

## Religion and Ghanaian Women Entrepreneurship in South Africa

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### Abstract

The paper demonstrates that migration is not just a physical event in the life of the migrant but that it impacts enormously on ways in which migrants renegotiate their beliefs, practices, attitudes and personal and social identities in the country of destination. Attention is paid here on the effect of the religious beliefs, practices and customs of these migrant women on their personal lives, attitudes, expectations, hopes and, not least, their business practices. I have described the intensive involvement of the migrant women in Ghanaian Pentecostal-type churches in Durban and how their payment of tithes and generous personal donations to their churches is understood by these women to be the pivotal reason for their success in business and in their private lives. There is a general consensus among these women that unless they create a vital connection between their entrepreneurial activities and their religious lives, they will fail to receive God's blessing and will therefore fail to prosper in business. These women also generally dedicate their businesses to the service of God by making their business premises a locus for religious proselytizing, which, in their terms, means being able to "reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ". Some the migrants strongly regard their evangelical activities as a means of fulfilling God's will in their lives. It is for this reason that they regularly say prayers in their salons and tune their radios to gospel channels so that those women who come to have their hair dressed may (involuntarily) hear religious messages and perhaps be moved to make further inquiries about Pentecostal Christianity.

## Introduction

While people may possess a sufficient number of skills and enough knowledge to take care of most of their basic needs, these factors in themselves are insufficient to prevent the personal illness, accidents, death and natural calamities and disasters. Whether or not religious beliefs and practices can actually affect our success or reduce our personal risks, they may nevertheless be useful or adaptive if they reduce our anxieties because a reduction in the levels of personal anxiety may indirectly maximise our opportunities of success. This might be particularly true of a salvation-based religion like Christianity in whose sacred book, the Bible, St Paul writes: "Be anxious about nothing, but in everything, with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving in your heart, let your request be known unto God." Looking at the circumstances under which people turn to the gods, Geertz, in Ember and Ember (1996: 316) emphasises that it is only when people are faced with the pains, misfortunes and injustice of life that they seek to explain events by attributing them to the agency or intervention of the gods.

Religion has long been identified as an important determinant of economic behaviour in the West. Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* elaborates on this relationship and argues that Protestantism creates conditions favourable for entrepreneurial activity (cited in Bendix 1996). According to Weber's analysis, Protestants might find their religion especially congenial because of their powerful expectation of material success in this world rather than because they have any overwhelming attachment to its religious formulations or supernatural concerns. Weber observes that it is possible for people's ideas, particularly their religious ideas, to influence the course of history. As far as Weber is concerned, the most important feature of Protestant Christianity is its doctrine of salvation which is attained by means of faith (*sola fide*). Protestantism of this kind advocates forms of human behaviour that are "pleasing" to God and obligatory for all believers. In Weber's analysis, Protestants regard the maximisation of profits as being the highest good that life can offer. In his book on Weber, Bendix (1996: 93) emphasises that human beings act in obedience to religious beliefs so that they will prosper and live long lives. In contrast to this, Hamilton (1995: 97) asserts that religion is not, for the most part, a matter of individual choice. He believes that people practise a particular religion only because all members of their society have been programmed to believe in that religion.

It seems nevertheless that religious beliefs shape key aspects of immigrant entrepreneurial behaviour and performance. In my own field research I noticed that it is customary to talk about one's personal financial prosperity in the churches that I attended for purposes of research. The members of these Pentecostal Christian churches often spoke about their personal business prosperity in public in the church and in other religious gatherings, and gave public "testimonies" of how God had blessed them with wealth. This kind of behaviour is encouraged because it is

regarded as proof of one's commitment to the teachings of the church and the benevolent activity of God in caring for his own. Ghanaian women openly testified in the church I attended about how they had been blessed by the acquisition of a house or car because (as they said) they had been faithful in paying their tithes. They regarded this as proof of God's blessing and were willing to share this belief with others.

Because I was interested in the entrepreneurial activities of these particular Ghanaian women, I used the following questions to help me clarify how religious beliefs are intertwined with mundane concerns in the day-to-day running of migrant women's businesses. Is there any specificity in their entrepreneurial style that demonstrates the embeddedness of religion and entrepreneurship among my informants? How do the beliefs of my entrepreneurial sample affect the management of their businesses? Do their personal values exert a strong influence on the business performance and management of my informants? What roles do Pentecostal pastors play in the lives of these women in business?

