PENTECOSTAL POWER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM:
RE-IMAGINING MODERNITY IN THE CHARISMATIC COSMOLOGY*
Elsie Lewison
Department of Geography
University of Toronto
elsie.lewison@utoronto.ca

In his 1999 book *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Peter Berger—a widely published sociologist of religion—renounced his own, former position that religion would lose ground with the rise of a pluralistic, modern age. Pointing out that the world seems to be “as furiously religious as it ever was,” he understatedly observes that, “To say the least, the relation between religion and modernity is rather complicated.” Indeed, the orthodoxy of Max Weber’s ‘disenchantment of the world’ has increasingly fallen out of favor in face of mounting evidence to the contrary. Among the most impressive disputants has been the Pentecostal movement, which has experienced explosive global growth beginning in the last decades of the twentieth century. With some estimates quoting over five hundred million adherents, it “may be the fastest expanding religious movement in the world today.”

The experiences of globalization—in the form of technological modernization and the conflation of geographical space through population and information flows—and more specifically neoliberal globalization, entailing the “deeply problematic commodification of everything,” the retrenchment of the social welfare state, and huge flows of speculative investment capital, have effected tremendous ruptures in lives around the globe. In many contexts, economic and cultural globalization has led to significant social restructuring and introduced new measures of status and value in the form of material accumulation and consumption—concurrent with an increasingly ‘macrocosmic’ orientation. Far from the predictions of secularization theory that modernity would make the world “more rationally comprehensible and

---

*I would like to extend special thanks to my friends and key informants, who chose to remain anonymous, in Kibale, Nanyuki, Elangata-Wuas, and Mbeya as well as throughout my research, for opening their thoughts and worlds to me with sincerity and generosity. I would also like to thank my advisor John Galaty for his support and insights and to extend appreciation for the constructive comments and suggestions of an anonymous reviewer.*

5 Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space,” *Antipode*, (editorial board, 2002), 380-404
manageable,” factors such as economic and political crises and the mystification of wealth distribution have generated sentiments of disorientation and disempowerment. As Jean and John Comaroff observed at the turn of the millennium, the triumph of global capitalism has been accompanied by a proliferation of occult practices, money magic, and prosperity gospels that constitute “enchantments… of a decidedly neoliberal economy whose ever more inscrutable speculations seem to call up fresh specters in their wake.”

In East Africa, the ferocious rise of Pentecostalism in the last decade of the 20th century represents one such ‘enchantment.’ The movement has found new niches of demand for meaning, community and livelihood in a rapidly modernizing society and has embedded itself within the ruptures and fissures that neoliberal globalization has wrought.

In comparison to the publicity of contemporaneous religious movements—specifically different forms of political Islamism—Pentecostalism has, at least until recently, expanded largely under the Western academia’s radar. Its force has only recently come to be widely acknowledged despite, or perhaps very much because of, its ubiquity within the Western world itself. Yet it is by no means a quiescent or passive religion. Its embrace of ecstatic emotionalism and principles of radical equality, which ignore and overstep bounded social geographies, as well as its violent discourses of good and evil, have made it a potent and often disconcerting presence in wider society throughout its lifetime. Its powerful and flamboyant presence in the public sphere, built on its evangelical charge, makes it a religion that takes up space—a religion that is very much ‘in’ and ‘of’ the world. This dynamic relationship with its surrounding environs has played a key part in generating Pentecostalism’s appeal in today’s religious marketplace.

Significantly, Pentecostalism has shown remarkably ability to adapt in pace with a rapidly changing world, transposing novel value systems, challenges and opportunities onto its basic cosmology of personal salvation. The movement’s cosmology and congregations give order and meaning to complex and erratic global processes. It provides direction and a supportive arena for individuals to advantageously reinvent their everyday lives and provides a means of effectively re-imaging one’s place in relation to contemporary processes of globalization. In light of individual, national and continental failures to succeed, particularly as reflected in the mainstream media, Pentecostalism presents believers with a chance to make a ‘complete break’ with the past. Its international community of the saved provides the believer with a new form of self-definition that is firmly founded in a direct, personal relationship with God. The Pentecostal identity does not necessarily negate all others, but rather supersedes them, allowing individuals to redefine their place within the wider world on the basis of equality and personal agency.

My intention here is to explore some of the ways in which these themes play out in the lives of East African Pentecostals today and, in doing so, draw several conclusions in regards to the movement’s astounding
growth in the past several decades, on both a regional and global scale. I will focus on three key ways in which Pentecostalism allows believers to develop a sense of empowerment by re-situating themselves in relation to the surrounding world. First, I look at the transformation of the individual’s relationship to a global-capitalist cosmology and existing social and geographic boundaries. Second, I turn to the role of the localized space of the congregation. Finally, I examine the appeal of Pentecostalism’s re-territorialization of the global public sphere through the assertion of a trans-local community of spiritually ‘radical equals.’

The paper draws on experiences from time spent in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda in 2009. While there I participated in a number of church services and spoke with a variety of individuals over the course of five months. While the congregations that I visited ranged from small, rural churches with straw covered floors to large urban auditoriums equipped with printed banners and projector, my language constraints limited interviews to English speakers, which led to a predominance of younger, male interviewees with at least minimal education.

**Historical Development of Pentecostalism**

In tracing the history of Pentecostalism we are faced with the challenge of first defining the movement, a challenge made difficult by its highly decentralized structure and emphasis on charismatic leadership. Wide discrepancies in statistics and measures of growth reflect this difficulty of definition. While Pentecostalism’s emphasis on experience and practice compels us to look not to doctrinal but rather experiential evidence for definition, this leaves us with a vast scope of—often mutually contentious—movements. Furthermore, in the analysis of the global scope of modern Pentecostalism, attempting to draw a linear, historical development of the Pentecostal or charismatic movement is also highly problematic. Our present concern lies not in distinguishing a ‘true’ or ‘historical’ Pentecostalism but rather in examining the appeal of its multidimensional contemporary forms. In framing our analysis of the contemporary discussion—particularly concerning power relationships and issues of cultural-imperialism—it is useful to examine Pentecostalism’s various histories and trajectories. This includes both the histories of ‘classical’ Pentecostalism’s North American origins as well as the independent and interdependent rise of Pentecostal-like charismatic movements across Africa.

**Development of Classical American Pentecostalism**

The origin of Classical American Pentecostalism is usually mapped to the Los Angeles-based Azusa Street Revival in 1906. Initiated with three days and nights of loud praying and rejoicing in a small private

---


home, the revival expanded rapidly, drawing people from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds and placed strong emphasis on national, as well as international evangelism. The revival drew significant influence from American Methodism, which “stressed personal liberty… and it extended its offer of religious power and autonomy to the ‘dispossessed,’ to women, African Americans and the poor.”

