THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF TRANSGATIONAL PENTECOSTALISM IN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

The article contrasts the burgeoning Pentecostal movement of the global South with the relative secularity of the European context, both Western and Eastern, into which Pentecostal migrants move. It examines processes of globalization and theories, notably that of Eisenstadt, that relate recent religious revitalizations to globalization. It suggests that the negative characterizations of Pentecostalism in such theories stem in part from Eurocentric evolutionary conceptions of modernity built into Western secularization theory, and in part from a failure to appreciate the centrality of certain constitutive antinomies in Pentecostalism. The argument stresses the global and hybrid character of Pentecostalism, its combination of European and indigenous spirituality, and its paradoxical ability to be both traditional and hyper-modern, local and global. It relates these to other Pentecostal antinomies, and outlines the debates about how these paradoxes operate in Pentecostalism’s relation to capitalism, politics and modern identity. The secularization processes of the West are contrasted with the continuing “enchantment” of the global South. The distinctive patterns of religion and secularity of Western and Eastern Europe are outlined and contrasted with the non-territorial nature of the transnational diaspora Pentecostal churches in Europe.

Keywords: Transnationalism, globalization, Pentecostalism.

Introduction

Pentecostal churches are dotted around all the cities of Europe today, sometimes right in the cosmopolitan centre, more often in remoter enclaves of immigrant settlement. The worshippers are not, for the most part, indigenous Europeans, but have come from Africa, South East Asia,
Latin America and every part of the global South, as migrants, guest workers, refugees and even missionaries. Their churches are busy, noisy and colourful, occasionally too much so for the taste of their immediate neighbours. They provide a sharp contrast with the low intensity religion of the established and ex-established national churches of Europe, and with the taken-for-granted secularity of the urban commercial culture that surrounds them.

This essay is about the global context of the transnational Pentecostal movement out of which these churches have emerged. The differences between that global context and Europe as the “receiving culture” will be the prime focus of the analysis: neither the Pentecostal migrant communities nor indigenous European Pentecostalism will concern us except as background issues. Indigenous European Pentecostalism is a relatively small and stable milieu compared with the rapidly growing Pentecostalism of the global South, although the movement has experienced a recent surge among certain marginal or peripheral populations in Europe, particularly Eastern Europe, notably among the peripatetic Roma. Some European and Scandinavian Pentecostal churches, such as the Swedish ones, remain very active in the mission field, notably in the more troubled areas of Africa, but overall, historic European, more particularly Western European Pentecostalism is not an area of notable growth.

The new Pentecostal churches in Europe largely function as diaspora communities, drawing members from migrants with similar ethnic and national backgrounds who share a language, and attracting very few lasting adherents from among the local population of the European cities in which they settle. Where they are not straightforwardly diaspora churches, they tend to be mega-churches with a multi-ethnic constituency, again mainly migrant even when the language they share is that of their common local host nation. Very few of these are as thoroughly indigenized as the largest European mega-church, the African-led Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations in Kyiv which has some 25,000 members, predominantly Ukrainians: as we shall see below, Eastern Europe after the Soviets is a very different situation from Western Europe.

The differences between the European context into which Pentecostal migrants move, and the global context from which they derive partly turns on the issue of secularization in Europe as against the continuing “enchantment” of the rest of the world. Despite the current popularity of analyses of “postsecularity”, the secularization thesis retains a modest empirical plausibility as applied to Western Europe, even though...
its wilder claims to be the universal future have mostly been abandoned in face of religious revitalization in all the major world religions elsewhere. The discussion below will examine theoretical frameworks that have been deployed to make sense of the resurgence of religion in recent decades, even in the areas of Europe that had been assumed to be most heavily secularized. The process of globalization forms the backdrop to all these recent religious developments. We therefore turn, first, to a brief review of that slippery but now indispensable concept, globalization.

Globalization

Most analyses of globalization suggest it is a process that erodes the significance of all kinds of boundaries, especially those of space and time (Giddens, 1990; Beyer, 1993; Beyer and Beaman, 2007), and increases hybridity, that is, mixtures and fusions of once distinct social and cultural elements (Bhabha, 1994; Appadurai, 1996). For many, globalization is essentially a product of global capitalism extending capitalist formations invented in the West into ever new areas and aspects of the world so that economic structures become globally interdependent (Robertson, 1992; Ritzer, 2004). Indeed, it might be argued that globalization theory is a continuation of the long contest between Marxist and bourgeois theories under a new rubric, though with large question marks against the teleological elements and the implicit models of functional unity underlying older versions of the modernization narrative and of Marxist-influenced development theory (Meyer, 2008a). The global mobility of population and capital and the instantaneous global transmission of communications, especially through new electronic media, are central features of globalization as an empirical process, while powerful political, economic and legal transnational institutions, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, the International Criminal Court and the European Court of Human Rights, are simultaneously symptoms and agents of globalization.

