects to the family, which took place in the house of the elder Moni (the family was still living in Ntaya Nova). As soon as the news of the passing spread throughout the family of the deceased, the death quickly became a multitudinous act. Members of the extended clan, as well as neighbours, friends and business partners, gathered around the house, paid respects and mourned the body for several days before the body was buried in the cemetery. The *mfumu a nkanda* (leader of the clan) hosted the visitors and prepared the ceremonies. The widow sat in one of the rooms, grieving and being consoled by a host of women from the lineage, while making efforts to greet those who arrived to pay their respects. Food and drinks were prepared, and monetary offers were received to help with the funeral ceremony. Here, as is expected, mourning, crying, lamenting and wailing were part of the scenery. The visitors sat in the house and surrounding streets, chatting and waiting for the arrival of the deceased's body from the morgue, which would remain under a tent-like structure until its transposition to the cemetery. The members of the Tokoist Church, in full attire, stood beside the tent and, every now and then, sang and performed collective prayers to 'envelope' the deceased's soul into the afterlife. Interestingly enough, none of the Tokoists cried. This envelope is part of what is described as the 'spiritual programme' of the funeral, which is complementary to the 'familiar programme'. During this moment, the body 'belongs' to the church until it is returned to the family, who will proceed to take it to the cemetery.

The liturgy that Ruy observed was a product of a negotiation between 'families': the 'blood family' that follows the traditional rule and the 'spiritual family' that responds to the deceased's soul. Within this framework,

there is an interesting convergence in which Christian faith and traditionalist practice team up to safeguard the passage of the soul to the afterlife. In this process, the presence and activity of the church will vary, depending on the deceased's involvement in the church in his or her lifetime. In this case, the deceased was not a high-ranking member in the church structure but had been 'born in the church' and came from Ntaya Nova. His family all belonged to the Tokoist Church, and many of its members are considered 'historical figures' in the institution. Thus, the funeral unsurprisingly became a multitudinous event in the Palanca, mobilizing the neighbourhood in different ways: from those who stopped by to pay respects to those who were involved in the different aspects of the funeral organization. The ceremony was a public, disseminated liturgy, occupying several streets in the Palanca and culminating with the public reading of the deceased's biography by the master of ceremonies, followed by the final prayers that initiated the transfer procedures to the cemetery. The Tokoist Church became responsible for this final transition of the body into the cemetery and of his soul to the realm of the spirit world. This enacts a spiritual mechanism of 'assurance', of making sure that the deceased's soul will be transported out of this world. For instance, in the cemetery, while the casket is lowered into the grave and the final farewell prayer is performed, several hymns are sung – hymns about promises, the future and the afterlife. This is therefore not just a remembrance but a preparation for what is to come.

We can thus see that death is not purely an 'end'. We can observe the key notion of an 'afterlife'. However, we can also observe that the funeral liturgy includes practical mechanisms that assure that the deceased leaves everything 'sorted out' behind him, namely economic and patrimonial issues. This is expressed in the particularities of the funeral organization, which culminate in the final reunion that takes place after the visitors finally leave and the closest kin circle remains, closing the meeting and dealing with practical issues: patrimonial redistribution, debt solving, financial accountancy, re-establishment of familial hierarchies and so on. This reunion will also account for the expenses of the funeral itself. Presence in the funeral will not only make explicit the degree of respect for the deceased but will also determine future relationships and alliances. This became clear to Ruy when learning that his Tokoist friend Maturino, although ill and bedridden due a serious case of malaria during the weeks of the funeral, made an extraordinary effort to be present in some parts of the ceremony because the deceased's family was akin to his. We can thus see that in addition to the opening of the 'afterlife', the funeral is an event that recentres focus on the living, on those that remain behind.

Perhaps the most illustrative marker of this vital recentring effect is that the Tokoists do not cry at funerals. In this *óbito*, Ruy was struck by the fact that, unlike other family members who could not contain their grief, the Tokoists remained solemn, respectful and sober throughout the liturgy. On another occasion, Ruy had asked a Tokoist why this was so and was told that, for the believers, death was a 'passing' to another stage as well as a reward for a life of sacrifice and dedication and thus required dignified celebration rather than mourning (Blanes 2014). From this perspective, the death of a church member was framed as an occasion to think about his or her life and his or her contribution to the church and to 'this world' in a collective, communitary fashion. Usually, the hymns chosen for the liturgy, sung in the moment in which the deceased's body leaves the premises and when it is prepared for burial in the cemetery, reflect this reflexive process that, at the end of the day, is about celebrating life.

But precisely by negotiating a complementary participation in such traditional liturgies, we realize that the church operates a vital recentring by creating an effect of collective involvement and participation that magnifies the importance of life and exposing what could be described as 'a funeral for the living'.

## Conclusion

This ethnographic journey started with the observation that funerals are less important than they used to be in Kiriwina. People spend less time preparing and performing these events, and they no longer signify a crucial regeneration of life but rather an 'end'. Therefore, elaborate death ceremonies have become 'wasteful'. This pattern was also found in Port Vila, where funerals have become burdensome. In the Palanca, we find a similar sentiment, but the Tokoists have found ways that seem to both involve notions of spiritual afterlife as well as a focus on 'closing' and recentring the focus on the living. Elaborate death ceremonies are not seen as 'wasteful' and draining resources from the living (as in Kiriwina and Port Vila), yet a crucial effect of the death ceremonies is nevertheless a focus on relations between those who are left behind. Thus, also here (although to a lesser extent) we can see that funerals tend to create an 'end'.

We could have visited other parts of Pentecostal Palanca that could have given us versions of funerals that would to a greater extent mirror what we found in Port Vila and Kiriwina – for instance, by looking more closely at neo-Pentecostal denominations. However, we wanted to stay

true to the idea that we could ‘find’ ‘Pentecost’ in the neighbourhood itself, beyond the ‘self-consciously’ Pentecostal churches (as outlined in the introduction). We wanted to see how a key phenomenon, identified in one of the Pentecostal contexts (Kiriwina), can be found in general social orientations of the other neighbourhoods (in Port Vila and Palanca). Although we cannot characterize our ethnographic descriptions as manifesting a conclusive ‘turn towards life’, where death is an absolute end, we can conclude this chapter by pointing out that there at least seems to be an emerging pattern in ‘Pentecost’, where concern with the immediate social relations of economic and material character are gaining significance over the mode of cosmological, kin-based notions of the regeneration of life. In other words, in ‘Pentecost’ – that is, in places where Holy Spirit churches and denominations of different kinds dominate – the social significance of death is declining.

In Chapter 5, these cases will form the basis for an analysis of how this ‘theory from Pentecost’ about ‘life-centredness’ relates to major debates in the anthropology of Christianity concerning moral economies, the prosperity gospel, ‘occult economies’ as well as the neoliberal economic approaches of Pentecostalism.

## Notes

1. Mark Mosko (2017) has recently published an important book emphasizing the role of *baloma* (spirits, ancestors) in the lives of Trobrianders. While our foci and interpretations of the role of revival Christianity in Trobriand cosmology are very different, Mosko’s emphasis on the role of *baloma* fits well with my understandings of ‘traditional’ (i.e. non-Pentecostal) Trobriand cosmology.
2. The convener of the United Church for the region, Samuel, explained to me that *semakai* comes from the verb *seki*, to give, and *makai*, an adverb meaning ‘freely’ or ‘for nothing in return’, though, of course, there is the hope and expectation of spiritual if not material rewards for giving ‘freely’ to the church.
3. Note that in Vanuatu, *laplap* refers to a food, while in Papua New Guinea it refers to a length of calico cloth.
4. Malinowski writes extensively about Tuma in his 1919 essay ‘Baloma: The Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands’. It is an island in the Trobriand archipelago that is believed to have an underworld, which is a sort of copy of the islands of the living, where the spirits of the ancestors reside after death. It is often compared with the Christian heaven.

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# 3

## **Anti-relativist Nostalgias and the Absolutist Road**

### **The Point of Departure**

It is a typically hot, dusty and stuffy September afternoon in Luanda in 2013. Ruy is knocking at the door of the house of his friend, Maturino, a member of the Tokoist Church, in the northern section of the Palanca neighbourhood. This part of the neighbourhood, unlike the southern section, is composed of large streets in grid-like fashion and has an easy access to the main avenue that connects the city centre to the outskirts. At this very point, Ruy observes how the macadam on the ground that stemmed from that main road slowly disappears into a sandy terrain. In the rainy season, Ruy anticipates, transit will be impossible there, and residents will improvise 'bridges' with rocks, planks of wood and leftover scraps from abandoned cars in order to circulate.

Maturino and his family are taking a while to reply to his knock, so Ruy takes the opportunity to take a closer look next door, where there stands a small temple of the UCKG, the famous neo-Pentecostal movement of Brazilian origin that has made a significant impact in Angola since the 1990s. In previous visits to his friend's house, he had not paid too much attention to this church, until one particular late afternoon when, while sitting on the patio with the family, the conversation was baffled by the screaming pastor's deliverance, amplified with microphones, synthesizers, claps and moans. He wondered how the family could cope with this on a daily basis, but observing their reactions and matter-of-fact behaviour, he realized that they had somehow become



**Figure 3.1** UCKG Church in Palanca, Luanda. Photo by Ruy Llera Blanes.

habituated to it, and the ‘noise’ had become part of their quotidian acoustics.

Noise is, indeed, a significant part of the Palanca experience and thus of this part of ‘Pentecost’. If in the entrance of the neighbourhood we are still enveloped by the aggressive sound of the trucks, buses, cars and motorcycles making their way through the motorway honking, accelerating and braking, upon entering we are confronted with different

soundscapes: the acoustic ‘pollution’ of *kuduro* music or TV soap operas spilling from private *kubikos* (rented rooms), backyards, shops or bars; the improvised football games played in the streets by youngsters; and, finally, the sonorities that punctuate the streets at given schedules, emanating from church buildings or improvised worship spaces. On many occasions, these sounds are fascinating a cappella choir songs in Kikongo, Lingala or Portuguese languages. But oftentimes they are amplified, nervous and tympanum-wrecking shrieks of pastors’ sermons amidst processes of spiritual possession. It is not always easy to glance inside such spaces, but during worship services the events taking place indoors often pour out into the public streets, precisely through such acoustic envelopes, and through the attendants that constantly flow in and out of these church spaces.

The fact that this acoustic profusion became ‘normal’ for the Palancans was thus not surprising. In the Palanca, the UCKG is but one of the countless different churches that populate the neighbourhood – already often seen as a sort of spiritual beehive in Luanda, to the extent that it is hard to find a street in its interior without a church building. Thus, in this part of ‘Pentecost’, there is an ongoing struggle for visibility and audibility among the different congregations. For instance, just on the next corner down from Maturino’s house, Ruy sees a billboard from the Igreja Tabernáculo do Céu (Church of the Heavenly Tabernacle) announcing the ‘Day of the Glory’. Most of these buildings are in fact makeshift, unfinished constructions, relying on improvised paintings or billboards to make themselves noticed. Others refuse the publicity and remain anonymous to the untrained eye.

Walking through the Palanca and observing their architecture, we can detect different stories and processes of implantation. On the one hand, the bigger buildings usually represent the older establishment of ‘mainline’ churches in the neighbourhood (from Baptist to Catholic to prophetic/messianic). On the other, ‘modernized’ designs reveal the newer Pentecostal churches of Brazilian and Lusophone origin (UCKG, Maná) that have taken root, and more makeshift constructions are usually characteristic of the wave of Bakongo ‘holy spirit churches’ arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the recent waves of *regressados* (Angolan, Lingala-speaking Bakongo who lived in the DRC until recently). Some of them even operate in private homes, backyards and open spaces. These different structures cohabit in the Palanca grid alongside secular structures such as shops, bars and warehouses, usually in a peaceful fashion but also ‘spiked’ by the competition that emerges from the processes of pluralization. From this perspective, the Palanca is also filled with stories of secession and dispute between

different church allegiances, as well as accusations of witchcraft (as we saw in Chapter 1). The neighbourhood thus combines different levels of this materialization and expression of religious activity, which the gaze of residents and visitors (such as ethnographers) that enter the Palanca inevitably alights upon – a realization that is not obvious from outside the neighbourhood.

The specific UCKG building that Ruy is looking at has not yet undergone the large-scale refurbishment that most other UCKG churches in the city have experienced. Instead of the currently prevailing gold and brown palette, this particular building still has the ‘traditional’ red, white and blue colours, which subliminally convey senses of urgency, brightness and passion. On their front wall, as many other churches in the neighbourhood often do, the local pastors have inscribed and publicized their programme of deliverance: ‘Here, we solve problems!’, ‘Urgent Help, at 6AM’, ‘Prayer of Faith and Miracles’, ‘Liberation Service’ etc. Presiding over the programme and the church is the motto ‘Jesus Christ is the Lord’.

Anyone familiar with Luanda would be used to the pervasiveness of these offers of ‘problem solving’ on behalf of the churches. Walking through the streets in the city centre, one’s view is flooded with posters, paintings, banners and flyers announcing healing and miracle sessions, evangelical crusades, gospel shows and the like. Many such imprints somehow aesthetically replicate the flashy acoustics and colourful hues of the church buildings. In one flyer from the UCKG that circulated in the city in late 2012, one could read this invitation: ‘Come to us to put an end to the problems in your life: sickness, misery, unemployment, bankruptcy, separation, domestic discussions, sorcery, ‘big eye’, etc.’ Considering the kind of biblical exegesis that is recurrent in such churches, one can imagine that these problems can be the kinds of ‘tribulations’ that are often invoked in church sermons and referred to in passages such as John 16 or Acts 14, where we learn that the tribulations are part of the road to the kingdom of glory.

We sense that this problem solving is a way of ordering, of establishing a particular path out of the seemingly chaotic experience of urban life in a city like Luanda. In other words, the UCKG, like most churches in ‘Pentecost’, performs and displays a diagnostic that establishes the road to salvation. It is a process of metaphorical mapping and temporal sequencing that produces an ordering effect in people’s lives. The certainty and conviction with which they produce this mapping and ordering, however, also seems to convey a moral absolutism of sorts, in which, at least rhetorically, there is little room for doubt and relativism. Slogans such as ‘Nothing is Impossible for God’, ‘Find Your Inner Self

in Order to Stand Out – 7 Days of Discovery’, ‘Center for the Chosen of Christ’ and ‘7000 reservations from God’ are invitations not just for specific events but are meant to steer one in a specific direction in both the city and in life. The UCKG model precludes other options; it is anti-pluralist. Current and prospective adherents are placed in a crossroads position, as if forced to choose between the path to salvation and the road to perdition.

Ruy’s friend Neves, a member of the Tokoist Church, exposed this ‘crossroads sensation’ when one afternoon they sat on a park bench and he shared his own spiritual trajectory and his story of involvement in a *mpeve ya nlongo* (Holy Spirit) movement in the 1990s. He recalled that moment in his life as a ‘traumatic’ experience: after escorting a friend who was seeking treatment for his illness to one such movement (the MEESA, *Missão Evangélica do Espírito Santo em Angola*), he ended up staying there himself for about a year and got involved in it in such a way that he had a ‘terrible time’ when he tried to leave it. For many months Neves felt a strong pressure on behalf of the church leader (a former disciple of the Congolese prophet Simon Kimbangu) to use his profession as a police officer to benefit the church in many ways. He also saw how his fellow members were constantly pushed into giving their wealth and possessions to the church. Then one day he realized that he was being manipulated and finally cut ties with the church. To this day he still avoids its known locations when he is circulating in Luanda. He described these places as being very closed, obscure and difficult to access, where members are usually interned in the church for treatment and delivery, leaving their own houses during the process. They provoke not just symbolic but also physical ruptures with pre-existing relationships and networks and propose new senses of ‘community’ through arguments of disconnection.

Obviously, not all churches are as extreme or invasive as the MEESA, but many can be equally absolutist in the way they present themselves. Ruy sensed this personally when he once tried to convince Neves to take him to one of these churches in the neighbourhood of Cazenga. With a nervous laugh, he replied, ‘I’m not sure if you want to do that. These places are dangerous!’ While Neves had arrived at this conclusion after what he considers to be a traumatic period in his life, in a certain sense, and retrospectively, he was able to find redemption through the experience, as if he needed to experience it, live through it, in order to conclude that his place, his home, was indeed in the Tokoist Church. Today he is one of the church’s active intellectuals, engaged in the study of its history and in the preservation of its memory. He found his path.



**Figure 3.2** Poster of Evangelical Crusade in Luanda. Photo by Ruy Llera Blanes.

The neighbourhood of Palanca is a place where multiple paths and itineraries are devised, as it is where many churches and movements are located. As part of what is traditionally depicted as the Luanda of the *musseques* (informally, slum neighbourhoods), the ‘disordered’, informal, chaotic, underprivileged part of town, these appeals and offers coming from ‘Pentecost’ become part of the everyday scenery, accommodated



**Figure 3.3** Christian church under construction in Sapu, Luanda. Photo by Ruy Llera Blanes.

within the social infrastructure. As we can tell in the multiple advertisements offering divine healing that populate the Palanca – e.g. ‘Jesus Christ Saves, Heals and Releases Those In Need’ – they respond to specific configurations of perceived disorder: the danger and insecurity associated with urban life in Luanda as well as the effects of sorcery. But the Palanca is also, first and foremost, a site associated with an intense spiritual activity – something equally connected to Bakongo ethnicity, predominant in this part of town. It is hard to find a street in the musseque that does not have a church or religious community. And even when one cannot see it, one will definitely hear it, punctuating several moments of the day with different prayer, healing or counselling sessions. Spirituality is thus part of the aesthetics of the landscape, competing with other significant manifestations and indexicalities, such as the famous *botequins* or eating and drinking spots (such as the *Zabá*), the nocturnal parties, the open-air markets, the endless *coiffeurs* etc.

Neves usually referred to the Palanca as a ‘religious supermarket’ of sorts, reinforcing this idea of a diversity and competition of Christian churches in this space, spurred by the Bakongo’s natural tendency towards both spirituality and commerce. He and Ruy and their friend Paracleto often circulated in the Palanca with a camera in hand, taking pictures of the facades of the endless ecclesiastical configurations and their aesthetic statements in the neighbourhoods. Most of these churches



remained, from this point of view, in a state of architectural incompleteness, retaining an unfinished state that although probably related to financial issues also reflected a sense of expectation, of the promise of a glorious future that is ‘in the making’.

During these photographic journeys, they attempted possible typologies of such institutions: from Catholic and mainline historical Protestant churches, such as the Baptist (IEBA) or Methodist churches, to prophetic/messianic movements, notably the Tokoist, Kimbanguist and (more recently) Bundu Dia Kongo churches. Since the 1990s, the religious landscape of Luanda (and the Palanca in particular) has become pluralized with the establishment of modern neo-Pentecostal movements of foreign origin – such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God or the Josafat Church (the Angolan version of the Maná Church) – and of Pentecostal churches of Angolan origin, such as the Igreja do Bom Deus or the Assembleia de Deus Pentecostal do Makulusso. Finally, over the last decade, a range of smaller movements that fall under the umbrella of *mpeve ya nlongo* or ‘Holy Spirit churches’ have become pervasive in the musseques and are often seen as makeshift, personalized initiatives on behalf of traditional healers reconverted into Christianity. This dimension of informality and spontaneity, expressed in the kind of constructions that house such movements, also imbues the *mpeve ya nlongo* with high levels of suspicion and accusation. In any case, the end result is an assemblage of highly diverse expressions and infrastructures in the neighbourhood, specialized in ‘solving problems’ of a wide variety that nevertheless all pertain to ‘Christendom’.

Initially, one would feel tempted to see this setting, teeming with plurality, within a capitalist argument: is this a ‘religious supermarket’, as Neves had suggested? That is, at least, what surfaces in the kind of negative narratives that the local media offers pertaining to such movements in the Palanca, as schemes that exploit the local residents through ‘faith marketing’ and ‘a strong competition for believers and their money’ (*Rede Angola*, 6 March 2015). However, Neves’ own narrative, while describing the movement’s attempts at exploitation, does not seem to replicate the common-sense idea of the believer as a victim and the pastor as a money seeker. So Ruy took the opportunity of asking his Luandan friends about this.

## Talking about Order

One of Ruy’ interlocutors, Maturino, once referred to this conundrum as a problem of ‘consciousness’. For him, the growth and success of

these churches in neighbourhoods such as the Palanca could not be disconnected from their ultimate alterity, sorcery (or *ndoki*, in kikongo). The increasing recognition of *ndoki* as a 'problem' in the Angolan public sphere, with several news pieces recurrently mushrooming in the local media, is also concomitant to the above-mentioned proliferation of Christian churches in the musseques that devise and offer strategies to combat it. Collecting these different narratives, one could say that in Luanda there is a collective construction of sorcery as a 'social problem', effected by either the Catholic Church or the secular state.

In one such example, in early 2008 several news pieces circulated in the local media concerning how members of a Catholic congregation rescued several children in the Palanca who had been beaten and abandoned by their parents, accused of sorcery. One of the Catholic nuns involved in the rescue, Sister Rita, declared to the local media that what underlay such phenomena was 'social disorder and extreme poverty, and the main victims are the children' (*Radio Ecclesia*, 30 January 2008). The reasoning behind this public framing is that *ndoki* does not exist and is either the source or outcome of a disordered mentality that conflicts with the project of a 'modern', 'advanced' Angola promoted by the official authorities. However, this narrative contrasts with the one that emerges from 'Pentecost' itself, in which witchcraft not only exists but is an agent, playing its role in the spiritual combat that affects people's lives. In fact, it does not seem possible to disconnect 'Pentecost' from witchcraft, as it pervades church theology, organization etc. as well as individual believers' own life experiences and conversion testimonies.

For many Bakongo in the Palanca, this combat appears in the process of emergence of an 'urban Bakongo experience' in Luanda, largely motivated by the decade-long conflict that affected the country from the 1960s, which provoked processes of displacement, disruption and separation in the different clanic and lineage systems. A good friend of Ruy from Luanda, Father Gabriele Bortolami, once argued in this respect that this process of urbanization deeply affected Bakongo 'tradition' – both as an idea or symbol and as a pragmatics of social and domestic organization – and pushed the Bakongo into finding ways to adapt. This process involved particular cases of conflict solving but also more overarching mechanisms of 'ordering', of finding a narrative and praxis that would somehow address the consequent conflictuality and help people make sense of things. In several interviews with local Bakongo elders at the União das Tradições Kongo (UTK, Union of Kongo Traditions), Ruy had lengthy discussions about how several aspects of Bakongo tradition – from marriage customs to ritual and domestic organization – had suffered a process of adaptation in the city, often amidst conflictive

episodes and events. Here, *ndoki* often appeared as a central element, for as a system of knowledge transmitted within the *kanda* or lineage it is understood among the Bakongo as an ancestral property connected to the 'spirit' of things and places. It is a wisdom that addresses and solves problems of livelihood but can also create them if intentionally misused. If all this produced straightforward mechanisms of mapping and ordering in the rural areas – the sacred bush, the forbidden lake, the magical hill etc. – the same cannot be said in the urban setting, where spatial connections are constantly shifting and where problems of plurality, competition and conflict inevitably emerge. Thus, mirrored against other social and political mechanisms of ordering (state, public space, other belief systems etc.), *ndoki* progressively becomes a 'problem'. It is simultaneously disrupted and disruptive.

When he was referring to 'consciousness', Maturino was in fact talking about sensations of destabilization of tradition and the opening up of a space of plural possibilities, to which Christian churches were decisive contributors. Thus, from Maturino's perspective, if we want to 'understand churches', we should first and foremost have to understand how they approach sorcery and 'solve it' with deliverance.

For a long time, the Catholics and the Baptists denied the existence of sorcery. Other movements, in turn, facilitate and promote sorcery by 'curing' it [*kelo*], but this is mostly a business venture for many hoping to earn money or followers for their church. For instance, many old *kimbandeiros* [traditional healers] are now presenting themselves as 'prophets' who sell solutions for witchcraft. Then, churches like the Pentecostals usually deal with it through prayer and counselling. The *mpeve ya nlongo* churches, in turn, often use waters.

Maturino was suggesting the different configurations that *ndoki* acquires in the different 'prescriptions' through which the disease (*ndoki*) is diagnosed or identified as well as its solution or deliverance. The different churches in the Palanca often act in complementary fashion to conventional medicine. The diagnostic determines if the disease is produced within or beyond the realm of *ndoki* and then will either heal it or discard it as a 'conventional problem'.

For instance, in the EKWESA Church – a more institutionalized version of the *mpeve ya nlongo* – people often come to the church for healing because they know it is 'spiritual', in the sense that it is Christian and comes from the Holy Spirit. They explain their case to the church members, who write down the symptoms in a book. Then there is a scheduled appointment for healing. The *mbikudi* (prophet) arrives and sits down, allowing the spirit to enter his or her body and to reveal itself.

The group works with the revealers and with spiritual chants. When the spirits are inside, the group begins to disclose statements and ask questions, writing in their booklets until they find a 'solution'. They also use holy water and earth from specific holy places. Oftentimes, it can be decided that there are certain diseases that must be treated in the hospital; this also depends on the revealer and the spirit, as sometimes it is possible to combine a mixture of therapies. I once asked Pastor Nunes, the leader of the church, how they dealt with diseases that were just spiritual and not physical. He explained that many patients actually come to the church after leaving the hospital, where they were not healed, due to the persistent action of evil spirits. They have realized that their problem is not 'conventional' but spiritual. This is determined by the process of identification of the ailment and the subsequent itinerary of healing, decided by the spirits that inhabit the mbikudi.

This process of highlighting spiritual and physical problems and prescribing solutions often finds expression in the constant references we hear in and around Luanda to the idea of 'insurance' as a method or strategy for self-protection. To be *asegurado*, insured, means to be protected against evil invisible agencies. In the Palanca in particular, traditional wisdom such as *ndoki* is often invoked as an insurance mechanism against such negativities, often framed within logics of evil spirits, envy or 'evil eye' (*mau olhado*), which can in turn be themselves a product of *ndoki*. The classic protagonist of such a process is the successful man or woman. Regardless of status, he or she who 'stands out' due to their financial, political or public image achievements becomes inevitably induced into the logic of *ndoki*: either they have become successful due to use of bad *ndoki*, or they have been successfully *asegurado*, protected by a savvy *kimbandeiro* – a master of traditional knowledge.

Two examples that Ruy was given in Luanda were of the former Congolese president Mobutu and the jazz musician Franco (from TP OK Jazz), also known as *Le Sorcier*, or 'The Sorcerer', due to his outstanding guitar skills allegedly gained through his involvement in black magic. In any case, *inveja* (envy) or evil eye logic appears when individual success is not coupled with some sort of mechanism of redistribution towards the collective entity – clan, lineage, domestic unit, neighbourhood etc. In other words, if the successful man or woman chooses to accumulate rather than distribute his or her wealth (a typical 'urban behaviour'), he or she will suffer from the effects of bad *ndoki*.