As we will see echoed in contemporary incarnations of Pentecostalism, Methodism gained particular popularity among the newly urbanized working class for whom it provided “opportunities for leadership and social respectability” as well as everyday lifestyles “well-suited to the disciplinary demands of the industrial order” that actively promoted upward social mobility. Classic American Pentecostalism was also heavily influenced by African American Christianity, which developed out of the religious expression of slave communities. This religious movement, while developing a similar emphasis on emotionalism and salvation for the dispossessed, emphasized a degree of isolation in which the religious community was presented as an ‘invisible institution’ or friendly microcosm offering equality and liberty through a transcendence of the slave identity. According to Katharina Hofer (2006), this Christianity was characterized by a mentality of the ‘suffering community’ which she sees shared by contemporary Pentecostalism and entailing an identity that develops explicitly in opposition to the outside world. For Hofer, this shapes a religion wholly concerned with, and defined by, its relationship to its environment.

Its coming into being, its reason d’etre, and all its longings are owed to this outer world . . . The hostile surrounding must be defeated, not for the sake of power, but for the sake of survival. The community must (re)-gain ground in order for its members to come into being.

Pentecostalism’s roots in both Methodism and African American Christianity nurtured a dynamic relationship with the outside world—defined by both hostility and participation—which plays a significant role in the appeal of the contemporary movement.

As Pentecostalism grew in numbers, its initial ability to bring believers together across the social spectrum was challenged by growing institutionalization, which led increasingly to racially divided congregations and alliances with fundamentalist evangelical churches. As a result, many Pentecostal churches “adopted the patriotic values of the US American middle class. In many ways it changed from being a protesting ‘church of the poor’ to ‘a conservative middle-class force.’”

In understanding this shift, it is important to highlight the strongly individualistic character of Pentecostalism’s message of empowerment and equality, which tended to preclude social or political engagement on the basis of other forms of social identities. Pentecostal churches transcended the social perimeters of race, gender, age, social class or level of education as opposed to

12 Allan Anderson, Introduction, 42
13 Allan Anderson, Introduction, 26
16 The fundamentalist movement arose largely as a response to the charismatics, opposing the open nonconformity of Pentecostalism with a scripturally centered intellectual discourse. Hofer, “Implications,” 177-178.
17 Allan Anderson, Introduction, 54
challenging wider social orders from within these social spaces. Thus, when compared with the concurrently developing Black and Liberation Theologies—which so clearly embraced their African American foundations—even ‘Black’ American

Pentecostal churches were not racially radical, avoiding specific identification with the established black community. Assertions of equality were couched in the idiom of the spiritual, rarely emerging into the overtly political stance of their theological rivals.

Development of African Pentecostalism

The history of Christianity in Africa has been one of tremendous diversity, hosting a vast array of denominations, movements, storefront congregations as well as autonomous preachers and holy-men and women, particularly in the case of Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal landscape is made up of early mission churches, a complex array of splinter congregations, independent charismatic movements and congregations as well as more recent groups connected with international NGOs and the charismatic leaders of mega-churches.

The independent charismatic movements of the African Instituted Churches (AICs) are often cited as precursors to the African Pentecostal movement. AICs emerged across Africa primarily out of African Christians’ growing frustration with the racism and exploitation of the early, mainstream mission churches. This frustration and desire for independence concerned not only the missionaries’ monopolization of faith and theology but social institutions and infrastructure as well. Early western-based Pentecostal missionaries also had a significant impact in many areas across the continent. In contrast to the AICs’ assertion of independence in opposition to Western control, these

---


19 Liberation Theology took shape in Latin America in the 1960s and was described by Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the movement’s most prominent thinkers, in his 1971 Teologia de la liberacion. Largely Catholic in origins, the movement drew on Marxist and dependency theories of exploitation and uneven development and emphasized a ‘liberating praxis of the poor’ that sought to critique the socio-political structures that create poverty. Black Liberation or Black Theology similarly emerged out of a social movement context, developing in tandem with the Black Power movement in the United States articulated in a National Committee of Negro Churchmen black power statement released in 1966 and later, famously, in James Cone’s 1969 Black Theology and Black Power. Like South American Liberation Theology, Black Theology identified critically engages with histories of subjugation and the meaning of racial and social identities in relation to faith. It was a thoroughly engaged form of theology that advocated for African American liberation from white oppression and was closely tied to the civil rights movement. Black Theology also perceived itself in solidarity with liberation movements in Africa and other areas of the Third World and played a significant role in the anti-Apartheid struggles in South Africa. Rebecca Chopp and Ethna Regan, “Latin American Liberation Theology,” in The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918, edited by Davis Ford (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 469-484; Dwight Hopkins, “Black Theology of Liberation,” in The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918, edited by Davis Ford (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 451-468.

20 Hofer, Implications.


congregations tended to remain under the strict oversight of their mission founders. European and North American churches maintained direct control over these congregations for decades. In cases where official leadership had been surrendered to local community members, overseas funders preserved power through their management of local finances, yet their influence surpassed mere financial control. African pastors frequently received training in the US or Canada and congregations often relied on imported teaching material for local training. Largely due to these close ties to Western partner institutions, these churches have “developed in tune with North American Pentecostalism.”

**Development of Neo-Pentecostalism**

Near the middle of the twentieth century, a number of enterprising Pentecostal preachers such as Oral Roberts foreshadowed a new generation of nondenominational churches that grew to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s. In describing this new movement, the term “neo-Pentecostal” began to be used interchangeably with the general term charismatic or, later, neo-charismatic. These churches gained explosive popularity in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, “the networks of independent churches were soon the fastest growing segment in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement in the English-speaking world, spreading to become hundreds of independent global networks.”

One of the most influential aspects of neo-Pentecostalism is the related development of a theology widely known as the ‘prosperity gospel’ or gospel of ‘health and wealth.’ It emerged in the Bible belt of the U.S. and drew on the teachings of contemporary televangelists. It preaches a message of this-worldly prosperity through faith alone, often emphatically highlighting tithes and church donations as the proper manifestation of personal faith. Often interpreted as an implicitly instrumentalist tool—used by leaders to manipulate believers and promote church growth and personal enrichment—many students of the movement, like Gifford, tie this increasing success to the gospel’s American capitalist mentality as it found fertile ground in the ‘boom years’ of the 1960s and 1970s when “‘success through a positive mental attitude’ was the rule” and Pentecostalism was becoming increasingly tied to growth-oriented American commercialism.