Post-colonial analysis further stresses the role of colonial and neo-colonial relations of the Western powers with colonized populations as a formative part of the globalizing process. This entails unequal economic, cultural and political relations, including the imposition/adaptation of the structures of the nation state on the European model, and of Western legal concepts and practices, the legacy of which remains after formal independence. Though there is much disagreement about how far the missionary expansion of Christianity from the West has been integral with, and dependent on, the colonial projects of different imperial powers, it
is plausible to suppose there has often been some kind of symbiotic relation between the two, though recent historical scholarship emphasizes the decisive role of indigenous missionaries in the spread of Christianity (Comaroff and Comaroff (eds), 1993; Maxwell, 1999, 2006; Peel, 2000; Etherington, 2005). Moreover, as Talal Asad (2003) insists, the colonial relationship and the missionary relationship alike changed both parties, and we cannot understand the emergence of Western modernity if we see it as a development in which the West was hermetically sealed off from the Rest. Asad applies this argument not only to the emergence of secularity in the West, but to the construction of new subjectivities and individualized “agency” among the colonized as well as in the colonizing societies as features of “modernity”. Global processes and their legacies, then, can be traced back well before their spectacular acceleration in the mid-twentieth century, and contemporary perspectives, such as that of Asad, are less determinist about the long-term outcomes than some earlier versions of development theory and the modernization narrative.

Many globalization analyses take up one of the central themes of postmodern theory, that is, the prevalence of disjunction and fragmentation rather than functional unity in societies subject to the process of globalization. The distinguished Israeli sociologist, Shmuel Eisenstadt, who would not regard himself as a “postmodern” theorist, nevertheless describes globalization as a process of “disaggregation” by which the properties of the nation state, of national and regional economic systems, of territorially and historically distinct cultures, religions and political systems, are partially dispersed and recombined, both in new institutions and in more diffuse forms. In Eisenstadt’s view, globalization leads to worldwide changes in the constitution of identities, not least through the multiplication of diaspora communities, and to the transformation of the nation state (Eisenstadt, 1999, 2008).

**Globalization and Religion**

Eisenstadt (1999), like Jürgen Habermas (2008) and others, such as Zigmunt Bauman (1998), believes that one of the most politically important aspects of globalization is the emergence of global religious movements that challenge the secular hegemony in Western democratic political culture. He categorizes these movements as “fundamentalist”, pointing not just to a literalist reading of their sacred texts but what he calls a “Jacobin” element, that is, a revolutionary, utopian project.¹ These

¹. Eisenstadt also uses the term “sectarian” from the Troeltschean mode of analysis
new religious movements particularly characterize diaspora communities that are “out of their centre”. They use modern media to construct global virtual communities, and they interact with the centres of the nation states in which they are located in ways that change that centre because it has to accommodate itself to them as peripheries of other societal or civilizational centres. These movements present themselves as being traditional, going back to the foundational roots of the religion, while in fact being very modern, especially in respect of technology and organization. They challenge the hegemony of their own religious traditions as much as those of the society or civilization to which they have been transplanted. They reject the idea of one religious authority and inaugurate a continuous contestation in which new leaders claim authority, especially through the use of new media. They undermine the taken-for-granted authority of local traditions and continually invent something new that transcends the local. Eisenstadt believes they constitute a global continuation of the principles of the Reformation (or, in Charles Taylor’s broader term, movements of “Reform” [Taylor, 2007]) in attempting to re-establish markers of certainty which modernity, and now globalization, chronically erodes.

This ideal type derives primarily from Islamic developments, particularly the Iranian revolution of 1978, but Eisenstadt extends it to cover the Christian world, notably the growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic/Evangelical churches as well as new movements in Hinduism and Judaism. I shall use Eisenstadt’s theory as a marker here because it is a systematic expression of views that are widely canvassed both in academic and popular commentary. Clearly his characterization of the new global religious movements includes many features that apply to Pentecostalism, but others are contestable and raise questions that students of Pentecostalism could profitably address. Some, indeed, are issues that are already the subject of debate within the scholarly literature on Pentecostalism. These issues came into sharp focus during a three day workshop in December 2008 at which Eisenstadt presided.² Two issues were the