## The Religious Background to Ghanaian Entrepreneurship in South Africa

It is often difficult to articulate clearly what the precise connection is between religious beliefs and the manner in which a business is being run. It might seem intuitively obvious that an individual's beliefs and practices would exert a strong influence on the way in which a person conducts the day-to-day conduct of a business. If religion is in fact a major determinant of the personal choices and personal attitudes of people, it might well influence believers to choose certain forms of behaviour and conduct rather than others.

Because all of my informants were strongly influenced by specifically Pentecostal beliefs in Ghana before they migrated to South Africa, all of them claimed to be Christians of a Pentecostal kind. The term *Pentecostal* in the Ghanaian context actually defies easy definition and categorisation because there are a number of Christian groups that use this label to identify themselves. In Ghana, all these groups are known collectively as Sunsum Nsore, which means "Spiritual Churches".<sup>1</sup>

When this term was first used in Ghana, anyone who believed in the possibility of receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit (described in the New Testament as being available to all believers) was considered to be a Pentecostal. Pentecostals were therefore designated as all those who believed that the "Bible pattern" of baptism in the Holy Spirit was an experience subsequent to salvation and that this experience was evidenced by the ability to speak in "tongues" or foreign or unknown languages.

My own observation was that these women are unable to distance themselves from a religion to which they had been intensively exposed from childhood. For some of these women, the beliefs and practices of their parents had been what led

them to find a spiritual home in alternative belief systems of this kind. An examination of the differences between the religious beliefs of older people and those of younger generations show that traditional African religious practices are losing ground in the lives of Ghanaian people. From the information that I was able to collect from my informants about their lifestyle and beliefs, I was able to extrapolate valuable information about their circumstances and practices. Some of the information set out below describes the circumstances back in Ghana that made these women unable to shed or modify their religious beliefs after they had come to South Africa. In spite of this, it was evident to me that traditional African beliefs still play a decisive role in the entrepreneurial success evident in the lives of my informants. Their religious beliefs and practices might accurately be described as *eclectic* because they managed successfully to harmonise and integrate beliefs, attitudes and practices from both traditional and Christian sources and religions.

### Case One

One of my key informants, Angelina Kobo, explains in an extract from her testimony (below) how her religious background made it difficult for her to belong to any religion other than Pentecostal Christianity and how her religion influences her daily life.

In our village in Jesikan, we grew up knowing that on Sundays we had to go to church. Why we went to church, I can't explain and we did not even understand. It was just one of our duties, like going to school. At times my father would go to church but as a rule, children were not allowed to stay at home on Sunday mornings. We were forced to go to church.

When we were still young, we all used to go to the Catholic Church, but I remember somewhere along the line my father stopped going. My parents married in the Catholic Church but when my father stopped attending, my mother went back to the Evangelical Church. This was the church she used to attend as a young girl and when she married, she had to move to her husband's church. We were told that if a woman married, she had to join her husband's church. Since my mother's father was an elder in the Evangelical Church, he asked her to come back to the Evangelical Church.

In Jesikan, I attended a Catholic primary school. As one of the school rules, we had to be present in church every Sunday.

An attendance register was kept every Sunday in church. If one was marked absent on Sundays, they were punished on Mondays. Attendance registers were also sent to other churches for those children who did not attend the Catholic Church. Those who were marked absent would have to carry forty-four buckets of gravel to fill potholes on the soccer pitch. The gravel was not readily available. We had to dig the gravel from the hills and carry it in buckets on our heads. I will never forget how I got blisters on my hands and had severe pain on my neck just because I failed to attend church only once. So on that unfortunate occasion, I went through what others used to go through. Since it was a bit difficult to dig the gravel, we arranged amongst ourselves for boys to dig while the girls carried. I think it was a way of introducing us to God. Even though I have left that religion, I believe it was a good way to teach us children how to follow God.

When I went to secondary school, I continued attending the Catholic Church. Whilst I was there, I used to attend crusades organized by the Christian Union (CU). Whenever there were camps organized for youths or girls, I went to listen.