A final prominent aspect of contemporary Pentecostalism is the rising tied of international missions and faith-based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that developed out of the late twentieth century merger between the fundamentalist evangelical and Pentecostal communities. This growth came out of post-Cold War international aid policies that favored non-state funding mechanisms and combined with the rise of a new generation of enterprising missionary efforts represented by organizations such as the ‘church growth movement’ (found in Africa as ‘AD 2000 and Beyond’). While this international mission has drawn much of its funding from North American sources, it is important to highlight that Pentecostalism has become international in a far more fundamental way. As Anderson (2004) notes, Pentecostalism has “become globalized in every sense of the word” demanding that we “make more

---

visible and accessible the ‘non-western’ nature of Pentecostalism without overlooking the international importance of the movement emanating from North America.”

With the rise of neo-Pentecostalism in the 1980s, Africa witnessed an upsurge of Pentecostalism and charismatic fervor and growth. By the 1990s it had become “undoubtedly the salient sector of African Christianity.” According to statistics, in the year 2000, 20 percent of the populations of Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Malawi claimed membership to Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity in addition to 14 percent in Kenya, 11 percent in Nigeria, 10 percent in Ghana and Zambia, and significant populations in many more countries including the DRC, South Africa and Uganda. Yet perhaps even more indicative of the strength of the movement is its infiltration into the daily life of many African cities and communities. Its “vitality of practice, high visibility in the public space, and the intensity of the debate caused by its diatribe against traditional religion, cultural practices, and the alleged compromises by other forms of Christianity,” has, as Gifford (2004) notes, led to a ‘paradigm shift’ in African Christianity. Indeed, along with the explicitly new churches, many previously existing churches, took on new identities more in line with the charismatic aesthetic.

One of the most notable manifestations of the movement has been the emergence of the previously mentioned international mega-churches. These are often centered on the personality cult of a charismatic leader, most of whom are highly educated bearing striking similarities to successful CEOs. One example is the Living World Outreach (“Winners Chapel”) of David Oyedepo, which in 2001 held the Guinness record for the largest auditorium in the world. Neo-Pentecostal and charismatic churches have appealed particularly to young, educated urban people with women tending to make up a significant portion of the membership. University and secondary school students have been a primary motivating force of the new religious movement in many African countries. Academics and professionals have become increasingly important in the Pentecostal movement and tend to represent a majority in para-church business fellowships. Yet, in the tradition of older Pentecostal and charismatic churches, new Pentecostal congregations continue to have significant bases among the less well off. In urban areas, a single mega-church will frequently draw membership from a full spectrum of social classes, while small store front churches in slums cater to the urban poor. New generation Pentecostal and charismatic churches are a formidable presence in many rural areas as well, as urban mother churches spawn rural branches and entrepreneurial individuals set up autonomous rural congregations.

**Pentecostalism and Modernity**

Recent scholarship has called into question the usefulness of abstractions like modernity and globalization in the social sciences. In a recent article, Harri Englund and James Leach cast a critical eye on what they term the ‘meta-narrative’ of modernity,
specifically as it functions in the exercise of anthropological fieldwork. They acknowledge the viability of contemporary concerns to "‘situate’ the local and the particular in ‘wider’ contexts" and the efforts of scholars of modernity like Arjun Appadurai (1996) who argue that anthropologists in particular should not "‘assume that as they approach the local they approach something more elementary, more contingent, and thus more real than life seen in larger-scale perspectives’." Yet, they also argue that anthropologists using the trope of modernity as an organizing principle run the risk of sideling a specific community’s “own contexts for ethnographic understanding.”

Such an argument against the use of modernity or globalization as an organizing principle could be similarly applied to my current attempt to map the growth of a neo-Pentecostalism onto a generalized experience of ‘modernity’ and globalization. Yet, as Birgit Meyer responds to Englund and Leach’s criticism of her scholarship on contemporary Pentecostalism in Ghana:

I consider “modernity” productive for my work because the notion enables me to get beyond a view of cultures as separate, bounded entities standing by themselves (without, however, losing sight of cultural specificity), to consider the history of encounters between Western colonial agents and local people from a critical perspective beyond the modernization paradigm, to take into account actual global entanglements and similarities in postcolonial conditions (the “wider contexts” alluded to by Englund and Leach are of course not abstractions on the part of social scientists but lived-in realities), and to develop a shared language which makes possible comparison between different cases as well as debate among social scientists.

Admittedly constrained by the scope of my own fieldwork, which was regional- as opposed to community-specific, in my own analysis I lean toward Appadurai and Meyer’s perspectives that allow for analysis within wider contexts. Indeed, like Meyer—who was struck by “the strong emphasis placed on the wish to be ‘modern,’ to ‘make a complete break with the past,’ to be ‘in control of oneself,’ etcetera” that she found in Ghanaian Pentecostal discourse—I found that the symbolisms of modernity and globalization was as much present for Pentecostals as it was for me in regards to developing a ‘context for ethnographic understanding.’ Thus in this analysis of the Pentecostalism, perhaps imperfectly, but I think usefully, categorized as ‘neo,’ I will demonstrate how the rising popularity of the movement lies in believers’ ability to rearticulate fundamental aspects of the Pentecostal creed in the context of shared, novel challenges and opportunities. These were, by and large, defined by those I interviewed through the idiom of globalization and development. I will thus approach the topic of modernity from the emic perspective, particularly as it has been articulated through the gospel of prosperity and enabled Pentecostals to own the concept by molding it to local needs and desires.

On the other hand, in our analysis of the Pentecostal ‘neo’ we need not confine ourselves exclusively to the post-modern particularism of Englund and Leach.

---

36 Englund and Leach, “Ethnography,” 236.
Lewison Ferguson (2006) has, like Meyer, noted that terms like globalization have had real, functional impacts on populations across the globe, particularly in economically and politically marginalized areas.  

In light of these “actual global entanglements and similarities,” we can broaden our scope of inquiry to situate how emic articulations of modernity are produced through their relationship with contemporary global processes and shared experiences—i.e. globalization—enabling us to examine the dynamics of the movement’s international scale. Noting the concentration of Pentecostal growth in the global South, Cox (1995) points to the significance of the relationship between globalization, development and the neo-Pentecostal movement. These will be the primary factors of modernity that I draw on in describing the changing needs and concerns of Pentecostal individuals in East Africa and the ways in which Pentecostalism has been able to, or been redefined to, address these concerns.