This is what the elder Mabuila, head of the UTK, explained once when he described how hard it was for him to build his garage in the Palanca. The building, which also includes a hostel occupied by

Chinese workers and the headquarters of the UTK, is a large red, four-story construction that has become a landmark reference both for the neighbourhood and for the Luandans that travel Catete Road back and forth every day. Today, Mabuila's house is 'complete', but it took him decades to finish it due to what he described as the 'constant attacks' by neighbours of this section of the Palanca. He did not say it openly but one can assume that he was able to persevere after seeking some sort of insurance on behalf of some spiritualist specialist.

From this perspective, for many Bakongo *ndoki* acts as an internal ordering mechanism, one that regulates the primacy of the collective over the individual. However, this internal perception contrasts with the external construction, which frames *ndoki* as the ultimate agent of disorder. This contrast, although established in diverging manners by the different creeds and theologies, is often dialectic, confrontational and violent in its deconstruction of *ndoki*.

'All this black magic, this evil wisdom,' Nunes once commented to Ruy, 'is not good.' This is why in his church, the church of the Holy Spirit, they struggle and win the souls of those who are contaminated. They treat people affected by *ndoki* by fighting against it. 'As Jesus Christ says, your faith saved you.' They rely on faith – both in terms of belief in God and of trust and confidence – as the ultimate mechanism of ordering in the city, creating spaces of diagnosis, certainty and comfort, away from the danger zone that is *ndoki*. The Holy Spirit thus becomes an opponent in the spiritual battle, a very powerful one. It can heal, eliminate danger and, especially, redeem.

Let us now turn to the effects of all this on social life in 'Pentecost'. We can recognize in the above descriptions the insecurity, fear and an almost paranoid sociality that we also highlighted in the stories in Chapter 1. In that chapter we looked specifically at the need for protection and borders that this dialectic generates between good and evil, the holy and the demonic. Here, however, we want to develop a slightly different aspect of this, which we call anti-relativism and absolutism.

## **Anti-relativism and Absolutism**

If the inhabitants of the Palanca traverse through different churches in order to seek insurance and deal with their personal and familial issues, thus engaging in a pluralist approach to spirituality, the way in which the churches themselves present their own prescriptions to the people is inherently absolutist – through the therapeutic itineraries (physical *and* moral) that they establish. Thus, plurality and competition, as

markers of the inconstancy of daily urban life, appear to be mechanisms of ordering on their own terms. What it is that the churches that dwell in these states address and 'order' ultimately becomes the key question. They solve problems. They provide insurance. They offer deliverance, healing, protection, security. But, first and foremost, they address doubt and relativism, presenting univocal narratives of certainty, salvation within what is presented as a chaotic state: the moral multiplicity and relativism of urban life. The emergence of a plurality of possibilities concerning the problem of security and insecurity simultaneously casts doubt and opens the space for new alternatives.

Here, we can think again of the words of Neves, who often described religious affairs in Luanda in terms of a 'spiritual market', where different churches, movements and individual healers competed for followers who simultaneously became clients. In other words, he accused several churches of 'clientelizing faith' within what could resemble a 'capitalist Christianity'. Coming from an austere, traditionalist position, Neves blamed the foreign neo-Pentecostal churches for the 'emerging market' that was also an expression of 'spiritual combat' – the militarization of religion, as it were. In fact, this belligerent mindset has a strong currency, both in terms of narrative and praxis, where we can find singing choirs named *Jovens Soldados de Angola* (Young Soldiers of Angola) or church ushers dressed in military uniform, such as in the Kimbanguist Church. With more or less literalism involved in this construction, we can observe how church adherence becomes a form of allegiance and militancy becomes militarism.

Within this framework, healing and deliverance appear as battlefields of sorts, which promote reverberations between the different actors in the public space. It is within this theory and sense of pluralism that many residents in the Palanca seem to navigate in their movements between different churches, prophets, healers etc. But what churches offer the prospective and current believer is not a pluralist worldview but rather an absolutist value, an anti-relativist interpretation, a single path in the road to salvation. This is proper of a Manichean reasoning, a narrative disposition that is necessarily dialectic and oppositional: good/bad, perdition/salvation etc.

This absolutist road seems to work in both directions: guiding eschatologically towards a future of salvation but also enacting a redeeming outlook on the past, either through a confessional biographical regime such as the one evoked by Neves or through a rupturist statement against the present, identified as inherently 'wrong' from a moral point of view. From this perspective, the narrative stemming from such churches in the Palanca seems to be equally based on a form of nostalgia, a longing



**Figure 3.4** Members of the Kimbanguist Church in Luanda marching. Photo by Ruy Llera Blanes.

for something that has been lost in the current state of chaos and moral decay. This longing can appear enveloped in metaphors of purity, orderliness, simplicity etc. as well as in explicit temporal connections, such as ideas of ‘biblical times’, the ‘original tribes of Judah’ etc.

Pastor Nunes of the EKWESA Church, for instance, embedded his church within what we could call an ‘ancestralization of Christianity’, its coupling with African (and, more specifically, Bantu and Bakongo) tradition and history. In a conversation held in the church’s headquarters in the Cazenga neighbourhood, he talked to Ruy about a figure known as Nzala Mpandi, who was the first person with the *poder de Deus* (power of God) in the beginning of the world, from the times of Babylon. In the old days, ‘we were all together, we were born among us.’ But then they began building the Babel tower, and people began separating into races (black, white etc.). God spoke to the blacks and told them that those who prayed in the Holy Spirit were on his side. Nzala Mpandi was the first spiritual leader; he spoke to Africa and to the whole world. In those mythic times, the Kongo – what is today the Lower Congo and Northern Angola – did not have borders. As soon as he arrived to the heart of Kongo, to a place called Nyamba, he rose up to the skies, alive. Today there is a sign on that very spot.

Continuing his afro-centred historiographical revision, Nunes explained that Blacks and Israelites were the same people but eventually each 'followed its own prophet'. Thus, the theology of Kongo and 'Issayeli' (the Bakongo name of Israel) ultimately diverged throughout the centuries because people began to follow false prophets. Those who sought the Promised Land arrived at Ethiopia but got lost and returned back home. Different groups emerged from the extant brotherhood, and some arrived in the Kongo. The process of colonization continued the process of deconstruction of the original, pure Christian Church. 'Many of us do not know in what times we live in,' Nunes concluded. 'And we must be ready because the prophets will come and save us. So the church's objective is to await the arrival of the messiah. So we ask: what do the prophets do? We analyse.' Nunes indeed outlines an itinerary, a historiographical path through which we could understand his church's mission and role in this world. While recognizing the current times of ignorance and disconcertment, he showed a trajectory by which we could make sense of the past and also devise a possible future of salvation.

At this point, what we sense from these observations in the Palanca is that in 'Pentecost' churches are prone to produce processes of 'ordering' that unfold in multiple instances: in the way they detect problems and offer solutions (particularly concerning issues of health, security etc.) and in the way they unfold a map of the urban lifestyle, identifying what is wrong and indicating the right way out of it. There are processes of discernment, identification and choice that affect both geography (marking sacred and sinful spaces in the city) and temporality (marking moments of sin and redemption). But if this is the case in the hyper-urban Luanda, what happens in radically different landscapes of 'Pentecost', such as in rural Kiriwina or semi-urban Port Vila? Can we also there identify this move towards an 'absolutism'?

## **Extending the Context: Finding the True Path**

The absolutist road and anti-relativist nostalgias operating in Luanda are part of a moral landscape that is proper of urban life: pluralism, diversity, disorder, uncertainty. From this perspective, places such as the Palanca, once framed by the local media as 'the neighbourhood that never stops', in reference to its burgeoning state of commerce and spiritual activity, seem prone to this kind of dialectics. One could, however, speculate on how this operation is affected in different social settings, such as rural or semi-urban spaces. What kinds of temporal operations, redemptions and salvations are displayed?



For instance, in the Trobriand Islands, witchcraft and sorcery is also seen as the ultimate disorder that social life in 'Pentecost' is geared towards (re)ordering. In what ways might Trobrianders, dwellers of rural settlements, conceive of the necessity of reining in the threatening forces that lead to sinful action? Here, the origin and source of sin is ideologically located in acts of witchcraft, Michelle reports, and in particular in the person of the witch. The acts of the witch are perhaps best understood as antisocial and even anti-feminine, against the 'natural' inclinations of women to be productive and reproductive, though it should be noted that men can be and are witches even as the category is gendered female. Sorcery, carried out at night under cover of darkness, is coded as masculine but likewise threatening and symbolic of social disorder. The threats of both sorcery and witchcraft are seen by Trobrianders as unsettling, chaotic and dangerous and are among the primary targets in Pentecostal Kiriwina and neighbouring islands. Stories, anecdotes, concerns, debates and warnings emerge through conversations and general chit-chat that Michelle engages in with her Trobriand interlocutors, both those who hold positions of authority in the various churches and those who do not.

In many such conversations, Michelle perceived the simultaneously geographic and historical grounding of these attributions. Throughout Papua New Guinea and the Pacific more generally, a common metaphor is used to distinguish between the time before the missionaries came and 'enlightened' the previously 'primitive' peoples, some of whom practised regular and brutal warfare, headhunting and cannibalism (though the latter two were never practised in the Trobriands), and the time of Christianity. Before conversion, many Pacific Islanders considered themselves to have been 'in the darkness', while Christianity brought 'the light', which is further brightened with the arrival of the stronger, more powerful faith that evangelical and Pentecostal movements are seen to represent. The darkness, being (as mentioned above) a cover for acts of secrecy, including the evildoing of witches and sorcerers, is again synonymous with disorder and sin, while lightness/whiteness is, in this nearly universal metaphor, purity, cleanliness and order. This chromatic sensation of darkness, which in Luanda would be referred to as *trevas* – the idea of moral sin that also indicates gloom, murk – already denotes a discursive mechanism of ordering that is simultaneously aesthetic and spatializing, determining locations or trajectories that embrace either light or shadow. It effects a moral mapping of the islands but also a projection towards the past, one that reclaims it in an attempt to 'control', appropriate and dominate the present.

This image of a journey from darkness to light is a common feature in Christian thought and narrative and is usually devised as an 'absolutist

road' in its own terms, allowing no optional route other than the route of salvation. This may be because it has a redemptive quality that is proper of confessional regimes that intersect personal and collective histories within the kinds of transformations that are sought and effected in churches of 'Pentecost' throughout processes of individual conversion. However, the perpetual moral demand that is implied in such processes shows us that, in fact, the 'light' is merely a promise, an expectation that is, at most, in the process of confirmation – because, as we saw in Luanda, the crossroads sensation is always there. Here, the eschatological dimension seems to weigh as heavily as the necessity to qualify the present and redeem the past.

In August of 2013, Michelle attended a Revival Crusade in the Trobriand village of Omarakana. Pastors of churches practising a 'revived' form of Christianity, in this case focusing on the power of the Holy Spirit and the importance of spiritual rebirth, had been invited from southern Kiriwina and the outer islands to preach, testify and perform calls from the altar to engage the Holy Spirit and effect conversions for those ready to be born again. While these male pastors were charismatic and compelling, what interested her even more were the conversations she had on the periphery of these proceedings, mostly with women from the southern village of Sinaketa. Several of these women told Michelle that they were witches but that they had now been *kalobusivau* (born again) in the Christian faith and had renounced their past misdeeds. After living for nearly two years on the island, she had had it firmly instilled in her that no one, ever, would openly admit to being, or having been, a witch. Accusations might be made in hushed tones amongst close kin or friends but were never spoken publicly, and there are no public or violent reprisals against known witches. Witchcraft and sorcery are forces that are omnipresent in Trobriand life and are evoked with virtually every illness or death, but this is always shrouded in secrecy, darkness and the unknown.

A century of Methodism and Catholicism has done little to diminish the power of magic spells, sorcery and witchcraft and the sway these hold over Trobrianders' lives. But those born again in the faith have, in some cases, publicly claimed their status as witches – a practice previously unthinkable – in order to demonstrate the power of their faith. Though they had been indoctrinated into these black arts (usually while very young), now, with their faith to guide them, these women resist the temptation to let their spirits roam to do ill to others. Instead, the women (both in spirit and in body) constrain themselves and spend their time in church or safely in the family home. Outside influences threaten evil, which can be rejected by staying at home. To go out – to

traverse the usual boundaries, not only of the village but of the body itself, as the spirit of the witch roams whilst the body stays put – is to do, and to invite, evildoing, violence and disorder.

This confessional regime on behalf of ex-witches becomes part of the process of ordering in ‘Pentecost’ – of time and space but first and foremost of the individual into the collective, into the ‘community’. The story I shared above of Neves and his ‘adventures’ in the mpeve ya nlongo churches of Luanda is also one of someone who was born into a Tokoist family and eventually ‘strayed’ as a youngster, seeking other spiritual experiences before returning home to his family (spiritually *and* physically). This sensation of ‘returning home’ or ‘finding your place’ is often populated by episodes and events of revelation and acknowledgement that bring the believer towards a sensation or idea of ‘truth’ that somehow becomes recognizable.

This is, at least, what Annelin found throughout her fieldwork with prophetesses in Fresh Wota, Port Vila. After a Bible reading session in church on a late afternoon in 2010, one such prophetess, Rose, told Annelin that she had decided to give her a Bible. ‘I have noticed that you never bring one,’ said Rose (she always shared hers with Annelin). She had realized that Annelin probably did not have one and wanted to help her out. Rose had long known, of course, that Annelin was not in church for the same reason as her. This did not stop her, however, from pretending that she was. As Annelin was usually a very interested conversation partner, she liked discussing her thoughts and intellectual puzzles and challenges. The Bible is interesting and useful for everyday challenges, she pointed out. Annelin asked her in what way the stories in the Bible, and especially the stories in the Old Testament, for which she had a particular fondness, gave her answers to her everyday challenges in Fresh Wota. Rose explained to Annelin that it gave her comfort to know that there were real answers to be found on difficult questions, such as how to deal with her brother, who was drinking and mistreating his wife; how to deal with her daughter, who had started working in a kava bar (which serves intoxicating beverages) to support her child; and how to save enough money to start building a proper cement house so that they could move out of the temporary house of corrugated iron that threatened to fall down in the rainy seasons. How should she help her family; how should she make the right decisions ...?

‘What you need to realize,’ Rose told Annelin, ‘is that there is only one answer, one truth, and it is to be found in the Bible.’ She went on to explain that although the Bible contained clear and unambiguous answers, one needed to work, to make an intellectual effort, to find them. ‘It is like this,’ she said, ‘when you start reading the Bible; it is as

if a door opens. You realize then that there is a path to be followed (*yu save se gat wan rod istap*).’ She elaborated by telling Annelin that there is only one path; however, it might seem, at times, as if there are alternatives. ‘You might come to a crossroad, and there seem to be good reasons for going in both directions. However, there is always only one road,’ she emphasized. Looking back on her life, she said that she might have tried different paths, different roads but had always come to a dead end. ‘Then, one must return,’ she said, ‘and try the other way.’ She emphasized, again and again, that this is hard work and demands constant attention. When you find the right road, however, you know that this is it. There is only one path, not several.

This sense of absolute truth was often articulated not only in conversations with Rose but also in perceptions of guilt in discussions of, and dealings with, witchcraft and witchcraft accusations. In these cases, there are no ‘grey areas’, no ambivalent cases or expressions of doubt. Quite the contrary, there is always a victim and an undisputable guilty party. Locating the witch is often the work of the healers. It involves their ability to see. The witch, as an expression of pure evil, can hide on the inside of a person. People can therefore be unsuspecting but still the target of an attack from a source of evil. In Fresh Wota, witchcraft can therefore often take the form of witchcraft hunts and witchcraft lynching, as has been the case throughout Papua New Guinea and in Vanuatu, where several witches were lynched, burned alive or beaten to death for ‘challenging’ Christian morality (see e.g. Rio 2014).

Such public lynching (physical or symbolic) becomes part of the process of identification and solution offered by ‘Pentecost’. In August 2013, in Kiriwina, a case of ‘sorcery illness’ took place in a hamlet next to where Michelle was living. Peter is the brother of Stephen, a catechist in the Catholic Church who is known to have visions and other spiritual gifts – despite the Catholic Church’s usually conservative stance concerning these. Peter was still a young man when he became very ill after a land dispute in a neighbouring hamlet. He went to the hospital on 2 August after Stephen preached in church and later announced again at the soccer field that he saw in a dream who was responsible for performing sorcery against Peter and said that all sorcery had to stop. Stephen is known for having very strong faith (*dubumi*) as well as the gift of being able to see things in visions or dreams – special abilities that are given by God and give him great power. Stephen wears a wooden cross around his neck, a totem through which he accesses God and this divine knowledge.

Stephen’s public announcement of the man’s name – a strong social taboo – led to a court case in Oluweta hamlet, with the elder/magistrate

Samgwa, from Michelle's own hamlet of Modawosi, presiding along with an elder woman from a prominent family in the village. All members of the village were invited to attend the court case, which began with a prayer and appeals to leave the matter in God's hands. In the context of the court case, Stephen did not repeat the story of his dream but claimed that the entire matter was Satan's work (*Satan lapaisewa*), but other elders present attested to the spiritual powers God had given to Stephen, saying '*lagift guyau iseki*' (his gift is given by God). Stephen, for his part, noted that it was *bomala* (forbidden by custom, but also used in the context of church to mean 'holy' or 'sacred') to speak openly the names of practitioners of sorcery. The elders spoke out about the need to rein in sorcery, especially by young people, and also chastised women who gossiped and spread stories. The court case was closed with a prayer after mutual apologies between the accused and Stephen.

Peter stayed in hospital for several weeks, but medical treatments did nothing to improve his condition. The fact that he was brought home from the hospital still unwell re-aroused the suspicion of sorcery, and the family thus decided to 'go another way' to get healthy, as Vero, Michelle's adoptive mother, put it. By this, she meant prayer and spiritual healing. Stephen would use prayer, holy water and/or laying of hands as necessary to help, but 'bush medicine' or counter-sorcery spells would not be sought, Michelle was told. This incident prompted Vero to tell her of other stories in which Stephen's powers had helped those in need, specifically mentioning several difficult births (usually off limits to men) in which mothers and/or babies were in distress, ensuring successful deliveries thanks to his spiritual gifts. Stephen, unlike sorcerers, never asks for or accepts payment for healing, as he sees his gifts as a blessing from God using him for His work, much as Annelin describes for the women healers in Port Vila in Chapter 1. Perhaps notably, for prayer or faith healing to work, Michelle was told that all parties involved have to believe fully, have strong faith in God's power. Unlike medicine or magic (*megwa*), which works independently of one's beliefs and are seen to have their own agency or power, faith healing is only successful for the truly devout.

Here, through these acts of discernment and their often violent outcomes, there is both a moral absolutism and an ontological absolutism involved, spurred by the way in which witchcraft in particular is dealt with in 'Pentecost', often inserted within more overarching sensations of 'unknowing-ness', of what cannot be seen, perceived or understood.

For instance, as Annelin realized in Vanuatu, people often pointed out, in nostalgic terms, that 'Port Vila is different now.' The sensation of 'order' that was present in the city (either as an actual experience or

a constructed memory) in the colonial period seemed to have disappeared. One might say that the aesthetics of visual order is no longer detectable; more is heard about the fear and danger of the 'hidden'. There are endless rumours about teenage boys hiding from the intruding gaze of adults, smoking marijuana. There are also other rumours, about places where people worship dark forces ('satanic worshippers') in houses without windows. There is a popular story about a house built on the way out of Port Vila's city centre, just as one crosses the city border towards the peri-urban town of Mele Maat. Here there is a brick house without windows. Many people tell the story of how men, most of them white businessmen, meet in the dark to perform grotesque rituals, slaughtering chickens and drinking blood. These stories reflect the fear of the hidden, dark and inaccessible places that are the absolute opposite of the values people try to uphold in their everyday life; values of visibility and openness, emphasized in the practices of beautification – of bodies, houses, gardens etc. These values are also present in the churches of Luanda that engage in uniform aesthetics to promote strategies of organization, both internally and as a statement towards the exterior, to give the impression of control and safekeeping.

Back in Port Vila, this dynamic of hidden/open and the aesthetic of a visual order are clearly mirrored in the abilities of the healers, who can 'see' where others cannot. One of the most useful gifts healers use is, for instance, the gift of 'X-ray' vision. This enables healers and prophetesses to penetrate even the most closed materials and to see that which others cannot. Order is thus related to the technology of seeing and the value of visibility or 'transparency'. Beautification is a way in which this is made obvious or given more attention.

## **Conclusion: Nostalgia, Absolutism, Escaping the Danger Zone**

Ideas of discernment and truth are commonplace in Christianity. As we saw in this ethnographic journey between Luanda, Kiriwina and Port Vila, such ideas are conveyed against a negative sensation of pluralism and spiritual breakdown provoked by the typical amoral relativism of non-Pentecostal worlds. This sensation is heightened in the hyper-urban setting of Luanda but can also be found in Port Vila and Kiriwina, in particular concerning the construction of the ultimate alterity: witchcraft. Witchcraft appears in these contexts enveloped by a chromatic metaphor of darkness and 'fuzziness' and is attacked in 'Pentecost' due to its apparent emptiness in what concerns (Christian) morality. It is

also enveloped by a temporal argument that, in a first instance, seems to place it in an unwanted past – the preconversion, traditional past. However, what we realize is that it operates very much in the present, as a counterpart to the kinds of moral mappings and routes effected in ‘Pentecost’.

Within this framework, the processes of social/political ordering and establishing absolutist, anti-pluralist routes on behalf of churches of ‘Pentecost’ reveal not just a process of establishing an eschatology (as is the common understanding in the anthropology of Christianity) but also and especially a process of simultaneously reclaiming/redeeming the past and ‘breaking with the present’ (see Meyer 1998). This takes place in two movements: firstly, in the commonplace confessional regimes that are part of the narratives of conversion and self-transformation – as revealed, for instance, among the ex-witches interviewed by Michelle in Kiriwina; and secondly, in a sort of nostalgia, a longing for order (often located in a biblical, mythified, ‘pre-corruption’ past) that is effected by churches in response to the present day experience of pluralism, disorder, uncertainty etc.

In these regimes we can observe a certain ‘resentment’, as it were, towards the present. And an interesting contradiction is detected: Pentecostal churches criticize and attack pluralism but nevertheless ‘need’ it in order to establish their Manichean reasoning and dialectic. From this perspective, many such movements rely on the identification of an enemy – be it witchcraft, disbelief, secularity, other churches etc. – for their identification of a specific truth. This truth often emerges in the spatialized, geographic form of a route within a maze-like map of never-ending infrastructural alternatives: a road, an absolutist road, that allows no other option to those of us who wish to be saved and enter the Kingdom of God.

It is precisely this presentification of the route that makes ‘Pentecost’ – more than an event or a temporality – a space. For instance, if the MER (Missão Evangélica da Reconciliação – Evangelical Mission for Reconciliation) announces, on the church’s wall, a service for women on Mondays, an intercession and pastoral dialogue every Tuesday, lessons and prayers on Wednesdays, fasting and prayers on Fridays, intercessions every Saturday and the main Culto de Adoração (worship service) every Sunday, it does not just offer a calendar ordering of the prospective believers’ lives but also an itinerary of effect, a trajectory throughout the city that becomes a space of spiritual conviviality. By guiding Luandans (and the Palancans, in particular) through time and space, in this respect, as we will argue in Chapter 6, the absolutist road is found to be more than an eschatological theology but a cartography of faith.

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**Part III**

**Theories from  
'Pentecost'**



# 4

## Borders and Abjections

### Approaching Individualism in 'Pentecost'

In Chapter 1 we presented the significance of borders in 'Pentecost'. In this chapter we will set the ethnographic theory on borders in a comparative relation to other theories on borders. In the anthropology of Christianity, and in particular in the anthropology of Pentecostalism, the theory on individualism has a significant place (Bialecki and Daswani 2015; Mosko 2010; Robbins 2004 etc). In many respects, theories of individualism are also theories on borders, as they often emphasize reasons for and consequences of separation and autonomy. One might even claim that theories on individualism are among the most significant theories on borders in Western social thought, reflecting on a key concept in social theory (see, for instance, Strathern 1988), a fundamental value (Dumont 1980) and a key process in subject formation (see, for instance, Deleuze 1992; Foucault 1975; Kristeva 1982; Lacan 1968). There are other theories on borders, of course, such as the theory on ethnicity (Barth 1969), but the theories on individualism seem more relevant for the kind of borders the healers in 'Pentecost' articulate. Theories on individualism are manifold and cover a great variety of disciplines and perspectives. Roughly, one might point to cultural theories, social theories and psychological theories. In this chapter we will first give a brief recap of the main points in Chapter 1 and elaborate on the phenomenon we call 'Pentecostal borders' by also bringing in ethnography from what we might call 'elsewhere in Pentecost'. This ethnography, we claim, emphasizes the ways in which borders operate and the significance of them for social life in 'Pentecost'. We then give a brief overview

of what we call the main theories on individualism, focusing mostly on Kristeva's outline of borders in her 'Power of Horror' essays as well as on Foucault's theories on discipline and Deleuze's on control. Lastly, we offer some thoughts on how the theory on borders from 'Pentecost' relates to these.

## Danger and Security

It might seem counter-intuitive to talk about 'Pentecostal borders'. Flow of the Holy Spirit, transcendence and the breaking down of borders might seem to be more in line with common descriptions of what Pentecostalism is about. Pentecostalism breaks with traditions, liberating the subject from the past – both the sinful personal past and the social past (see, for instance, Engelke 2010; Eriksen 2008, 2009; Meyer 2004). However, as is expressed by the healers described in Chapter 1, borders are even more fundamental. As they see it; prior to the break with the past, prior to the flow of the Spirit, there is the need for protection against danger. The believer is part of an already 'liberated space'. They are 'inside' the holy in their encounter with God. The sense of danger and insecurity is prior to salvation in the sense that it is the *context* for it. According to the healers, it is in this fundamentally insecure world that the Pentecostal borders are erected. There is a thoroughgoing sense of insecurity, of danger and the need for protection. 'Breaking with' or 'breaking away from' must be understood in this context of a threatening 'environment'. Establishing predictable and secure borders is primary (see also Chapter 6 on anti-relativism for a further discussion on this). The healers presented in Chapter 1 who can see what others cannot, and who are therefore more articulate about what the landscape of 'Pentecost' looks like, all emphasize the importance of the borders as protection against 'the roaming danger'. They express a clear sense of fear, danger and insecurity. The landscape is filled with threatening spirits, witches, sorcerers and general evil that can at all times potentially attack. The only protection that can give true security is protection through the Holy Spirit, the way the healers see it. The Holy Spirit creates and maintains the protective borders. In this fundamentally insecure world, the Holy Spirit, channelled through the healers, brings order, predictability and protection.

