Article

The Social Architecture of Belonging in the African Pentecostal Diaspora

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Abstract: From megachurches in movie theatres to prayer groups held in living rooms, Pentecostals worldwide are constantly carrying out religious activities that ultimately aim to integrate diverse worshippers into the kingdom of God. Born-again Christians refashion their 'ways of being' by breaking down and re-establishing the interpersonal relationships shaped and changed by emerging diasporic modernities. I examined some of these changing ways of being by comparing the discursive practices of African Pentecostal pastors in Johannesburg (South Africa) and Bilbao (Spain). These case-studies demonstrate how these migrant-initiated churches create a 'social architecture', a platform on which African worshippers find social and spiritual integration in increasingly globalized contexts. I argue that the subdivision of large congregations into specialized fellowship groups provides African migrants with alternative strategies to achieve a sense of belonging in an expanding diasporic network. Their transformative mission of spiritual education, by spreading African(ized) and Pentecostal values according to age, gender, or social roles, helps to uplift them from being a marginalized minority to being a powerful group occupying a high moral ground.

Keywords: identity; African Pentecostalism; integration; transnationalism; diaspora

1. Introduction

When looking at a world map or listening to the daily news, we imagine that territory and culture are marked by apparently static geopolitical divisions. But such assumed isomorphism of territory and culture is problematic when looking at those who live across such borders (Gupta and Ferguson 1992), or along what Gloria Anzaldua (1987, p. 3) calls that 'narrow strip along steep edges'. It has long been the case that scholars of migration, diaspora, and transnationalism treat culture and territory as constructs that are neither static nor isomorphic. Rather, their studies show how rituals and social processes can 'fill up' spaces with complex meanings, practices, and experiences, subverting hermetic notions of the local, global, indigenous, foreign, traditional, and modern (Anderson 1991; Clifford 1997; Levitt and Schiller 2004).

In this vein, most religions are not limited by geopolitical borders, but seek to transcend these material boundaries by cultivating and disseminating a particular worldview and ethos. Although Christianity has its historical connections with specific nation states, the idea of the gospel is that it cannot be contained or bound by a single person or place. Rather, the gospel is understood by believers as a Christian message that must be revealed to the world in multiple places and varied forms see (Sanneh 1989). Pentecostalism, especially, has spread transnationally in our global era while maintaining considerable cross-national connections. It fits well with a new world order in which national affiliations do not fully explain how a person's identity is socially, symbolically, or materially constructed (Marshall 1998).

In the case of African Pentecostals, migrants do not cut off ties to their homelands, but instead establish *trans*-territorial networks in and beyond the African continent (Adogame 2004). The internationalization of

commercial goods, activities, people, and ideas has inspired Pentecostal churches to produce modernized versions of transnational religious communities. These churches are neither limited by colonial powers and authorities, nor strictly characterized by specific ethnonational identities. Static notions of culture dissolve as transnational mobility creates new forms of cultural and religious belonging (Gerloff 1995; Hunt 2002; Levitt 2007).

The churches examined in this study are structured around a flexibility of religious meaning, discourse, and practice. Religious leaders help build communal and individual spaces within their churches by engaging with the tensions and challenges experienced by migrants in a diasporic context. These lived experiences shape how people attain a subjective sense of belonging to one or more communities. I argue that such the *religio*-cultural construction of belonging is parallel to the notion of 'social architecture': the conscious design of a space that forges particular human responses, feelings, emotions, memories, behaviours, and discourses[1].

In this article, my arguments draw upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in six migrant-initiated Pentecostal churches, three in Bilbao (Spain), and three in Johannesburg (South Africa). These churches were mostly, if not exclusively, attended by migrants coming from Central and West African countries. I examined biographical narratives from in-depth interviews conducted with ten pastors of the selected churches in both countries. In addition, I participated in these pastors' church services and observed their public narratives, which I compared with their private ones. As holders of an institutional position of power and as experienced migrants themselves, I see these church leaders as creating a shared social architecture for their religious communities.

Despite their differences (denominational, ethnic, national diversity, etc.), each of these congregations divided itself into smaller subgroups or specialized fellowships patterned by cohort variables such as gender, age, and the spiritual gifts of individuals. This reveals an African Pentecostal social architecture that forges spaces of belonging for worshippers in diasporic contexts. Three strategies guide this process: (1) the division of the larger church community into smaller fellowships aimed at providing socially transformative missions to worshippers and pastors; (2) the (re)configuration of migrants' African and Pentecostal values to bring about purposeful roles within the church community and wider society; (3) the creation of family-like bonds and morality-based relationships in the congregation, which reshape worshippers' ethnic diversity into an African and Pentecostal melting-pot, centred on the moral restoration of broken societies.

I argue this three-dimensional approach helps to integrate worshippers into an African Pentecostal frame of reference. That frame makes sense of group dissonances by challenging the wider society to conform to more spiritually driven and morally bounded relationships. This social architecture is thereby able to elevate a marginalized minority to a higher moral ground, given their transformational spiritual mission. In this way, no matter where they live, African Pentecostals see themselves belonging to a group that holds desirable features or the 'right' formulas for dealing with the distresses of the present world.

2. Methodology

Pentecostalism is known for its linguistic, racial, ethnic, national, and cultural diversity typified by the use of multiple languages in church services and the formation of independently initiated congregations. The size and infrastructure of Pentecostal churches ranges from small garages, office spaces, and industrial pavilions to new commercial buildings, old theatres, and cinemas. The latter venues are often used by religious institutions that have large organizational boards of leaders; the former set of venues tend to host smaller cohorts. But besides size and structure, what connects

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[1] This definition is a reinterpretation of the expression 'social architecture' defined by 'The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture' (Curl and Wilson 2015) as the 'architecture intended for use by the mass of people as social beings as a reaction against architecture concerned with form and style supposedly for the dominant members of society'.