² An International Workshop on “New Directions of Religiosity, Religions and Virtual Communities” under the auspices of the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Services Culturels de l’Ambassade de France à Tel-Aviv and the International Institute of Sociology, Jerusalem, 14–16 December 2008.
particular focus of contrary interpretations of Pentecostalism. The first was the use of the term “fundamentalism” with its “Jacobin” or sectarian connotations, as against the view that the literal reading of the sacred text has as its counterbalance the centrality of the gifts of the Spirit rendering Pentecostalism more a denomination than a classical sect, in spite of the apocalyptic elements in its theology. The second was the argument that Pentecostalism is a transformative faith that constructs a pathway to a recognizably “modern” form of selfhood, based on a significant degree of individualized autonomy and effective “agency”, and that, like its precursor Methodism, it can ultimately incubate democratic forms of action. This was countered by the claim that, despite its voluntaristic character, Pentecostalism has authoritarian, unaccountable leadership, little or no institutional “structural differentiation” or financial accountability, and it fosters collective rather than individualized identity: it may have transnational features but it is also marked by “re-territorialization” perpetuating mutated versions of traditional forms and cultural presuppositions. I shall come back to these issues below, but at this juncture I want to proceed by way of a digression to ask why these new global religious movements, and not just the Islamic ones, cause such obvious concern, even alarm, in the secular, democratic West in ways that find academic expression within the Eisenstadt model.

Religious Growth and the Global South

Let me start with the fact that the centre of gravity of Christianity itself has moved decisively to the global South in the course of the twentieth century (Jenkins, 2002) while the centre of cultural and political secularity is Western Europe. The classic secularization thesis has been whittled down in recent years, but it is still generally acknowledged that the institutional dominance of mainstream Christianity has weakened over the past two centuries or so in Western Europe, though many scholars in the field argue that this does not mean the disappearance so much as the transformation of religion, even in these secular heartlands (Davie, 2002; Berger, Davie and Fokas, 2008; Hervieu-Léger, 2000, 2008a, 2008b; Greeley, 2003). Moreover, as Talal Asad and Timothy Fitzgerald among others have made clear, the “secularity” of the West has always been part of a double act with “religion”, each definition being framed and developed in relation to the other (Asad, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2007). Secularity comes to be defined in relation to the European Christian religion out of which it mutates, as Charles Taylor (1989) has shown. At the same time, through a contrast between European Christianity and the “primitive”
“superstition”, “fetishism” or “taboo” of the non-Western world, generalized categories of “religion” and “secularity” have emerged as part of a no longer plausible and patently ethno-centric Western evolutionary model of intellectual and social progress (Asad 2003). This is an insight that illuminates one source of fear about religious movements from the global South when they take up residence in the (relatively) secular, and economically and politically dominant, global North and West. If Asad is correct, it is the relationship between the two as much as the differences between them that matters.

Pentecostalism, like global Christianity itself, is very much a phenomenon of the global South, particularly in the latest waves of development since the 1960s (Dempster, Klaus and Petersen, 1999; Anderson, 2004). Though there are different views about Pentecostalism’s historical origins and subsequent development, it is generally agreed Pentecostalism was a global and hybrid movement from the outset. Christianity, of course, as a Jewish heresy preached to the Gentiles, was always both hybrid and incipiently global, but Pentecostalism was both in a way that is critical for contemporary analysis. One view sees Pentecostalism as American in immediate origin (Stephens, 2008) and another as generated simultaneously at multiple locations in the mission field by a fusion of Protestant mission Christianity and local, indigenous religious sensibilities (Bergunder, 2008). In its American manifestation, from Azusa St. onwards it has been a potent mixture of the black religious spirituality preserved and transformed within American Christianity by black African slaves and their descendants, and the practices of poor white American Protestants in the holiness tradition. Everywhere it was an impeccably colonial hybrid that blended the traditions of Luther (and Calvin) with the repertoire of that “primitive” indigenous folk religion that Talal Asad represents as a property of the colonized Other against which progressive European thought defined both “civilized” European Christianity and the secularity which was expected to supersede it.