Hackman, in her description of spiritual warfare and spiritual mapping among Pentecostals in Cape Town, South Africa, points to a similar perception of the social and spiritual landscape. After years with

the ANC-dominated regime and with a new constitution and law, the end of censorship and the new freedom allowed with sexual rights, abortion and polygamy, the Pentecostals in South Africa experienced what they called 'a country in a spiritual mess' (2015: 6). She writes: 'Capetonian Pentecostals used spiritual mapping at the time of nascent democracy as a way to monitor and police what they understood as uncertain physical, moral, and spiritual boundaries' (2015: 6). Coloured, violent, gay or otherwise sinful neighbourhoods were mapped, encircled and spiritually contained behind borders created and upheld through mapping and prayer wars.

This sense of creating an ordered and secure world has also been underscored in O'Neill and Thomas' book *Securing the City: Neoliberalism, Space, and Insecurity in Postwar Guatemala* (2015). For instance, O'Neill unravels the tight connection between ideas and language about the self and soul among neo-Pentecostals and the new language of 'soft security'. In a high-risk world, where crime rates are astronomical and the state has withdrawn, security is the big topic. Security is, however, not only material – that is, about weapons and institutions. Rather, 'soft security' targets the heart and the mind and does not need high security buildings or incarceration in prisons or mental hospitals. Rather, soft security works with the self, in non-institutional programmes. Prayer warriors and spiritual warfare create secure borders for the Pentecostal citizen in a highly insecure world. This security can be gained by creating and maintaining borders on different levels. Dan Jorgensen (2005) has described the ways in which the Pentecostals secure the nation of Papua New Guinea, praying on the borders of the country by actually flying around the physical borders of the nation in a helicopter. Similarly, Annelin has described elsewhere how in Port Vila, Vanuatu, people pray at selected areas that in many ways symbolize the borders of the nation – the airport, the harbour and the highway into the capital city (see Eriksen and MacCarthy 2016).

Having established that borders seem to be fundamental not only in the Pentecostal world illustrated in Part II of this book but also in other areas of the world where Pentecostalism is growing in popularity, let us now look a little closer at these borders. What kind of borders are established and how do they operate?

## **A Theory on Borders**

There seems to be a specific 'phenomenology' to these borders: firstly, the technology through which they are handled; and secondly, the

transformative space the borders themselves create. Let us take the first point – the technology. In the healing of a person the border appears to always be created from the outside; the healer never enters the internal space of the patient's body. This might seem self-evident, but when we give it a second thought it is also a little curious. Why cannot the healers, who are so spiritually powerful, enter the body in some spiritual sense and cleanse the patient from the inside? Very often healing technologies echo medical technologies (for instance, 'X-ray' sight) but why are not surgical procedures used? The bodies are never opened, spiritually or metaphorically. The healers will instead touch the skin of the person, massage and sometimes use anointed oil in the massage. It is the touching in this process that seems to be essential and which in itself is healing (because, of course, the healers channel the Holy Spirit). They have visual tools that are crucial here: the X-ray sight and visions they receive from the Holy Spirit. These technologies allow them, from the outside, to see through the skin as a border. They can thus identify the problem (this is the process of discernment described in Chapter 1), and by touching the skin, massaging and praying they can transform the person from sick to healthy or discover the demon that possesses the person and force it to leave. The inner space of the person, however, is impenetrable for the healer. It is only the Holy Spirit and the evil demons that can enter the body; the healers must work on the surface, *on* the border.

The healers have thus developed an elaborate technology for detection and removal from the outside. This healing practice reflects a theory of the body and the self that is closed and impenetrable. Furthermore, the healing cannot be effected from the inside. It might not be sufficient for the person to pray for him or herself, or to believe hard enough, or to commit him/herself to God, because it might be a false self committing. Committing to God is necessary but not sufficient. The commitment must be validated by an external observer who can confirm the truth of the commitment, like a pastor or a healer. They need the healer's eyes, their outside gaze, to be sure of their own clean 'insides'. The agency of the healing, so to speak, stems from the outside – from the healers and their technology for detecting and channelling the spirit. One might even say that there is a hierarchy between the inside and the outside. The inside is accessible only to the Holy Spirit, or to the evil spirit who can trick or lure the person to open up. It is not accessible to the healer herself. The inside is an elevated space and needs to be contained and kept pure. However, by working on the border, the healer can reverse the hierarchy and turn the outside into a privileged space for reworking the inside.

Sometimes the analogy between the person/the patient and the house or the yard is a necessary technology to employ in order to work on the inside from the outside. For instance, when healing her patient who had no luck in his career (see Chapter 1), Monique not only prayed for him, touching his skin and his head, but she also found it necessary to visit his house. She could there physically remove the bones from the entrance of the man's house and thus remove the cause of misfortune. Analogy is a technology that healers apply when working with patients. One border (that of the body) can be replaced with another border (that which surrounds the house). This analogy is also used in the process of the removal of 'evil' from the inside. Evil is a general term for the result of sorcery. A victim of sorcery might display any symptom from cancer to arthritis to bad luck and misfortune. Once, when Sarah was healing a patient with arthritis in her knees, she removed black stones from the ground where the patient was sitting and threw them out of the healing room. When I asked her why she had done this, she replied that she was getting rid of the cause of the illness. It was obvious that neither she nor the patient intended for me to believe that the stones had actually, physically, been inside of the patient's knees. Rather, Sarah worked on the outside in order to affect the inside. She worked through analogies.

The second aspect of the theory about borders from 'Pentecost' is the way in which the border itself is transformative. The Tokoists in Luanda wear white garments as a way of displaying the clean and pure inside. This enhances and emphasizes the border, but it also improves the purity of the inside by symbolically working the border. The Trobriand witches get rid of their evil insides by confessing to witchcraft and opening themselves to the Holy Spirit. It is through these acts of confessing, through spoken words and through the speaking mouth, that the evil is encountered. The main borders the healers in Chapter 1 talk about are the borders of the person, the house, the yard, the neighbourhood and, in some cases, also the nation. It is interesting that in regards to whatever entity is contaminated or problematic, healing takes place *on* the borders. In other words, not only are borders significant for the social landscape but the transformative processes must operate directly on the borders for healing to take place. For instance, Monique found the relics of the bones of a dead child *in* the entrance of her patient's house, not slightly inside of the house or a few metres outside of the house. This highlights a sense in which the inside is always inaccessible and healing is thereby always external. It also makes clear the power of the borders. The border can turn the inside into the outside, can force the demon to show itself and can channel the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

## Theories of Individualism

Let us now move on to another theory in which borders are essential – in Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection. We find her reflections on what we might call ‘abjective individualism’ interesting because of the connections she outlines between different biblical texts and notions of the self. First, however, we will set her theory into a larger context in order to ‘justify’ the claim that this can be termed ‘a theory of individualism’. Individualism is, of course, an expansive topic and can be covered from a number of angles. Here we will briefly mention three: a social theory, a cultural theory and, finally, a psychoanalytic theory.

As we see it, there are three anthropologists who have set individualism in social thought on the anthropological agenda, Louis Dumont (1980), Marilyn Strathern (1988) and, more recently, as a major debate within the anthropology of Christianity, Joel Robbins (2004). Although Dumont initiated the subject, let us start with Strathern.

Strathern was in many ways groundbreaking in her questioning of Western analytical apparatus in her outline of Melanesian ‘relationalism’ in the *Gender of the Gift* (1988). By giving portraits of Melanesian ways of understanding social relations, she set up a radical contrast to not only Western individualism but the ways in which Western social science has understood the nature of the social. The significance of her work, as we see it, was thus not so much the portraits from Melanesia (although, of course, these are also valuable) but the effort she made in not applying established analytical concepts: the individual, the actor, the society etc. She questioned Western universalism in a very effective way. *The Gender of the Gift* analysis makes us rethink the ways in which we understand social dynamics. Can we understand them differently? Are we stuck in analytical models where the starting point is always the individual actor or the only ‘natural’ counterpoint, the collective – in other words, the bounded unit at different scales? Strathern very effectively demonstrated a tendency in Western social science to begin our understanding of social dynamics with the individual actor.

The next question, of course, is: why? The focus on the actor (and his or her transactions) privileges a form of ‘economism’. As MacPherson (1962) pointed out, throughout much of social theory, ownership is constitutive of individuality. Property rights and the development of ‘possessive individualism’ are foundational for an understanding of the Western form of individualism. In the Pacific, as well, this connection has been emphasized (see Sykes 2007). However, the analyses focusing on religious change have had the strongest influence in



setting the question of individualism on the agenda in anthropological debates. When Robbins (2004) was faced with massive conversion to a Pentecostal form of Christianity among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea in the 1990s, the role of Christianity in the establishment of the individual was highlighted. Whereas Strathern's intellectual interest had been on questioning key concepts and perspectives in Western social science and moving beyond individualism in social scientific thought, Robbins focused on another intellectual challenge – understanding radical change. If Strathern's focus was looking for analytical models challenging individualism, Robbins' focus was on how individualism was established. The focus in this chapter springs out of the latter kind of question, but it also extends it. The conceptualizations of borders in 'Pentecost' invite us to think about what kind of individualism this is and how forms of individualism change. Before becoming more concrete on these questions, however, let us turn briefly to Dumont, whose work has been central for how individualism has been understood in anthropology.

Dumont's 'Essays on Individualism' is a significant contribution to our intellectual understanding of, firstly, the significance of the individual as a value in Western (perhaps primarily European) culture; and secondly, how individualism, in its specific form, has become established in this context. Dumont connects the specific development of individualism in Europe to a specific development within Christianity that culminates with Calvin. The early form of individualism, however, had a very different quality. In the history of Christianity in Europe, we can see the development from a cultural system where the individual was submitted to the religious whole to a cultural system where the individual in itself was the only value, separated off from the religious whole. This is a development from what he calls holism to individualism. Dumont identifies a key factor in this transformation, the change from an 'outworldly individual' to an 'individual-in-the-world' – a religious person who is first and foremost concerned with material and present matters.

The idea of an individual who was not only secluded from the world in total immersion with God but also part of the world in active social engagements resulted in a particular form of individualism. The recent ethnography that in our opinion catches this phenomenon best is Luhrmann's description of Vineyard Pentecostals in the US. In her book *When God Talks Back* (2012), we encounter people who feel God's presence, and talk to and hear God, in their everyday activities. Compared to the deeply focused and renouncing monk in early European Christianity who secluded himself and worked through specialized techniques to

submit to God, the American Pentecostal can hear God and ask for advice on hairstyles when visiting the hairdresser. Thus, not only has the 'individual-in-the-world' become able to listen, to hear and to talk to God but she can do this anywhere in the world and at any time. This, in short, is what the transformation from the outworldly individual to the individual-in-the-world is about. The individual is not only significant in his or her seclusion (and thereby in a sacred context). Rather, the individual has become the only possible way to be, and this has also transformed the idea of the religious and the sacred in itself. It can be found in the person, not in the context (of seclusion).

This focus on context, on the secluded and holy space versus what the individual is, is also key for Kristeva's reading of the Bible. As a literary theorist reading it from a psychoanalytic perspective, she has highlighted this change from the external or outside context to inner states of mind as a significant change from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Such a change fundamentally shapes religious subjectivity and the social subject. In many ways Kristeva echoes Dumont (and, as an interesting aside, they worked around the same time in the same city but perhaps in very different circles). An understanding of what the contemporary subject is must be based on how Christianity has turned an outworldly individual into an individual-in-the-world. Although she does not use these concepts, it is in many ways the same phenomena she points to: the move from an external to an internal focus on the subject – in other words, a move from an outer to an inner context. However, Kristeva is very elaborate on the social and psychological effects of this change and how it affects the process of becoming an individual for the modern subject. Borders are the key here. Let us start by giving a short summary of her analyses.

## **On Abjection as 'Borderwork'**

In Chapter 4 of her *Power of Horror* (1982), Kristeva performs a psychoanalytic reading of the Old Testament, primarily on the topic of purity/impurity in Leviticus. She starts out by referring to Mary Douglas' work on the same topic, crediting her for the fundamental insight that impurity is always that which departs from the symbolic order. As a new symbolic order was established with Judaism; it was primarily the maternal cults of the existing paganism that had to be combatted. The new symbolic order reflected the patriarchal order of the temple. Kristeva outlines three categories of the impure (or what she calls 'abominations'): food taboos, corporal alterations (with its culmination in death)

and the feminine body and incest. The elaborate rules and regulations established clear borders between the acceptable and the unacceptable, between the masculine and the feminine, but also, and perhaps most significantly, between the pure and the sinful individual – especially the taboos related to corporeal alterations, reflecting the significance of that which threatens individual identity and boundedness.

Kristeva points to Leviticus chapters 13 and 14 and the abomination of leprosy as a clear example of how bodily alterations threaten the individual. With leprosy, it is exactly the boundary of the person that is being attacked. In Kristeva's psychoanalytic reading, the obsession with leprosy in Leviticus is 'a fantasy of a self-birth on the part of the subject who has not rejected his mother but has incorporated a devouring Mother' (1982: 102). In other words, the obsession with leprosy signals an obsession with separations, boundaries and individual identity. Also, bodily fluids and secretions are threatening and must be tabooed, especially those leaking from the feminine body. Containment and maintenance of clear borders are essential. The key logic in the symbolic order of the Old Testament, according to Kristeva, is separation, first from the mother and then from the feminine in general (and thereby through rules that regulate the movement of women, for instance). This is echoed in taboos against everything that threatens the individual borders or symbolically reflects such a threat, mainly through food taboos. In Leviticus a clear and total symbolic order is outlined, one that will prevent the individual body from becoming impure.

The counterbalance is sacrifice. When the symbolic order is violated, sacrifice can re-establish order. Sacrifices 'abject' (cast out) the impure object. Kristeva accentuates the importance of sacrifice in the Old Testament. Almost any violation can be undone and un-differentiation (between pure/impure, men/women) avoided by casting out the object that threatens subjection to the system. In many ways we can see Leviticus as a guide to maintenance of the symbolic order through an elaborate sacrificial activity.

Let us for a minute pause the outline of Kristeva's reading of the Old Testament, and the establishment of separations and borders around the individual, and look at how this theory of the individual relates to anthropological discussion on the topic, as a side note. As mentioned briefly above, Robbins' analysis of Urapmin conversion made the argument that radical change and the significance of Christianity pushed the emergence of a concept of the individual. This generated a lot of controversy in anthropology, in particular in the anthropology of Melanesia. One of Robbins' main critics was Mosko in his 2010 prizewinning article on the individualism and 'partability' in Christianity. Here Mosko argues

that it is possible to read the Bible in a dividualist light. The Christian person is a divisible personhood – not necessarily individualist and indivisible. Rather, with reference to, among others, Dumont, he argues that the individual character of Christian personhood is a modern development. A Christian personhood is a composite personhood, he argues. The sharing of substance – the Holy Spirit as a non-contained force – establishes the point. According to Kristeva's reading of the Old Testament, however, and her focus on the abominations, it is exactly the separations and the establishment of individual identity that is the key to the symbolic order. It is avoidance of that which threatens the individual that is emphasized. Sacrificial activity, which might seem like the sharing of substance, is in effect the re-erection of borders and separations. Sacrificial activity is the negative manifestation of separation and individual identity and not a positive establishment of exchanges and sharing. Abjection practices point to the necessity of borders for Christian personhood and not of exchange and sharing. It is the *casting out* that is key and not the composition.

In her next essay, in Chapter 5 (called 'Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi'), she moves on to the New Testament and identifies a key shift in balance between taboos and sacrifice. With Christ, dietary taboos and taboos around verbal and gestural contact with lepers are abolished. The radical move of Christ is to approach and become intimate with lepers, prostitutes, the poor and the filthy. The symbolic order remains unchanged, but the manifestation of it is radically shifted. Kristeva writes: 'A new arrangement of differences is being set up, an arrangement whose economy will regulate a wholly different system of meaning hence a wholly different speaking subject' (ibid.: 113). The key is still the establishment of differentiation processes creating the individual identity. But this individual is created in a totally new way. Why is it that the figure of Jesus approaches lepers and breaks with the established system of taboos? Because abjection is no longer exterior, according to Kristeva. The objects of avoidance or abomination are moved within the body. The pure/impure distinction of the Old Testament is transformed into an inside/outside distinction in the New Testament. Kristeva underlines the following example from Mark 15: 'There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him; but things which come out of him, those are that which defile him.' The threat from the non-holy is no longer from the outside, according to Kristeva's reading. It is exactly this break with the idea that one can cast out the impure that creates the new subject and the new type of individual. The impure is now placed into the subject 'as a polluting and defiling substance' (1982: 114). Kristeva cites Matthew 23:27–28:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

There is a new kind of permanence to this turn to the inside. The unclean substance is internalized without the possibility of eradication. The technology of casting out, of abjection and sacrifice, which was so elaborate in Leviticus, is no longer applicable. Impurity comes from within and cannot be counterbalanced in sacrificial acts. The category of sin is thus established as a permanent, interior state. The unclean is now permanently on the inside. In many ways this is the first move towards the 'individual-in-the-world' logic, which, according to Dumont, culminated with Luther and Calvin. The turn towards the 'inside' implies the lesser significance of the external landscape of separations, seclusions and regulations. It also implies that the ritual activity is of lesser significance. It is almost as if the Vineyard Pentecostals (described by Luhrmann 2012) are already visible here; it is the everyday act, the inner thoughts, that are crucial.

Attention should be drawn to two points from Kristeva's analysis. Firstly, the new inside/outside dichotomy replacing the purity/impurity dichotomy is a spiritual one. It is no longer acts of eating or movements beyond boundaries that are problematic. Rather, it is thoughts, or lack of thoughts, that are problematic. Secondly, as is underlined in the following quote from Mark 7:21, the problematic comes from within:

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.

Thus, it is there already. Inner impurity is permanent. Only momentary relief is given, in what Kristeva calls the 'fantasy of devouring', in the Holy Communion. By internalizing the Spirit of Jesus in the act of eating bread, the cleanliness is momentarily achieved but only as a spiritual state. Only Jesus is pure in spirit and can transcend the bodily state. The sinful body of man (but primarily, woman) is permanent. It is this analysis of the transition from the Old Testament logic to the New Testament logic that we find of comparative interest for our 'theory from Pentecost'. It is not the theological argument that men are born sinful that in itself interests us here but the rather dramatic turn in regards to where the sinful emanates from and the effect of ritual activity on it.

The New Testament individual is a permanently split individual, between spirit and matter, body and mind. For Kristeva, this is

interesting in relation to psychological disorders. She connects eating disorders among women with this turn towards the inside. The feminine, which was defined as impure in Leviticus, can no longer be controlled in an external landscape through seclusion practices. Rather, the impure is a permanent part of the body. For women this is especially problematic. Anorexia is a disease that plays on this logic. According to Kristeva, the effects of the disease (the threat to the menstrual cycle, the loss of fertility, the loss of feminine forms etc.) signal exactly the need to combat 'impurity' from the inside. It is as if lack of abjective technologies turns the 'purity-machine' towards the body, leaving everything to the individual (subconscious) mind.

When we now turn to 'Pentecost', we can immediately identify one obvious contrast. The individual is not closed off in the way Kristeva describes. The theory on borders from 'Pentecost' involves an intense ritual activity to abject the impure, the evil, from the bodies. It thus reflects a specific form of boundary-making and, consequently, a specific form of individualism. Let us take a closer look at this comparison.

## **Comparing Theories on Borders**

In our reading of Kristeva, there are three main points to stress: the turn towards separation, borders and individual identity in Leviticus; the transformation from an external landscape to an internal landscape in the New Testament, thus creating a specific kind of individualism; and the effect of the latter as a loss of ritual activity. This is a theory of how the operation of boundaries has created very different kinds of individuals.

When looking at the ways in which healers presented in Chapter 1 articulate the significance of border and boundaries, there are two striking contrasts. Firstly, Kristeva describes the contemporary Christian as locked within a system of meaning where the impure and evil resides in the body of the individual without any permanent possibility of abjection. This is exactly the opposite of what the healers articulate; the process of casting out is not only possible but necessary, and constant. Secondly, in Kristeva's reading of the New Testament, evil emanates from the inside, as outlined in the presentation of the theory about borders above. For the healers and their patients, evil comes from the outside but can take root on the inside. Furthermore, the pure can only be confirmed as present when identified from the outside. The rhetorical question is, of course, how can the reading of these Christian boundaries be so different? An easy answer, but one that is clearly insufficient, is that

Christianity in 'Pentecost' is 'unmodern' and therefore more related to the Old Testament than to the New.

Although there is clearly a great interest in the Old Testament in the places we have visited ethnographically in this book, we have each also experienced the effect of a 'Jesus-centred theology'. In Port Vila pastors, healers and general prayer meetings often focus on Jesus. The healers also see themselves as working *as* Jesus – seeking the poor, the sick, the dangerous, unprivileged and marginalized. The healers frequently mention that their work is dangerous, that they get intimate with that which others find repulsive. Thus, it is not as if the healers work with an 'Old Testament logic'. It is in many ways the New Testament that is interesting for the healers and their patients (and when we say patients, we are referring to most people, since nearly everyone in the areas we have visited ethnographically will visit the healers at some point). In all of the contexts described in this book (in all of 'Pentecost', if you will), Christianity has been present for at least a century. These are places where sincere individuals (Keane 2002) and true believers have been moulded over generations. The first missionaries to Vanuatu, for instance, were obsessed with banning any kind of ritual activity that they saw as a survival of heathendom (see Eriksen 2008). Thus, instead of seeing abjective and ritual activity in 'Pentecost' as a reflection of an older form of Christianity, a more 'tradition-mixed' form perhaps, we suggest seeing it as an explicit turn to a new form of individualism, one that brings back certain elements of the Old Testament logic. We need to understand the expressions of borders and 'border work' as an articulation of a new theory of the individual. This articulation is a dialogue with the contemporary world. A re-ritualization of the impure and a new understanding of the significance of boundaries reflect exactly this. Let us explain.

As we pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the significance of borders must be understood against the background of a deeply insecure world. Danger, in the form of evil, the devil, demons and sorcerers, is potentially everywhere, according to our interlocutors. Boundaries, therefore, protect from the outside, and, as we pointed out, healing takes place on the outside. It never emanates from the inside. This, of course, is in stark contrast to the points referred to above in the citations from the New Testament, where impurity (which is, in NT context 'sin') is permanently locked on the inside. The confession rituals in Kiriwina and the discernments of the healers in Port Vila reflect rituals of separation – the separation of evil from the body. These become new avenues for casting out evil, for ritual abjection. Furthermore, we can see the technologies of analogy, described above, as technologies for

managing abjection – it involves a turn to the exterior landscape – and as a turn to external regulatory practices. In addition, we can see how the transformative space of the borders, which we outlined as a key aspect of what we called ‘the phenomenology of the borders’, reflects an opening of the border, a way into the inner space from the outside, and not an order that permanently closes off.

Thus, the theory of the borders reflects a specific form of individualism where the presence of evil and danger is foundational. What the comparison above highlights, as we see it, is primarily two different forms of individualism that are reflections of very different social conditions. We might compare the ‘closed’ New Testament individual Kristeva identifies and the ‘abjective’ individual of ‘Pentecost’ to the kinds of individuals that are produced in what Foucault (1979) calls the discipline society and what Deleuze (1992) calls the control society. The discipline society produces an individual who is constantly self-aware, self-monitoring and self-disciplining. This is in many ways the New Testament individual who is no longer just being watched by God but also watching him/herself. Although there is an external, watching gaze in the background (the illusion of the panopticon), the effect of the internalization is an individual who does not need external ‘modification’.

There are, of course, differences between the ‘docile body’ in the context of the ‘bio-power’ Foucault describes and the ‘closed’ individual Kristeva describes, but they are both self-governing’ and self-monitoring. This is an individual who in confession practices, for instance, starts with the ‘I’. The focus of sinfulness, the target of the (self-)surveilling gaze, is the ‘I’. One might say that the closed individual Kristeva describes is a perfect fit for the disciplinary societies of institutional containment. There is ‘no way out’, so to speak. There is no abjection from the autonomous individual. In ‘Pentecost’, however, the ‘I’ is of another kind. This is an ‘I’ that is controlled in a very different way. It is not disciplined in order to repress sinful tendencies. Rather, in the theory on borders that the healers articulate, sinfulness can be dealt with through abjections and transferred to an external landscape. When looking at what we with Kristeva’s gaze can call the abjection practices in ‘Pentecost’, it seems obvious that it is not the ‘closed’, disciplined and autonomous individual of Foucault’s disciplinary society that is produced. The very focus on borders, on protection and abjection, creates another kind of personhood. It creates a personhood that can get beyond his or her internal impurity, over and over again. It also reflects a personhood that must be protected from the *outside*.

The theory on borders, and in particular the theory of the abjective ‘I’ in ‘Pentecost’, can perhaps be compared to specific theories on



subject formation in theories of control (Deleuze 1992). There are two reasons why this is an interesting comparison. Firstly, the social processes described as inherent in the new forms of control, on the surface at least, might look like a similar turn to an 'open' individual, and the borders inherent in new forms of control seem, to some extent, to parallel the borders erected in prayer wars, healing of neighbourhoods etc. However, as we will show, major differences are also easily found. Secondly, when we describe 'Pentecost', we detail phenomena that are part of a more general trend; 'Pentecost' is global and is reflected in different spheres of life. As others have pointed out (Guyer 2007), the key ideas of 'Pentecost' are reflected, for instance, in financial markets, in stock exchange logics etc. This is part of the reason why we need to 'go to Pentecost': to get the key social processes in focus, to 'zoom out' in order, as we pointed out in the introduction, not to 'only' focus on self-conscious religious life. In other words, if the ethnography from 'Pentecost' aims to capture some key globalizing processes, descriptions of forms of control also seek to describe these global processes. To what extent do these overlap?

The person in the Deleuzian control society is fundamentally different from the person in the discipline society. First and foremost, the person in the control society is no longer autonomous, no longer closed, but rather (in Deleuze's term) a 'dividual' (Deleuze 1992: 5). In control societies it is no longer the individual who is the key agent but multiple representations of the individual, the so-called 'data-double' (see Galič, Timan and Koops 2016). The new goal is access, not discipline. As Galič, Timan and Koops phrase it, this is a shift from 'soul-training' to managing user profiles and consumer practices. The representation of the self is more important than the self. Corporations do not need docile bodies. They want to monitor consumer practices and mould their products accordingly.

The usernames, online profiles, passwords and personal codes link a person to multiple representations. This shift, from discipline to control, maps a move from nation state-driven societies to corporation-run networks. The individual of the discipline society was watched by the gaze of the sovereign and thereby internalized this gaze. The new dividual is no longer contained in a body but can take on multiple identities. The idea of liberation from containment is crucial in the society of control, not only at the level of the individual. In many ways, in societies of control, borders are always challenged. Containment is not necessary for control. Control is achieved by giving direction, by steering movement in (virtual) landscapes where borders are invisible. More than this, borders are denied. For instance, the highway does not contain; rather, it creates

'freedom' for the driver while controlling movement. Google opens the possibility to search for anything, but the algorithm controlling and limiting the search is not obvious and visible. The places where one *cannot* go are not in focus. The borders are created by what you cannot do (on the highway, inside buildings etc.), the search results you do not get on the internet. But whereas in the theory from 'Pentecost' the healers can see the invisible – where the evil emanates from and where the protection of the good must be effected – in the theory of control, borders are invisible; they are created by forms of control that are unapproachable. In other words, in the theory from 'Pentecost', the articulations of evil create a visibility of the border. In the theory of control, control itself (and thus the border) is invisible. The 'data-double', the person who can become anything/anyone through access codes, usernames and online profiles, seems unlimited. Whereas a healer in 'Pentecost' needs to manifest the border – after a ritual abjection, for instance, to protect and keep the person secure – there is no articulation of the limit for the dividual in control societies.