Pentecostalism on a worldwide basis? Do global, continental, or local traits connect or differentiate African, North American, or Latin American versions of Pentecostalism?

This research project was initially conceived to explore the phenomenon of migrant-initiated churches in an autonomous community of the Basque Country, in Northern Spain. I chose the largest city of this region, Bilbao, and its metropolitan area, to conduct my fieldwork. I selected three churches located in the districts of Ibaiondo and Errekalde—the areas with the highest percentages of foreign nationals within the municipality of Bilbao.[2] The churches were geographically close to each other and mainly located in working-class regions.

The initial phase of the fieldwork concentrated on a Nigerian-led church, the Hand of God Ministries International; it was considered to be the largest African Pentecostal congregation in Bilbao. From 2011 to 2012, I regularly visited this community and attended weekly services and meetings of the smaller fellowship groups. I was introduced to Apostle David[3], the church's founder and his wife and women's fellowship leader Pastor Irene. I also met Edward, a resident pastor and leader of the youth fellowship.

In an effort to extend my observations to different contexts, I also visited other churches with more or less analogous characteristics (i.e., number of pastors and attendants, industrial building, national background of interviewees). By 2012, I had selected and visited two more churches in Bilbao. One was led by a Pastor Kando, a Congolese migrant who founded the *Misión Evangélica de la Reconciliación* in 2009; the other was Christ the Rock Ministries, founded by Pastor Ehis, a Nigerian national, in 2010.

Over one year of observation, I repeatedly heard pastors speak of their participation in transnational religious networks, especially those connected to Africa. In order to enrich the transnational dimension of my study, I decided to undertake fieldwork in migrant-initiated churches located in the African continent. A 2013 six-month research stay in Johannesburg, South Africa, allowed me to select three more migrant-initiated churches for comparison with my Spanish cases.

Like Spain, South Africa is an important migratory hub, hosting one of the largest groups of Christian migrants on the African continent.[4] The first of my three churches was the Bread of Life Foundation, led by Congolese Pastor Steven and his assistant Pastor Richard. It was located in the area of Honeydew. The second was Diplomat's Assembly, led by Nigerian Pastors Victor and Emmanuel; it was located in Strydompark. Finally, La Louange was a Congolese-led congregation located in the suburb of La Rochelle, where I met Pastor Esther and Pastor Alfred. The three suburbs are geographically distant but evoked a similar cityscape to their Spanish counterparts: all were semi-peripheral areas zoned for services with industrial warehouses, offices and garages.

In total, I collected twelve life course narratives from these pastors: five males and one female in each city. All were between the ages of 30 and 55 years. Outside the church, they were employed low-skilled temporary jobs or in informal businesses. This was despite most of them claiming to have attended university and in some cases to have finished degrees in such fields as economics, engineering, and teaching. I did not choose the pastors based on their nationality; instead, my sample's national diversity emerged from a mix of snow-ball sampling and my explorations of church services and interdenominational conferences that I found announced on local posters and flyers.

This diversity is nonetheless important. Claudia Währisch-Oblau (2009, p. 47) demonstrates how current understandings of the intersectionality of church members' nationality and denominational

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2   Source: (Ayuntamiento de Bilbao 2017).

3   Oral consent was obtained and recorded at the beginning of all of the interviews in which respondents were provided with a summary of the research project. This procedure followed the ethical guidelines of the American Anthropological Association for Institutional Review Board in Ethnographic research (Section 6, 4th Paragraph) available at https://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1652. All the interviewees mentioned in this article agreed in being quoted using their 'stage names'. The use of 'stage names' is justified by interviewees as part of the born-again process and/or when they assume a position of leadership. In this way, born-again Christians adopt names from Biblical characters they admire, as well as to inspire and show others their acquired spiritual gifts, charismatic skills and Christian path associated to such biblical names.

4   Source: (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2012).

identity remain inadequately explored in academic literature. She states that, 'while some churches are clearly mono-cultural and mono-national, others are multicultural and multinational'. The importance of multinational identity among Pentecostal members in Spain and South Africa became apparent in my data, as my six congregations had members from a variety of cultures spread across many nation state borders.

The pastors I interviewed also embraced these members' different cultural backgrounds as part of the church's wider rich diversity. A Nigerian pastor in South Africa rejected the label of migrant church, mentioning that around sixty per cent of his congregation were South African nationals. Later on, the pastor offered an alternative understanding of migrants by suggesting that worshippers were diverse in the sense that they also come from various South African provinces and cultural traditions. It was then that I decided to focus my study on small, ethnically diverse African Pentecostal churches in Spain and South Africa. This sample of churches hold visible differences when comparing my interlocutors' trajectories, narrations, and practices. Yet, the fieldwork reveals that in both cases of Johannesburg and Bilbao, similarities are more important than divergences. Despite the ethnic, national and societal divisions involved in both contexts, the sharing of African and Pentecostal components among these populations established a social architecture, a common organizational strategy, which guides preaching narratives and the social division of the congregation and that encapsulates religious experience into (de)localised senses of community.