The Pentecostal Cosmology

Several authors have argued that in our contemporary historical ‘moment,’ global economic liberalization has allowed neoliberal capitalism to promote a novel cosmology of its own. In the kingdom of capitalism, consumption becomes the fundamental “measure of wealth, health and vitality” at the expense of class and other ‘natural’ hierarchies. Through newly promised social mobility, the principle of consumption provides the individual not only the freedom, but also the onus to demonstrate success and self-worth through

---

40 James Fernandez points to the very real impacts of ‘globalization’ that occurred through colonization. He notes, “whatever the impact of the various cultural superstructures, Africans were being brought more or less successfully (or more or less forcibly) into new maintenance systems—those of mercantilist capitalism, with emphasis upon economic individualism, consumption, wage labor, a competitive reward system, and taxation without evident redistribution.” James Fernandez, “African Religious Movements: The Worst or the Best of All Possible Microcosms,” Issue: A Journal of Opinion (vol. 8, no. 4, 2000), 51.


43 The Comaroffs expand that in social theory consumption “has become a prime mover” becoming the “factor, the principle, held to determine definitions of value, the construction of identities, and even the shape of global ecumene.” Comaroff and Comaroff, “Millennial,” 294. This conception of consumption, particularly as it becomes a means of not only achieving class mobility, but also of articulating identity in the realm of global exchange, resonates with force in prosperity theology.

44 Ruth Marshall-Fratani explains Appadurai’s concepts in the context of Nigerian Pentecostalism, noting how his sense of ‘neighborhood,’ i.e. ‘local’ identities and social relationships become harder to maintain and reproduce as a result of the ways in which “identities are imposed and manipulated by the Nigerian state, but also related to economic crisis and the strains it puts on local networks and social relationships, increased rural-urban migration, and perhaps most importantly, the ways in which the global images, ideas, commodity forms and technologies, have been absorbed by local culture. As Appadurai argues, in this context identity appears less and less as something tacitly accepted and reproduced as ‘natural,’ and more and more a question of conscious choice, justification and representation.” Ruth Marshall-Fratani, “Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism,” Journal of Religion in Africa (vol. 28, no. 3, 1998), 299.
material. Cosmologically, Pentecostalism’s prosperity theology’s assertion of this-worldly evil and salvation framed in a language of modernization and development provides a theological framework for making sense of a world of non-transparent wealth flows and massive inequality. Its message of individuality and rebirth provides a novel discourse in which individuals are able to transcend former ‘traditional’ geographic and social space cursed with poverty and backwardness. It has held particular appeal for populations of young, forward looking individuals seeking to leave behind the failures of their nations’ pasts and embrace the bright possibilities of technological modernity and material prosperity. In the context of globalization, this imagery has become pervasive in popular culture through, for example, the omnipresent music of Akon and Jay-Z, who provide the pounding soundtrack to Nairobi bus rides, or in American shows like Desperate Housewives or 24 carried on KTN, the leading television network. Images of affluence are further brought home through the dominance of the tourism industry that caters largely to wealthy Westerners.

In neo-Pentecostalism, a discourse of demonology is used to account for economic failure and dispossession. Demonic forces are immediate and omnipresent. One young pastor told me that a primary activity in his congregation was that of the exorcism of demonic spirits manifesting their forces through poverty, illness as well as troubles at home or in the work place. In many services, the spirits of poverty and unemployment were addressed at particular length. This threat not only applies on a personal level, its influence can extend to wider physical geographies. A traveling Nairobi-based evangelist portrayed his city, en masse, as under the influence of the Devil. America’s victory over Saddam Hussein, on the other hand, was attributed to divine national favor, as was Israel’s continuing defense from its hostile Muslim neighbors. This becomes a matter of particular concern for middle and upper class populations, who, despite success within their own communities, feel constrained in the international sphere by nation-level marginalization. Pentecostal prosperity theology and demonology are drawn on to explain generalized third world failures with sentiments that “economic collapse is a sign of national sin.”

---

45 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Millennial.”
46 It is perhaps important to underline that this emphasis on the material presence of the devil and demons is by no means limited to African Pentecostals. One of the British missionaries whom I met was, in fact, by far the individual most involved with demonology of anyone I spoke with. He mentioned conferences that he had attended in the UK and presented involved theological arguments based on the work of Derek Prince, one of the fathers of contemporary Western demonology.
47 Service Gospel Celebration Centre, 17/05/09.
48 Service God’s Victory Centre, 22/02/09.
49 Service Winning Faith Outreach Centre, 19/04/09.
50 The professional classes were often the ones hit the hardest by the economic crises of the 1980s. “Some have argued that the collapse of the economies encouraged many professionals to seek solace in a spirituality that proffered the prospects of recovery.” Kalu, African, 138.
51 These are the words of Filipino preacher Jun Vencen. Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford and Susan Rose, Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism (New York: Routledge, 1996), 83.
results of divine displeasure. Eunor Guti, the wife Zimbabwean Pentecostal church ZAOGA leader, Ezekiel Guti, expressed the logic as such:

People are trying to give help to third world persons. They find third world persons do not prosper. Money is being poured in a bucket. It's being poured in a bucket that has holes. Nothing is being achieved. Billions and billions of dollars have been poured out. Hallelujah! But nothing is happening in Africa. Africa is remaining under the Spirit of Poverty.

This sentiment reflects the frustrations introduced by the vast complexity of modern day economic systems, which function to obscure the relationship between production and wealth. As East African economies—as well as those of developing countries across the globe—have been integrated into the global marketplace they become more prone to international market fluctuations and cycles of poverty. As Jean and John Comaroff point out in their article “Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming”:

Crisis after crisis in the global economy, and growing income disparities on a planetary scale, make it painfully plain that... the neoliberal stress on consumption as the prime source of value is palpably problematic. If scholars have been slow to reflect on this fact, people all over the world—not least those in places where there have been sudden infusions of commodities, of new forms of wealth—have not. Many have been quick to give voice, albeit in different registers, to their perplexity at the enigma of this wealth: of its sources and the capriciousness of its distribution, of the mysterious forms it takes, of its slipperiness, of the opaque relations between means and ends embodied in it.

Pentecostal pastors will often address subjects of international inequality and the mystification of wealth in their sermons. America in particular has come to embody this enigma of wealth. As one pastor put it, “Wealth does not come through labor... look around you, many people who labor very hard are still poor, the wealthy people don’t labor, rich men in America are not sweating, all they do is sit and think. Just think!”