Furthermore, the casting out of evil, which is the specialized capacity of the healers, reflects a process of controlled externalization, of creating new individuals with new capacities. This might, to some extent, be similar to the ongoing creation of new user profiles in the digital control sociality. However, there is one major difference. In 'Pentecost' this 'flow' is structured on a binary opposition of major importance: the good versus the evil. In the digital control society, only one logic structures the flow: that of capital. When the healers work through analogies, for instance, this might reflect the creation of external representations, but the context is one of protection and not of 'global flow'. Online user profiles and multiple social media identities are not created for protection, of course, but in order to consume. In contrast to the global flow of the 'network society', the structuration of 'flow' in 'Pentecost' is a deeply moralized one, distinguishing fundamentally between the good and the evil. The specific kind of 'abjective individualism' articulated in 'Pentecost' reflects a specific social context, one that emphasizes 'the roaming danger' and 'the omnipresence of evil'.

Thus, the abjective individual of Pentecost is very different from the partible personhood of the dividual in the free-floating control society. The logic of the control society is primarily formed by the stock market and exchange rates. Limitless but directed flow is the goal. In contrast, the processes of externalization in 'Pentecost' are fundamentally structured on a good versus evil logic. Understanding what this idea of evil represents is crucial, we argue, for an understanding of the specific theory of borders and the specific theory of individualism that is being

developed in 'Pentecost'. Evil is (no longer) something that stems from the inside, as it is in Kristeva's reading of the New Testament. Rather, evil is potentially everywhere and attacks the body from the outside. It reflects a deeply insecure world, a world where only one thing is established beyond doubt: there is evil and there is good, and distinguishing correctly between them is a matter of life or death.

## **Concluding Reflections**

If borders as forms of control are hard to articulate, pinpoint and define, they are constantly worked on in 'Pentecost'. 'Pentecost' opens a space for thinking about the borders that might remain unarticulated elsewhere. On the one hand, this means that a person's borders are challenged, thus creating a new abjective individual, perhaps in response to the new form of dividualism outlined by Deleuze or perhaps independently of it. On the other hand, it means that other borders, such as, for instance, those around the nation and the neighbourhood, are given prominence, especially in prayer wars, prayer campaigns etc. Still, it is not as if the articulation of the borders in Pentecost is a reflection of a control society. The new abjective individual in 'Pentecost', along with the work to secure borders, seems almost to be as different from the individual in the control society as the individual in the disciplinary society. Perhaps we can see the articulations of borders and the abjective individual as a different form of global discourse (or theory), one emanating from a very different kind of reality in which danger is omnipresent and protection is fundamental. This is a world where the spiritual is primary and the material is secondary, in contrast to the social conditions of forms of control, where this order is reversed (i.e. the capital is only logic; see Galič, Timan and Koops 2016). In this sense, perhaps we can see the theory from 'Pentecost' as a 'critical theory'.

To sum up, we see the focus on borders in 'Pentecost' as an articulation of the problems of closing and opening the individual, and we see healing practices as a turn to abjective technology. On the one hand, this echoes the externalization processes described by Deleuze in control societies, and it reflects, we argue, a move away from institutional discipline. On the other hand, the abjection practices are also crucially different from the dividual of the network society. The form of individualism developed in 'Pentecost' is setting up clear boundaries and in this way structuring how and where the (global) flow should be limited. In many of the prayer wars and prayer campaigns Annelin witnessed in Port Vila, for instance, symbolic sites for desired global flow

were targeted: the harbour, airport, roads etc. In a specific prayer group called 'The Mothers of the Nation' that Annelin attended frequently in 2010, the theme of global flow was often on the agenda in different ways. Trade agreements, international political problems and electricity prices were just a few of the many topics on which the women would focus. In many ways those women were seeking with their prayers to erect borders and structures in similar ways to that which the healers did (although more abstractly) – creating divisions between good and evil by structuring the flow. One example is a prayer this group performed petitioning for the failure of a new trade agreement with China. China was regarded, explicitly in the prayers, as the most unchristian and evil country.

The major difference between 'Pentecost' and societies of control is that in 'Pentecost' healers and prayer warriors can see and work with the borders, whereas in digital control societies the illusion of free access and unbounded sociality is hard to challenge. Perhaps 'border work' becomes particularly pressing for the witches in Kiriwina, for the Tokoists and EKWESA prayer circles in Luanda and in healing sessions in Port Vila in a context where anything can be 'accessed', including selves, minds and bodies.

## Note

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# 5

## Engaging with Theories of Neoliberalism and Prosperity

Pentecostalism has often been understood and theorized as the religion that epitomizes neoliberal economic strategies and what has been termed ‘casino capitalism’. The focus on quick and manifold returns, and the almost magical means through which such returns are created, are identified as key characteristics of Pentecostalism, especially where notions of the prosperity gospel or Word of Faith movements are present. In these theories, tithing and seed money are defining features, as these are the basis for bountiful returns in health and wealth. However, by looking closely at the ‘theory from Pentecost’, as developed through the ethnographies presented in Chapter 2, we can read another story. Life in ‘Pentecost’ is not primarily about the prosperity gospel as a means to become rich. Rather, being in ‘Pentecost’ represents a deeper shift: a new significance given to life in the present and a move away from death. The focus is oriented primarily on the here and now, which becomes much more prioritized as a site of productivity and exchange over the dead, the past and so on, which, we will argue, signals a cosmology wherein the cyclical nature of life and death is reoriented to a more linear one. In Pentecost, we find what we might call the ‘life gospel’; it is a theory about why it is necessary to focus on the living, and why the move away from a focus on the ancestors and elaborate kinship ceremonies are necessary and desirable. It is a theory that fundamentally changes cosmological perceptions. In this chapter, we will look at what this turn to life represents, why it is significant and how this ‘theory from

the field' can provide a corrective to the dominant understandings of economism in Pentecostalism.

Firstly, we will briefly revisit some of the main threads developed in Chapter 2 in order to move into another level of comparison wherein the local ideas and concepts that seek to explain significant changes in the ritual practice come into dialogue with the major relevant theories from the discipline. In Chapter 2 we identified a local discourse in 'Pentecost' around the wasteful/productive dichotomy and the need to focus resources on 'the living' (especially the nuclear family and church congregation) rather than 'the dead' (ancestors, recently deceased relatives). This shift is not necessarily articulated as one of economy, in a narrow sense, but ideas of saving and making money are often most clearly articulated. We will therefore start the frontal analyses (Canda 2016) by looking at the (mainly anthropological) literature that sees economic change as foundational for conversions to Pentecostal forms of Christianity. In particular, we engage with the well-known debates around Pentecostalism as a corollary of neoliberal economic restructuring in developing and postcolonial regions, perhaps best exemplified by the work of Jean and John Comaroff. Together with such arguments, we look to the literature examining the so-called Health and Wealth Gospel, prosperity gospel or Word of Faith movement, in which God wants his faithful to prosper, but believers must speak and/or act in the right way to access the riches they rightly deserve. These movements are part and parcel of many (but not all) Pentecostal messages, especially in the American mega-church and celebrity pastor milieu, and such messages have, in one form or another, resonances in our respective field sites. Our primary question in comparing these analyses with locally based understandings of what it means to live in 'Pentecost' is: What are the similarities between the local discourses of usefulness/wastefulness in 'Pentecost' and anthropological understandings of the relationship between Pentecostalism and neoliberalism? In this chapter we will show that local 'Pentecost' discourses may help us move beyond reductionist economic arguments without leaving economy out of the picture.

### **The Theory from the Field: 'Why Should We Waste Our Time on These Useless Things?'**

In Chapter 2, we explored the ways in which many Trobriand Islanders talked about *doba*, which had previously been an essential component in elaborate exchange rituals following the death of a close relative. Trobriand Islanders stressed that using *doba* was a waste of time,

resources and even money. It is backwards, dirty and unproductive, as against productive behaviour or activities such as cleaning and washing, sewing, weaving mats, growing and preparing food or selling things at the market. They pointed out that the production of *doba* and the practice of *sagali* meant that too many resources were spent on the dead, at the expense of the living. If they stopped wasting time on *sagali*, they reasoned, Trobriand Islanders could be more developed and materially well-off. They would also be better Christians if they focused on prioritizing the nuclear family and their church congregation rather than their extended kinship ties. Furthermore, the focus should be on the here and now and not on the past and the ancestors. Local discourses on notions of productivity as against waste(fulness) or uselessness were then explored in Port Vila and Luanda to develop a theory of the importance of productivity and to explore what that means in the context of 'Pentecost'. When taken in comparison with similar if distinctive notions about productivity and the focus on the here and now in Port Vila and the Palanca, a theory 'from the field' emerges. We have suggested that within 'Pentecost', redefining what is a productive use of time and resources is seen as a step towards redefining which kinship obligations should be prioritized, how the domestic moral economy should work and ideals of 'living well'.

In 'Pentecost', life is what matters. Death is the end; the end of obligations, the end of meaningful relationships. A focus on death draws one away from living a good life here and now. By 'wasting time' on unproductive activities, or simply being idle, or failing to make profits when one could be doing so, people keep themselves 'in the dark' – in poverty (spiritual and material), less developed and isolated from the rest of the world. Furthermore, idleness or time-wasting is not truly Christian and will not contribute to giving one a Good Life. In such a theory, *doba* becomes a metaphor and a material representation of the old, the dirty and the useless. By getting rid of it (and, concomitantly, by using those resources of time and energy to more productive ends to provide food for the family and tithes and offerings to the church), people show that they are ready to embrace a new and better way of living in Christ. Crying or otherwise putting resources into the dead/funerals may be seen as similar metaphors. In 'Pentecost', death is not elaborate.

Going back to the specific case of the Trobriands, Annette Weiner made the bundles and skirts manufactured from dried banana leaves, collectively called *doba* in the Kilivila language, a classic case in anthropology for the importance of a gender perspective and attention to women's role in exchange. She saw them as physical representations of the matrilineage and thus demonstrative of the importance of what she



referred to as 'women's wealth', which to her demonstrated 'women's power over cosmic (ahistorical) time [which] is singularly within their domain' (1976: 231). These grass skirts and bundles, the major objects of value on display in huge quantities and given away to members of other clans at the time of a death of a close kinsperson, she argued, were so symbolically 'dense' and charged with meaning as representative of the very mother's milk of the clan that they could not be substituted or replaced, despite the fact that already during her fieldwork their distribution at mortuary feasts was supplemented with lengths of printed calico. And yet, Chapter 2 described how, in some Trobriand ('Pentecost') villages, collective or clan-based decisions have been made (and largely adhered to) which limit the size and scale of mortuary distributions. In many villages, this means much less focus on the banana leaf textiles locally manufactured by women, and in some villages the use of bundles and skirts has been completely eradicated. Those living in the (still very many) villages that continue to exchange *doba* in vast quantities at each death regularly debate its worth, and most villages have had community meetings to discuss and debate the merits of continuing this aspect of Trobriand exchange versus the benefits to be gained by giving it up. While at the time of writing more villages continue its manufacture and distribution relative to those that eschew it, its continued use is by no means a foregone conclusion. The current discourses about waste and uselessness suggest new moral as well as economic imperatives to reorient exchange activities, which this ethnographic project sets out to examine more closely.

## **Pentecostalism as Neoliberalism**

Comaroff and Comaroff's (1999, 2000) analyses of 'occult economies' and 'millennial capitalism' are among the most influential and debated contributions to what we might call an economy-centred understanding of Pentecostalism. They suggest that Pentecostal denominations are especially close to the new neoliberal spirit (2000: 314). As Coleman (2011: 31) has it, 'millennial capitalism is said to contain a confusing and contradictory blend of hope and hopelessness, alongside a privatized sense of religious participation in relation to a market whose benefits remain ever more unattainable, constituted through rapid flows of value across space and time'. In contexts where vast wealth appears to concentrate in the hands of just a few citizens, the market becomes a container of mysterious mechanisms of accumulation and distribution (Coleman 2011: 29–30). Brouwer, Gifford and Rose (1996: 179) have

argued that Pentecostalism is attractive to many in economically vulnerable areas by giving them a means of control over seemingly uncontrollable circumstances through following strict protocols of ‘right living’. The spiritual and personal authority of the pastor provides guidance, and believers can access miracles to help them face the uncertainties and difficulties of life.

The Comaroffs’ version of the neo-Protestant ethic involves the ability to gain wealth without perceptible production, but it also implies – to those at the bottom of the economic pile – the working of insidious forces and even sorcery as means of accumulation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 282). For them, occult economies have two dimensions: a material aspect wherein efforts to conjure wealth, or to account for its accumulation, are attempted by appeal to techniques that fall outside practical reason or conventional market practices; and an ethical aspect ‘grounded in the moral discourses and (re)actions sparked by the (real or imagined) production of value through such “magical” means’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 310). Occult economies are seen by the Comaroffs to have close parallels with new religious movements, especially Holy Spirit-based faiths, as they move across the planet and perhaps especially into the global south. They provide as an example the neo-Pentecostal Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus), the Brazilian-originating denomination whose members were among Ruy’s interlocutors in the Palanca. They argue that this church

reforms the Protestant ethic with enterprise and urbanity, fulsomely embracing the material world. It ... promises swift payback to those who embrace Christ, denounce Satan, and ‘make their faith practical’ by ‘sacrificing’ all they can to the movement. Here Pentecostalism meets neoliberal enterprise. In its African churches, most of them (literally) storefronts, prayer meetings respond to frankly mercenary desires, offering everything from cures for depression through financial advice to remedies for unemployment; casual passersby, clients really, select the services they require. ... The ability to deliver in the here and now, itself a potent form of space-time compression, is offered as the measure of a genuinely global God ... [T]he Second Coming evokes not a Jesus who saves, but one who pays dividends. Or, more accurately, one who promises a miraculous return on a limited spiritual investment. (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 314–15)

The Comaroffs note the allure of accruing wealth from nothing; that is to say, the promises of vast returns on offerings given in faith as per the prosperity gospel (or in Ponzi schemes such as U-Vistract or Money Rain in PNG, see Cox 2011, 2013; Cox and Macintyre 2014). Indeed, Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) examine prosperity gospels alongside

pyramid or Ponzi schemes in the postcolonies in their discussion of the ‘money magic’ of ‘millennial capitalism’, which they describe as ‘a capitalism that presents itself as a gospel of salvation ... invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered’ (2000: 292). Similarly, political scientist Isabelle V. Barker argues that Pentecostalism ‘fosters norms and behaviours that harmonize with neoliberal economic restructuring’ (2007: 407), a reaction to weakened state governance relative to neoliberal trade and fiscal policy. She states, ‘I suggest that Pentecostalism has embedded the self-regulated aspects of neoliberal capitalism ... [and] that Pentecostalism has the capacity to embed neoliberal economic activities by integrating these activities into society’ (Barker 2007: 407, 409). The argument goes that, especially in developing countries, Pentecostal churches fill the gaps left by failures of the state to provide for essential social needs (Barker 2007: 409; see also Eriksen 2009; Maxwell 1998). Moreover, Barker argues that the individualist theology, charismatic practices and the new kinds of community fostered by Pentecostal worship instigate shifting modes of production and support the informalization of the labour market, increased labour migration and the rapid transformation of local communities (2007: 409; see also Carrette and King 2005). Likewise, Maxwell (1998: 351) argues that Pentecostalism is seen by members of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God as a way to cope with rapid social change, achieve social mobility and avoid falling into poverty and destitution by following a well-defined moral code. For the Comaroffs, Barker and others, then, ‘occult economies’ and prosperity gospels are responses to inequality and the inability of the state to provide for its citizens, and to new forms of capitalism, so-called ‘casino-capitalism’, the notion that capitalism is essentially speculative and little more than a system of big and small bets in a grand game of chance.

## **The Gospel of Prosperity**

Before we can turn back to what a comparison with the theory from ‘Pentecost’ can add to such an understanding of prosperity gospels and the economic-oriented analyses of Pentecostal Christianity, a brief explanation of what is entailed in the ‘health and wealth’ and related gospels is necessary. The Word of Faith movement (alternatively, Faith Theology, the ‘health and wealth’ gospel or the ‘name it and claim it’ gospel) originates with the notion of ‘positive confession’ to articulate one’s needs such that God will provide. Kenneth Hagin, an influential Charismatic American preacher, is a key figure in this movement. Hagin claims to

have been raised from his deathbed in 1934 by 'the revelation of faith in God's Word'. He began preaching and evangelizing, first at Assemblies of God churches throughout Texas, and developed the notion of positive confession into the Word of Faith movement. Proponents of the Word of Faith doctrine influenced by Hagin's teaching include Oral Roberts, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Jerry Savelle, Charles Capps, Bill Winston, Creflo Dollar, Charles Nieman, Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, T.D. Jakes and Marilyn Hickey, among others. Word of Faith teaching holds that God wants the faithful to be prosperous, in terms of finances, good health and good marriages and relationships. Its practitioners promise physical, emotional, financial, relational and spiritual healing or prosperity for anyone who has the right belief-filled confession, in which believers have the power to speak things into being. The prosperity gospel is a particular offshoot of the Word of Faith movement, teaching that gifts of money are as important as visualization and positive confession in achieving the wealth (material and spiritual) that God wants for his followers.

Not all Pentecostal-Charismatic congregations adhere to the prosperity gospel, which interprets health and material prosperity as evidence of the strength of one's faith. Although such gospels are not always explicitly promoted in our particular case studies, Word of Faith crusades are well known, and general ideas about the health and wealth gospels are common in local discourse. Health and wealth are seen as gifts of the Spirit and the rightful rewards of believers, and one has to speak and ask for those things that will materially help their lives. Those who do not receive blessings of wealth and health must have failed in their faith, made negative confessions or otherwise come up short in meeting their obligations to God; for example, by not investing their 'seeds' or giving generously enough to the church or charitable endeavours. In the sites in 'Pentecost' we have examined, prosperity gospel and the Word of Faith message are not a primary point of orientation, but the messages and ideals inherent in them are certainly a part of people's understanding of the potential benefits of true belief, especially as they relate to health and wellbeing. In other words, in Kiriwina, Palanca and Port Vila, the health gospel in a general sense and not capital (the wealth gospel) is especially salient, though there is a concomitant hope for improved material conditions to also follow with the appropriate investments, both in terms of the moral investment in being a productive Christian and the economic investment of making seed offerings to the church.

The notion of Seed-Faith, developed by the American preacher Oral Roberts, asserts that money and material goods donated in faith are the

seeds of prosperity and material blessings from God and that the Bible assures believers that He promises to multiply in miraculous ways whatever is given. Critics refer to it as a get-rich-quick scheme that appeals mainly to the poor, disadvantaged and desperate. The Seed-Faith principle has supported vast networks of televangelists who vie for their viewers' money with fervent promises of 'miracles', usually in the form of material wellbeing. Although people living in Trobriand Island villages lack electricity and running water, let alone a television and access to the Trinity Broadcasting Network or other media outlets where such televangelists preach their message, more than one Trobriand Islander reeled off the names of such celebrity pastors as Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer, Jesse Duplantis and Jerry Savelle (all in one way or another associated with the Word of Faith or prosperity gospel movements) and Tim Hall (known for laying hands and healing in the Spirit) – many of whom have, in fact, preached at crusades in Port Moresby or at the very least have their TV broadcasts made available on one of PNG's two free-to-air television channels. Whether by giving tithes and offerings in hopes of manifold returns, by keeping a small store as a moral obligation to be responsible with money or giving up previous obligations to widespread kin networks, aspects of this message are present throughout our field sites. What is more, the emphasis on speaking and acting in the proper way to achieve desired outcomes is also emphasized.

Inequality, poverty, a lack of adequate government services and food insecurity long predate the arrival of Pentecostal forms of Christianity in the communities where we have worked. Indeed, Catholic and Methodist missions of a century ago provided the education and health-care that the government often did not, though the general quality of government services and infrastructure in much of PNG (and in many postcolonial nations) declined with the transition to independence and ongoing problems of corruption and inefficiencies in government at all levels. However, the reasons Trobriand Islanders gave for embracing a new 'life in Pentecost', as we are phrasing it, had not in the first case to do with the structural inequalities and conditions of poverty they faced, but rather it was a response to rampant sorcery deaths and the inability of mainline religion to combat such evil forces (MacCarthy 2017b) (though of course, increased sorcery also often follows particularly stressful social conditions such as drought or severe storms, which further threaten food security and available infrastructure). However, there are other reasons to doubt that an explanation purely focused on individual economic success and/or shortcomings in government services can account for spiritual and social change in the Kiriwina case, as well as in 'Pentecost' more generally.

Haynes (2013) has argued that the economy of Pentecostalism is not necessarily capitalist and inherently antisocial. Essential to the prosperity gospel is the notion of giving gifts – to the church (and the pastors who embody the church) – to others less fortunate or for specific funding drives. The notion of gifting – and of getting something in return in the form of material and/or spiritual blessings – is hardly far-fetched in the Trobriands, as it has long been used as a model for reciprocal (and often delayed) exchange relations, such as in the famed *kula* ring (Damon 1980, 2002; Kuehling 2005; Malinowski 1920, 1984 [1922] and many others) and also in terms of mortuary exchanges (MacCarthy 2017a; Weiner 1976, 1978, 1994). Furthermore, in an agricultural society, which places huge emphasis on planting, weeding, tending and nurturing (and eventually, harvesting, gifting, and consuming) garden produce, the idea of seed offerings or seed money that when given in faith to Godly purpose will eventually result in a ‘harvest’ for those who sow them is perhaps of particular resonance. In discussing Pentecostal economics on the Zambian Copperbelt, Haynes (2013) argues that seed offerings there represent both faith-inspired sacrifices to God *and* socially productive gifts to church leaders that ‘work together to create and protect the kinds of social ties that people in urban Zambia consider most important’ (Haynes 2013: 86). She notes that this means emphasizing holiness and proper Christian conduct as well as gifts of money as a prerequisite to prosperity.

We take this argument a step further to suggest that not only are social relations nurtured by gifts of tithes, offerings and prayers but that this reflects larger concerns of a focus on life, specifically ‘the good life’ (morally and materially), at the expense of an interest in or concern with death. A priority on immediate returns (a capitalist approach to a health and wealth gospel) is not an accurate representation of what our interlocutors suggest. Rather, the ethnography shows that the necessity of being productive, sowing seeds and living a Godly life is a sort of ‘life gospel’ that focuses on the kinds of relationships that matter in a world where death and the relationships associated with death (ancestors, affines, distant kin) are no longer particularly meaningful or important. This contrasts with recent work by Mosko (2017), which emphasizes just such relationships, especially with *baloma* (spirits, ancestors), in Trobriand cosmology. Where Mosko sees little substantive change with Christianity, we stress that Pentecostalism indeed marks a cosmological shift.

## The Comparison: Living Well in Pentecost

Briefly, let us recap the main economic theories of Pentecostalism as per the Comaroffs and those who have argued along similar lines, which we have outlined above: Pentecostalism is a form of ‘occult economy’ that promises magical returns on (spiritual and material) investment. This is particularly manifested in adherence to the prosperity gospel in its various forms. It offers immediate, rather than delayed, returns for personal sacrifice and can be seen as having the functional purpose of filling the gaps wherein the state fails to meet the fundamental needs of its citizens. This suggests at the forefront an economic or material rationale for conversion, and using Pentecostal religion as a substitute for (or even a new form of?) magic, in order to help one control the uncontrollable. It is tempting to look at the lack of development and opportunity in a place like the Trobriand Islands, peri-urban Vanuatu or the shanty towns of Luanda and suggest that the promise of salvation and even immediate rewards to be enjoyed from gifts given to God are a direct result of desperation and a desire to get in on the wealth that clearly exists in the world but that the people we work with seem never quite able to access. Indeed, structural inequalities and barriers to economic success are certainly a factor in religious life. But such a theory essentially directly equates life in ‘Pentecost’ to that of a spiritual marketplace, where every transaction is a direct corollary of capitalist economic systems, which seems to be overstating the point. As Coleman (2011: 33) suggests, what is needed here is a more multidimensional understanding of how Faith practices articulate the connections between ‘religious’ and ‘economic’ spheres of activity.

Now, we must return to our theory from the field, the local discourses and understandings of ideas about productivity, to argue that such economic-focused arguments miss that money, prosperity and wellbeing are not necessarily the end-goal in and of themselves; they are rather a means to an end, in which money and the kinds of exchanges favoured in ‘Pentecost’ can be used to focus on what is really important: life. Not only the here and now – which indeed becomes much more prioritized as a site of productivity and exchange over the dead, the past and so on – but in fact a cosmology wherein the cyclical nature of life and death is reoriented to a more linear one.

Taken from the Trobriand perspective, this reflects, perhaps, a reorientation from the Trobriand view of death as is well known from the ethnographic literature, wherein spirits of the dead (*baloma*) are transported to the island of Tuma only to be regenerated as new members of

the same matriclan. Though today Trobrianders are well aware of the biological facts of reproduction, Malinowski reported that in the early twentieth century the following belief was 'universal' in Kiriwina:

When the *baloma* has grown old, his teeth fall out, his skin gets loose and wrinkled; he goes to the beach and bathes in the salt water; then he throws off his skin just as a snake would do, and becomes a young child again; really an embryo, a *waiwaia* – a term applied to children *in utero* and immediately after birth. A *baloma* woman sees this *waiwaia*; she takes it up, and puts it in a basket or a plaited and folded coconut leaf (*puatai*). She carries the small being to Kiriwina, and places it in the womb of some woman, inserting it *per vaginam*. Then that woman becomes pregnant (*nasusuma*). (Malinowski 1916: 403)

When I mentioned such a belief to my own Trobriand interlocutors, they looked confused, bemused or were almost irritated at the absurdity they saw in such a notion. And yet, under certain circumstances, references are still made to cases of impregnation caused by magic or by appealing to the *baloma*. Several more recent ethnographers such as Weiner (1976) and Lepani (2012) have likewise stressed the cyclical nature of the Trobriand life cycle, such that 'death' is only a temporary stage or phase that, while it is marked with major feasts and ceremonies, is not an 'end' as such but the transition to a new kind of life. Mosko (2014: 20) similarly points out that 'life' and 'death' are for Trobrianders differently conceived than in 'the West' or, perhaps more accurately, in the Judeo-Christian tradition. He stresses how 'the spirit world, Tuma, and the beings and entities inhabiting it are saturated with *momova*, the essence of life, on which the inhabitants of Boyowa [The living world of Trobrianders] depend for their very material existence'. There is a notion that the *baloma* in Tuma live as a 'mirror image' to life in the village, such that death is a transition to a new state of being and not an end.