Pentecostalism went global almost immediately, as its missionaries went out to all the world, not just from Los Angeles, but from Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Wales, India and many other places. Today it is a global religion in at least two further senses. It has evangelism at the core of its mission and therefore carries an inbuilt dynamic that leads to the planting of churches in ever new places, even where proselytism is a dangerous business, as when it challenges certain local Muslim or Hindu monopolies, for example. Pentecostalism also goes global when its carriers become geographically mobile both across the global South and
from the poorer countries of the global South to the richer countries of the global North and West, sometimes as refugees, but mostly in search of employment. This produces the multiplication of diaspora Pentecostal communities in all the great cities of the developed world and the megacities of the developing world. When, as is frequently the case, all the processes of global mobility are combined we can trace the typical trails of Pentecostal migrant-missionaries from the colonial peripheries back to the imperial centre (Brazilians to Portugal and lusophone Africa; Koreans to North America; Nigerians, Zimbabweans and Ghanaians to Britain) as well as across common language blocks or contiguous territories (ex-Soviet block citizens, especially Ukrainians, to Russia), or between diaspora communities and their mother-lands, and, most of all, from America to everywhere and back again. These trails are serviced by networks of media communications, and by exchanges of educational and financial resources that keep alive the local context migrants have left behind, link the Third and the First worlds through images and exchange of resources (including access to the English language), and thus create virtual global communities of Pentecostal believers who can legitimately see themselves as aligned with the modern, including the epitome of modernity, America. Pentecostalism is thus simultaneously traditional and ultra-modern. It also mirrors the tracks of global capitalism in reverse since most of the flow is from poor, dependent economies to the affluent centres of global capitalism, or at least to the contemporary hubs of capitalism’s outposts in the global South.

The European “Receiving” Context

If globalization erodes the significance of boundaries and territoriality, is there any sense in distinguishing between the wider global context and the European “receiving” context of transnational Pentecostalism in Europe? Globalization may make boundaries more porous but they do not disappear, and though the local and the global transform each other, the distinctions are not eliminated entirely, as that useful but inelegant coinage of globalization theory, “glocalisation”, recognizes. There are disjunctions as well as tendencies to homogenization in the globalizing process. It is worthwhile, then, to specify the distinctive features of the European “receiving” context, not least because it has only a weak, indigenous Pentecostal presence of its own. The character of the European receiving context has been shaped by three processes that have affected Western and Eastern Europe in very different ways. The first is the Westphalian system of territorial religious monopolies in what became the
nation states of Europe. The second is the relationships of empire noted above: in the case of Russia an empire of contiguous territories. And the third is the process of secularization.

**Secularization in Europe: the West-East Contrast**

To begin with secularization, it is now generally agreed that while the classic secularization thesis is exaggerated, Euro-centric and often ideologically coloured, it does, in a limited way apply to Western Europe. The weakening of the institutional dominance of Christianity is undeniable, even though it is now apparent that religion has not disappeared but rather been re-constituted in eclectic and often diffuse forms of “spirituality” and intense but fragile small groups of mutual seekers after “authenticity” and personalized experience (Davie, 2000, 2002; Hervieu-Léger, 2000, 2008a and 2008b). Nevertheless, Western Europe is the epicentre of what Charles Taylor calls “the secular age” where the default position is the “immanent frame,” an epistemology and a lifeworld without the transcendent dimension (Taylor, 2007). Even though Casanova (1994) and others have shown that religion has never been absent from the public sphere and has never been truly “privatized”, the political sphere has been secularized in some important ways. The nation state and the transnational political and legal institutions operate through a secular epistemology within the immanent frame. This is one reason why Habermas and others see a difficulty in including religious and secular citizens equally in the (secular) democratic dialogue.

In Eastern Europe the enforced secularization of the communist era had very uneven effects. The causes of the variations cannot be explored here, but we can note that the spectrum ranges from East Germany at the secular end to Poland and Romania at the religious end (Hann, 2006; Greeley, 2003; Tanase, 2008; Leustean, 2009). However, the fall of communism set off a resurgence of the traditional ethno-religious nationalisms of the region, not least in the Orthodox countries where the Orthodox hierarchy mostly attempted to re-establish the principle of *symphonia* between Church and state, and also along the civilizational fault-line where Islam, Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism meet and overlap.

3. The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 ended the century of religious wars in Europe after the Reformation. It established the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, (the religion of the ruler is the religion of the territory). This shaped the territorial basis of the established churches of the nation states that emerged in the next centuries, and thus a pattern of ethno-religious national identity.
Religion and National Identity

Throughout the twentieth century, notably during and immediately after the two World Wars, and again in the resurgence of the repressed nationalisms of the Soviet empire after 1989, there has been a recurrent drive to homogenize the population of the nation state, particularly in the region straddling the civilizational fault-line (Judt, 2005; Bauman, 1992). This has involved violence as well as exchanges of population. The idealized homogeneity usually takes an ethno-religious form, as in the Balkans and the Caucasus. A more peaceful variant of the process underlies the split of Catholic Slovakia from the Czech Republic. Despite these tendencies, the newly independent countries of Eastern Europe (and of Central Asia) all adopted constitutions guaranteeing religious freedom after 1989, though the reality is sometimes a continuation of old Soviet repressive practices (Hann, 2006; Wanner, 2007). Nevertheless, even in the countries such as Russia and Romania where the tradition of symphonia remains strongest (it even continued in Romania throughout the communist period) and is endorsed by political as well as ecclesiastical elites, it has proved impossible to re-establish Orthodoxy as an official element in the national identity or to outlaw alternative religions rather than just regarding them as unpatriotic. Catherine Wanner in her study of Ukraine, perhaps the most effectively pluralist of all the Orthodox heartlands, suggests that two main factors are operative here. The first is that the Orthodox Church remains remote and hieratic while many people, especially in the younger generation, are searching for emotional warmth and intense community (not unlike the new “spirituality” in the West). The second is the moral vacuum left by the collapse of communism. Missionary Protestantism, mostly initially Baptist and Pentecostal, met these needs. These churches gained important footholds in the Soviet era and took off after 1989, particularly with the appearance of the charismatic mega-churches of Pentecostalism’s third wave. Ukraine has become a source of migrant-missionaries across the whole post-Soviet region (Wanner, 2007).