The rise of prosperity theology, and its implied divinization of the language of modernity and progress, has promoted the concurrent demonization of the backward and ‘traditional.’ A number of pastors made reference to the worship of traditional religions as one source of bad energy. One spoke of the need for new revelation as the old knowledge was “stinking” (ananuka).

52 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Millennial,” 298. This sentiment was poignantly expressed me by one young safari guide who, sadly surveying Lake Elimentaita’s declining flamingo population, mentioned to me that it was because of the violence following the failure of the 2007 national election. In response to my inquiry as to why, (I had been expecting a decline in food availability or changing migration patterns) he said simply, “We made God angry.” The post-election violence was frequently raised as the source of misfortunes including the current drought.


54 Equality has similarly been tied to millenarian expectations of dispensation and material modernity in the cargo cults of Papua New Guinea. As Andrew Lattas notes, “these movements sought to realize a new age of equality with white people, with Melanesians sharing the cargo that villagers saw arriving on European ships and planes.” Andrew Lattas, Cultures of Secrecy: Reinventing Race in Bush Kaliai Cargo Cults (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), xi.

55 Service Winning Faith Outreach Centre, 19/04/09.
Another spoke of the presence of curses, which arose from ancestral worship of demons and have been carried down many generations. He noted that curses continue to be very prevalent and, echoing the demonization of the old asserted that jealous members of the older generations often curse their young successful children.\textsuperscript{56} Hofer quotes a number of other Pentecostal preachers in Kenya and Uganda who reiterate the concern of trans-generational curses.\textsuperscript{57}

Attention to the past within discourses of modernization is not unique to Pentecostalism. Marshall-Fratani (1998) points to a need for individuals and collectives to domesticate and subdue the past in order to embrace ideas of linear progress via human agency. She goes on to note that Pentecostalism’s attentive, albeit negative, acknowledgement of the past “provides a version of ‘modernity’ which is more compelling and more accessible.”\textsuperscript{58}

While contemporary Pentecostals seem to draw on a long history of mission and colonial essentialization and degradation of the traditional, it is important to note the extent to which the current level of hostility toward the traditional marks a break with that of the older AICs. These churches tended toward a transposition of Christianity onto traditional beliefs, offering Christianity as a better alternative for addressing preconceived phenomena, such as evil spirits. Pentecostalism today, on the other hand, is much more outspoken in its attack on African traditional religion as an institution and defined social space and draws heavily on new, Western-based, scholars of demonology, such as Derek Prince. The difference is particularly highlighted between neo-Pentecostalism and ‘Ethiopian’ AICs which evolved in a consciously African response to mission racism. The significance of this shift in attitude toward the traditional reflects an increasing urgency for change and ‘complete break with the past’ that seems to be felt by many members of the younger generation.

While providing a means for understanding misfortune, the cognizant moral structure of the Pentecostal cosmology also supplies hope for this-worldly, miraculous salvation through this break with spaces and narratives of failure. This promise is more than Fernandez’s ‘opiate option’ in which elites allow “religious microcosms their microcosmic sphere of influence for the compensations they provide an otherwise disgruntled populace.”\textsuperscript{59} As opposed to a surrender of responsibility, or internal retreat, it is envisioned as an active assertion of self-determination and rebirth into a larger world and the transcendence of former microcosms. An unmediated relationship with the divine and access to potent miracles has been one of the prime movers of the religion since its inception in Azusa Street.

\textsuperscript{56} This strongly echoes Derek Prince’s ‘curse theology’ whose writings are often referred to and sold across Kenya and Uganda. Hofer, \textit{Implications}, 185.

\textsuperscript{57} For example, “Though people suffer as a consequence of their personal sin, they could also suffer due to the sins of their parents, grand parents and great grand parents.” And a prayer: “Dear Father, I present the whole of my family members before you. I command every manipulation in my family to manifest... I come against all the demons of manipulation on assignment in my family.” Hofer, \textit{Implications}, 188.

\textsuperscript{58} Marshall-Fratani, “Mediating,” 292. Note that, in the case of Africa in particular, this process of the invention of tradition and domestication of the past has been institutionalized through vehicles like the colonial state and missions. Western missionaries today continue to arrive with a highly distorted understanding of ‘traditional religions.’ One Pentecostal missionary from England, seeming to draw largely on Egyptian mythology, spoke dismissively of the ‘native beliefs’ in which people worshipped ‘things with crocodile heads’.

\textsuperscript{59} Fernandez, “African,” 51.
doctrine of personal salvation, equality before God and control over one’s destiny, has become all the more important in light of promised social mobility contradicted by experienced inequality and lack of opportunity. The Pentecostal theology reaffirms the believer’s, literally, ‘God given’ right to divinely dispensed success manifest in material evidence. The allegation of equal opportunity pledged in capitalism—its destruction of social class and traditional barriers to mobility—is reinvigorated in this cosmology.

Thus, in services disadvantage is never an acceptable barrier to both trying and succeeding. A traveling preacher in one of the more progressive churches I attended asserted that “some people make excuses for themselves, they say, I am too short or I am black, I can’t do this thing. I can’t approach this white woman because I’m a black man. You are wrong! All you need to do is stand in your place with God, because with God, you can achieve anything!” In another service I attended, located in rural Kenya with a congregation for whom accessing education is a significant weight, the pastor assured them, “winning is not about physical strength, a paper degree or certificate. It’s not about what you know, it’s about knowing and understanding God, knowing that your resource is God!” Similarly, in a less well-to-do church in rural Uganda, a young preacher in a smartly pressed shirt and a short silver tie declared in English (with partner echoing him in rapid translation to Rotoro) ‘even people who cannot speak English now will be able to rise to prominence… you see people who used to walk, now they ride in cars, even in planes!”

This revealed understanding of success, bears distinct similarities to capitalist imagery, which portrays entrepreneurial insight as the sacred bearer of progress and growth. One of the best illustrations of this connection was observed in the Winning Faith Outreach Center in which a young energetic preacher told a story about a fellow minister who, one day during service, was moved by the power of the Lord. Pointing to a young man in the congregation, he declared ‘you are receiving a holy revelation.’ The revelation immediately (physically) struck the young man and was received in the form of an idea, an inspiration to manufacture Fords rather than repair them. This idea propelled him to instant success. He is now in London, with a billion dollars ‘flowing to him’. In this story, divine revelation is explicitly related to Henry Ford’s classic example of entrepreneurial success. This connection of divine and entrepreneurial insight was echoed across congregations. “Do you see prosperity or poverty? When you look at a tree what do you see? Do you see a guitar, do you see a factory?” “Divine revelation is new insight. In times of new challenges, times of new technology, we need new revelation. We need new revelations to meet the challenges of new times.”