This stands in contrast (while, in some ways, showing similarities) to Christian ideas of death, which may focus to a greater or lesser extent on ideas of heaven/hell and an eternal afterlife from which there is no earthly return. Death in the Christian view is the time of judgement when, based on criteria that may differ from one faith to another, one is either admitted to heaven or condemned to hell for all eternity. In general, such a judgement is based on one's moral goodness during life, and the moral imperative of 'living well' and being Godly is the basis for acceptance into heaven. In such a view, death is less a stage than an eternal state of being; one is either alive or dead, and life is a linear progression from birth until one's ultimate demise. In the Pentecostal



faith, the notion of being ‘born again’ or reborn in the spirit is a central tenet, such that there is a ‘new beginning’ in one’s spiritual life when one embraces the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, in Pentecostal and many other Christian beliefs, the righteous (but not the damned) will ultimately be resurrected by the Second Coming of Jesus. Scriptural verses are recited to assure believers that death is in fact *not* a totally separate state of being: for example,

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25, 26)

The Christian view of death, whether seen in a binary relationship with life or as a more linear progression, is something quite apart from the Trobriand belief (predating its inclusion in the world of ‘Pentecost’) that life and death are a spiral that continuously regenerate the matrilineal clans identified and associated with founding ancestors and original places in the landscape across Kiriwina Island. On the contrary, in the Kiriwina we refer to as part of ‘Pentecost’, death becomes a form of unproductive accumulation (of ancestors, obligations and kinship ties as represented materially in decaying piles of *doba*).

As described in Chapter 2, Trobrianders who have forgone the use of *doba* feel that their lives have improved and that they have more to offer to their own families and churches now they have stopped ‘wasting their time’ with banana leaves. From the other side, Michelle’s adoptive mother Vero (who is not born again and worships in the ‘old style’ at the Catholic church) complains that the members of the communities that have stopped using *doba* ‘have it easy’ compared to her. Indeed, the responsibility of providing that which is needed for a mortuary feast for one’s close relatives – involving not only finding large amounts of *doba* but also calico cloth, other store goods, coins and notes in kina (the PNG currency) and yams, rice and pigs – is commonly referred to as *ula/la mwau* (my/his/her heavy load or burden). One can unburden oneself by denying the significance of death, by turning it from a major event to a simple absence and termination of obligation. If one, instead, puts one’s faith in God to provide and shores up this responsibility by paying tithes and making generous seed offerings, one’s load is lightened, in a way, as the rewards promised are both more immediate and more materially satisfying. This is not about personal accumulation, however, or necessarily even shirking obligations to share and give freely; it is rather a redirection of reciprocal obligations and a reorientation of priorities in terms of how one defines productivity and how the results of one’s productive efforts should be distributed.

There is, perhaps, an interesting contradiction here. While on the one hand, life in ‘Pentecost’ can be thought of as providing one with boundless opportunities for personal growth, material wellbeing, spiritual development and so on – a vital and generative ethos – at the same time, a sense of obligation to be productive, to grow in defined ways, to reign in passions and ungodly behaviour and thoughts also significantly constrains the lives of our interlocutors. The focus is on life but also, in a way, on the responsibility one has to *do* something to make that life better, on a daily basis. In ‘Pentecost’ there are clear expectations of the proper kinds of work one should do and the proper channels and means of exchange and reciprocity. If death is the end of obligation it is also the end of opportunity (to be productive, Godly and an active participant in Christian life).

The concept of seed money and the reciprocal returns anticipated from tithes and offerings is part of the discourse in the parts of ‘Pentecost’ we have visited (see Chapter 2). Recall the words of the pastor who said, ‘God promises wealth, not only in money but in a big family, and other ways. Giving ties God’s hands to you. If you give from your heart, you will receive a reward. The pastor will pray for those who give freely, and blessings will come from God.’ This accords precisely with Haynes’ argument that giving seed offerings instils two kinds of expected returns or obligations: one in which God is indebted to them for their generous gifts; and the other, more worldly obligation of the pastor, who physically receives the gifts and has an obligation to pray for the giver. Thus, as Haynes (2013: 87) points out, we can look at seed offerings as operating on two levels of exchange: both as sacrificial offerings and as socially productive gifts. Further evidence of the social nature of exchange even in ‘Pentecost’ is the substitution of, or at least replication of, the kinds of redistribution and ceremonialized gifting in sagali, in the practice of the church offering collection drives called *semekai* and the move from socially productive church fundraisers to impersonal lotteries (but which still provide money to improve the church, even at the expense of other kinds of social interactions) in Port Vila, as described in Chapter 2. And in Luanda, we can see the orientation of funeral ceremonies towards redefining relationships among the living and a minimum of focus on the dead person as a sort of turn to life, at the expense of a direct focus on the dead and the afterlife. In all cases, we can see life (participation in the church community, for example, to provide support for the pastor and church infrastructure) as the focus rather than a ‘wasteful’ direction of resources – and useless, dirty, non-productive ones at that, in the case of *doba* – towards the dead. As noted in Chapter 2, Pastor Cedric put this perhaps as clearly as anyone when he stated, ‘My father already

looked after me when I was small. I don't have to pay anything back after I look after him when he is sick. Death is the end [of obligations]. These things [sagali] drain resources from the living.'

It is clear that a move away from sagali and doba as much as a reduced willingness to pour resources into crying and funerals in Port Vila and the Palanca is a move away from looking to the ancestors and the temporally and spatially widespread kin linkages that connect members' extended kin networks. Doba itself has a short life cycle, and when it becomes old, dirty and smelly (like the corpse of the deceased) it no longer holds value. Both doba and dead relatives, in the logic of 'Pentecost', are 'useless' and a drain on available resources. What is more, the distributions of sagali traditionally carry on over several years, during which time and resources are repeatedly put towards the reciprocal relationships entailed in 'finishing' the exchanges encompassed by a death. In a sense, this focus on time stands in contrast to the way we have been thinking about 'Pentecost' as a space, in terms of a social landscape or place (houses, yards, hamlets, villages, churches, communities, islands, neighbourhoods, and even nations) as well as the 'space' of the individual body, especially that space 'inside' where evil or goodness may dwell. People in Kiriwina, Port Vila and the Palanca all repeatedly stressed the concept of 'wasting time' along with similar negative associations regarding 'looking backward' and being caught up in the 'old' ways of doing things, suggesting that in this case the spatial aspects of living in 'Pentecost' are intricately bound with temporal ones.

Indeed, doba is the essence of a moral problem in 'Pentecost' (as pointed out in Chapter 2); doba reminds people of another morality (and mortality) that is in direct contradiction to the idea of investing in life. Doba makes 'Pentecost' visible for us through its negative connotations of smelly, rotten substances present in the house, on the sides of the roads and even on the roads as women transport huge baskets of the leaves from one village to another (sometimes, the baskets are so big and heavy they cannot even be carried by the women but rather must be transported by truck). It is accumulated at the time of the death of a relative until such time as it can and should be recirculated and redistributed, but it is, in the eyes of those in Pentecostal Kiriwina, an unproductive and pointless accumulation. From this perspective, it is akin to death. In 'Pentecost', the focus and concentration of resources and energy are immediate and directed inwards such that the nuclear family is the epicentre, and the significant 'extended family' becomes centred more on one's church congregation or fellowship group than towards obligations to clan members. In such an orientation as we find in our examples in 'Pentecost', death is the end, as the soul goes to heaven at

God's discretion based on the deceased's moral behaviour during his or her life; there is nothing a clan member can do once their loved one has passed on except pray for the departed soul. A focus on 'life' instead of 'death', then, means a focus on ensuring material wellbeing and spiritual wholeness in the here and now and looking to the future rather than the past.

We see, then, that it is not just about moving away from *doba* and replacing it with money; nor is about the moral obligation to make money where one can by having a store in a corner of one's home in Fresh Wota or taking part in *kixikilas* (micro-saving ventures) in the Palanca. These things may indeed result in greater 'profit' and material wellbeing than either idleness or pouring one's energy into 'useless' endeavours (like making *doba*). But the point is not a replacement of 'traditional' exchanges with strictly monetary ones. Such an analysis falls short of representing the ongoing importance of gifts and exchanges, which are not replaced with a capitalist, money-focused economy but rather are redirected with new purpose. According to prevailing theories, the point of living in 'Pentecost' is to give one the means to control one's economy and meet one's needs in a failing state. But our ethnography suggests that there is an even more fundamental level, a deep cosmological restructuring of life and death. When the residents of 'Pentecost', whether in Luanda, Port Vila or Kiriwina, talk about 'living well' or 'really living', it means more than just spiritual and material wellbeing. It means, the theory from the field suggests, a cosmological reorientation that the economic arguments above do not account for. In 'Pentecost', life itself is the focus. Money, which emerges from turning one's attention to productive activity and exchange, is the means not only to feed and clothe one's family (and to meet obligations to pay tithes and offerings to the church, which will ensure high returns) but doing these things – as opposed to other things, like pouring resources into funerals, death rituals and exchanges that honour the dead and reinforce far-flung extended kin networks looking to the ancestors and the past – reorients the focus of productivity to the present and to a more linear understanding of life and death rather than a cyclical view of life as a spiral or continuum.

In a way, a focus on time (movement from life into death, focus on the ancestors, productive vs unproductive uses of time) in 'traditional' Trobriand exchange morphs into a focus on space in the Pentecostalized context, both in terms of place or landscape (as described above) and social relationships (the church, the Fellowship group, the markets and so on). The significance of those relationships and the exchanges they entail reflect a much broader consequence of the arrival of Pentecostal

Christianity than the number of congregants at a given church on a given Sunday might suggest. We could even argue that in 'Pentecost', death and the stockpiling of *doba* for distribution at mortuary feasts have both become seen as forms of unproductive accumulation that are no longer salient, as the social action they once achieved (reaffirming extended kinship obligations, honouring ancestors, demonstrating the strength of the matriclan and women's social productivity) has dimmed in importance. More immediate social relations, paying school fees and providing for immediate core families are now considered more significant.

Still, any accumulation of wealth is only temporary; as with *doba*, the goal in amassing wealth is to recirculate it, but now with new targets and aspirations. One gives to the church and the pastor to ensure spiritual returns and, ideally, material ones too. One feeds and nurtures one's nuclear family and downplays obligations to wide-ranging kin. Indeed, in the context of 'Pentecost', one focuses on life and the spaces in which it happens (home, church, open-air sermons, community meetings and so on) rather than death and the cyclical nature of time that has long been observed to anchor Trobriand sociality. Weiner (1976: 61) asserted that the rituals of Trobriand mourning ceremonies 'visually and symbolically diagram the social categories basic to the cultural system'. These 'basics' of the cultural system are now perhaps reordered in the Pentecostalized context, as exemplified in the devaluation of the manufacture and exchange of *doba*.

As the last section pointed out, much of the existing literature on prosperity and related gospels focuses on money, and on material returns. It is not at all original to point out that prosperity can (and does, in our case of 'Pentecost') reflect a broader spectrum of wellbeing or 'living well' than mere material wealth. Indeed, many pastors themselves focus on physical and spiritual health, family and marital relations and other markers of a good life in addition to monetary success, and anthropologists, too, have noted this. What we might argue is missing from these other analyses, though, and what our ethnographic exercise from 'Pentecost' illuminates is that a turn to 'living well' – being productive, avoiding wastefulness and idleness – also in a way necessitates a re-evaluation of what it means to die. If life is the central focus, death is not. If living well means ensuring material, physical and spiritual vitality in the here and now, then the distant future (the afterlife) and the distant past (the ancestors) are not so important. Pentecostal theology may or may not place importance on the idea of the Second Coming of Christ, but the primary focus is on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and one's personal and quotidian relationship with God. In 'Pentecost', this is manifested

in not only ideas about how to be a productive and devout Christian in a society where evil and corrupting influences (such as black magic or sorcery, witchcraft and other pre-Christian practices passed down from the ancestors) are omnipresent. It is also manifested in views about death, as the mirror image of life. If life is what matters, death is, indeed, nothing: 'the end', as Pastor Cedric put it.

As pointed out earlier, Weiner (1976) and Lepani (2012) have stressed the cyclical nature of Trobriand exchange; this could likely be extended to exchange in many localities situated in the global south that are not part of 'Pentecost'. One of the core arguments of Weiner's *Woman of Value, Men of Renown* is that in sagali the attempt to control human behaviour through the exchanges enacted are 'not limited to the sociopolitical sphere but include a cosmic order of time and space' (1976: 219). She argues that Trobriand women control immortality through the recapitulation of dala identity, such that women's power of cosmic or ahistorical time is singularly within their own domain. Men, in Weiner's schema, only control objects and persons that remain totally within a generational perspective of social time and space (1976: 231). In Pentecostal Kiriwina, this distinction loses salience. Exchanges are no longer so ahistorical, and women no longer have a particular power in this regard. The focus and concentration of resources and energy are directed inwards such that the nuclear family is the epicentre, and the significant 'extended family' becomes centred more on one's church congregation or fellowship group than towards obligations to the dala.

While Weiner saw it as a mistake to reduce exchange to an act set firmly in the present rather than comprising a system of generational regeneration (1976: 219–20), in the context of 'Pentecost' in Kiriwina, as well as in Port Vila and the Palanca, exchanges perhaps *do* become more immediate. It is not that the totality disappears but rather that the significant relationships become contracted or collapsed, both spatially and temporally. Death becomes unproductive, and life is focused on the connection between the household and the church. In the 'Pentecost' neighbourhoods we explore, embedding Pentecostal ideas in economic activities and keeping the household so that it reflects church teachings is paramount. We have argued, based on the view from within 'Pentecost', that not meeting traditional kinship obligations to extended networks of relatives and ancestors has major implications. It entails a reorientation of an entire cosmology, replacing a view backward (ancestors, customary exchange obligations) to a view focused on the present and living a good life. It also suggests a revaluation of particular acts of exchange as well as of the exchange objects themselves and the relationships those exchanges represent.

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# 6

## Ruptures and Encompassments

### Towards an Absolute Truth

In Chapter 3 our portrait of Pentecost started out in a hyper-urban space. Key characteristics of 'Pentecost' are perhaps most clearly articulated and visible for observation in the hyper-urban contexts, as in many typical African metropolises densely populated and with infrastructural and security issues that affect the everyday lives of its residents. In particular, we looked at the neighbourhood of Palanca, which is described as being a 'spiritual supermarket' due to the contribution of one particular ethnic group, the Bakongo, marked by both Christianity and traditional beliefs (*ndoki*).

By acknowledging the 'spatial effects' of Pentecost, we highlighted the multiplicity of inscriptions and announcements that are offered on behalf of religious movements and institutions, offering diagnostics and solutions to their existential problems. We pointed out how people see these as particular itineraries inscribed in a place understood as one of 'spiritual warfare', particular of the plural condition of the urban lifestyle, where witchcraft plays a central role. These invitations for diagnostic and solution, and the spaces devised for welcoming those responding to the invitations – necessarily makeshift but inevitably 'promising spaces' (Cooper 2013) – are mechanisms of ordering, establishing a certain logic and truth in the otherwise chaotic lifestyle. This ordering appears as an 'absolutist road' in the sense that it admits no other possibility of truth other than that which is proposed. The absolutist road, although perhaps most visible in hyper-urban contexts, can also be found in 'confessional regimes' of former witches in the

Trobriand Islands, where a very clear path from darkness to light was designed, also marked by the dialectic between Christian faith and witchcraft. We could also recognize this focus on absolutism in the more modestly urban condition of the Pacific island capital Port Vila; for instance, in a Christian prophetess' description of life as a maze, a puzzle, with only one true answer and one true road. Here, there are no grey areas; you are either saved or damned. In this process, we realize how, in these paths, it is the work of the Holy Spirit that becomes central in the experience of the believers in 'Pentecost', as that which heals and combats evil and produces order, clarity, transparency – which in turn reveals an aesthetic of visual order.

This theory from Pentecost is, in the first place, one of moral absolutism, where 'solving problems' becomes part of a process of establishing a dogmatic solution, an order of things, a truth and is thus presented as unequivocal. It is also, as we will see below, the ground from which arguments of rupture/encompassment, iconoclasm and nostalgia emerge. This truth, or better yet the necessity of truth, appears as a response to sensations of uncertainty, ambiguity and 'fuzziness', as it were. However, if we began by explaining this conundrum as typical of the (African) urban lifestyle – the paradigm of chaos and insecurity – our journey through the 'Pentecosts' of Vanuatu and the Trobriand Islands reveals something different: that this logic is also displayed in rural settings, creating its own narrative regimes that recognize, often in a Manichean fashion, moral problems and their solutions. From this perspective, one could argue that 'Pentecost' is a space through which 'pluralism' emerges and is simultaneously negatively enveloped within an absolutist theory.

This negative envelope of the absolutist frame of mind, through which distinctions and conflicts emerge (between 'what is Christian and what is not'), has a particular effect, a form of resentment that is similar to, but not the same as, the more overarching sense of 'rupture' with which scholars of Pentecostalism are more familiar with. This resentment enacts a process of differentiation that is, as we will argue below, driven by an element of nostalgia. It enacts a form of separation within a 'present' that is inherently immanent.

From this perspective, the 'resentful theory' of absolutism that emerges from 'Pentecost' directly challenges theories that have emerged in the anthropology and sociology of Pentecostalism, and in the Anthropology of Christianity in particular, concerning two themes: the idea of Pentecostalism as an agent of 'rupture' and the idea of Pentecostalism as an eschatological theology. While many anthropological and sociological theories have highlighted the opposite in Pentecostal ideology – contextually based relativism, rupture and eschatological

definition – what the ‘journey’ through ‘Pentecost’ seems to have brought us is something quite different if not opposite. In what follows we will explore, by way of comparison, how the worldview and discourse that emerges from Pentecost relates to prevailing theories in the social sciences of religion, in particular concerning both points mentioned above.

## **Theories of Ruptures and Iconoclasm**

The idea that Pentecostalism produces a ‘rupture’, a separation or exclusion from something in order to create something new, can be considered a trademark of the anthropological studies of Pentecostalism. In a first instance, this framing can be considered natural, as it is an inference of the epistemological and experiential centrality that Pentecostalism – in its multiple instances: evangelicalism, charismatic movements, Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism – attributes to the issue of conversion at several levels – psychological, intersubjective, ritual, political etc. As several authors have noted, the idea and experience of conversion is not only axial but epistemologically geared towards a personal and political process of ‘transformation’. Peter Stromberg, for instance, noted how conversion stands upon a prior recognition of a situation of ‘contradiction’ (1993: xi), which is produced within a specific ‘communicative behavior’ and sparks the urge or drive towards change. Simon Coleman later observed that in processes of conversion a disjuncture is observed between the language – instant, radical – and the experience – gradual, complex – of conversion (2003). In any case, conversion becomes a process of what Elaine Lawless called ‘rescripting’ (1991), through which one ‘changes his or her own world’ (see Buckser and Glazier 2003) towards the creation of what Thomas Csordas eventually called ‘the sacred self’ (1994).

However, as recent contributions by Girish Daswani (2013) or Liana Chua (2012) have noted, Pentecostal movements of rupture go far beyond the act or idea of conversion. Daswani, for instance, placed this rupturism within an ethical movement and subject positionality, through which we could appreciate precisely the inconstancy of the translation of an exclusionary ideology and semiotics into an everyday practice, forming the ground upon which dialectics and disputes emerge within Pentecostal churches (2013). In this respect, judgements and statements about rupture often become situational and subjective, reminding us that the narrative or justification of ‘being saved’ in Pentecost does not warrant the actual experience of ‘being saved’. In other words, the liturgy of conversion, despite enacting rupture, does not actually enforce it and

thus rupture becomes something that is sought but not experienced. Presented as paradigm, rupture is in fact situational.

Chua, in turn, describes how the language of rupture acquires multiple tonalities in the framework of Pentecostal ideology and practice (2012). She addresses the notorious debate on conversion and (dis)continuity as proposed by Joel Robbins (2004) and others, which expanded beyond the study of emic worldviews and into disciplinary analytical discussion. She rightly notes that such issues emerge in a space of confluence between the lived experience of the believers, their affective and moral experiences, and the domain of politics and ideology (Chua 2012: 15) Here, following Chua, we are less interested in understanding how conversion enacts discontinuity and more in its insertion within wider languages and semiotics of distinction and (possibly) exclusion in this space of confluence. Such languages of exclusion, as we will argue, are effected through absolutist arguments and become primarily about combatting uncertainty, anxiety etc.

In this line of thought, perhaps the most influential discussion on the problem of rupture was performed by Birgit Meyer, with her debate on discourses of 'making a complete break with the past' in Ghana (1998), which equated problems of rupture in terms of temporal experience and ideology. In her famous article, she explains how, among the Ewe in Ghana, this 'complete break with the past' was a form of rejecting any kind of synthesis with local culture – as mainline protestants would propose, for instance – and creating a new sense of allegiance with a modern, 'global culture' (Poewe 1994). From this perspective, Meyer noted the parallelism between the individualizing dimension of conversion and self-transformation and the fashioning of modernity in terms of progress and continuous renewal (1998: 317). Consequently, she adds, there is a particular focus on time that enables for a specific Pentecostal narrative towards the promotion of an individual and social change, through logics of salvation, purification and so on. In a time and place (postcolonial Africa) in which notions of heritage and cultural salvage were important political tropes, the Pentecostal discourse emerged as a counterpoint, introducing ideas of salvation and redemption as 'solutions' for underdevelopment. From this perspective, she argues, in Pentecostalism there is no place for nostalgia and no attempts to 'return to the whole', to paraphrase James Fernandez's notion (1986: 3 ff.).

This future-oriented time-centredness was later addressed by Matthew Engelke, who noted that the rupture with the past is, more often than not, a rhetorical device that in fact provokes a process of realignment with the past (2010) – a reconfiguration or redefinition. As authors such as Filip de Boeck (2005) or Jane Guyer (2007) have shown

us, it is undeniable that an Evangelical and Pentecostal worldview produces specific eschatological narratives – of the millennial and eventually apocalyptic guise – that have specific material consequences for the believers in terms of orientation and self-positioning.

We also found this in Ruy's previous research with Pentecostal Gypsies in Portugal and Spain: their massive conversion to the Filadelfia church provoked not only a significant change in the Gypsies' lives by making the church pervasive in their everyday lives but also a rewriting of their own past as an ethnically informed collective. This rewriting implied understanding their collective past as a path filled with sacrifice and suffering, but guided towards their ultimate salvation (Blanes 2008). From this perspective, the past was as important as the future for the Pentecostalized narrative that the pastors of the Filadelfia church conveyed. On the one hand, it appeared as a preconversion alterity that became an object of rejection, invaded with stories of personal and collective perdition – from drug and alcohol abuse to criminal activities, prison, discrimination etc. But also and simultaneously, this past never disappeared; it was always there for taking, as it were, by the testimonials and pedagogies of the biblical studies promoted by the church. And it was conjured with another past – that of the Bible and its exemplary function. This is precisely the dynamic character of Pentecostal temporality that Engelke (2010: 177) noted – the constant movement of semantic redefinition between the future and the past – or what Daswani calls a 'constant re-creation' (2013: 468). Within this framework, if there are certain pasts that have become an object of rejection, other pasts also become objects of reception and persist in the Pentecostal vocabulary – in particular, the preconversion past, which also becomes the present when pastors and preachers address the complexity of the contemporary here and now: it is observable in the lives and behaviour of the non-converts and is engaged through a missionary posture.

Through our 'journey through Pentecost', what we realized is precisely this: more than breaking with the past, perhaps what is at stake for Pentecostals is actually breaking with the present – a dangerous ordeal, as Ruth Marshall (2009: 65) frames it (see also Daswani 2013: 471) – conducive to both nostalgia and future thinking. Perhaps this idea is better illustrated with the distinction operated by Dan Jorgensen in his research on Pentecostal movements in Papua New Guinea (2005) – and following from Joel Robbins' debate on continuity and rupture in Christian conversion (2004) – between what he called 'world-breaking' and 'world making'. If the former is about severing ties, disconnecting, rejecting etc., the latter reveals the concrete topographies that emerge from that process, often framed in Manichean categorizations and

territorializations: evil versus good, saved versus lost, etc. This is something that both Filip de Boeck (2005) and Katrien Pype (2012) have successfully described in the case of Kinshasa, DR Congo: the specific urban configurations and infrastructural recognition that emerge from the Pentecostal worldview, produced through movements of separation and delimitation. The main point here, we believe, is the concomitance and dialectical character of these processes, by which the projection of evil into the past becomes part of a wider political conceptualization of time that renders it simultaneously 'present' in the lived experience of the believers. It becomes part of an inherent dialecticalism that is necessary for the Pentecostal rhetoric (see Mafra 2002). And precisely, it is a nostalgic dialectic because it prevents oblivion.

But with nostalgia we are not necessarily talking about an anti-modern movement that combats the irreversible wheel of time and shies away from the new – quite the opposite in fact (Angé and Berliner 2015a, 2015b). As David Berliner and Olivia Angé note, more than a longing for a lost past, nostalgia operates a structuring of temporal frameworks, mediated by a moralizing, eventually political conservative worldview (2015a: 4). What is interesting in such nostalgic configurations is how they appear implicitly or explicitly associated with ideas of order – an order that is no longer existing and may even have never existed but appears as a powerful temporal reference. This order often appears in this conservative discourse under the guise of 'simplicity' (absence of multiplicity) but also of a hierarchy of things. In other words, against the cultural relativist idea of 'anything goes' and in favour of the dogmatic prevalence of a moral system, which in the case of Pentecost comes down to the Bible and its literalist, fundamentalist hermeneutics. And it is precisely through a moral angle that nostalgia is often framed as an anti-relativist stance.

From this perspective, Pentecostalism is often understood to share the same kind of 'postmodern angst' as other nostalgic theories – that is, the longing for simplification, clarity lost in the process of pluralism and cultural relativism. Thus it is nostalgic because it longs for something, an idea of the absolute, which can indeed be located in the past but not necessarily: it can be located in the future yet to come. We will return to the problem of the absolute below.

Within this framework, another perhaps less noted aspect of Meyer's theory of rupture is how the Pentecostal struggle against the 'past' is also located in a particular realm: that of Satan and satanic expressions in the believers' everyday lives (1998: 318ff.). In other words, the 'past' that the Pentecostals try to 'break from' is embedded within an ideology of warfare against satanic forces. As she describes in her text, the

attempts, on behalf of local pastors, to 'Africanize' Christian churches were decried by Pentecostals as 'invitation(s) of Satan himself to the church' (1998: 319). This conflation of 'tradition' (in particular, local systems of belief) and 'Satanism' not only inaugurates the dialectical mode of Pentecostalism but also places it within the temporalizing perspective that creates a particular 'past' that is operative in the present. As Ruth Marshall describes for Nigerian Pentecostals, this is often presented in terms of the ambition of an imminent redemption that will not only allow for the forthcoming *parousia* (the full presence of God) but also combat, through the force of the Holy Spirit, the 'lawlessness' provoked by satanic forces in the current age (2009: 205 ff.). In this respect, the theory of Satanism identified by Pentecostals in Nigeria conflates ideas of past and present evil, combatted with a (Pentecostal) language of conquest and invasion (see also Coleman 2000).