My approach to these multiple and diverse spaces echoes what Ghassan Hage described as a 'single geographically discontinuous site' (Hage 2005). He problematized the concept of multi*sitedness* in ethnography when studying migrants who share a certain unifying culture across a number of global locations. I take Hage's perspective to frame the unique socio-religious landscape in which the case-study participants were immersed. The discontinuous site here is the pervasive social architecture of churches within a diasporic African Pentecostal network that makes it possible for worshippers to feel a sense of belonging in geographically distant localities. This can be a church service where an elder Congolese pastor coherently engages with a young Nigerian preacher and a female Spanish evangelist in Bilbao; this can be an interdenominational conference about female empowerment held in Johannesburg, where a South African female evangelist and a Congolese male pastor explain the 'spiritual wonders' of the female body. In other words, the familiarity with African(ized) and Pentecostal repertoires engenders the necessary fluidity pastors practice when developing their missions and visions on a worldwide scale and in local contexts.

3. (De)localizing African Pentecostalism

In previous decades, an extensive body of academic literature has discussed several approaches for 'achieving' and catalysing the integration of migrants to a determinate society (Hepburn and Zapata-Barrero 2014; Houle and Comunicació Presentada al II Seminari 2000; Koenig 2005). These strategic policies have turned 'integration' into a capacious concept vastly explored in social sciences with regards to public policies, social interventions, and international cooperation programmes in the global North. That said, migratory processes are not a phenomenon that is exclusively determined by nation state policies. While their impact is not limited to developed countries, human mobility remains largely significant in South–South dynamics, where complex rural-urban or intra-continental flows are observed throughout history (Skeldon 2014, p. 70).

The decreasing moral legitimacy of governmental structures and political institutions shows that it is precisely within the spatial interstices of urban areas that integration plays an essential role. Such spaces are often seen as failures of urban development in that they lack 'healthy public space', and can be understood as 'anti-public space' (Brighenti 2013, Introduction). From migrant neighbourhoods to ethnic businesses and informal markets, these interstices or social spaces of differentiation are sometimes known as marginalized, heterogeneous, mixed, familiar, and delocalized. They appear to be a communal alternative to the organization of a fragmented reality, where intersubjective experiences and cultural values are negotiated (Bhabha 1998).

In particular, within the urban perimeters of either African or European major cities, Pentecostal Charismatic churches seem to forge rich spaces for worshippers to wrestle with the global and local tensions that arise in their migratory processes. In this regard, anthropologist Simon Coleman used the term 'part-cultures' to analyse the theological ambivalences of Pentecostal Charismatics. For the author, 'their self-consciously globalizing manifestations' present worldviews meant for export that are holistic in one sense but, as we have seen, also in tension with the values of any given host society' (Coleman 2000, p. 11).

These 'part-cultures' offer a way to form transnational belonging, a bridge between the 'here' and the 'there', as well as a connection between past and present, tradition and modernity. In some cases, this religious practice involves attending a specific congregation where the doctrine, leadership, and structure are clearly established. But in other cases, there is no sense of belonging to a particular congregation, nor of personal devotion to a particular doctrine or leadership; religious experience can be developed in any church nearby (Levitt 2007). These ready-to-hand churches become a space in which the transnational experiences of worshippers acquire meaning, a place where migratory processes become relatable through the sharing of gendered, classed, racialized, generational, or spiritual experiences in both 'origin' and 'destination'.

Pentecostals favour these two different approaches—the established and the ready-to-hand—precisely because Pentecostalism is not composed of a unified theology. Scholars have often remarked that this is the 'key' to coping with modernity and globalization in religion today. Pentecostalism's distinctive characteristic among major religious groups is that it embraces and accommodates global exchange and change. Different streams of theological interpretation or approaches within Pentecostalism resist the idea of a sole doctrinal system guided by a particular logic (Hollenweger 2004, p. 129; Pinnock 2000).

In the global amalgam of different ethnic, national, linguistic and racial groups, human bodily and emotional experiences are reworked as transcendent languages that facilitate the incorporation of the many voices of 'the local' (Wilkinson 2011, p. 42). Pentecostalism's theological diversity and its cultural mosaic find common ground in the experience of the supernatural, as the manifestations of the Holy Spirit are embedded within and emerge out of the body.

In this regard, Roswin Gerloff (1995) argues that the non-white Pentecostal Charismatic movement offers a series of responses to traditional Christianity in which experiential aspects of religion play a greater role than does dogma, rhetorical arguments, or rational treatises. Gerloff calls attention to the strong faith that emerges with a renewed sense of independence from hegemonic Westernized Christianity and that takes seriously structural marginalization, exploitation, and oppression.

Pentecostal movements in Africa long proclaimed a biased history that entrusted Western institutions, leaders, and experiences with the responsibility of defining what constitutes fact and consequences. This offered a misleading framework for understanding how African Pentecostals developed independently from Western missionaries (Gaiya 2002; Jesse 2014; Kalu 2008, 2009; Ndung'u 2009). Until the late 1990s, the majority of studies done on the history of Christianity in Africa focused exclusively on white Christian missionaries' role in evangelizing Africans, rather than looking at African evangelists themselves (Kalu 2009).

Though international media depictions of Pentecostals focus mostly on white North Americans Pentecostals, Pentecostalism in the non-white global South accounts for up to three quarters of born-again Christians worldwide (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2006). Instead of relying on the 'application of imageless ideas exported from the West', anthropologist James Fernandez (1978, p. 215) argued that scholars should be 'beginning with African images and, by careful methodology, learning what they imply—what is embedded in them'.