In Western Europe the shadow of ethno-religious nationalism is fairly muted, although even the forms of secularity tend to mirror the forms of the once-dominant established religion. Even here a ghost of the Westphalian pattern of territorial religious establishment can be seen as the “heritage” religious backdrop, the cultural taken-for-granted, against which the migrant diasporas from the global South appear exotic, alien, foreign, more particularly, though not exclusively, the Muslim minorities.

In sum, Eastern Europe has seen both a resurgence of ethno-religious nationalism and, even so, the establishment of an effectively indigenized...
Pentecostal movement arising out of global migrant-missionary mobility; while Western Europe has experienced extensive secularization interspersed with new, diffuse spiritualities, but the influx of Pentecostal diasporas from the global South has not so far set off a significant indigenization of Pentecostalism, except among the marginalized Roma (Thurfjell, 2009).

**The Global Context of Transnational Pentecostalism**

The “supplying” context from which transnational Pentecostalism moves into Europe is largely the global South, though America remains an important source both of mission and resources. The most recent upsurges that have fed the global Pentecostal migrations began in Latin America in the 1960s, followed by Africa in the 1980s and Asia in the 1990s (Anderson and Tang, 2005). From the late 1970s classical Pentecostalism has been supplemented by a charismatic movement that spread into some of the mainstream Christian denominations as well as joining the Pentecostal stream, and by the spread of a prosperity gospel (Anderson, 2004). The latter tendency, the “third wave,” is particularly associated with the Faith movement and the growth of mega-churches such as that run by the Nigerian pastor, Sunday Adelaja in Kyiv (Wanner, 2007; Coleman, 2000) and is strongly developed in Africa (Gifford, 2004; Maxwell, 2006; Meyer, 1999, 2007, 2008a; Soothill, 2007).

The countries of the global South in which Pentecostalism flourishes are various. They cover the poorest parts of the global economy, but also rising economies such as Brazil, India and China. They include many failed or failing states, such as Zimbabwe and the Congo, areas shattered by corruption, war and civil war, such as Liberia, as well as recently stabilized regimes such as Chile and Argentina, and countries still working through the aftermath of communal violence, such as South Africa and Rwanda. The whole region has suffered the effects of the AIDS epidemic which often devastates the structures of family and disrupts generational continuity. In some places churches are the only source of order, continuity and welfare and they sometimes operate much like NGOs or whole-life systems, while in other places, especially the mega-cities, storefront churches and mega-churches alike offer harbour from the moral chaos of fast and unregulated economic change. While it would be absurd to try to provide a comprehensive economic and political profile of the global South it is worth making two broad points. First, stable, democratic regimes are relatively rare, so the experience of Pentecostal entry into the public, and especially the political, sphere can be hazardous, either
because of an actual or an expected incorporation into the corrupt norms of the local political culture (witness the recurrent charges of corruption and involvement with the illegal drug trade that have dogged the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Brazil (Freston, 2001), or because of a slide towards indigenous “magical” practices to guarantee success (as in the cases in Ghana documented by Birgit Meyer where witchcraft has been employed as a political tool [Meyer, forthcoming]). This is perhaps one source of secular Western disquiet about how “democratic” Pentecostalism really is, but it is important to note that the literature on Pentecostalism also contains contrary evidence of Pentecostals turning their backs on customary violence or corruption at some cost to themselves (Wanner, 2007). Second, globalization has drawn the whole of the global South into the global capitalist system in ways that make its economies dependent and usually fragile, even where they have come to include a growing business and knowledge class and, at least until the current economic crisis, a steadily growing GDP, as in the BRIC economies.