However, this configuration does not condemn evil, disorder and lawlessness to a mere alterity. As we know, the Pentecostal narrative of conversion works upon ideas of sin, which incorporate the individual and psychological dimensions of the Pentecostal experience. Within this framework, Pentecostals are the 'soldiers of Christ' (Ojo 2006; O'Neill 2010) that march against Satan but also incorporate the 'moral torment' of recognizing one's own, embedded sinfulness (Robbins 2004) proper of our condition as humans. This was very eloquently explained by Ruth Marshall in her analysis of the Pentecostal political theology: 'Pentecostalism's antinomianist tendencies, the importance of *sole fides*, and an embodied, charismatic, and experiential faith means that its engagement, particularly in the context of post-colonial anarchic and authoritarian exception, is not one of a theocratic re-foundation. And the first enemy to be identified is the enemy within the self' (Marshall 2010: 201).

This duality and concomitance of a satanic 'lawlessness' and a personal vulnerability can also be understood within a wider sociopolitical setting, in what Jean Comaroff (2010) described as the problem of relativism (the 'anything goes') and crisis of meaning that is the main object of Pentecostal interlocution.

I will return to the point of relativism later on in this chapter. At this point, we are interested in exploring the problem of meaning – its lack or production – and its material, expressive consequences. From this perspective, the scientific theory of Pentecostalism as rupture and producer of alterity makes for what could be called an 'iconoclastic pragmatics', through which Pentecostals enact some form of scission that is socially and politically operative through their location of evil in specific material configurations – from fetishes to images and figures.

Interestingly enough, the anthropological study of Pentecostalism has not been inspired or interested in addressing iconoclasm as a key factor for the understanding of this movement's narrative. However, if we continue to consider (as the prevailing literature does) Pentecostalism as a social movement of 'rupture', we cannot ignore its iconoclastic dimension, in particular when Pentecostalism has often been engaged in literal acts of iconoclasm, such as the destruction of iconic figures, images and representations from other religious or secular movements (see e.g. Giumbelli 2014; Rio, MacCarthy and Blanes 2017). Such processes are, more often than not, described as entailing (physical and symbolic) violence, acts of belligerence against the 'other' – satanists, witches, traditionalists etc. – but also against the self – the preconversion body, as described, for instance, by Linda van de Kamp in her study of Pentecostalism in Mozambique (2012).

From this perspective, as Ramon Sarró noted (2008), iconoclasm, as an act, incorporates a necessarily destructive dimension, usually tended towards the physical elimination of something that is seen as negatively powerful. But he notes a distinction between kinds of destruction: the destruction of things because of what they *represent* – as we could see recently, for instance, with the destruction of statues in Palmyra, on behalf of ISIS supporters – and the destruction of things because of what they *make present*, the invisible forces that they materialize (2008: 2). From this perspective, Pentecostalism can be understood to have both dimensions, either through physical acts of destruction or through ritual and/or linguistic configurations that operate logics of rejection, sectarianism, exclusion etc. This becomes evident in the kind of proscriptions that constitute the Pentecostal (or Christian, for that matter) theology: what is forbidden, rejected, combatted – and what is justified, permitted, holy. Here, as Willem van Asselt et al. have debated (2007), religion is built upon controversy, which is displayed through both material (iconoclasm) and mental (iconoclash) acts of destruction. But Sarró also questions if indeed iconoclasm is only about destruction of a given 'heritage' (2008: 5). In fact, iconoclasm engages in semiotic renewal; more often than not by way of 'replacement' – i.e. of re-semanticizing or revaluing objects, persons, actions or ideas. The overarching process may well be one of substitution.

This is why, for instance, Pentecostalism is presented as being against iconicity, while it cultivates other kinds of aesthetic paradigms. In Chapter 3, for instance, we discussed some of these elements: architecture, chromatic elements, clothing and so on. Clara Mafra, in her article on neo-Pentecostal architecture in Brazil, described how an otherwise anti-Catholic ideology incorporates certain 'techniques of seduction'



that can equally be observed in the grand, majestic Cathedrals throughout Europe (2003). There seems to be, therefore, a Pentecostal aesthetics that enables the materialization of collective imaginaries into the realm of the concrete.

In this respect, the work of Filip de Boeck in Kinshasa is a case in point. In his article on the 'apocalyptic interlude' (2005), he describes the temporal shifting and scaling produced by millennial (and Pentecostal) prophecy that fed into 'collective imaginary' he found in Kinshasa, experiencing economic (absolute precariousness and poverty), political (Mobutism and its legacy) and spiritual (the implantation of charismatic and Pentecostal churches) transformations. He describes the emergence and circulation of millenarian certainties, sensations of catastrophic imminence and political contestations in an analogous fashion to what Jean and John Comaroff (2001) described for South Africa or what Joel Robbins (2001) recognized in Papua New Guinea: how senses and imminences of rupture are in fact bound within the 'Pentecostal everyday', equally informing spatial, temporal and political dwellings.

The same logic was noted by Katrien Pype (2012) when she described Kinshasa as a moral territory dominated by Pentecostal-originated apocalyptic imaginaries, where its inhabitants' quotidian is permanently experienced as a function of a battle between forces of good and evil (see also Knibbe 2009; Maskens 2012). Consequently, she explores narratives and creations that respond to, and simultaneously convey and reproduce, this apocalyptic scenery: the industry and consumption of Pentecostal television melodramas. One such result is precisely how the city of Kinshasa becomes remapped into 'holy' and 'evil' spaces. But Pype takes the argument further by explaining how Pentecostals 'curse the city' (2012: 27), which reveals, more than merely mapping, Pentecostals act upon the city, determining its inhabitation through moral statements and propounding the path towards success (Gilbert 2015; Haynes 2012).

Both De Boeck and Pype's analyses invoke processes of (both temporal and topographical) constructions of 'certainty', of unequivocal determinations. As Wendy James (1995) notes, the religious 'pursuit of certainty' is one of building identity through allegiance, in response to fear and ignorance in times of complexity and turmoil. Thus, we realize that there is an intersection of claims to knowledge (understanding 'what it is all about') and senses of belonging and collective identity ('I am not alone in how I think') that become paramount in Pentecostal ideology. In the process, what begins as a temporalizing argument that establishes eschatological routes progressively becomes a space of effect, with specific consequences in the lives of those that live in and around Pentecost.

From this perspective, the acoustic environment stemming from the UCKG church in Palanca, near Maturino's family house, signals the kind of consequence of 'presentification' effected by Pentecost's absolutist stance, concretizing paths towards certainty. Within this framework, if above we described Pentecost as essentially 'breaking with the present', here we realize that, in doing so, it establishes alternative presents, recognizable through architectural, aesthetic and geographic elements.

## **A Theory of Absolutism**

The anthropological literature on Pentecostalism debated above showed us how this social movement relies on processes of rupture and the creation of alterities geared towards a (metaphorical or physical) place of certainty. However, the kind of ruptures articulated in 'Pentecost', and described in Chapter 3, were far subtler and more complex than the cases discussed above: Although they do not exclude logics of rupture and violence, they are often about epistemological configurations and reconfigurations that establish what we could call a teleological path: a trajectory that embodies a sense of design and destiny within a wider space of multiplicity. Let us go back, for instance, to the Bible that Rose held with her in Port Vila. Perceiving that Annelin was in a stage of uncertainty – an ethnographic one – she handed her the Bible and presented it as a sort of manual through which you can open the right doors that will lead you into the 'right road'. This 'right road' is precisely what the different posters offer in places like Luanda's 'Pentecost', with invitations for your personal salvation by this or that church, pastor or evangelist. However, they dwell simultaneously as single choices that nevertheless appear multiplied in the city's walls and religious architectures. Which way to go? The idea of 'supermarket', as framed by Neves in Luanda, hinted on this idea of multiplicity and fuzziness motivated by an excessive and uncontrolled offer of spiritual routes. 'All this black magic, this evil wisdom is not good': such were the words of Pastor Nunes of the EKWESA.

This is what made believers such as Rose or Neves struggle until they finally felt they had found their right path: paths of certainty, wellbeing and wealth. From this perspective, acts of healing and destruction such as those described in Chapter 3, although unequivocally part of the Pentecostal ethos, appear more as means rather than ends in themselves. They are part of a logic of diagnosis and therapeutics, but they are first and foremost a process of discernment and identifying borders, as described in Chapter 1, and also of learning to stay within them. This

is what we described in Chapter 3 when we saw the ‘enveloping effect’ that the churches created in their continuous liturgical programmes that enacted constant prayer and protection for the enabling of a space of ‘insurance’ (*assegurado*). ‘As Jesus Christ says, your faith saved you,’ to go back to Pastor Nunes’ words.

What seems to be at stake, therefore, is a process of elimination of ‘grey areas’, spaces of diffuse, ambiguous, uncertain or contradictory meaning. This is what we observed in the kind of ‘dark spaces’ that Michelle identified in Kiriwina – the spaces of witchcraft and evil that are inherent to the state of spiritual warfare and which often create contexts of confrontation, as we saw in the case of witchcraft accusations.

On the other hand, if in Kiriwina the dark past appeared as the place from which to move away, in Luanda we realized that more than the future some churches seek the past as the place of redemption. This was the case, for instance, of the EKWESA, who sought this redemption in the ‘ancestralization’ of the Christian narrative, which refocused personal and collective spiritual histories into an afro-centred perspective. This reveals that, more than mere rupture, we are before a reconfiguration in which the eschatological element only makes sense in terms of a redemption of the past, as Walter Benjamin would put it. This is indicative of how the ‘right path’ is not necessarily a way forward but more a ‘compass’ that guides you through a process of anamnesis – rediscovery of our once lost reminiscences – into one of multiple directionalities.

In this respect, the pull of Pentecost appears, in this new angle, subsumed within a wider, more abstract movement of reaction against the ‘status quo’ – both personal and social. However, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, one could also affirm that what was initially understood as a rupturist or iconoclastic movement is also one of encompassment, of ingestion and domestication, as it were. This act of domestication is precisely what solves the apparent conundrum in a movement that simultaneously rejects and embraces the past, ‘tying’ them up into a future-oriented narrative. Here is precisely where the notion of the absolute, as an idea of ‘truth’, righteousness and (moral, physical) wealth, begins to make sense.

### **Synthesis: Anti-relativism, Nostalgia and the Absolute Truth**

After our journey through the anthropology of Pentecostalism and through the space of ‘Pentecost’, we return to the question: what is

really at stake in the Pentecostal appeal? What is the 'Pentecostal effect', in places like Luanda, Port Vila or Kiriwina? In our portraits in Part I of this book, we have seen that 'Pentecost' does not necessarily imply an extreme act of rupture, nor does it configure itself as exclusively eschatological. It is an act of identification and discernment that does not reject but rather encompasses alterity.

From this perspective, the moral demand of Pentecostalism is directed both towards an 'outside' (a sociological alterity) and an 'inside' (an individual subjectivity). In a sense, what seems to be at stake is Pentecostalism's fundamentalist stance, the 'demand for a strict adherence' to theological precepts such as conservatism, literalism etc. (see, e.g., Harding 2000). This puts into question how the social sciences of religion place Pentecostalism vis-à-vis modernity. On the one hand, Pentecostalism is almost unanimously connoted with modernity – as one of its agents, protagonists, consequences or effects – through processes such as globalization, capitalism (or neoliberalism), mobility, technology, urbanity etc. (see, e.g., Comaroff 2009; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Maxwell 1998; Meyer 1998).

On the other hand, Pentecostalism often stages a powerful critique to modernity 'at large' and what it considers to be cause and/or context of moral corruption or degeneration, in particular due to the (perceived) subsequent triumph of moral relativism or, at most, a-moralism (Cargal 1993; Poloma 1989). One case in point, for instance, is the HIV crisis in Africa and how Pentecostal churches deliver from one of modernity's 'wounds' (see, e.g., Bochow and Van Dijk 2012; Dilger 2007; Dilger, Burchardt and Van Dijk 2010; Newell 2007).

In most cases, such critiques emerge from a fundamentalist theology. Fundamentalism is based on the idea of biblical inerrancy established through an (often Manichean) epistemological irreducibility and a subsequent politics of conviction (Harding 2000). For many Christian fundamentalists, the 'fundamentals' of life can only be found in the Bible, which is crystallized in a 'deep temporality', as it were – one that transcends the specifics of our modern times. From this perspective, as a fundamentalist methodology, the kind of biblical hermeneutics practised by Pentecostals often become literalist. In his study of literalism in America, Vincent Crapanzano (2000) explored it as an 'interpretive style' that addresses problems of 'law' and 'truth', exceeding the religious and theological realm. This interpretive style, which transforms into experience, is precisely what creates an absolutist thinking that combats what was eventually described as 'the dictatorship of relativism' proper of liberal humanism (see Comaroff 2010; Monbiot 2005). As Jean Comaroff recently described, it is an impetuous 'politics of conviction'

that combats senses of 'widespread deregulation' in the contemporary world (2010).

However, what our 'journey through Pentecost' brought us was an expression of how this politics of conviction is played out on a different level: it is a form of personal and collective pursuit, through which adherents learn to close doors and open others and reduce the 'grey matter' of life into a more cogent (but also more binary) black and white scenery, where the everyday complexity of life can be decoded into simpler, straightforward statements. This is why Pentecostalism emerges as inherently dialectic and combative. But if this idea of combat is proper of the political level, we can also observe how it unfolds at more subjective and interpersonal levels. Here, the Bible assumes a central role as a space of 'comfort, inspiration, council, strength and conviction' (Bielo 2009: 1) but also and especially as a critical mindset through which adherents reflect and question their lives and the world. This is what we observed, for instance, in Annelin's account of Rose's 'crossroads sensation' sensation, in Michelle's account of 'recognizing darkness' in Kiriwina, or in Pastor Nunes' re-elaboration of Christian theodicy in Luanda. In such cases, the Bible acted as guidance but also required a subsequent act of decodification in itself. These acts of decodification are, ultimately, acts of reduction of relativism and creation of an 'absolute' space.

But both these dimensions – political and personal, experiential – may or may not couple into a neat, coherent worldview. As we know, dogmas do not eliminate contradictions. But perhaps the point of intersection between both levels is the necessity of a sense of the 'absolute'. In 1997, the literary critic George Steiner published an essay entitled 'Nostalgia for the Absolute', in which, inserted within a Weberian secularization paradigm, he claimed that the decline of traditional religious forms and institutions in Western culture has created a sense of 'moral and emotional emptiness' that has given way to the emergence of 'alternative mythologies' such as Marxism, Freudian psychology, structuralism etc. In this respect, in Western society, scientific rationalism, as well its companion scepticism, rendered obsolete formerly established religious systems otherwise seen as encompassing and paradigmatic. After this decline, Steiner argues, society required the emergence of 'secular messiahs' as surrogates of sorts.

While we have serious concerns with Steiner's generalizing argument and depiction of the human impetus – was there ever a sense of 'absolute' to begin with? And what ever happened to the 'religious decline' he mentions? – we take two relevant points from his proposal: the idea of a 'nostalgia for the absolute' that is politically operative and agent;

and the concomitant process of moral mapping that emerges from this recognition. These are, precisely, the processes that are at stake in our theory from Pentecost – the nostalgia for the absolute.

But before engaging in both ideas, what is this *absolute*, and why can Pentecostalism be framed as absolutist? Here we are thinking specifically of moral absolutism, an ethical normativity that is inherently Manichean and grounds itself upon the unquestionability of its principles or precepts. In Christian cultures, this unquestionability emerges from the kind of hermeneutics that is applied to the Bible as an undeniable ‘source of truth’, as well as of purity: its divine origin, infallibility, historical reality and, in particular, its actuality – i.e. its quasi-atemporal capacity to ‘unlock’ the mysteries of the world throughout the millennia.

Such argumentations produce what Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle recently described in their critical analysis of capitalism as ‘cartographies of the absolute’: ‘processes of inquiry and sight involved in the endeavor to understand the world, and the magnitude of the ambition behind such an all-encompassing will-to-know’ (2015). They subsequently explore the idea of the ‘view from above’ in order to address how encompassing thinking plays a role in today’s political thinking (ibid.). This encompassing view from above is precisely what produces a ‘true ontology’ (ibid.), the access to the ‘real nature of things’. Within this framework, ‘(t)he “absolute” is a theological and then a philosophical category, gesturing towards that which defies representation, which, contrasted to our mortal perception, is infinite and unencompassed’ (ibid.). The absolute is unencompassed, but we perceive it as a form of encompassment of our perceived surroundings.

## **Conclusion: Returning to the Whole**

While most literature on Pentecostalism has focused on rupturist and eschatological frames, what we realized through our journey through ‘Pentecost’ was that what is often at stake is a movement of what James Fernandez once called ‘returning to the whole’ (1986), of accessing the fundamental principles, logics and (Lévi-Straussian) structures of the ‘real world’. Truth be said, Fernandez was not focusing on Pentecostalism but rather on the performativity of tropes in culture, from the viewpoint of the then called ‘African revitalization movements’, such as the Celestial Christians in Cotonou, Benin. From this perspective, he develops an ‘argument of images’ (visualizations, pictorializations) whereby the recognition of a social or cultural whole is identified. However, he explores a theme that we see as inherent to the theory of the Absolute explored in

this chapter: the idea of ‘conviction of wholeness’ that emerges from the ‘discovery of meaning’ and the against agnosticism, pluralism and ‘particulate’ experience of modern life (1986: 160). Interestingly enough, he invokes Lévi-Strauss’s example of a roomful of mirrors to explain the ‘savage mind’s’ knowledge of totality: ‘a room by mirrors fixed on opposite walls which reflect each other (as well as objects in the intervening spaces) although without being strictly parallel. A multitude of images forms simultaneously, none exactly like any other – none furnishing more than a partial knowledge – but the group is characterized by invariant properties expressing a truth’ (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 263). As Fernandez will argue (1986: 3 ff.), it is through tropes and semiotics that one begins to acknowledge the wholeness of the picture, emerging as a musical symphony of sorts – a conjunction of significant and expressions that ‘makes sense’. All too similar with Rose’s crossroads dilemma.

From this perspective, we could argue that Pentecostalism offers ‘whole narratives’ that encompass the good and the bad, the holy and the evil, and offer the possibility of a purpose in life. As we argued above, this is performed through binary Manichean methodologies that lead the believer through an absolutist road, one that produces ultimate certainty. But this absolutism, despite its appearance, is not merely exclusionary, as it relies on acts of encompassment through which it builds its righteous itinerary. But in order to become an itinerary, it requires the presence of non-absolute possibilities. Likewise, the Pentecostal worldview requires non-Pentecostal possibilities in order to become effective. From this perspective, we could argue that Pentecostalism poses a very Levi-Straussian method of organizing the world through structuralist points of view: by relationships of contrast. It offers a ‘view from above’ that divides the world into binaries. Within this framework, the ‘Pentecostal holism’ that Jean Comaroff describes (2010: 21) also acts simultaneously in both directions: it is combative of certain cartographies (the unholy or satanic spaces), but it is also encompassing in how even the excluded cartographies are necessary for the Pentecostal believer to devise and discern his or her own itinerary towards what Hegel once called the ‘Absolute Spirit’, the place of ultimate truth. It is here, precisely, where we perceive that the absolutist stance enacts rupture and exclusion in order to achieve encompassment and holism.

But Fernandez’s idea of the ‘whole’ is as important as that of ‘return’, as it indicates a temporal mode that is not just expectant but also and equally nostalgic. This nostalgia is not necessarily directed towards a particular past; instead, it is directed towards an anti-relativist possibility that can be found in a deeper temporality, one that is almost atemporal in its mythic quality: biblical or ancestral times. These times

may or may not be located in a historical empirie and can indeed be fictive, but in any case they operate a sense of longing – a longing for something that is not the complexified, relativist present. And it is in the fulfilment of that longing that the absolutist path emerges. This was the case of several of the protagonists of Chapter 3. Rose, for instance, saw in the Bible a ‘door that opens’ towards clarity – the same clarity (or absence of ‘grey areas’) that was observed by Stephen in Kiriwina, who healed his fellow villagers with the certainty of God’s company. Likewise, if Rose found her way out of the crossroads, so did Ruy’s friend Neves, who eventually found his ‘spiritual home’ after years of wandering and doubt. These paths configure, precisely, the absolutist road towards salvation, which ultimately appears as a form of transcendence of the anti-relativist and anti-pluralist resentment that the Pentecostal worldview sets into motion.

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**Part IV**

**Comments**



# 7

## Comparison, Re-placed

*Matei Candea*

Heuristics of comparison have been an enduring topic of reflection, concern and innovation for anthropologists since the very beginnings of the discipline. However, some periods in the history of the discipline have seen particular effervescence around this methodological-theoretical problem. Like the 1950s or the 1980s, the present day feels like one of those moments of which future writers might say in retrospect that the problem and possibilities of comparison loomed large for our discipline. Part of this effervescence is related to a changing funding landscape – at least in Europe – in which anthropologists have been increasingly successful at obtaining (and increasingly expected by their institutions to obtain) large grants that involve the collaboration of multiple scholars in collaborative projects of the type the present book is based on. This institutional context gives new urgency to the long-standing agenda of rethinking the classic model of lone work in anthropology. In that process, the crafting of new comparative heuristics increasingly appears as a necessity as much as an opportunity.

The new heuristic proposed in this book – that of ‘going to Pentecost’ – involves a conscious play on a classic expository device in anthropology. Let us call this device *the place-concept binary*. This is as old and enduring a heuristic as the frontal-lateral contrast that I discussed elsewhere (Candea 2016) and that the authors invoke in the introduction. In many ways the two devices are related. As the authors note in the introduction, anthropologists usually go *somewhere*, to study *something*. This is a two-pronged affair: concepts (whether as categories,

traits, themes or topics) play the role of cutting across places (and times, but let us leave time aside for now). Places, by contrast, cut through these conceptual moves, grounding, multiplying and specifying them (Candea 2007: 180, 182). One classic way of deploying this contrast is to deploy the same concepts in different places – cross-cousin marriage, for instance, emerging here and there (Lévi-Strauss 1969). Another, now just as classic, is to imagine ‘other’ places breaking down ‘our’ concepts – as when we find that ‘society’ or ‘nature’ has no purchase on Mount Hagen (Strathern 1980, 1988). These map onto ideal-typical versions of the lateral and the frontal comparative heuristics respectively. But these two moves do not by any means exhaust the potential of the place-concept binary. Anthropologists have also imagined concepts travelling through places, changing as they go (Howe and Boyer 2015), or places acting as arbitrary, partial or equivocal locations for rethinking conceptual entities’ interactions (Candea 2007; Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair 2009; Heywood 2015; see also Gluckman 1958; Van Velsen 1967).

What remains fairly stable, however, despite these various intellectual acrobatics, is the fact that the place-concept binary organizes two audiences for any anthropological argument, two communities of practice to which our writing can potentially be addressed. In very schematic terms these could be thought of as a regionalist and a generalist audience. However much anthropologists may rile against this – politically, conceptually and morally loaded – distinction, it continues, for now, to organize our teaching, our institutional structures of recognition and reward and most of all our publication. Who has not had the experience of wondering whether to send a particular article to a ‘generalist’ or to a ‘regional’ journal? Most of us write with both of these imagined audiences in mind, albeit not equally in any given piece (see Candea 2018 for a fuller discussion of this point).

In line with this classic view, the commonplace reading of this volume would be one in which three scholars have gone to study the same thing (concept, problem, theme, topic), namely Pentecostalism, in three different places (Port Vila in Vanuatu, Luanda in Angola and Kiriwina in the Trobriand Islands). And it is precisely against this reading that the contributors insist that they are in fact *going to Pentecost*, as the introduction outlines. Those three locations are recast as ‘areas’ within Pentecost. The aim to mess with the place-concept binary, to disrupt it in some way, could not be clearer. There are, however, two readings of the precise nature of this disruption. One reading would be that the aim of the volume is to disrupt that classic anthropological device for good – to break the concept-place binary, supersede it and leave it behind. The second, to which I return in closing, is that this disruption is merely



temporary and partial – paradoxically, perhaps, I will argue that this second reading is more radical.

There is evidence for the first reading: for instance, the introduction to this volume asserts that one of its aims is ‘to get beyond what we can call a regional, contextual methodology or a territorial methodology’ (introduction). If the present work is read as aiming to collapse the place-concept binary, that places it in good company – both ‘the ontological turn’ and ‘multisited ethnography’, evoked in the introduction, have sought to do this. The key device of the ontological turn has been to collapse the distinction between concepts and things (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007; for a critique, see Heywood 2018b). This means not only viewing concepts as ethnographically derived but also insisting on the fact that such ethnographically derived concepts cannot be detached from their source or location (Holbraad 2017; Holbraad and Pedersen 2009). It would therefore be meaningless, on this view, to seek to study ‘the same thing’ in ‘different places’ – there can only ever be different ‘place-things’. This is, in a nutshell, the inherent limitation of any comparative programme that puts all its eggs in the frontal basket – the difficulties with comparison associated with an earlier generation’s radical relativism was another instance of the same problem (Holý 1987).

The root of an answer to that move was already contained in the multisited programme’s own way of collapsing the place-concept binary. Rather than derive concepts from places and leave them there, multisited ethnography took a particular problem, thing or group of people and followed it wherever it might be found. The conceptual core of multisitedness – which was, I think, rather more radical than is suggested in the introduction – was to collapse the local/global distinction by, precisely, collapsing places and concepts in such a way as to make it possible to make one’s research object (however geographically diffuse it might be) into one’s site. Thus one’s ‘site’ might be a group of people in various places (Smith 2006) or the aftermath of a catastrophe (Fortun 2001; Petryna 2002). This in turn implied a certain kind of holism in regard to one’s ‘site-object’ (Candea 2007), which echoes the holism introduced more recently by the ontological turn in regard to its ‘place-things’.

At the intersection of these two conceptual possibilities, one might thus read the present volume’s heuristic proposal – ‘going to Pentecost’ – as an inventive solution to the problem of comparison after the ontological turn. If ‘things’ can be places and holism can be multilocal, anthropologists can move about or compare without having to worry about the dangers of decontextualizing their concepts. Their concepts can all still stem from the same ethnographic place – ‘Pentecost’.

And yet as soon as it is collapsed, the place-concept distinction reappears. Here, it reappears in the form of the three ‘phenomena’ or traits of Pentecostalism that are elicited in the chapters of this book (inside/outside borders; ‘anti-relativism’; the move from ‘wealth’ to ‘waste’). If ‘Pentecost’ is the place, then these traits are the concepts that are studied ‘there’. ‘Pentecost’ as a place-concept hybrid plays a transitional role between its ‘areas’ (Port Vila, Luanda, Kiriwina) and the conceptual payload of the volume, namely those three phenomena. The former are straightforwardly and unabashedly places, albeit places ‘within’ ‘Pentecost’, just as the latter are straightforwardly and unabashedly concepts. One is not, for instance, enjoined to ‘go to “anti-relativism”’ – at least not in this volume, although one might perhaps imagine this as a future permutation.