Pentecostal Charismatic movements in Africa are interactive and should be understood independently from Western historical accounts of Christian missionary work. Their social architecture of belonging and membership is a process of layered integration of migrants into church spaces. This describes a distinctive response by African Pentecostals to modernity and the complex migratory processes that take place on the African continent and in the African diaspora. With its historic

background involving racial, social, political, and cultural dynamics, these Pentecostal congregations become what Emmanuel ([Akyeampong 2000](#), p. 209) defined as 'important spaces for the establishment of kinship and family networks while extending the emotive religious experience initiated by Pentecostal churches in the homeland'.

In my study, I examine the ways these spaces are structured by religious leaders and how these leaders interpret migratory processes religiously, transforming them into meaningful church experiences for churchgoers. My data shows how pastors reorganize religious space to negotiate moral and cultural identities that either help foster integration of migrants into new social roles or duplicate the communal experiences of a constructed homeland while adapting these practices to new surrounding circumstances.

4. A Social Architecture: Missions, Fellowships, and Roles

Every Friday, the intercessors come together to intercede for the church. They intercede for our people, we intercede even for the Basque Country, and we intercede for Spain. So, we pray all around. We pray for the city, we pray for the state, we pray for the mission. We have another group here called the women's group. At the women's group, my wife is the one who is taking care of them. So, she pulls them together on how women need to behave in the church and in their homes and even in society. We also have men's groups and they also have responsibility for how to behave in the church and in their homes and in society. We have the youth, the singles who are not married, so they also have a meeting. In their meetings, one of these days, I saw the way they organize themselves on how to behave in society and behave in the church so there will be no violence. We also have a children's group. We teach them about Christianity and how to read what they learned in school, how to read the Bible and study the Bible. How to respect their father and their mother; because most of the children in the society today, especially the Spanish children, they don't know how to respect. We have to teach our children how to respect their parents.

Apostle David, Nigerian, in Bilbao, Spain, 2014

Apostle David, founder of the Hand of God Ministries International, preaches in Bilbao together with his wife, Pastor Irene, and Edward, an assistant or resident pastor, in a congregation mainly attended by Nigerians and other West African nationals. The three pastors have been living in Bilbao for over a decade and their long-term residence in the country has granted legal documentation to carry on their activities. Before residing in Spain, they lived in multiple countries either in Europe or Africa and had formal education ranging from technical courses to university degrees. Their "privileged" situation contrasts with most churchgoers who attend their congregation. As pastor Edward explained to me, their followers are often undocumented migrants with low levels of education. Located in a semi-peripheral neighbourhood[5] 10 blocks away from high-end shops, street cafes and tourist buildings, the church building is reminiscent of the industrial era that lifted the Spanish economy in the first half of the 20th century. The denomination has other branches in David's hometown of Benin City, Nigeria, as well as in the Spanish cities of Valencia and Pamplona. From 2006 to 2016, I witnessed the expansion of the church's headquarters in Bilbao in both space and the number of attendants, currently at around 150.

The profile of churchgoers is mixed: children, young people and adults who seem to attend services with their nuclear families. The congregation has a variety of activities for members, ranging from weekend entertainment and spiritual guidance to weddings, baptisms, fellowships, prayer groups

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5 Considering the dimensions of the municipality of Bilbao (350,000 inhabitants), its population density is one of the highest in Europe (8300/km^2). The metropolitan area extends to around 15 km, and along the margins of the River Nervión, there are churches located in a strategic area that is relatively close to the city centre ("Chart 158". *Ine.es. Archived from* the original *on 3 April 2015*. Retrieved on 26 June 2014.)

and choirs. This diversity establishes subdivisions, commonly known as fellowships, which provide specialized devotional practices. This is a widespread strategy among Pentecostals. Such encounters help socialize each member to either a gendered or age-specific form of spiritual worship; they may also encourage the development of particular charismatic or musical skills. After a year of visiting Apostle David's church, I realized that the importance these religious activities hold goes beyond the weekly Sunday service. The many activities offered are a means for socialization worshippers into both the African Pentecostal tradition and into Spanish society. I observed this patter in other congregations as well.

Pentecostal church leaders understand these activities as forms of teaching or training for migrant churchgoers. Members are taught how to respond to the stresses of their host society and to their interactions with other migrants and locals. As David explained, these meetings address pressing social topics, experiences and circumstances, while detailing specific virtues for each group: they teach men responsibility, children respect for their parents, and young people about calmness and peacefulness (so as to avoid violence). Pastors and worshippers discuss reactions to xenophobic attacks, tackle unemployment by promoting informal jobs within the community, and address gender, conjugal, and peer conflicts.

I also visited Diplomat's Assembly, a Nigerian-led Pentecostal church in the semi-peripheral vicinities of the Randburg in greater Johannesburg. The building, which was typical of an industrial area, was an unsurprising location for a Pentecostal church as far as I observed in my fieldwork in Bilbao and Johannesburg. The congregation was founded by Pastor Emmanuel and assisted by Pastor Victor, whose activities include preaching in radio shows and online streaming videos. Three other branches of the church had developed activities under this particular denomination: two in Port Harcourt and Lagos, Nigeria, and one in Nairobi, Kenya. Pastor Victor articulated that the vision of the church is strongly marked by educating congregants not only in spiritual matters, but also in several aspects of social life ranging from affective relationships to finances.

With these brief accounts of Pastor Emmanuel's church in Johannesburg and Apostle David's church in Bilbao, I drew a preliminary picture of what I later observed in all six congregations selected for this fieldwork. As trained pastors, migrants themselves, and holders of charismatic skills, these church leaders design sections and subdivisions among worshippers that shape a hybrid African and Pentecostal culture. Their social architecture allows strategic spaces for the negotiation of cultural tensions and for the establishment of moral codes and modes of behaviour that configure African Pentecostal responses to modernity. In other words, while (re)producing this social architecture, pastors and worshippers are also creating (and belonging to) a borderless kingdom of God.