The Pentecostal Congregation

While their cosmology functions to lay the groundwork for Pentecostals’ orientation within the metaphysical universe—providing existential explanations and solutions—the Pentecostal congregation provides a means of translating these principles and values into everyday life. In contemporary East African Pentecostalism, the congregation acts as a microcosm of an idealized, insulated, modern world in which...
Pentecostals are provided with the opportunity to redefine themselves in a new image. The microcosm provides legitimacy to this experience through a direct and physical spiritual experience as well as technical, logistical and emotional support to become successful individuals both in their religion and in the wider world. We will explore how this process of self re-definition occurs in the context of conversion, the experience of the service as well as in the activities of para-church organizations.

For the Pentecostals I spoke with, conversion to their religion was generally referred to as a turning point, marking a revolution in all spheres of life. The aspects that this transformation took were generally abstinence from alcohol, drugs and cigarettes, greater sexual discipline, and a change in social circles as they moving away from dangerous influences. While the extent to which the average Pentecostal’s daily life in fact conforms to these principles is debatable and, of course, varies among individuals, there is significance in their reflective understanding of conversion as such a rupture and opportunity. This perception reflects Marshall-Fratani’s (1998) assertion that the Pentecostal conversion is “a model for the construction of identity” in which the choice is wholly dependent on individual impetus. In this regard, becoming “born again” encapsulates a particular attitude towards agency and social change,” one which tends to fall in line with the values of modern capitalist society.67

As Dearman (1974) notes, the usefulness of the concept of ‘dominant values’ can be dubious.68 This is particularly true when coupled with the ambivalence of the concept of modernity. Yet, even without imposing a value set from an objective standpoint and instead drawing on Pentecostals’ own self-reflections, it was clear that they themselves saw their conversion as a means of conforming their lives to the image of a disciplined, successful professional—an image often described as Christ-like.69 Indeed, biblical

69 David Smilde explores the ‘instrumental’ aspect of Pentecostal conversion—belief as a means of achieving an external ends (economic prosperity, discipline or economic success)—in Venezuelan Pentecostalism. Smilde points to the common inability of social scientists to reconcile the strategic, self-serving benefits of Pentecostal conversion and its integrity as a genuine culture of belief. He counters this dilemma arguing that “the Pentecostal narrative predicates the act of believing in such a way that the individual is not the only or even the most important agent in the [act of conversion]” thus, “by emphasizing God’s agency, the individual minimizes his own responsibility for the belief thereby increasing its external validity.” This process occurs through by the convert “[working] through his or her memories’ to highlight God’s agency,” specifically in the identification of ‘testimonies’ of the work of God in their lives, something I encountered in the stories of many Pentecostals with whom I spoke. I would further highlight how this ‘narrative play’ is embedded in the aforementioned Pentecostal cosmology of an immediately present and active physicality of the supernatural in which worldly events and actions, including one’s own, are an embodiment of the ultimate war of good and evil.
figures, pictured as successful were often drawn upon in the illustration of Godly behavior as pastors told stories highlighting business acumen and wise investment. Pentecostal services are attended in highly professional wear that expresses exuberance and success as opposed to the demure conservatism that is often found in mainline services. This is particularly true among the younger generation. Young women are attired in ostentatious sequined skirt suits; men are dressed in sharp jackets with brightly colored shirts and ties. This formality of dress seems to be generally maintained beyond church and into believers’ everyday lives.

The central function of the congregation is to provide the location and activities of the church service. The effort and thought that Pentecostals give to their appearance in church attendance is representative of the veneration they hold for this act. This is unsurprising given that the everyday transformations required by the Pentecostal conversion are ultimately grounded in the all-important need for the convert to “ensure, through his thoughts and deeds, that he is a fitting vessel for the ‘infilling’ of the Holy Spirit, an event which is centralized and brought to fruition in the sphere of the Pentecostal service.”

It is the service that seems to encapsulate and act out the heart of the religion’s appeal. It does so by providing the vehicle and space in which the material expression of divine favor is fulfilled. It is here where the Pentecostal finds physical proof of the individual’s immediate access to God and where the divinely dictated equality and empowerment of all believers is realized.


71 Crusade Gospel Celebration Centre, 17/05/09

72 Crusade Gospel Outreach Centre, 30/04/09.
involved in church leadership and activities. Many of the young, specifically male, Pentecostals with whom I spoke had become involved in church leadership shortly after conversion. Many of them spoke of the newfound confidence they received through these engagements.

Many individuals I spoke with had not been able to continue their education past secondary or even primary school. For ambitious young people church often seemed to offer a substitute for this lost opportunity. Sermons—magnified intensely through overloaded sound-systems—will often adopt aspects of a formal university lecture, as pastors make points in a numbered outline or employ the services of an assistant to record the sermon in point form on a presentation board. Crusades present themselves as educational opportunities. “Gospel Outreach Ministry Presents 11th April ’09 School of Ministry…Come with a Bible, Note Book, Pen…” read one poster. The latter request is, in fact, hardly necessary. Particularly in more wealthy areas worshipers arrive equipped like students attending lecture, carrying several prayer books, notepads and pencil cases. During service, many in the congregation take attentive notes. When asked what drew him to his church, one young man referred to what he learned from the traveling preachers from Nairobi who gave lessons on business as well as religion.

In addition to the confidence that leadership activities instill in Pentecostal members, there is also an element of skill building that congregations provide their members. Through their extensive embrace of technology and the imagery of modernity, young Pentecostals, particularly migrants from rural areas, become versatile in the language and tools of the professional business world. An atmosphere of professionalism is clearly displayed in crusades and services, which are manned by a team of official ushers. They display large, often colorful, printed banners and posters. Tables selling merchandise are set up and manned near the front doors. These set ups are complemented by conspicuous displays of modern technology. The presence of a keyboard and sound system—powered by a church-owned generator in rural congregations—is nearly ubiquitous and frequently rises to the level of a five or six piece band equipped with electric guitars, drum kits and soundboards.