Pentecostalism has thus in the end played the role that themes and regions often play in edited volumes: a way to gather and focus accounts of different locations in order to produce new concepts from their comparison. In the classic *African Political Systems* (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940), for instance, the pair formed by a conceptual theme (the notion of a political system) and a geographic location (Africa) gathers together accounts and produces a new conceptual distinction – between ‘group A’ and ‘group B’ forms of organization. Here, ‘Pentecost’ has acted as a gathering point in which the thematic was recast in the language of regionalism. But the general arc – from (particular) locations to (travelling) concepts – is a classic one. You cannot keep a good dualism down.

Of course, thinking of ‘Pentecost’ as a place rather than a theme or concept makes a difference to the nature of that arc, a difference that is more than semantic. As the introduction outlines, the approach would not have been the same, and neither would the concepts elicited in the final instance, had it not been for the injunction to treat ‘Pentecost’ as a place. That is a difference that makes a difference. The introduction outlines this difference clearly, and I will not revisit it here: treating ‘Pentecost’ as a place involves a particular attitude to the selection of problems to focus on, a particular concern with interlocutors’ own sense of continuity, rupture and relevance. It also defines a particular horizon for the concepts (phenomena) elicited in the final instance.

So in comparing the present volume to older forms of comparative endeavour, my aim is not to diminish its claim to methodological novelty but rather to specify it. This brings me to my second reading of what the present project does to the place-concept binary. For in this longer view, what is distinctive about the present experiment appears not to be, after all, a move to eliminate or dissolve the place-concept

binary but rather a self-conscious play on it that *temporarily reverses* one of its constituent polarities. Indeed the 'going to Pentecost' move relies on the place-concept binary precisely as it troubles it. The injunction of this volume is to treat what is normally seen as a theme or an aspect of social life (Pentecostalism) as you would normally treat a place. But how does one normally treat a place in anthropology? One treats it precisely in relation to a concept or theme. The place-concept binary is linked to a series of other implied contrasts, in the sort of patterned arrangement that sociologist Andrew Abbott has called a 'methodological manifold' (Abbott 2001: 28). Abbott has in mind the standard association in social science between grand binaries such as positivism/interpretivism and analysis/narration – these binaries are mapped onto each other (and also onto other contrasts, such as society/culture) in a fairly stable way in most classic research programmes. On a much smaller scale, the place/concept binary is one of our own distinctly anthropological manifolds. Indeed the place/concept distinction usually comes associated with other binaries: specific/general, holistic/fragmentary, context/text, background/foreground, description/analysis etc.

In Abbott's view, the history of the social sciences can be read as a succession of inversions of those and other basic dualisms (*ibid.*). These operate as 'fractal distinctions' – since a conceptual revolution based on foregrounding description as against analysis, for instance, will soon find itself subdivided into a more descriptive and a more analytical branch. While Abbott's overarching vision of the history of theory is one of a regime of permanent conceptual revolution that in fact leaves much unchanged, his key point is that each inversion is profoundly productive – locally – of new questions, new empirical studies, new approaches and points of view. A particularly productive move, in this view, is the inversion of one of the dualisms constituent of a methodological manifold (see also Abbott 2004). Reversing one or more of these contrasts – treating the concept as a holistic entity and the location as a fragment of it, for instance – produces a profoundly generative disturbance.

This view of the productive nature of conceptual dualisms, which dovetails with a distinctive strand in anthropological thinking (Canda et al. 2015; Heywood 2018a; Jean-Klein and Riles 2005; Strathern 2011; Yarrow 2008), is importantly at odds with the pervasive call in the past thirty years to collapse dualisms and binaries. It is facile, yet true, to point out that such talk of collapsing binaries is itself just putting the onus on one pole of an enduring philosophical binary: dualism/non-dualism. In a broader view, the dualism/non-dualism binary, too, is an enduring conceptual pair or 'fractal distinction'. The insistence on non-dualism has been generative as long as it has stood out against a

dualist consensus, but it is beginning to run out of steam and is itself turning consensual. The more generative conceptual move may now be – for a time – to let the pendulum swing back towards dualism.

I would like to place the present volume on this side of that pendulum swing – and it is of course a decision, for one could read the volume otherwise. On this view, the reappearance of ‘standard-looking’ places (Kiriwina, Luanda, Port Vila) and concepts (inside/outside borders; ‘anti-relativism’; the move from ‘wealth’ to ‘waste’) is a feature and not a bug. This reappearance would be problematic if the aim were to dissolve the place-concept binary for good. It is to be expected if the volume is actually performing a temporary disruption. That is the difference after all between a revolution and an experiment. A revolution seeks to do away with a previous state of affairs. An experiment produces a set-apart context in which the normal state of affairs is tweaked and transformed in controlled ways. When the experiment is over, we return to the normal state of affairs, hopefully with new insights in hand. This, then, would mark out the present volume’s heuristic gambit most clearly from the methodological manifestoes of multisited ethnography or the ontological turn. Where the latter sought to collapse a distinction, the present volume’s achievement is, on the contrary, to make it more clearly visible.

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# 8

## **Pentecostalism and Forms of Individualism**

*Joel Robbins*

The discussion around Christianity and individualism is a bit unusual in anthropology for having the character of an actual debate – those contributing to it have been uncommonly responsive to one another's arguments in ways that give the literature a certain momentum and coherence. In Chapter 4, 'Borders and Abjections', the authors, with one slight exception I will take up below, leave much of this literature aside, choosing instead just to lightly refer to the two main opening statements (Robbins 2004; Mosko 2010) as a background to introducing their own highly original and stimulating arguments. One thing I might usefully do with my contribution, then, is situate their discussion in the context of the wider debate.

At this point, it is perhaps fair to say that there are four main positions in play in the debate about Christianity and individualism. 1) Christianity in some of its forms can foster a strong commitment to individualism, most fully elaborated in the idea that what Christians must strive for, alone and together, is a kind of salvation that God will deliver only on an individual basis. This would be a good representation of my original position (Robbins 2004). 2) Christianity in all its forms has nothing to do with individualism; it is in itself a 'premodern' cultural form that, like perhaps all of these, is based on individualism and notions of partibility, whereby people conceive of relations as ontologically primary in this world and conceive of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit as beings with whom one relates by means of traditional kinds of transfers of detachable aspects of the self. This is Mosko's (2010)

position. 3) Christianity supports not just individualism but also the cultivation of relations of various kinds, and it supports both of these things equally, so there is no sense in which it can be meaningfully called individualist. This is Werbner's (2011) position. 4) Christianity supports both individualism and relationalism, but in different contexts or at different moments in people's lives, so its individualist impulses are truly a part of its general make-up, but they are not always its dominant ones – rather, Christians 'oscillate' between individualist and relational understandings of the self. I read Daswani (2011) as holding something like this position. My own final position is something akin to a version of the fourth position, but one that notes that considerations of value need to be taken into account in arguments about oscillation, such that if people consider those contexts or moments in which they pursue Christianity in individualist ways as more important than those in which they draw on its relational aspects, then we should be prepared to let that tell us something crucial about the nature of their Christianity – something that might count as its leaning overall in an individualist direction (Robbins 2015).

Something like a mix of third and fourth positions has become, I think, the dominant one – the idea that Christianity is both relationalist and individualist. Some scholars adopt this position as a way to have things both ways, as it were, not really having to make any strong claims about whether Christianity favours individuals or relations. Others, or at least I myself, would like to retain the option of making such strong claims in ethnographic situations that seem to warrant them. But no one wants to argue any more (and indeed no one ever really has, but demonstrating that would get us into more detail than we have space for here) that Christians do not have any relations. Most people, perhaps with the exception of Mosko, want to treat Christian lives, if not Christianity itself, as having individualist and relational aspects.

So where does 'Borders and Abjections' fit into this scheme? As written, it has to be read mostly as changing the subject (pun intended). Or at least, it works to redefine individualism as not a matter of caring about the individual and its salvation but rather as one of caring about the making and maintaining of borders that in various respects protect one's inner world from a chaotic outside one. If we were to translate this into the terms of the standing debate on Christianity and individualism, we might see bordering efforts as akin to moves toward individualism, while crossing borders could stand for a relational impulse. Read in these terms, this chapter would stand as a refreshing turn to taking a kind of individualism – abject individualism – as central in Pentecost – forgoing a stress on relations (without making the silly claim, which again no one



has ever made affirmatively, that Christians do not have relations). But the authors mean the shift to a focus on borders as a wholly new conception of individualism and a fundamental reorientation of the debate, so it is best to honour this intention and ask what kind of space this move opens up beyond that occupied by the prior discussion.

My use of a spatial metaphor in concluding the previous paragraph was not random. Focusing on what is new in 'Borders and Abjections', we might say that at a deep metaphoric level the authors' argument is about the person in space, while much of the other literature on Christian individualism is, at an equally deep metaphoric level, about the person in time. Thus, the previous debate dwells on the temporally grounded notion of oscillation and sometimes also attends to believers' concern with breaking with their past and with their *eventual* salvation. Focusing more on issues of space, and drawing in Kristeva, the authors argue that the New Testament and Christian individualism more generally focus on matters of the inner person and the borders that create it.

Sticking with spatial metaphors – the approach of 'Borders and Abjections' looks at borders from the inside towards the outside, focusing on how to defend them and how to purify the inside when it is demonically breached. Here I think things get interesting in comparative terms, for there is some variation in this historically and today across the Christian tradition, and even in 'Pentecost'. Leanne Williams and I (2017), looking comparatively at some of the literature on Pentecostalism in Africa and at my own work on the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea, and also at some work on the history of the Christian notions of sin, note that this kind of material indicates that there are at least two models of sinfulness in the Christian tradition and that one can find both in Pentecostalism. One model stresses human fallenness and finds that the way humans are by nature is sufficient to explain the existence of sin and evil inside of persons and in the world. Evil does not come into people from the outside but is in people from the start. Another model sees evil as caused by demons and the devil and as afflicting people from the outside in. One can look at the historical development of these two models, noting, for example, that the one that concentrates on innate human evil has been central to the Calvinist tradition. One can also look at the history of Pentecostalism in these terms. The well-known move in some but not all places from 'ascetic' classical Pentecostalism to the neo-Pentecostalism of spiritual warfare, healing as deliverance and, in some places, the prosperity gospel is in some respects a shift from a focus on innate human sinfulness to one on demonic causes of evil. One question these observations raise is whether 'Pentecost' as a heuristic needs to be retooled so as to take in this variation or whether it mostly

means to apply only to the three cases at hand in this book, perhaps all clearly marked by neo-Pentecostal emphases, and also to whatever other cases might look just like them, but is happy to leave out Pentecostals who do not fit. This might be justified in various ways but then perhaps one might want to rethink the name 'Pentecost' for this heuristic because of such internal variation.

Part of the reason I wanted to bring up the historical complexity of Christian thought about whether sin is more a product people's insides or of external factors that contaminate those insides is to raise some questions for the very interesting thoughts in 'Borders and Abjections' about the shift from disciplinary society to control society and the bearing of this shift on 'Pentecost'. There is a suggestion, though the authors ultimately deny it, that the new kind of Pentecostal individual they identify is a reaction to a new kind of society in which, following Deleuze, external replaces internal control and power and capital move without borders, attempting to do away with all set apart 'insides'. The new Pentecostal individual could be, as the authors put it, a critique of the control society or, as another idiom has it, a form of resistance to it. But others might imagine, using yet another idiom for thinking about places like Melanesia and Africa, that this Pentecostal formation is just a hold-over from disciplinary kinds of self-management – obsessed as they are with borders and at least one binary, neither of which are after all really important in control societies – in places where the control society has not yet been fully installed. Can this possibility be ruled out? In general, I think the analysis presented in 'Borders and Abjections' has promise, but the other interpretation I have mentioned seems plausible because, as it appears here, the analysis floats a bit high above the data. The way around this would be to locate the shift from discipline to control societies in the places studied (giving it real content there) and then put the details of this analysis of social change into conversation with religious details. This effort would also have to include a careful consideration of the fairly well documented history of the neo-Pentecostal view of the world as an arena of threatening principalities and powers and its allied healing techniques. This was put together in Southern California at a specific time – indeed, exactly the moment Deleuze published his control society essay – and it spread out from there to other parts of Pentecost; indeed, one reason there is a 'Pentecost' figurative as a global place is that this neo-Pentecostal style was not invented locally in each place as a response to local experiences of a shift to a control society but rather diffused around the globe in ways that, as is so common with Pentecostalism, allowed the demons to be local without generating much localization of the framework for understanding or dealing with

them (Robbins 2012). This kind of historical discussion and attention to globalizing dynamics might well support the argument made in 'Borders and Abjections', but without this kind of attention to ethnographic and historical detail I worry that this argument might just remain too abstract to be more than suggestive.

And finally, having troubled the notion of 'Pentecost' by zooming in close enough to find variation within it, I guess I should also zoom out and raise the question of whether 'Pentecost', the place that is not a place, cuts the world at its outer borders as well. At the very least, I think it makes a cut in the broader evangelical tradition at a place where it does not make sense to do so. In a somewhat cognate comparative exercise to the authors', Bambi Schieffelin, Aparecida Vilaça and I looked at conversion in three different settings and to two different kinds of Evangelical Christianity – fundamentalism and Pentecostalism (Robbins et al. 2014). As is well known, these two traditions are siblings that do not like each other much. Arising around the same time and both out of the broader evangelical stream, Fundamentalists, who do not believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to believers today, anathematize Pentecostals for their belief that they are. We wanted to know what conversion to one or other version of the faith meant for converts' views of the person. I cannot summarize the whole argument here or our use of Marcel Detienne's (2008) work on comparison as one important guide to method, but a key finding was that in all cases, converts developed a new understanding of and a heightened concern with the inner self. So Fundamentalists resemble Pentecostals when it comes to commitment to border work, even as they differ in other ways. Indeed, if one reads Nancy Ammerman's (1987) classic ethnographic account of Fundamentalism – the book *Bible Believers* – it is hard not to think that Fundamentalists may even have perfected this model before the Pentecostals got to it, for Fundamentalists have long made border work of all kinds central not only to healing but to all of religious life. From the point of view of 'Borders and Abjections', then, perhaps they would also belong in 'Pentecost', though they would surely want to change the name! One question this discussion of fundamentalism raises, just as do some of my other points in this comment, is about the kind of work that could profitably be done to situate Pentecost within or at least in relation to the massive continent of Christianity more generally.

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# 9

## Life at the End of Time

### A Note on Comparison, 'Pentecost' and the Trobriands

*Bjørn Enge Bertelsen*

This book, and the fundamentally experimental basis of the project from whence it emerged, has gradually managed to convey – or, rather, conjure – 'Pentecost'. And once conveyed, conjured and stabilized, 'Pentecost' endures and provides an optics, a hermeneutical layer that is infective and that, as a disease or as a prophetic vision, accords a novel vista onto human settlements across the globe. As someone that has been a (sometime) fellow traveller with the *équipe* of this book, this optics of 'Pentecost' recently aided me in a very literal sense when embarking in 2016 on exploratory fieldwork in Accra, Ghana: here, I was struck by the saturation of the urban domain of what one could call the semiotics of 'Pentecost' as, among others, Birgit Meyer (e.g. 2004a) has so eloquently shown. Accraan images ranged from posters of the medical doctor in Oxford Street, who claimed, 'I medicate but God cures' to the bank on which it is written – in 10-meter-high letters – 'To God alone the glory' (see also Quayson 2014). In addition, I have also been to 'Pentecost' in rural and peri-urban Mozambique, where pastors and churches mushroom, thrive and then die and by doing so reinscribe the social with semiotics of 'Pentecost' (see also Bertelsen 2016; Kamp 2016; Premawardhana 2018). And informed precisely by my recently acquired 'Pentecost' specs, I would like to draw attention to two aspects of possibility in this commentary; one very brief on comparison and one specific regarding life in/of 'Pentecost' as most explicitly elaborated in Chapter 2 but also in other sections of the book.

## Comparison

As should be apparent for the reader, the figure of ‘Pentecost’ may be approached as a non-institutional space or place, terrain or territory – as a working holism. And it is precisely its slippery character and ability to evade the sometimes intellectually stifling theological definitions that, first, accords it with anthropological and comparative value and, second, as a concept emulates ethnographically observable features as ‘Pentecost’ mutates, morphs, moves, shapeshifts, migrates, doubles and oscillates within and across domains. This mobility and agility is what makes ‘Pentecost’ apt as open to anthropological experimentation with holism, as well as non-place-based anthropological theoretization (see also Englund and Yarrow 2013; Otto and Bubandt 2010). After all, when anthropologists deploy their intellectual curiosity to the infinite possibilities of the ethnographic, novel concepts such as ‘Pentecost’ arise akin to figures and objects from *Tehom* – that deep, primordial, Christian realm of possibility – to unsettle stable categories of, for instance, religion and gender (see also Helmreich 2017).

Now, comparison can be conceived in myriad ways – most simply by letting the characteristics or format of single or multiple entities stand out when juxtaposed with single or multiple other entities. This is, of course the vision of comparison that blindsides the necessary triangulation of comparison – i.e. that which presupposes a third component, namely the gaze of the comparer. A gaze from a singular methodological, disciplinarily, definitional or theoretical point effectuates an ontological flattening of the landscape in its purview. This gaze produces non-messy figurations and assemblages of certain entities that may, in neat fashion, be juxtaposed while other features recede into the haze or ground. For this very reason, such a form of comparison may be quite rewarding, as it produces (seemingly) crystal-clear units of comparison. However, we all know that vision – even purportedly singular ones as in this example – is paradoxically and problematically both *impartial and partial*. In fact, flattening visions in the form of radiant definitional or disciplinary beams that level the ontological ground, save for predefined features, are highly problematic given their biases towards certain epistemologies, modes of representation or ontological presuppositions (see, e.g., Bertelsen and Bendixsen 2016; Holbraad and Pedersen 2016; Viveiros de Castro 2015).

I take precisely this problem – that of the radiant, flattening beam – to be what this experiment-as-book aims to move away from. Instead, it seeks – in a playful and somewhat productively messy fashion – to

resituate or, perhaps better, decentre the authority of that which is compared to ethnography. It does so, however, *not* following the calls for a new naturalism or neo-positivism that has often comprised the response to, for instance, experimentation in anthropological comparison inherent to what has been called the ontological turn. Rather, 'Pentecost' arises from the depths of *Tehom* and travels, like a ghost, between various registers that are compared, between various spatialized domains of its (mythical) land and, lastly, between 'Pentecost' and the discipline of anthropology. Travel has always served anthropological comparison well, and the multidimensional journeys undertaken to perpetually discover and relocate 'Pentecost' is no exception to this.

## Life

Now, let me, after this brief and general comment on comparison, delve into one of the actual neighbourhoods of Pentecost that is consistently explored in the project, the Trobriands. Being based largely on Kiriwina material, Chapter 2 addresses the reconfiguration of life and death and tackles dominant ideas of 'Pentecost' as being integral to, shaped by or comprising a corollary of neoliberal capitalism – also in the guise of health and wealth gospel. The chapter does an excellent job at critically probing such approaches (including the Comaroffs' well-known readings) as well as showing how such tendencies may be identified in Papua New Guinea, particularly through various fast-money schemes. Crucially, an argument is made that such a redirection towards capitalist values of wealth and an orientation around Ponzi schemes and frauds have eclipsed the many generative processes that emerge in the wake of 'Pentecost'. The chapter highlights a few of these generative processes, starting with a very interesting point on temporality, where it is claimed that 'Pentecost' involves a distinct transformation of visions of life and death – from a predominance of cyclical time towards a more binary notion. Moreover, in this neighbourhood of 'Pentecost' this increased significance of the binary seems also to introduce a hierarchization where new import is given to life to the detriment of death. This reorientation also manifests itself, as demonstrated in the chapter, in new 'production' and 'produce'-oriented notions of reciprocal returns from tithes and offerings: '...focusing on living a good life and directing resources for the wellbeing of one's family in the here and now, rather than orienting production and exchange towards the deceased'. Several points can be made here.

For one, I believe this argument about life can be taken much further, and, in a sense, one might say that in ‘Pentecost’ one is *not* only moving from cyclicity to a (hierarchized) life-death binary: Instead, death recedes more permanently into the background and becomes impotent, unimportant, more of a non-event than a crucial point in energizing cyclical and reproductive cosmologies. Put differently, life trumps death to such a large degree that the notion of a life-death binary is misleading. The glow of life also has a temporal dimension, as its radiance and towering presence seems to generate an eclipse of the past and a privileging of the present and, perhaps, also of a certain vision of the future. Struck by this sense of immediacy of the present/life over the past/death, I see it as an expression of what one could call *Pentecostal vitalism* – a stubborn assertion of boundless human possibility. But there is, of course, a paradox here: life is to be cultivated, cherished purified and used to the full, as life is short and will end – even though death’s importance seems diminished and despite contexts arguably defined by poverty and marginalization (see also Wilhelm-Solomon 2017). Further, life *itself* contains within it the possibilities of everything: riches, happiness and love. Thus, as there is no constitutive outside to a life that is infused with God, the Holy Spirit or Jesus – as a totalizing force – life *transgresses* and *transcends* the needs for strict self-cultivation and/or economizing with time. ‘Pentecost’ has, in some sense, cosmogenetic and vitagenetic properties and points to possibilities for (perpetual) rejuvenation and, hence, the obviation or stopping of time. Furthermore, and Chapter 2 shows us this, life is collective and not merely individual. In the coexistence of these two visions, however, there seems to be a tension that is not wholly articulated in Chapter 2 nor in other sections of the book: that between life as boundless and post-temporal or atemporal – pure and immanent possibility – and life as an entity that needs to be contained, disciplined, controlled and put to productive use. This difference could also be framed as that between an open horizon of possibility and the strictures of sequence, production and causality on the other. In re-deploying the figure of ‘Pentecost’ elsewhere – analytically, theoretically as well as ethnographically – this tension between life’s boundlessness and the strictures imposed by production can be pursued to flesh out life in/ of ‘Pentecost’ more clearly.

Second, and at another level, as it is treated in Chapter 2 and also alluded to in the introduction, life in *the global south* is somehow portrayed as teeming with life and generative of its novel configurations. And, indeed, as we know, the global south has been the object of massive experimentation with life in the form of the combined violences of colonialism, imperialism and, in many ways, development schemes – as well



as its many possible futures (see also Goldstone and Obarrio 2017; Sarr 2016). Arguably integral to the capitalist transformation and its perpetual incursion – briefly mentioned in Chapter 2 in relation to revaluation of productivity, time and wealth – nonetheless what I find particularly intriguing is that in ‘Pentecost’, as conjured for us here, such past and ongoing imperialist and capitalist experimentation with life is thrown open: vast domains of the social order, ritual and, even, cosmological domains related to cyclicity, generativity and, indeed, life itself are challenged, undercutting reductionist conclusions as to the (allegedly) unidirectional and detrimental workings of empire, capital or state.

Third, ‘Pentecost’ seems to be populated by an exuberant and unstable figure of the human that one can only glimpse the contours of in Chapter 2 and in other parts of the book, and I will only allude further to the salience of this for ‘Pentecost’ here. Crucial to such exuberance is the *feature the grotesque*: as exemplified beautifully in Achille Mbembe’s work (e.g. 1992), the postcolonial subject in his view, of course, does not only submit to power and make available his or her body and self to such power. Instead, the ludic subject wilfully connives and toys with various forms of power and potentiality and, indeed, seeks to access, appropriate and reconfigure its very force and direction. In a sense this is a figure of life that is antagonistic to the beautiful and serene being saved and purified by the Holy Spirit but rather one that is grotesque and inflated – that is, disfigured yet powerful. When visiting ‘Pentecost’ – in this book, in Accra, in Mozambique – I see the contours of such grotesques, as well. And it is particularly clear, perhaps, also in the semiotics of growth, wealth and prosperity represented visually in posters in cities and online – and in narratives of exuberant growth and wealth in a present rid of the past or cyclicity, as Chapter 2: life is here distorted and inflated, transgresses boundaries, while death is nowhere to be found.

Another *context for such human exuberance* in ‘Pentecost’ that I see emerging is, and here I am very much informed, of course, by my own work on urban situations – in particular, Mozambique – the figure of the poor subject as an entity to be contained, formatted and kept in check. Informed by the strictures imposed by what I see as the politics of the Anthropocene – including questioning human expansive development – this translates in development settings to the poor *needing* to become and consume less and be restrained in their growth and resources. In other words, the figure of human life shaped by such anthropocenic politics in many development settings is now the lesser human being; the human that does not expand, the subject that is resilient, pliable and poor. This is an idea where growth and wellbeing has been abandoned, given a future that is, in a sense, always already collapsed precluding

any (universal) possibility of expansion. Against this bleak configuration of post-development politics, 'Pentecost' seems to offer another vision of life *rejecting* such strictures in insisting on growth that celebrates exuberance and non-containment. Potentially, 'Pentecostal' life, then, provides an argument against resilience, smartness and the containment of the poor – a liberationist script of expansion, growth and life's unboundedness.

## Creation, Generativity, Opposition

The above comments on, particularly, life but also on comparison invite the question: what cosmological or religious edifice powers 'Pentecost' and what domains are integral to it? As suggested in the book's introduction, religion – and by default Pentecostalism – has to be approached both as non-territorial *and* as non-separate from other spheres, such as the social. Thus, if we cannot approach it as a religion in a classical sense, should we then – and here I am drawing on extending my comments above about the opulence, exuberance and unruliness characterizing this Pentecostal vitalism – extend this argument to reframe it as an *alter-globalization movement* or *alternative cosmopolitan orientation* generating novel forms of subjectivity and personhood?

The book project seems (helpfully) conflicted on this issue: on the one hand, in Chapter 4 one finds, among a host of other fine analyses, an argument relating *abjective individualism* to Deleuzian notions of *control society* (Deleuze 1992) as part of a comment on powerful and important contributions to understanding relations between individualism and Pentecostalism (e.g. Meyer 2004b; Robbins 2004). On the other, Chapter 2 does *not* convey a subject that is dividualized – a subject that has been violently forged into an open source assemblage to be mined, capitalized on and, indeed, abjected. Instead, I perceive – and perhaps as a response to such processes and the spectre of control society – a dynamic that undermines the logic of control society: it erects boundaries, sure; it generates institutions and stricture, certainly; it emulates the logic of capitalism though imposing notions of productivity, generativity and wealth, no doubt. But simultaneously 'Pentecost' comprises a composite and cosmologically mutating site of perpetual creation and destruction, generativity and opposition, conformity and transgression undercutting abjection, dividuation and control. In a sense, my emphasis on life and 'Pentecost's' sometimes grotesque and celebrative exuberance and transgressive character is, of course, a caricature. But it is one that seems pertinent to make, as it has been too

facile to be caught in the idea of 'Pentecost' as radiating cancerous beams disfiguring the social, as a form of virus deadening and flattening cosmologies, as a para-state or proto-state instituting stricture, discipline and obedience, or as the theological apparatus of neoliberal capital. The figure of 'Pentecost' alerted me to instead appreciate the creative, generative and oppositional traits – unevenly realized or lurking as mere potential – and its global relevance.