As I intend to show, the integration of worshippers into such social architecture is accomplished first by the breakdown of the church community into smaller assemblies. These smaller groups provide a specialized social capital for worshippers as they are taught the African Pentecostal values they need to navigate the vicissitudes of life in their host countries: Spain and South Africa. Second, each group engages members in a spiritual transformation process that prepares them to assume family roles as mothers, fathers, children, men, women, elders, religious roles as evangelists, missionaries, pastors, and professional positions as teachers, medical doctors, businessmen or women, etc. A third dimension of this process involves the ascription of meaning to interpersonal relationships among group members. This forging of family-like bonds and the creation of a moral community seems to bring together members of different ethnic groups and educational backgrounds through shared biographical experiences. As they reach across social boundaries, members exchange stories of everyday experiences and suggest to each other solutions to the problems that their lives as migrants raise. These mutually supportive relationships produce a shared sense of belonging to a simultaneously inclusive and exclusive religious community.

In sum, the following sections explore the ways through which such communities rework cultural elements from either South Africa or Spain into African and European traits within a Pentecostal framework. This approach offers a particular model *for* reality that conflates the various models *of*

reality—local, global, conservative, progressive, Spaniard, South African—particularly evident in diasporic contexts (cf. Geertz 1966). It is one that helps them to repurpose their lives and make sense of relationships inside and outside the church community in Bilbao or Johannesburg; it also helps them make sense of their mission of spiritual transformation within the church.

5. Forging Afro-Christianities

In both Bilbao and Johannesburg, church fellowships were similarly organized by gender, age and individual spiritual gifts. Assistant or trainee pastors and other leading figures (i.e., fellowship leaders, prayer leaders, etc.) were often held responsible for organizing the activities where age and gender were identified by church leaders as the most important demographic features for spiritual and social growth. Some distinctive skills acquired or offered by worshippers indicate their integration into respective groups. Ushers, for example, organize services. Spiritual practices such as prayer and music become important services that members cultivate as they are socialized, integrated, and made to feel to belong to the group.

Pastor Ehis, a Nigerian church leader interviewed in Bilbao, runs the Christ the Rock Ministries, a Pentecostal church in the area of Errekalde. The congregation hosts around 120 people, mostly Nigerians and English speakers. He explained to me the purposes of gender- and age-related fellowships in his church:

> The men's fellowship is for letting them know how to live as a married man. When you are married, there are principles you need to follow. The principles of Christ you need to follow. The organization of women is to teach them how to live as a married woman. What they need to do and the responsibility as a Christian married woman. The youth, you teach them what to do as a youth and the life they need to live, the kind of lifestyle you need to live as a Christian. That's why these groups are organized; for them to know their part to play as a Christian.
>
> Pastor Ehis, Bilbao, Spain 2014

In addition to these fellowships, Pastor Ehis also underlined the importance of the elders' group, whose function are similar to the African cultural tradition of leaders who represent and discuss matters on behalf of the larger community. These elders are respected members of the African Pentecostal congregation and are not simply lay worshippers in the way an adult woman or young boy might be. They are defined as wise worshippers, and they often preach in specific services and church gatherings.

In this way, these subgroups not only uphold key Christian roles, but they also respect and uphold social values and moral codes rooted in what they understand and honour as part of African culture. Addressing how to carry out proper affective relationships, cope with family conflict, or build loyalty and honesty in friendships were among the most pressing concerns for church leaders and attendees. These topics were discussed regularly in the various fellowship groups, with constant references made to the Bible. These references help believers cultivate a shared understanding of personal conflicts that can be anticipated or even solved by spiritual means.

Moreover, belonging to a religious community requires compromise: not only in terms of worship practices, but in the formation of affinity groups. Such affinities have been previously defined by the organizational structure of the church (e.g., prayer warriors, choir members, fellowships, etc.) and are often recalled and deployed in collective gatherings of all sorts (e.g., *intra*denominational or *inter*denominational church services, festivals, conferences, etc.). These affinity groups can also refer to migratory categories. For instance, when located in Bilbao, values and morals are articulated under the auspices of stereotyped European and African ontologies. At times, pastors stressed what it means to be a 'real African man', or they address the community as 'we, Africans' as opposed to 'those Europeans'. In Johannesburg, the basis for comparison to an 'other' was linked to secularized

South African society as opposed to its more traditional counterparts. Instead, the wider society[6] was broadly framed as violent, xenophobic, inefficient, and materialistic, as opposed to more positive attributes that aspire toward cultivating a strong work ethic or the pursuit of promising educational and business opportunities.

The small-group structure increases the number of opportunities for migrants to develop a sense of belonging among those who share similar struggles and for whom experiences of migration resonate. This social architecture of belonging is shared not only within the community of reference, but also among those in other African congregations. It is not uncommon, for instance, to participate in conferences dedicated to fellowships within a particular church network or denomination. Likewise, a believer can participate in a fellowship that is not part of a specific congregation but constitutes an independent ministry.

For example, Pastor Emmanuel, now a media personality and senior pastor at the Diplomat's Assembly Church, told me that he was gradually introduced to the world of preaching when attending a university student fellowship in Nigeria, his home country. He said: 'we got into the fellowships and we got to know so many things that we didn't know had become exposed to Pentecostal preachers; and then, the more we knew, the more our mind opened up, and the more I've found myself preaching more, talking to more people.'