**Pentecostalism and Capitalism**

Many observers have commented on the relationship between Pentecostalism and capitalism. Given the parallel trajectory of global capitalism and the growth of Pentecostalism in the global South since the 1960s it is not absurd to expect some kind of linkage, though the claims sometimes made in the 1980s that Pentecostal growth was a direct product of American imperialism have wisely been largely abandoned. Pentecostalism has often been seen as an important contemporary carrier of the Protestant work ethic. David Martin in particular has argued that it is a repeat-with-variations of the Methodist reformation of manners and morals that tamed the American frontier and the early industrial cities of Britain, creating, as an unintended consequence of personal moral reformation, a disciplined, hard-working, thrifty, peaceable workforce that served industrial capitalism and, in the view of the French historian, Elie Halévy, prevented proletarian revolution (Martin, 1990, 2002). Peter Berger pushes this interpretation considerably further and links it to Weber as well as Halévy (for instance in his Foreword to David Martin’s *Tongues of Fire* [Martin, 1990]). Weber’s famous work on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1965/1905) was concerned not with the sources of a work ethic for the masses but with the original rise of an entrepreneurial class in early modern Europe for whom accumulation but not consumption was the imperative. Weber speculated that an ascetic motivation to do something so counter-intuitive as to gather money but never enjoy its fruits could only

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have come from a religious source. Thereafter, however, he postulated the steady secularization of the work ethic, with rational, secular bureaucratic systems institutionalizing the necessary practices and dispensing with the original motivations. However, the “second” wave of Pentecostal growth from the 1960s mostly involved the poor migrating to the mega-cities not to join an industrial proletariat but typically to enter the lowest rungs of the service sector, and any entrepreneurship was mainly of the micro variety and located in the informal economy. Self-discipline and ingenuity were at a premium in these conditions and could not be supplied by established bureaucratic procedures such as Weber envisaged. In this situation a religiously-sanctioned moral reformation can again have economic consequences such as Halévy observed in early industrial England (B. Martin, 1995). In a surprising recantation of his previous views Otto Maduro has argued that Pentecostalism enables Latinos to survive the experience of economic and social exclusion when they migrate to the USA (Maduro, 2007). It was only with the latest charismatic or neo-Pentecostal “third” wave after the 1990s that a serious Pentecostal business and knowledge class appeared. Birgit Meyer (2007, 2008a) has recently suggested that this latest development has a better fit with the spirit of consumer capitalism than with the ascetic spirit of capital accumulation that Weber sought to account for, or even with the self-discipline and moral rigour of the Halévy model that fits conditions of general scarcity and bare subsistence rather than consumer plenty. Meyer draws on Colin Campbell’s (1987) analysis of the Romantic ethic and the spirit of consumerism in discussing the way that the prosperity gospel has been understood and deployed, particularly in African charismatic Pentecostalism, to focus on conspicuous consumption at the expense of a work ethic. Like Paul Gifford (2004) she sees an elective affinity between the spread of a prosperity gospel and latest stage of consumer capitalism, or neo-liberalism, enforced by the global political and financial establishment, and suggests it may be damaging to economic development in Africa.

**Pentecostal Asceticism and Pentecostal Affirmation of the World**

This suggests an antinomy in Pentecostalism, the first of several that characterize the movement. Pentecostalism is very positive about life in this world, about health and well-being as an arena of salvation, but at the same time it has strong ascetic elements, particularly with regard to sexual discipline and modesty, and it condemns the hedonistic experiential excesses that have accompanied consumer capitalism in the secular West even while
welcoming material goods as part of the “good” promised by God. (Pentecostal churches, especially of the third wave, often show better success than secular therapies in treating drug and alcohol addicts.) We need to clarify the circumstances in which Pentecostalism tips to one side or the other of the fulcrum on which its economic ethic is poised: towards what Jean-Pierre Bastian calls “the politics of the miraculous through a market logic” (Bastian, 2008), or towards an ethic of work and self-discipline powered by a confidence that God is on your side. While Birgit Meyer and Paul Gifford supply examples of the first (Meyer, 2008; Gifford, 2004), Simon Coleman and Catherine Wanner (Coleman, 2000; Wanner, 2007) supply contrary examples of business practice and business education grounded in a firm personal morality and as rational as in any secular context. What makes the difference? We also need to monitor the Pentecostal response to the hard economic times that are undoubtedly on their way, remembering that the rise of the prosperity gospel dates back to the debt crisis of the 1980s which was an era of fast Pentecostal growth.