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# 10

## Wealth versus Money in Pentecost

### Why Is Money Good?

*Knut Rio*

This book builds a case and an argument that deserves a lot of attention – notably about the particular observation that the people in ‘Pentecost’ invest in notions of productivity, life and circulation. We have understood from the text above that the people in ‘Pentecost’ do not want to waste their time; they value work over ceremonies and they value sale over accumulation – and ultimately they value life over death. I think there is one particularly interesting notion at play here; that death in itself seems to be associated with a form of unhealthy and dangerous accumulation.

Hence, I would like to follow on from Michelle MacCarthy’s materials from the Trobriand Islands ‘neighbourhood’ of ‘Pentecost’ and try to go a little deeper into the relation between our concepts of ‘wealth’ and ‘distribution’ – two concepts that are absolutely central to contemporary global movements.

The concept of wealth in English comes out of a notion of wellbeing and strength. This is different from French or German or Norwegian, where we have *rikdom* (‘richdom’) like *richesse* in French and *reichtum* in German. Through these words, words for royal riches in continental Europe and wellbeing in the United Kingdom, we can imagine that wealth was always related to power and the estate – and the royal management of it. The concept of wealth was simply the basis of the aristocratic realm as a totality – and the wellbeing of the subjects to this realm – and did not have much currency apart from exactly that. Wealth as a concept was deeply entwined in the ontological status of the king

or chief and their relations towards the subjects of the realm. It had to do with a crucial cosmological notion of balance – as the riches were the substance holding the cosmos in place, so to speak, that provided the realm or estate and its subjects with wellbeing but also heavy bearings for centre and periphery and divine glory.

One of the historically most controversial and problematic messages in Christianity is the rejection of this concept of royal wealth. When people were waiting for Jesus they were indeed waiting for a king – but a different kind of king. A king not basing his kingdom on earthly, material wealth but *spiritual wealth*. In the Old Testament we read about the prohibition of ritual worship of a material nature and fetishism. In the well-known story of Exodus, a part of the Bible well rehearsed in Pentecost we can assume, Moses burnt the golden calf in a fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on water and made his followers the Israelites drink the mixture; to make the point that wealth was not something to worship as a power in itself. The followers of Moses killed around three thousand worshippers of the pre-Christian god of Baal, who had been misled by this figure of wealth. In the archaeological materials and written tablets there are references to Baal that bring this mythological corpus in relation to other mythologies of the area – including the Bible – related to a cult of fertility, of water and floods of the rivers Euphrat and Tigris, and a control of nature. Baal was the god of riches and beauty, the storm god, associated with lightning and the mountain, and the burning tree and the bull were his symbols. Historians have connected the rituals of fertility in Ugarit to the Palestinian cult of Tammuz, and Baal is also associated with the *Song of Songs* in the Hebrew Bible (see Fisher and Knutson 1969). But for Moses, and for later interpreters of the Bible up until today, Baal was the image of a false god, a devil who betrayed man through his seducing appearance, and in Europe he later reappeared as Beelzebub – ‘the god of flies’ that always figured in medieval witch-hunts. The issue of worship should be a matter between the Christians and God and not through a mediator of wealth – like Baal or an Emperor. In the New Testament this is taken one step further, since Jesus renounces wealth and hierarchy altogether as the basis for Jewish society. Jesus taught that one should use one’s financial resources to help the poor and needy through benevolence. He claimed that one should not depend upon one’s resources but upon God as the source of supply. One should invest one’s wealth in the lives of others and not hoard resources to ourselves:

Looking at his disciples, he said: Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be

satisfied. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. (Luke 6:20, 21, 24, 25)

We find a lot of similar phrases rehearsed in Pentecostalist congregations and webpages – because this is something that concerns them a lot. And this has very much to do with what the authors are writing about in this book – that the people in Pentecost are concerned with wealth in a specific way.

Here is a little passage from a Pentecostal webpage – the Kingwatch.com:

People who follow Jesus have a new King. This is important because a king owns all the property within his Kingdom. He will assign some property to his followers, but they will only hold it while they remain in his favour. People who opposed the king could have their property confiscated without compensation. The name of this practice is ‘eminent domain’.

When Christians decide to ‘seek the kingdom’, all their possessions become the property of their new king. Giving a tenth of what they own is not an option. Everything they own now belongs to Jesus, and must be used as he directs ... For modern Christians, seeking first the Kingdom means surrendering all our income and wealth to the Holy Spirit and using it as he directs. If he tells us to sell our property and give it away, that is what we must do. It no longer belongs to us, but to our king. If the Holy Spirit tells us to share our possessions, then we have no option ... Many Christians respond to Jesus’ teaching by asking, ‘Can a Christian own property?’ The New Testament answer is ‘No’. Christians cannot own property. The reason we cannot own property is that we have a king. When we commit to Jesus, all our property belongs to him. We cannot own property, because we and everything we hold belongs to him. ([http://kingwatch.co.nz/Christian\\_Political\\_Economy/jesus\\_on\\_money.htm](http://kingwatch.co.nz/Christian_Political_Economy/jesus_on_money.htm))

What is clear from the Pentecostal webpages that I have visited is that in theory no person can own property, since everything belongs to Jesus and the kingdom of God. But they also emphasize that one can own property in order to look after it for Jesus. Hence all the wealth that the churches and pastors in Africa and Melanesia are raising is guarding it for Jesus but also putting it to use for the benefit of others.

We can interpret a lot of global movements from the bearings of this Christian history of wealth and distribution: from earlier times when wealth represented the glory and gravity of holy empires, to movements of revolution and renunciation of wealth, of destruction and iconoclasm. Wealth or money was never inherently evil for these Christians, but the corruption and selfish accumulation was always at the core of

Christian fears. Buying and selling, sharing and giving – the distributive aspects that we now call the economy – is at the core of a Christian ethos and being at the full attention of the Pentecostals – in the capacity of leading towards their kingdom.

I should also add that none of us can pretend that we escape this ethos of distribution. All of our notions of equality, of democracy, of market trade, of paying taxes, of nation-state distribution – these are all parts to this ethos. Capitalism as described by Marx in his three volumes, or indeed by Weber, is no doubt a Christian phenomenon. Christianity, in its very break with aristocratic forms of wealth and wealth as a source of governmental power, also opened up the path for capitalism. What we call capitalism is a system wherein accumulation is prohibited – at least in theory – and counterproductive to the system that is based on a free flow of labour and valuables. Marx in volume II of *Capital* is very clear that there is no such thing as ‘fixed capital’ in capitalism, and he was eagerly arguing against Smith and Ricardo on this point, since for Marx what they called ‘fixed capital’ was merely capital waiting to be exchanged or worked. In this way we can say that there can be no wealth, in the old meaning of the word, in capitalism, since everything must per definition be circulated, distributed and recycled by labour and production. Accumulated wealth does not any longer hold the cosmos in place and provide wellbeing, so to speak – it has instead become an image of corruption and anti-humanity. For the capital system accumulation or ‘fixed wealth’ is counter-effective and in a sense ‘evil’ if we translate the capitalist language into the Pentecostal. Fixed wealth is the enemy of the nation state and democracy (think about, for instance, the hidden wealth in Swiss banks or the way Google is hunted by France for its tax returns), and accumulation and uneven distribution of wealth is said to be the major political challenge in the twenty-first century. It is the major evil for capitalism and for Christians alike because accumulating wealth is unproductive, it is dirty and it does not create work and meaningful lives for people.

As outlined by the authors in Chapter 5, to pin all of these things down to a narrative about neoliberalism or occult economies derails our attention from an important social dynamic – notably a dynamic of perpetual conflict between distribution and accumulation. This is a key point in the Bible but also a key point for Marx’ *Capital*. This problem reappears in Jean and John Comaroff’s criticism of neoliberalism in Pentecost (2001). In their view capital is evil because it accumulates and oppresses, and this is translated or highlighted by the African ‘occult economies’, where, for instance, witches force people to work or give blood. The witches base their power on the accumulation of human



blood or vitality, just like global capitalism accumulates, in essence, human relations of production. The bottom line of their argument is that the economic mode produces the ideological mode; thus Pentecostalism becomes the religion of neoliberalism (in that order).

I cannot say too much about neoliberalism here – it is mainly just a derogatory term for laissez-faire economic governance, a weak state and free market fundamentalism. But it must be noted in extension to the Comaroffs' point that the critique of neoliberalism is also an important feature of the system that is neoliberalist; the critique belongs inside neoliberalism and should be added to its definition. And what I mean by its critique is mainly that it might create corruption, new forms of accumulation and inequality and a return to aristocratic forms of wealth. Neoliberalism comes with its own forms of critique, so to speak.

My point here is just the opposite from the Comaroffs' point. The distributive mode was all the time Christian, and it only became capitalist during the big breaks with landed aristocracy in Europe. Capitalism became the economic system of the Christian religion, and not vice versa, and the attack on royal glory and monarchy followed from this movement. When the modern nation states emerged in the late nineteenth century, with labour movements, with parliamentary democracy and bourgeois or corporate businesses at the heart of the system – the perpetual struggle was crowned with the victory over 'fixed property' – i.e. an 'occult economy' of sorts – directed against aristocracy, powerful estates and kinship. The fear was always that the capitalist system would fall back to a system of accumulation and feudalism. This is explicitly stated by Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* after the Paris revolution of 1848 – but also again and again being argued up until today. Distribution is good; accumulation is evil – capital is good; wealth is evil.

Here we have our bearings, so to speak. It is with capitalism that the promise for freedom, equality, redistribution and labour arises, and that is the paramount value of modern revolutionary western society – as demonstrated quite clearly in Dumont's book *Homo Equalis* (see Dumont 1977). Wealth and accumulation is the suppressed value in this system that instead upholds distribution, if we can put it like that – such that accumulation becomes the impure and distribution the pure, in a Dumontian value axis.

The authors pointed out that the reason that (some) Trobrianders wanted to join the territory of 'Pentecost' was linked to two different things. The first was in 'a response to rampant sorcery deaths and the inability of mainline religion to combat such evil forces'. The other was related to a heightened sense of productivity, of modernity and progress in terms of modern technologies and infrastructure like electricity and

roads, for instance. They wanted to leave behind a life where they were merely wasting time on backward-looking rituals and dirty heaps of unproductive banana leaf bundles.

I think we can place the idea of sorcery into the logic of an ongoing war between distribution and accumulation. In fact, sorcery beliefs are exactly expressing themselves around the issues of selfishness and envy. The sorcerer or witch is a figure who is envious of other people's property – and all material items are marked by the gaze of the witches as their property. They desire it and they want to take it. To take it, possess it and consume it. MacCarthy (2017) also notes that it is taboo for the witch to own a broom and coconut husks used for cleaning pots and pans and making the cooking fire. The broom is what the good women use to sweep the homestead and the kitchen utensils are their way of reproducing their household. Productive work and exchange is assumed to be taboo for the witch. And another thing is that witches block people's consciousness; by creating delirium or forgetting, and symptoms of sorcery are often the lack of clear, rational thought. Clarity of mind, work, production and social relations of inter-village marriage is in total what the witch obstructs. This is what, the authors suggest, the Trobriand example says life is about in Pentecost.

And they do not want to waste time on death. I find the abandonment of the famous banana leaves and mortuary ceremonies intriguing in this respect. Doba is a physical expression of the matrilineage, as we were told by Annette Weiner (1976); it is women's wealth but also their value – it represents the mother's milk of the clan, collected and given away in great quantities. It was given by women who were close matrilineal kin of the deceased to his or her principal affines in payment for their onerous services in mourning the deceased. What could possibly be the problem with this – if we place it inside our 'distribution is good' vs 'accumulation is evil' dynamic? Why does doba become undesirable in Pentecost? This used to be the main work of women. The work resulted in heaps and heaps of bundles that could be exchanged and distributed. Why is not this work and distribution good? Now they are 'dirty' and 'a waste of time' – what does that mean?

Of course, the material quality of banana leaf bundles is such that they actually decompose and have a short life. They are made of dead leaves, in contrast with the mats that the Pentecostals prefer making – which are always made anew with fresh dyes and thereafter sold and exchanged for money and quickly move out of sight. The thousands of banana leaf bundles must end up as a massive heap of garbage in the villages. They must be burnt at some point or discarded through yet more unproductive work.

By contrast money has the material quality of not decomposing but simultaneously not accumulating, since it must be spent again and again. The *doba* has this particular quality of accumulating, it being stored in someone's house in readiness for the mortuary happening and after that taking up space and rotting away. But more importantly (in relation to my interest here) *doba* seems in another sense also to be *wealth more than capital*. It is grounded in the clan; it is the spirit of the *dala* matrilineage and hence when lying there in big bundles on the ceremonial ground they are materializing the spiritual 'occult economy power' of the lineage. And the essence of the lineage does not circulate; it is rooted in the land and held down by the heaviness of big stones and the yam houses, as we know from the ethnography. You see, I am trying to push the idea that it *must* be opposed in 'Pentecost' because it is a form of power that is not open, not distributed, not productive but rooted in the past, in the land, in the lineage as a spiritual being and in the cult of ancestors and death.

The Pentecostals do not pretend to think neoliberalism or capitalism is evil, exploitative and wrong – like the Comaroffs or western leftists. On the contrary they uphold capitalism as an ultimate ideal (if capitalism is what we call the distributive movement of keeping everything productive and laborious) and so they instead express the idea that it is the lineage, the *doba*, the ancestors and death that is evil (or, at least, unproductive and ungodly).

The critique of neoliberalism by western leftists is equally aimed towards corruptions and unfair accumulation as the critique by Pentecostals. And in many ways the critique of neoliberalism and the Pentecostal critique are exactly symmetrical. They both want a productive economy, they want everyone to take part, they want production and labour, they want redistribution and they want the poor to be lifted out of their misery. They want brotherly love, peace, freedom and equality. They attack any sign of unfair accumulation, returns to aristocratic arrangements, landed wealth as (in the *doba* case) or corruptions of relations between people (by witches).

By simple calculus the critiques of neoliberalism and the Pentecostals have shared concerns about the modern condition. It is not that Pentecostals become neoliberalist because they join a church – as the Comaroffs hint at. The world of 'Pentecost' is already neoliberalist. Rather, different movements in 'Pentecost' partake in different ways in its critique and its control. The Comaroffs merely express the morality of neoliberalism – from within 'Pentecost', so to speak – a critique that is in every way internal to it and instrumental for it (yes, the Comaroffs are also in 'Pentecost!').

As stated in Chapter 5, by embracing ‘productivity’ one can become part of a global community, which presents both an opportunity and a responsibility to make ‘good’ use of one’s time, to move forward and to be more modern and developed. In this system death is the end point for all distributional horizons. It smells, it decays and it is there as a wasteful presence. A focus on life instead of death, then, means a focus on ensuring material wellbeing and spiritual wholeness in the here and now and looking to the future rather than the past.

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# 11

## ‘Pentecost’ in the World

*Birgit Meyer*

Space is just an activity of the soul, just the human manner of connecting inherently unconnected sense affections into unified ideas.

—Georg Simmel, *Soziologie*

*Going to Pentecost* is an ambitious thought-experiment. In the anthropology of religion, the study of Pentecostalism has been profiled as a field for conceptual innovation. This volume is placed in this tradition. At a time in which anthropologists, also due to new funding schemes, are increasingly involved in collaborative research projects, the question of the methodological and conceptual gains of such more or less explicit comparative endeavours is pertinent. There are still many researchers who study Pentecostalism *in* various locations – myself included – but few attempt to study it *across*. This is the explicit aim of this volume. In order to do so, as the authors argue, the anthropological inclination of contextualizing Pentecostal forms and practices in a particular regional environment is to be put on hold. In order to overcome the limits of a methodology that takes for granted geo-cultural territory as the prime explanatory frame, they plead for a deterritorialization of approaches to Pentecostalism. This, however, does not mean the rejection of space as a category. As a next step, Pentecostalism is reterritorialized as a trans-regional ‘place’ consisting of various sites: Port Vila on Vanuatu, Kiriwina and the Palanca neighbourhood in Angola’s capital Luanda. Through this move, the authors argue, it is possible to undertake a ‘direct’ comparison of the way in which ‘the recognition and immediate experience

of the Holy Spirit' occurs in these sites. In this volume this direct, lateral comparison is undertaken along a horizontal axis (Part I), which subsequently forms the base for a frontal comparison along a vertical axis that aims at conceptual innovation in anthropology (Part II). With much pleasure I have accepted the invitation to reflect on the question of what is gained by undertaking this thought-experiment, paying special attention to Chapters 3 and 6 in which the Palanca, a neighbourhood in Angola's capital Luanda, is the point of departure.

### **Going Horizontal: Discerning 'Pentecost's' Absolutist Logic**

The authors constitute 'Pentecost' as a place for the sake of their experiment. I have no problem with this move as such. Spaces and places are not given but shaped through the imagination. They emerge – and are made real – through human actions and thoughts: 'an activity of the soul' (Simmel 2016 [1992]: 688, translation BM). Usually the main interest of anthropologists and scholars of religious studies is to grasp the actions and thoughts through which their interlocutors develop a sense of place and how it is informed by and feeds into a particular social configuration. Christianity, and Pentecostalism in particular, offers a broad sense of place and space that envelops local sites into a wide – or even global – cosmological scheme. Studying this upscaling of place and space from the level of the local to the global on the level of the interlocutors is not the prime interest of the authors of this volume. Connecting geographically distant sites into a unified transregional whole, their concern is to project 'Pentecost' as an imagined, laboratory place for an innovative scholarly analysis. Still, if we take 'Pentecost' as such a place, the question arises how it relates to the regional environments that the authors reject as their prime explanatory frame. Chapter 3 shows that 'Pentecost' is neither independent from nor congruent with the Palanca, Kiriwina or Port Vila. If anything, it is a place within other places to which it stands in an oppositional relation. The dialectical engagement with the world out there, which is discarded and encroached upon, is at the core of Pentecostal activities. Construing 'Pentecost' as a separate place independent from the region in which it is situated would stand in the way of grasping this dialectic. De facto, the authors acknowledge this in their analysis, thereby relativizing the initial deterritorializing move. This is most explicit in Chapter 6's emphasis on the continuing impact of traditional Bakongo notions on everyday life and the directions taken by Pentecostal churches in the Palanca, but it also shows clearly in the

point that sin is understood as rooted in Trobriand notions of witchcraft and sorcery.

So if analytically 'Pentecost' can be taken as a place, it needs to be stressed that it is located in the midst of tensions, conflicts and antagonisms in relation to non-Pentecostal worlds as well as with regard to the relation between different kinds of Pentecostal churches. What emerges as the defining characteristic is the uncompromising, absolutistic manner through which it relates to its pluralistic environment. We learn that those in search of experiencing the Holy Spirit as an immediate presence live in the midst of a world that they find disconcerting and even potentially polluting. This is most obvious in the Palanca, an urban neighbourhood with countless churches, bars, shops and markets and filled with sounds and images from all these locations. The Palanca witnesses the outcome of a process of urbanization through which an older moral order was dissolved – at least this is how it looks in retrospect – and where inhabitants find themselves in need of security and guidance. The extent to which this is a world in turmoil comes to the fore in the shift of meaning attributed to *ndoki* (witchcraft). While in the traditional past *ndoki* served to establish order, now it is taken as a symptom of disorder that calls Pentecostals into action. A sense of insecurity associated with disorder also emerges from the two Melanesian sites. So here 'Pentecost' is not a nice future destination like heaven (as a perspective that emphasizes the Pentecostal eschatology might suggest) but a place in or from where to wage war. In other words, construing 'Pentecost' as a place puts its antagonistic and aggressive stance to the world at the centre of the analysis. It opens up scholarly inquiry for a systematic study of Pentecostal ideas and valuations about as well as engagements with co-present others.

In this context it needs to be noted that the Pentecostal discourse in the three sites itself makes profuse use of spatial and temporal metaphors but does not construe 'Pentecost' as a place (if anything, it might be the event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit). Being Pentecostal means being in motion. Pentecostal churches in the Palanca offer 'a diagnosis that establishes the road to salvation'. Through 'metaphorical mapping' and 'temporal sequencing' they produce 'an ordering effect in people's lives'. In Port Vila the Bible is taken as a door to the 'right road' to be followed, while on Kiriwina Pentecostalism involves a 'journey from darkness to light'. This use of spatial metaphors resonates with the longstanding Christian trope of life as a journey along either the broad path through mundane pleasure that ends up in hell or the narrow path to heavenly Jerusalem. Traditionally (as in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or the lithograph of the *Broad and Narrow Path*), the

narrow path would require a sober, world-renouncing attitude that Max Weber (1920) circumscribed as innerworldly asceticism. The path taken by Pentecostals in the three sites leads through a battlefield in which evil spirits – especially witchcraft – are fought in the name of the one and only truth, the world here being perceived as posing a serious threat; the right attitude is not one of mere dissociation from the world but of an active fight against and with it. Promising a way out of the mess and to restore order, the Holy Spirit vests believers with belligerent mindsets, prone to insist on and install an absolute truth.

What I find particularly intriguing is that the chapter spotlights a strong Pentecostal resentment with regard to the present in which born again Christians cohabit with all sorts of others who are perceived as enemies. The messy, plural world, with all its distractions, seductions and dangers, fuels, at least in some people, a desire for a Christian order that is to be reached through an absolutist, anti-pluralist route. As the authors spotlight, the rejection of plural possibilities in favour of a singular truth comes with its own contradictions. The plurality despised by Pentecostal churches is at the same time the reason for their existence. They thrive thanks to the very sense of insecurity that they seek to alleviate and yet need in order to be in demand, just as they need to affirm the danger of witchcraft and the devil against which they claim to protect their followers. And while they each claim the ultimate path to an absolute Christian truth, they are in strong competition with each other, entailing fission and differentiation, and finding themselves placed in what Blanes' interlocutor Nunes sees as a capitalist spiritual supermarket.

In sum, by exploring 'Pentecost' as a place opposed to and yet entangled with a non-Pentecostal world, it becomes very clear that the appeal of Pentecostalism in the three sites – and I would say, in many others – is due to its rejection of relativism and plural possibilities. It appears to be a simplifying and uncompromising force that seeks to resolve the challenges posed by pluralism or, as I would put it, co-existence with others across various differences by closure and insistence on one single truth. However, I wonder whether the Pentecostal logic of absolutism is as absolute in practice as it is claimed to be by the authors. How far can this stance at all be maintained in everyday practice in the more or less plural configurations of Port Vila, Kiriwina and above all the highly diverse Palanca? More comparative research on 'Pentecost' in the world – in the three sites and elsewhere – would be needed to sort out the effects of a stance that absolutely opposes an inescapable plurality. As I will argue below, doing so would require looking beyond 'Pentecost' into the broader dynamics of coexistence in the midst of everyday encounters.



## **Going Vertical: The Conceptual Gains**

Chapter 6 discusses the findings of the 'journey through Pentecost' in the light of existing scholarly concepts and theories developed with regard to Pentecostalism in the framework of the anthropology of Christianity, and beyond. The proverbial motto of making 'a complete break with the past' (Meyer 1998) relied on a temporalizing strategy used by Pentecostals to construe contemporary others as not sharing the same time and place, thereby denying their coevalness (Fabian 1983). The qualification of significant others as backward and hence as belonging to an imagined past is a prominent strategy of dissociation (currently also often recurred to in populist ideologies mobilized in Europe that regard Islam as backward). While I think that this strategy is still operative in Pentecostal discourse (at least in Ghana), I agree with the authors that the logic of moral absolutism found to prevail across 'Pentecost' amounts to more than the trope of rupture in the sense of a break or discontinuity that for so long has occupied scholars of Pentecostalism. Emphasizing the dialectical relation between 'Pentecost' and the non-Pentecostal world, they argue that the resentment towards others 'enacts a form of separation within a "present" that is inherently immanent'. Instead of temporalizing enemies as backward, they are spatialized as dangerously co-present. This wish to distinguish and separate themselves from others with whom they share time and place in one space has strong implications for how people live together with and across their differences. They point out that Pentecostals perceive their world as a space of multiplicity. Enemies are confronted as illicit, immoral cohabitants with whom one is doomed to, and yet does not want to, coexist. This focus on the dangers in and of the present opens up possibilities to reimagine the past in a nostalgic longing for wholeness, rather than as a backward stage to be left behind for the sake of progress. The past is opened up as an imaginary space from where to expect a future. Such an apparently hitherto little explored use of the categories of time and space in 'Pentecost' is intriguing and certainly deserves more attention in research to come.

And yet, what I find much more telling with regard to the thought-experiment offered by Chapter 6 of this volume is Pentecostals' strong idea that absolutism is the only adequate response to the vicissitudes of coexistence with morally, religiously and socially different others. For me, it brings across a strong sense of a fear of the other and danger of pollution. Having illuminated the operation of the absolutist logic in the dialectical encounter between 'Pentecost' and the world in great

detail, the authors state – in their last sentence – that the ‘absolutist road towards salvation ... ultimately appears as a form of transcendence of the anti-relativist and anti-pluralist resentment that the Pentecostal worldview sets into motion’. I find it difficult to see evidence for this statement. Is it a wishful attempt to eschew the final conclusion of Pentecostalism as owing its appeal to offering a highly simplifying order? As noted above, I wonder how far this logic is at all maintainable and maintained in the practice of everyday life. In Southern Ghana I often noted a gap between Pentecostal believers’ strong emphasis on personal piety and their preparedness to arrange themselves with others – whether they belong to other religious traditions or are found to lead an immoral life. Notwithstanding strong personal convictions, many people are prepared to work out a way, albeit superficial, of dealing with each other or to ignore each other (see also Larkin 2014, who argues that in a setting of coexistence of Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria, people develop ‘techniques of inattention’ so as to ignore each other). So it is not the case that the characteristic absolutist logic, which I also recognize with regard to my research, is implemented in all situations. In my view, it is high time to conduct more detailed research on the modalities of coexistence as they are practised in plural settings in general, and the role of Pentecostals therein in particular. An absolutist logic is not all there is and, if pursued to the end, may raise more problems than it sets out to resolve. A lesson to be learned from the thought-experiment is that a sole focus on ‘Pentecost’ is too limited to understand the problems of living together for which Pentecostals search a solution. I think that it is time for scholars studying religion to move beyond a narrow focus on Pentecostals and Christians and to pay more attention to interactions and entanglements with significant others. There is a need to transcend the distinct anthropologies of Christianity and Islam so as to explore how and how far people manage to live together with and despite staunch exclusive religious convictions and absolutist logics in everyday settings (Janson and Meyer 2016). If ‘space is just an activity of the soul’, as scholars we are to find out how multiple souls construe a joint common habitat of which ‘Pentecost’ forms one part without entirely imposing its absolutist logic in theory and practice.

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