In the Catholic Church, I belonged to the Saint Anthony Guild, which was for both boys and girls. We use to go for prayer meetings and pray with the rosary and the way of the cross [Stations of the Cross]. We were told that Saint Anthony used to pray those prayers and [that he] was someone who lived his life for the service of God. So for us to follow his footpath, this guild was created so that people could exemplify Saint Anthony. During those years, we would wake up very early in the morning, sometimes at 2 am and go to church. I used to wake up and walk to church. Once the church bells rings, everyone who belonged to that guild would go to church. From about 2 am, we would pray till 5 am. It was a commitment. We prayed for the sick, destitute, needy, nations, etc. We used the simple prayer book. We were told that Saint Anthony used these prayers. During my days in the secondary school, Pentecostal Christians were many and it was becoming common. Even for us who used to pray a lot were told that we were not believers in Jesus. This I couldn't understand until I started spending holidays with my elder sister, Hanna, in Accra.

I started seeing the difference when my sister's husband, Jonathan became born-again. As a result of Jonathan becoming born-again, Hanna too joined. Each time I visited them during holidays, they would ask me to accompany them to church. They used to attend a Pentecostal church. From there, every day they would pray in the house in the morning and in the evening. I knew the kind of man my sister's husband was before he became born-again (he used to drink a lot of alcohol and have girlfriends) and I realized that something was different in him. I also wanted to experience it. I then bought myself a Bible. Till then, I had never used a Bible. In the Catholic Church, we used the newsletter. After that, occasionally, I would read it and my sister encouraged me about following Jesus and the importance of being born-again.

I will never forget how village life in Ghana influenced my life. The way village life is in Ghana is such that every one has an opportunity to hear the gospel preached by the Pentecostal Christians. Whenever there was a crusade in the village, I don't know whether it was out of curiosity, most of the people, especially children came out for these crusades. It was an excellent opportunity for me to leave the house. I used to be excited to leave the house with a good excuse to meet with my friends on the pretext that I was going to attend a crusade. There were a couple of things that as a young girl I was interested in finding out about these Pentecostal practices. One of them was whether people fell on the floor or under the influence of the Holy Spirit as the preachers used to tell us. During the crusades, those who have been converted gave testimonies of how they were either thieves and they have changed or how they were sick and they were unable to be cured by the hospital and when they became born-again they were miraculously healed, etc. Some said that they were witches and have changed. These people all indicated that their presence at the crusade ground was a testimony of what happened in the lives.

These things did not mean much to me and at times I used to make fun of them and laugh. At other times, some of the songs that were sung at the crusade grounds, my friends and I would use the song and make jokes out of them. An example was; "In my heart, in my heart, I want to see Jesus in my heart".

We sang it as "In my cup, in my cup, I want to see beer in my cup".

Despite all this childishness, when one of my mother's sister's daughter, Theresa, became born-again, I had more exposure to what it really meant to be born-again. She moved to Accra to live with my sister and each time I went to visit my sister, I would share a room with Theresa. On those occasions, every evening before we went to bed she would just tap me on my shoulder and say that it wasn't sleep time yet, that we had to pray. At first I wasn't worried because I thought that it was going to be for a few minutes. On the first evening, instead of my normal five or ten minutes' prayers, I used to pray alone, we prayed, standing on our feet for more than one hour. Sometimes I felt like not sharing a room with her because she would want us to pray and pray.

With this exposure, Christian values were deposited in me but the real turning point was when I got married. My mother-in-law always accused me of squandering her son's money. During those early years in marriage, I used to have bad dreams and I was told by some of the people in our village that my mother-in-law was a witch. In my dreams I would see people threatening to kill me. This drew me closer to God in whom I could seek protection and the Pentecostal Church in which I knew how to secure my protection. I joined the Christian Union and every Sunday evening, we would share the word of God and pray together. I would like to say that it is God who calls his own.

In Ghana, the fetish priests are revered because people believe that they speak with the voice of God through a god or spirit who lives within them and who speaks through their mediumship. They are locally regarded as the representatives of God because, it is believed, they act as intermediaries between creator and creature (Williamson 1965: 102). Helen and the other informants told me that when they were young, their parents prohibited them from asking any questions about fetish priests or the activities that went on in a shrine. Because fetish priests are regarded as having the power to inflict illness and misfortune by means of cursing, they are greatly feared among those who reverence them.