**Pentecostalism, Politics and the Civic Sphere**

I turn finally to concerns about the civic and political participation of religious citizens and guest workers in the secular West and how they relate to perceptions about the global South as the cradle of these Pentecostal sub-cultures. Clearly, there can be no fears about a potential Pentecostal terrorist movement in Europe: on the contrary, as Catherine Wanner’s work on the Ukraine illustrates, there are more problems with the pacifist strain in Pentecostalism which can give rise to accusations of a failure of citizenship and patriotism (Wanner, 2007). Religious movements such as Pentecostalism are in danger of being damned if they do and damned if they don’t act in the public sphere. If they act on their religious and moral convictions by putting pressure on/or acting in partnership with governmental institutions, as they do for instance in Ukraine (Wanner, 2007), they can be accused of failing to keep their religious convictions safely in the “private sphere,” or even of having “theocratic ambitions” to control the state; or, at the other extreme, of having “sold out” in return for social recognition or a toe-hold in power (Bastian [2008] cites the attendance of the new President at the Te Deum in the central Methodist Pentecostal Church in Santiago, Chile, after the 2000 elections as evidence of this). If they turn their backs on the political sphere, however, they can be dismissed as “a-political” and unconcerned for the public weal; if they practise self-help they can be accused of creating only “fortressed” social capital rather than developing common citizenship – “blocks” rather than
“bridges” in Robert Putnam’s terms (Lehmann, 2008) – and if they work among the addicted and destitute they can be accused of only wanting to fill their churches. Critics of Pentecostalism also cite a dangerously authoritarian leadership that lacks both transparent financial procedures and “structural differentiation” of roles and responsibility (Eisenstadt, 2008). This authoritarian structure is also thought to foster collective identity at the expense of the development of the individual autonomy essential for democratic participation. Jean-Pierre Bastian (1986, 2008, for example, follows Lalive D’Epinay (1969) in arguing that Latin American Pentecostalism operates in the traditional caudillist and co-optive mode of baroque civilization.

Some of these views clearly arise from a sense of Pentecostals as shaped by Third World political cultures. There is also uneasiness over issues of personal morality, particularly in relation to abortion and homosexuality, where most Pentecostals have the conservative views widely held throughout the global South that cut across Western secular definitions of individual human rights. At a deeper level, however, these criticisms suggest a perception of Pentecostals as an insulated sect that is not permeated by the democratic principles of Western civil society. Eisenstadt argues that, whereas in the past, religious movements (sects or monastic experiments) could simply withdraw from the world and build their own hermetic community, globalization has made that exit strategy impossible, and therefore we all have to live alongside the “utopian imaginaries” of religious groups which may thus disrupt the secular processes of democracy when they act within the body politic.

Pentecostalism, Modernity and the Shadow of “Primitive Religion”

I return here to the argument of Talal Asad about the way the West defined its own modernity by contrast with the “primitive” religion of the colonized world. Underlying all the specific worries cited above lies the assumption that Pentecostals and other Christian “fundamentalists” fall short on crucial criteria of Western “modernity.” They do not live wholly inside the “immanent frame;” their world is not “disenchanted” but peopled with spirits and pervaded by the battle between the forces of good and evil. Individual Pentecostals are not unequivocally “buffered selves” (in Charles Taylor’s summary term for post-Enlightenment selfhood), assured of their total secular autonomy, but are mere husks either filled with the Holy Spirit or forever in danger of being invaded by demons (Meyer, forthcoming; B. Martin, 2008). Thus their “agency” is always compromised.
Pentecostalism, in short, carries the legacy of the indigenous, spirit-filled religious world of the once colonized continents of the global South. It has been pointed out many times that in relegating the old gods and spirits to the negative side in the ongoing Pentecostal psychomachia, the very act of repeated exorcism keeps that “primitive” world alive. After all, the Christianization of the indigenous, enspirited world of folk religiosity is one of the keys to the appeal of Pentecostalism among the populations of the global South, just as the “disenchanted” secularity of Western Europe may well be crucial to Pentecostalism’s lack of success there. As a spokesman for the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God remarked when his church lost its bid to buy the Brixton Academy in London, Britain is not a good place for evangelism because people don’t even know the names of their demons.

Because they are not a violent political threat Pentecostals very seldom attract media attention or urgent political concern in the way the Muslim presence does, but occasionally the underlying problem is made publicly explicit. This happened in Britain recently through a campaign in the news media, including the BBC, against the practice of exorcism in certain Pentecostal churches as a form of “child abuse.” Two churches were targeted, both with a largely black congregation. One was a branch of the Nigerian Cherubim and Seraphim, and the other was the Brazilian Universal Church of the Kingdom of God where an African child, who had been brought into Britain by her aunt and her partner, had been taken for exorcism shortly before her guardians murdered her. Their (unsuccessful) defence in court was that they were trying to expel the demons that possessed her (the Victoria Climbié case in 2003). All the media commentary treated exorcism as a “barbaric” superstition and much journalistic effort was also directed to showing pastors and mediums as financially grasping. The other theme was the demand that faith healing should be subjected to the scrutiny of “proper” scientific and medical testing. The sub-text was the contrast between rational secular modes of thought and the dangerous, irrational practices arising out of “primitive superstition.”