While the pastor complained that, back then, he did not feel socially integrated in the university environment, the fellowship opened a new way for him to socialize with other students in non-academic settings. Furthermore, Emmanuel's student fellowship at university was constantly visited by pastors from different congregations who were experienced in caring for student fellowships at other universities throughout Nigeria and abroad. The relationship Emmanuel established with this network of pastors helped him set up his own church in South Africa later on in his life.

These scenarios echo what Loren Landau (Landau 2009) has previously highlighted as the capacity of religion to bind communities in a 'stable way', offering channels of inclusion and mechanisms of exclusion. Moreover, when dealing with unbelievers or new believers, religion has the ability to enhance cohesion and resistance. Landau's work points out that religious organizations are capable of bonding host and migrant communities, as well as offer fertile ground on which to preserve 'a touch of the familiar amidst an identifiable other' (Landau 2009, p. 5).

The kinds of diversities observed in the churches of Bilbao and Johannesburg also parallel what Steven Vertevoc calls 'super-diversity' or 'the proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of additional variables' (Vertovec 2007, p. 2). He shows that diversity cannot be seen solely through ethnic or linguistic lenses. Additional variables were observed in this case by pastors who expressed their difficulty in dealing with the different levels of spirituality and faith among worshippers. According to them, such 'imbalances' are due to the cultural, social, educational, migratory, generational, and linguistic differences among congregants, which explains the strong agenda for Afro-Christian socialization. According to Kando, founding pastor of the *Misión Evangélica de la Reconciliación*, a diverse set of individual variables and personal traits need to be examined at a micro-level and spiritually managed by pastors in order for congregants to 'sing the same tune'. In spite of its unusual location—an underground storage facility of a derelict building in a migrant area of Ibaiondo in Bilbao—the church carries on a series of weekly activities. These activities give worshippers the chance to collectively develop their spiritual gifts such as singing in a choir, praying or studying the Bible.

Therefore, the process of the 'layered integration' of worshipers within the church community forges stable bonds among equals without stressing ethnicity or nationality. This spiritual integration within the fellowships helps congregants—whether immigrants or locals—socially define themselves.

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[6] I define 'wider society' as including the Basques, South Africans, non-congregants, or other migrant groups. However, it is acknowledged that a 'wider society' is not a unified construct by which social and cultural recognition among its members is monolithic. For our purposes, the notions of 'host' or 'wider' societies are discursive efforts to frame 'otherness' along the social construction of 'us'.

The breakdown of the church into specialized fellowships also helps forge roles that seem consistent with African Christian values, regardless of where worshippers reside. Adscription to fellowships helps pastors manage the social and cultural diversity of their congregations, but that in itself is not enough. It also enables re-signification of kinship and social bonds among migrant worshippers.

6. The Negotiation of Gender and Family Roles

Understanding the forms of belonging among African Pentecostals depends on the pastors' approaches to managing a congregant's socialization and integration to the larger group, encouraging members to 'stick together' no matter where they reside. Moreover, the emotional attachments among congregants fostered by Pentecostal pastors in Bilbao and Johannesburg are evoked through co-dependent processes of individualization and *communitarization* of certain values, roles, and ideas. But how does this type of 'bridging' operate? Which aspects are recalled and deployed in such a process? How are African Pentecostal migrants' ideals of family and gender roles different from their European and non-Christian ideals and how do these church leaders and communities navigate these differences?

Participation in the weekly activities and everyday life of these churches' circles exposes migrants to a constant call for the resuscitation of 'lost' family values and for the maintenance of an ontological security found only in the kinship that characterizes the 'kingdom of God'. The relationships among worshippers under the aegis of a 'new family' are developed, where kinship and social bonds are rearranged by harmonious discourses of control and stability. This ideal family encapsulates biological nuclear notions while being extended to spiritual brothers, sisters, 'papas', and 'mammas', as they are affectionately called among African Pentecostal Christian communities.

On closer examination, it is clear that something akin to a renegotiation of gender roles takes place at the intersection of Christian and African(ized) kinship. Beyond their attained religious titles, church leaders are often referred to as the spiritual papa or mamma of the community, while worshippers refer to themselves as brothers and sisters in Christ. Age, marriage, maternity, and paternity are then reflected at the spiritual level in order to recall the pillars of a Christian congregation. Maturity is defined as a form of spiritual knowledge acquired as a consequence of one's marital status (e.g., single or married, a father or a wife). The reiterated stress upon marriage and parenthood indicates that the combination of spiritual knowledge and family-driven maturity is a prerequisite for leadership. In the words of Pastor Adam, resident pastor at the Hand of God Ministries International in Bilbao, one's marital status and attainments are the 'passport for righteousness'.

In my case-studies, the pastors' discourse views the surrounding dominant contemporary secular social realm as problematic. This stems both from the perceived lack of Christian beliefs and from the mistakes that emanate from modernity. Preachers in Johannesburg and Bilbao saw the maintenance of the patriarchal family as inherited behaviour; such filial values were characterized as being culturally African, varying a bit by specific countries of origin. Indeed, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were characterized as 'more Christian' compared to South African or Spanish society, but they were also 'more African', or 'more modern', depending on the issues being compared.