Pentecostal use of the media has become particularly important, both in its usefulness for evangelism, as well as in its emblematic ownership of this key symbol of technological modernity. In the early years of the movement, the media, particularly as used by Western-based televangelists, played a key role in the spread of a particularly American form of contemporary Pentecostalism. However control of the medium has been diffused as technology becomes more widely accessible. Radio, which represents a less expensive and more extensive alternative to television in East Africa, is an important means of local religious dissemination. One young pastor from rural Uganda with whom I spoke was tenaciously proud of maintaining a one hour weekly evangelism radio program, despite the high financial and labor costs. Another localization of the media has occurred through the increasing popularity of recording church services. In many more urban and middle-class services one is confronted by young men with large cameras and tripods stationed prominently in the center aisle or roaming through the congregation for close ups. They are members of the ‘media ministry,’ one of the many church organizations run by the

73 Hofer notes, perhaps humorously but quite sincerely, that, “A Pentecostal church can do without a cross or shrine but not without a sound system.” Implications, 11.
congregation, which provide access to technological and organizational skill building. For Pentecostals, media, as Marshall-Fratani points out, becomes a mode of appropriating modernity, and the material and symbolic goods it offers… we may see pentecostalism as an example of one of the ‘micronarratives’ and other expressive forms which allow modernity to be rewritten more as vernacular globalization and less as a concession to large-scale national and international policies.  

As we have seen, the congregation thus provides a space, both physical and psychological, where Pentecostals can build skills and confidence to succeed in the wider world. Yet, the support of the congregation does not stop at the church doors. Many pastors actively engage with their congregations in the search for opportunities in the outside world. Some congregations made announcements of local job openings. Pastor Paul of the Gospel Celebration Centre announced an opening for a position in a large Insurance Company and went on to proudly state that the company had come specifically to him because they knew that “our church produced people aggressive in sales.” Pastors read encouraging testimonials from people who had succeeded in finding employment through their faith as well as supportive congratulations to members who had, for example, been able to obtain a visa to visit Europe or been chosen to attend an international business conference.

The professional trappings of Pentecostal services, their striking employment of technology and advertising as well as their emphasis on financial success, have led some outsiders, including many East Africans, to criticize Pentecostals for operating their churches as businesses. Indeed many thriving Pentecostal leaders would not necessarily dispute this claim, although they would assert that the end goal is, of course, for the glory of God. The business aspect of the church is in tune with the goals and spirit of the movement itself. In many cases, the congregation becomes a nexus of business entrepreneurs. One pastor called on the congregation to view the upcoming crusade in financial terms, “think of the conference as a business deal, choose to partner your business with the God of our church, this is a partnership that will pay off.” I met one young woman who was doing just this, looking to partner the services of her internet company with the church for the conference. She also offered her services to me and mentioned that I could contact her through the church. With its production-focused attitude and consumerist bent, the Pentecostal movement has helped to foster a wide range of dependent industries in East Africa including design services, music stores, media producers, publishing industries and much more. This business focus of the movement has generated appeal among professional and academic classes. These individuals also tend to make up the primary membership of para-church business organizations—such as Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International, Women’s Aglow, and Gideons International—which have “simply exploded into many parts of the continent within the last two decades.”

---

75 Service Gospel Celebration Centre, 17/05/09.
76 Service Gospel Celebration Centre, 17/05/09.
77 Kalu notes this is particularly true in relation to megachurches, which have sprung up in more urban areas, African, 135.
78 Kalu, African, 125.
The Pentecostal Community

Having examined the ways in which Pentecostalism lays a foundation for the rebirth of the individual through a groundwork of cosmological doctrines—realized in everyday life in the local space of congregations—we now turn our attention to the place of this individual in the wider Pentecostal community. In contemporary Pentecostalism, the decentralized, international character of the movement and conflation of geographical space through the mechanisms of globalization, has radicalized the Pentecostal convert’s ‘break with the past’ by providing new avenues for self-definition over and above previous identities. Here we will explore the novelties and importance of the wider Pentecostal identity and the ways in which it shapes Pentecostal relations both on the local and international levels. For contemporary East Africans, not only has this re-spatialization of identity allowed for novel agency in the formation and location of the self in the wider world, but through the provision of this opportunity, Pentecostalism has become a site in which Africans and populations of other nations of the global South are able to contest narratives of dependency and international marginalization.

As we have seen, Pentecostalism wields a powerful blow to established social spaces. The absolute polarization of good and evil in their cosmology outweighs any worldly castes or segregations, and the mentality of Hofer’s ‘suffering community’ functions to solidify this metaphysical divide. Yet, as Marshall-Fratani (1998) emphasizes, today—primarily as a result of the transnational mediation of the religion—this community has taken a fundamentally different form. The transnational aspect of this new identity has been particularly important in the East African context, in which the relationship between Christian and African identities has been an arena of persistent contestation. While Spirit and Holiness Churches—Sundkler’s ‘Zionist’ tendency—isolated themselves in closed communities, African Ethiopian churches, on the other hand, emphasized a specifically African ownership of Christianity. The East African Pentecostals with whom I spoke, however, were eager to leave behind both isolation and marginalization. For them, the international character of Pentecostalism provided a profound source of pride and confidence, not due to a desire to become less African (or Kenyan or Maasai, etc.) but rather as a chance to gain an identity as both African and more than African: to be able to assert themselves as equal members of a wide-reaching, globally powerful community.

In the East African context, Pentecostalism’s complete break with the past is not necessarily an eradication of previous identities. Drawing on Appadurai’s idea of the imagination as constitutive of modern subjectivity, Marshall-Fratani notes that the Pentecostal conversion’s “projection on a global scale of images, discourses and ideas about renewal, change and salvation opens up possibilities for local actors to incorporate these into their everyday lives.” In this sense, the break rather

79 Marshall-Fratani, “Mediating.”
80 As Englund points out, “The belief in the omnipresence of the Devil is, when combined with the belief in one’s own salvation, a source of formidable social critique. It dismisses conventional terms of social critique—wealth, complexion, nationality, gender—as irrelevant and replaces them with unflinching confidence in a sharp distinction between God and the Devil.” Englund “Christian,” 96.
81 Marshall-Fratani, “Mediating.” 290. Later she gives a more detailed illustration of how the seemingly unnecessary use of televisions and mediating
allows for membership in a novel ‘de-localized’ community which, through the decentralization of the Pentecostal imagination, generated in part through the growing amount of locally produced media and materials, allows the individual revolutionary power to reinvent and, importantly, relocate the self in the wider world.

The principle of ‘radical equality’ underlying the Pentecostal community shapes an international support network, built on fundamentally different principles than that of the prevailing charity relationships of international aid and development. By identifying the divine as the sole source of grace, Pentecostalism depersonalizes acts of charity and challenges the dominance structures of aid relationships. As one Englishwoman offering charity from a home congregation put it, “Don’t thank me, this is God’s doing, not mine.” The pastor reiterated this sentiment, assuring her that “We will pray that God will enable your people in England to continue to partner with this congregation.”