Other Pentecostal Antinomies

I suggested above that Pentecostalism was stretched between the two poles of an antinomy, or, if you like, a paradox, in respect of its economic ethic. Let me suggest some further such antinomies that relate to the inherent tension in the movement between the European (largely Lutheran) Protestant tradition and the various indigenized spiritualities of the global South that Pentecostalism has Christianized. These antinomies often mirror the
contrary pull of the local and the global. It is clear that local Pentecostalisms do in some senses “re-territorialize” the movement, identify it with local traditions in a way that becomes part of local Pentecostal identity and may be carried into the European contexts into which diasporas move. Michael Bergunder, for instance, notes the way caste inflects the Pentecostalism of South India, especially Sri Lanka. Bergunder also describes how the pastorate is expected to pass as a legacy from father to son in South Indian Pentecostalism, and tells a story of fierce and not always edifying leadership contests (Bergunder, 2008). While this gives plausibility to arguments about Pentecostal authoritarianism, other parts of his study suggest a different reality, for example showing women taking initiative and authority. The same is true of Catherine Wanner’s study of Ukraine, where examples of autocracy and of democratic developments vie for attention. Again, in another nice paradox of authoritarian structures used to expand access to authority, Jane Soothill shows how in Ghana the system of Big Men reappears as Big Pastors, and women enter the sphere of power in the pastorate by becoming Big Women leading Small Girls (Soothill, 2007). What scholars of Pentecostalism might usefully do is to consider what stimulates one rather than the other tendency both in the original local context and in diaspora communities. At the very least we need to find out just how insulated Pentecostal diaspora communities are from each other, and how far trans-national Pentecostalism in Europe breaks down the boundaries carried by the local forms into the global context. How multicultural are Pentecostal congregations?

The same problems arise over individual agency and autonomy. Do we see in Pentecostalism, as I and others have argued, a marked tendency towards the development of a recognizably modern reflexive selfhood through rather than despite the “enchantment” of the Pentecostal world and the apparently equivocal “buffering” of the self (B. Martin, 2008)? Or is the Pentecostal an essentially dependent self, locked into structures of pastoral and communal authority and submission to divine agency that simply replicate traditional patterns? (Here let me remind you of Talal Asad’s dissection of the variety of ways “agency” was constructed in the course of Western modernization. Early Methodists learned to exercise personal agency only through total submission to the power of Jesus which in turn empowered them, and then some forgot that they had ever thought the power resided anywhere but in themselves; Asad, 2003).

While it may be illuminating to clarify the conditions under which Pentecostalism tips to one side or the other of contradictions such as I have been discussing, it is important to remember that most of these
contradictions, antinomies, paradoxes, cannot be definitively resolved because they are what constructs the movement, they are its ground. Its power and appeal is based on the force field they generate. Consider just some of them: expectations of imminent apocalypse and canny preparation for the morrow; moral asceticism and a theology of world- and body-affirming salvation here and now; conversion as an overwhelming experience of divine power and conversion as a rational choice (Smilde, 2007); conversion as a break with the past and as continuity with that past (Meyer, 1998); divine inspiration justifying the authority of pastors and the independence of believers; the literalism of the text and the kinetic experience of the gifts of the Spirit; formal patriarchy and transformation of gender relations; the spiritual heritage of the pre-Christian global South and of the European Reformation; total dependence on divine power and personal empowerment. I could go on. My point is that in most of these cases it is not one or the other but both one and the other, though the precise balances shift, and those shifts, may carry significant consequences.

Conclusion

Research into transnational Pentecostalism must engage with analyses such as Eisenstadt’s or Habermas’s that frame Pentecostalism in ways that are not wholly sympathetic to the movement but place it in a broad theoretical context. By seizing on the evidence for one side of certain constitutive antinomies in Pentecostalism they may be giving the movement less than its due, but they challenge us to clarify the vexed issues about what Pentecostal modernity is. They also require us to focus on the processes that are set in motion both within the transnational Pentecostal movement and within the European host community when this vigorous religious growth moves out of the global South and into the relatively secular and politically democratic context of old Europe, remembering, as Talal Asad reminds us, that such processes go two ways. Perhaps all we can do is to document the variety of ways in which Pentecostal subjects live out their own modernities, negotiating European secular contexts and juggling the various, mostly creative, tensions within the Pentecostal faith, not least the exchanges between the local and the global.

References


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