In Bilbao, pastors depicted Spaniards and Europeans as too modern and thereby as un-Christian or immoral. They also warned worshippers about African fellows who arrived in Europe and forgot God in their detrimental pursuit of materialism and individualism. In Johannesburg, pastors' critiques were twofold: on the one hand, they aimed at the un-Christian nature of South African traditions by relating them to witchcraft, sorcery, and magical beliefs. These were seen as 'old Africa', whereas African Pentecostals from Nigeria and DRC were championing the new Africa. On the other hand, they pointed to the richness of the South African economy as the 'evil' that had brought materialism and ungodly, un-African modern behaviours: drugs, divorce, violence, etc. From my perspective, these ambiguous responses display a tactical positionality regarding gender and family roles in which Pentecostals seem to always hold the 'right formula' for solving societal problems.

On several occasions, migrant pastors referred to the challenges that families face when learning to conform to standards of Pentecostal worship in everyday life. While divorce and the 'modern' devotion to a single life were both considered negative among Pentecostal leaders within their respective societies, women were often portrayed as both the protagonists and the victims of such contexts. At a women's conference at the Bread of Life Foundation, in Johannesburg, male and female pastors presented a series of Biblical anecdotes as reasons why women need specific attention in prayers. Papa Shaun, an experienced pastor and founder of the church, used the acronym W.O.M.A.N. to describe the characteristics and roles women play spiritually: 'W' is for wise, 'O' is for organizer, 'M' is for manager, 'A' is for adviser and 'N' is for nurse. Papa Shaun used various Biblical verses to support and scrutinize each of these word concepts and constructed a short theological narrative about women's societal duties in the family. He eulogized the 'natural' aspect of purity and 'cleanness' present in femininity. Some invited speakers from other churches also presented their insights on the subject.

One particular point was emphasized by a female pastor, who stated that 'women are the mystery of God'. She explained that women are mysterious by nature due to the prominent role played by emotions in the constitution of the feminine character. According to the pastor, this gendered characteristic contrasts with the male *persona* that is generally more rational. In this way, mystery and rationality were used as tools for enacting or mediating changes and awareness about what the female pastor considered as women's 'natural weakness': emotions. This idea was followed by the association of women with snakes, symbols of evil and temptation. The conference promised to empower women to fight against their weaknesses, which manifested themselves in such acts as defying male authority, materialism, divorce, abandoning children, or not getting married. This narrative caught my attention, as I had heard similar parallels between womanhood and 'mystery' in several church services, both in Bilbao and Johannesburg.

In both the African and the European contexts, pastors viewed the empowerment of women in the private sphere as her capacity to deal with family issues while maintaining a woman's role as a wife and mother. At times, pastors contrasted this vision with the 'local' way of performing these roles. Spaniards and South Africans were often deemed to be un-African and to be leading un-Christian lifestyles; these resulted in the bad behaviour of children, in homosexuality, and in the failure of both women and men to marry or remain married. By contrast the key contribution of Christian women in society was to be nurturing and to provide love and care to an otherwise broken environment. Alternatively, other pastors stated that they were concerned with women's roles becoming increasingly materialistic. They feared that financial desperation might tempt women to drift into prostitution or into relationships without love.

Yet, love was the feeling that was mostly referred to as being beyond gender. Love was also expressed in pictures as images of union between a man and woman in love. Flyers and posters were distributed in the neighborhoods around the churches, portraying the pastor and his or her partner as the protagonists of the church service see (Cazarin 2017). Such images pictured women as holding together the family by supporting their children, keeping a harmonious marriage, and keeping a functional household. These 'tasks' were seen as a part of the mission to be accomplished by every Christian woman who belongs, or aims to belong, to the kingdom of God. This mission is not just for themselves, it also seeks to convert the 'lost ones' (South Africans, Spaniards, and other African migrants) to these roles, as this would re-integrate them into God's Kingdom.

Likewise, men were also given a clear picture of what model to follow, especially with regards to those who serve in the church. All male pastors interviewed were married, and all had at least one child. Sermons in both Spain and South Africa repeatedly expressed the idea that being a true 'man of God' is connected to having a wife and being a father. In fact, more than age and attainment, in these congregations, parenthood and marriage were seen as important features of one's vocation. Although all the pastors were roughly between thirty and fifty years old, no mentions of age were made when questioned about the requirements for being a leader. In this way, the status and power of a pastor seemed to be also related to one's role in family life, particularly, if they had—or not—´become

a man´. Here, the notion of manhood was linked with the archetype of an ´(Christian) African man' who becomes real once he has a wife and children.

Inspired by a kinship found in God, African pastors symbolically legitimized social boundaries and the collective imagination of filial piety by teaching congregants to reject the past and to adopt a new family with intrinsic Afro-Christian morals. In this imagination, the church rises up as a symbol of one harmonious 'family' that surpasses all others. It adopts defensive strategies to protect the church from the evils of modernity that threaten its sacred bonds. By addressing the common failures and successes of married life among church members, pastors use their own conjugal experiences to craft moral lessons and sacred formulas to help congregants cope with the emotional stresses of a migrant's private daily life. This spiritual kinship, discursively founded upon concepts of harmony and love, is extended to those who remain faithful to the church as devoted and actively engaged Pentecostals, no matter where they reside.

7. Restoring 'Broken' Societies into the Kingdom of God

The idea of socially and morally repairing the society that surrounds the church starts within the church community itself, as well as with every single worshipper. In other words, a pastor's discourse must reflect the mission of bringing the kingdom of God to the world system, where tangible objectives are primarily focused on intimate and familiar domains. Particularly in the African diaspora, dynamics regarding migratory processes become a primary concern for African Pentecostal churches. There first arises a cry from the heart for a forgotten (essentialized African) communality and Christian ethos.