While this depersonalization functions to empower recipients of Pentecostal aid flows, these relationships also do not conform to Jean technology within services functions in the creation of this wider ‘de-localized’ identity: “The ‘breach’ between past histories, everyday realities and the promises of ‘development’ is narrowed not only in Pentecostal discourse, but the very spaces where people come to worship reflect a conscious project of creating modern, functional spaces and forms of association. It is not simply the way these spaces are ‘delocalised,’ with their emphasis on cleanliness, order and punctuality, the use of modern technology such as computers, electrical instruments, video recorders, televisions, but the way in which, in particular through the use of modern media, a sense of ‘delocalised’ community is created, one in which members are ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ in Christ before being members of different age groups, ethnic groups and social classes.” Marshall-Fratani, “Mediating,” 292.

Francois Bayart’s (2000) ‘extroversion’ of cultivated dependency. Bayart questioned the unidirectional power flow in African dependency, asserting that aid relationships are manipulated by ‘big men’ seeking to secure funds for their own projects. Yet, as Englund (2003) found in his research with Malawian Pentecostals, “Pentecostal extraversion secures membership in a global community as much among the donors as among the recipients of assistance.” Englund goes on to note that:

[Malawian Pentecostals] are less likely to advance any form of inferiority as a ploy to cultivate external links. When they draw wealthy missionaries’ attention to their material poverty, they do not envisage themselves as perpetual poor relatives but as wealthy missionaries’ relatives in the Spirit whose poverty is a scandal in an otherwise equal relationship.83

While this redefinition of aid and support has allowed African Pentecostals to tap into available resources without being marginalized as dependent, it is important to note that in many cases Third World Pentecostal churches have demonstrated remarkable ability to maintain economic independence. The scale and direction of Evangelical aid flows are often misrepresented in literature on the subject.84 On one end of the spectrum, mega-churches and their celebrity preachers such as Benson Idahosa, Duncan Williams and Mensa Otabil, have proven spectacularly capable of self-sustenance and now represent some of the largest Pentecostal churches in the world. On the other hand, some individual congregations simply don’t have access to

84 Kalu, African.
international resources. Others—either as a result of negative interactions with Western missionaries or desire to demonstrate church success—actively avoid seeking foreign aid. As Kalu notes, “some of the incautious literature canvassed Western sources of funding and dependency models even as many African churches struggled to promote independence by paying honorarium to visiting pastors.”

Similarly, I drew negative reactions from a number of Pentecostals when asking about missionary sponsorship. In a conversation about foreign visitors, an assistant preacher at the Gospel Celebration Centre quickly dismissed the topic of foreign funding, assuring me that their church “does quite well.” He said that if a visiting minister can’t pay for himself, his church finds a way to sponsor them.

This brings us back to the subject of the Pentecostal command to ‘go forth’ into the world and African Pentecostals have been remarkably successful in this regard. In their success we find yet another means of disputing narratives of marginalization and dependency. Pentecostalism’s growth in East Africa (and throughout the developing world) has opened an arena in which even the vast material resources of the developed world are seen to have failed to out compete the determination and skill of their African counterparts. Today, African preachers are increasingly transposing this skill into the international sphere. The term ‘reverse flow’ has arisen in response, referring to the growing number of immigrant churches and itinerant evangelists who have felt the call to bring the gospel to counter the failing morality of the West. Many of my interviewees rebuked me for assuming that their pastors travelled abroad only for training. Several of the Pentecostals I spoke with, all young ambitious men involved in leadership positions with their churches, brought up the subject of diversity in relation to the evangelism. I believe that this topic strikes at the heart of what membership in the wider Pentecostal community meant for them. One friend glowed with sudden animation when I inquired as to why international connections might be important. He explained:

You heard what our pastor said about everyone being unique? I believe that we all have a different way of packaging the gospel; some will see it and share it differently. You see, someone will come from Canada to Kenya and they will explain it one way and it will speak to this person, who has never heard before. A Kenyan will go to Canada and reach this person. This is why God has made us all different and why exchange is so important.

My friend’s sentiments echoed his pastor’s earlier assertion to the youth service that “You can go into America without letting America into you!” Meanwhile, for another of my Pentecostal friends, the validation of diversity seemed to displace concerns of wealth disparities. In a conversation about global inequality I asked him if he thought everyone should be equal. He thought about it and said well yes, but God liked difference. “That is why you are white and I am black.” For my friend and his diverse array of brothers and sisters ‘united in the blood of Christ’ across the globe, the mandate to cross-cultural evangelization… The cry goes beyond the black manifest destiny to evangelize Africa to the ultimate mandate to rescue the global north where Christianity is declining.” Kalu, African, 288.
significance of the Pentecostal principle of equality lies not only in an ecclesiological promise of future wealth and prosperity, but in an ontological assurance of human equality spanning all manner of geography and diversity.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The riotous expansion of Pentecostalism in recent decades can be understood in its relationship to processes of globalization; specifically, in its liberating ability to traverse and transcend social and geographical space to orient and empower believers within a chaotic and unpredictable world. The experiences of Pentecostal believers who I met contest popularized discourses of religion as opiate or brainwashing. In its relationship to the modern world, Pentecostalism does seem able to “complement the technical order and enrich it.” Yet its import is deeper than mere social functionalism. Pentecostalism speaks more to Marx’s less referenced image of religion as “the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.” A sentiment by no means relegated to the developing world—as the truly global scope of the contemporary movement indicates. Dissatisfaction in an historical moment of millennial capitalism and consumption-driven individualization echoes across continents, uniting us in shared experiences of dislocation and disempowerment. Contemporary Pentecostals have appropriated the failing promises of progress and development. They have seen them revived through the descended Spirit, manifestly present in the beating heart of the Pentecostal service. In this revival, Pentecostals not only find hope for a more prosperous future but, perhaps more importantly, assurance and confidence in their personal equality and agency today.

---

89 Fernandez, “African,” 50. Indeed Fernandez sees a degree of irrationality, or belief as crucial to the acceptance of ‘rationalization.’ He argues, “The reason and purposiveness of the technical order, for their part, inevitably rest on images of right order which paradoxically are difficult or impossible to generate by reason alone—archetypal images that are found in mythical narrative and reiterated in millenarian expectation.” Fernandez, “African,” 50.


---

**Bibliography**

**Primary Sources**

**List of Locations**

Agape Hope Centre  
Gospel Celebration Centre  
Gospel Outreach Centre
God’s Victory Centre
Kyanyawara Christian Fellowship
Nanyuki Vineyard Church
Winning Faith Outreach Centre

Secondary Sources