Pastors see it as their duty to show congregants that Christian values will alleviate the psychosocial dissonances between migrants' *religio*-culture and the stresses of wider society—in this case South Africa or Spain. Secondly, the church attributes distinct value to social bonds within the congregation, reinforcing its collective self-esteem to the detriment of the undesirable characteristics of other groups.

The cry for the restoration of a lost African and Christian ethos requires the transposition of an African communality to the everyday spiritual life of its members (Adogame 2004; Waweru 2011; Sow et al. 1977). According to Dimitri Bondarenko, the idea of communality 'is wider than community in the sense that as a principle of social life organization and a basis of culture, it can well manifest itself in complex societies, far beyond the community' (Bondarenko 2008, p. 7). Communality serves as a true matrix for building a complex society with pillars that enable reconstruction.

The transmission of communality within and beyond the borders of these congregations is twofold: it restores those who are both 'close' and 'far' from their respective congregations. A 'mission', as defined by several pastors, implies that this African communality is aligned with a Christian ethos that creates a 'this-worldly' simulacrum of the kingdom of God. In other words, it is the 'spiritual education' or 'maturity' of the congregation within an African Pentecostal framework that makes sense of group dissonances and challenges the wider society restores itself and becomes a spiritually driven social order. This idea reimages a once marginalized immigrant minority into a group that possesses the 'right' formulas for dealing with the distresses of the present world.

This reconstruction of bonds, morals, and values is focused on a modernized religious 'project' to 'fix' and restore a broken society. The pastors articulated these goals in cosmopolitan discourses, emphasising the strengths of both their host societies and their societies of origin, while recalling what they had learned throughout their migratory processes. Examples of this perspective were exhibited by Pastor Irene, who re-appropriated the term 'civilization' to explain how she was able to make spiritual sense of her experiences in Africa and Europe:

> Yes, there are some differences. When I went to Africa, I went to preach in our church and I also told them things that are good here, which they have to apply. Anywhere we are in the world, we must see something good in the place where you might not have that good thing. Maybe you are not seeing anything good, but there are things and you can pick them. Do you know the civilization? You go and pick those good things and add it to your own

and you will become richer than before. So, I also took things from here [Bilbao] that are good and told them.

<div align="right">Prophetess Irene, Bilbao, 2015</div>

In my view, the civilization evoked by Irene is neither African nor European; it involves an understanding of Christian morality entrenched in the Bible that absorbs both African(ized) and European(ized) values. All of these work together to help 'restore' a society to which migrant African Pentecostals can easily relate. By constructing a mental prototype that conflates being African, being migrant, and being Pentecostal, these pastors reconstruct common categories of masculinity, motherhood, European, African, religion, tradition, and culture. In doing so, their churches become a 'producer of institutional power (by) skilfully using globalization to create a global religious empire' (Knibbe 2009, p. 156). Such dynamics also echo the processes of boundary maintenance (Barth 1969) and 'ethnicization' (Sarna 1978), by which solidarity and cohesion are developed within a group and delineate a transnational Pentecostal culture.

8. Conclusions

Findings from my study reveal an African Pentecostal social architecture that forges spaces of belonging for worshippers in diasporic contexts. Three strategies guide this process: (1) the division of the larger church community into smaller fellowships aimed at providing socially transformative missions to worshippers and pastors; (2) the (re)configuration of migrants' African and Pentecostal values to bring about purposeful roles within the church community and wider society; and (3) the creation of family-like bonds and morality-based relationships in the congregation to reshape worshippers' ethnic diversity into an African and Pentecostal melting-pot centred on the moral restoration of 'broken' societies.

This social architecture not only demonstrates how socialization processes of belonging mediate such religious institutional apparatuses, but also demonstrates the complexities of integrating migrants into both the Pentecostal Charismatic community and into their wider secular societies. From weekly Sunday encounters, fellowships, or Bible schools to the establishment of relationships with migrants from other congregations, these interstitial spaces expand and grow to become a network of reference. The development of religious links and organisational structures does not rely exclusively on functional demand; the lived experiences of diverse congregants in multiple localities are significant too. While church services, conferences, and fellowships are happening in emptied warehouses, office spaces, or living rooms, these spiritual encounters are only sustainable across time if individuals feel purposefully connected with their changing life experiences.

As Homi K. Bhabha notes, within interstitial spaces marked by diversity, 'the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical but profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable' (Bhabha 1998, p. 6). In order to alleviate societal dissonances, African Pentecostals through their sermons, prayers, songs, and testimonies reinterpret, relocate, and seek to negotiate and resolve those problems by directing worshippers into specialized fellowship groups, each with distinctive roles stratified by age, gender, and/or marital status.

As stated by the church leaders I interviewed, the novelty of the African Pentecostal movement is not necessarily based on juxtaposing the ways the church of origin was built and inventing completely different strategies for a new church. Rather, African Pentecostal congregations succeed on a transnational scale precisely because they provide a social architecture of African Pentecostal morality. In a process of layered integration, this morality bounds these communities together in shared values ascribed to their respective gender, age, or spiritually gifted roles.

Whether in Johannesburg or Bilbao, the social architecture of belonging created in these African Pentecostal churches is not strictly tied to geographic boundaries. It is, instead, composed of religious experiences that integrate believers into a specific congregation and worldview. Such experiences may (1) deconstruct particular notions of integration through Pentecostalism, as well as (2) offer spaces

for belonging into collective, and individual, transformative projects within a diasporic network. As argued above, this social architecture is a platform for worshippers to shift and lift their social status from the margins to the centre while bridging the past and present, tradition and modernity, the individual and the communal, and their origins and destinations.

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