Meyer and Geschiere (1999) claim that people are abandoning the traditional missionary churches in Ghana because the Pentecostals have presented themselves and their practices in such a way that the comparison makes the traditional mission

churches seem largely powerless and ineffectual. Pentecostals criticise the missionary (traditional mainline) churches for failing to emphasise the role of wealth and health in the lives of believers and for their failure to emphasise their own belief that those who believe in Jesus Christ will be rewarded after they have died. In contrast to the kind of salvation preached by the mainline missionary churches, the Pentecostal churches teach that the gospel confers both material and spiritual fulfilment in this present life. Matshidze (2004) believes that Pentecostalism has become enormously popular in West Africa because it produces radical changes in the lives of believers. It changes both the way in which they view the future and the way in which they feel about the present. It depicts God as a caring father who comes to his children through the power of the Holy Spirit because, in Pentecostal belief, God is a God who touches human hearts and restores hope in the midst of life's troubles and anxieties. Cox (1996) has noted in his study in Kinshasha that most of the people who join Pentecostal churches are those who have abandoned traditional mission churches to look for salvation in other Pentecostal-type churches where their aspirations towards material prosperity might be better addressed. As one of the pastors I interviewed remarked, "Fight fire with fire."

## Case Two

Agatha Abua, owner of African Specifics Hair Salon in Durban, felt that the Pentecostal influence in Ghana made her and her Ghanaian counterparts "feel [like] natural Christians". While her hair salon is situated in Albert Street, Susan's is located in Smith Street. They share a flat in Russell Street although they own different hair salons. It was during my in-depth interviews with Agatha that I realized how easy it is for people to expose the private beliefs and practices of others while not revealing their own. Before I explain how this happened, let us first read Agatha's account of how Pentecostalism influenced her life.

By the time I left Ghana, I wasn't a really Pentecostal Christian but because the charismatic movement had been introduced into the Catholic Church where I belonged, I had received Jesus Christ into my life. The charismatic movement had long been in existence in bigger towns like Accra and Kumasi, but in Jesikan, it was introduced only about fifteen years ago. I was a committed member of the movement. We prayed in tongues like the Pentecostal churches but it somehow brought division which I think is present till now. We were encouraged to read the Bible and find things out ourselves. I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We prayed for sick people and they got healed but we were still restricted in many ways because we

were under the control of the Catholic priest who was not baptized in the Holy Spirit. What I didn't like was the fact that we still had to pray using the rosary and holy water. However, the charismatic influence drew me closer to the Pentecostal Christians. There was a change in me because I started asking questions about things that I didn't understand about being a Pentecostal Christian.

Pentecostalism became the most influential current in Ghanaian Christianity after the 1990s. This might well have been influenced by the institutionalisation of charismatic movements in the Catholic Church itself that had occurred a few decades earlier. The Catholic hierarchy at that time began to accommodate Pentecostal values in the Catholic Church because they feared that they would continue to lose members to the Pentecostalists.

Before we all left Ghana, we had heard the gospel of Jesus Christ although some chose not to believe it completely. My father once said that when he was growing up, there were few churches, but presently in Ghana, "When you lift a banana leaf, you will be certain to find a Pentecostal church underneath." In our village, Jesikan, there is no one who can claim that they haven't heard the gospel. One of the reasons why Ghanaians all claim that they are Christians is because back in the villages during Christmas, one cannot find a seat in church. The person coming to church may be "as drunk as a fish", saying that it was the end of the year and "I have come to thank my God who has helped me throughout the year". From the experience I have with my sister whom I live with, I understand that some people don't want to be told to abandon their traditional beliefs.

Back in Jesikan, we have fetish priests that people, especially when they are about to leave Ghana, go to look for good luck. Some people like myself have moved away from them while others like my sister have not. For this group of people, praying to an unseen God is not enough. The elders believe in it [so strongly] that when some of us are about to leave Ghana to travel abroad, they will come and pray and commit you in the hands of the ancestors. I remember when I was about to travel to South Africa (I came before my sister, she followed a year after), my father said that even though we are Christians,

before I travel we had to go to Papa Kodjo (a fetish priest) to pray on the altar and offer chicken and eggs so that it would be well with me in South Africa. By then I was a “born-again” [and] so I refused and left. My sister, Susan, followed my parents’ advice.

Susan is not a committed Christian. I always had to plead with her before she would go with me to the Durban Christian Centre. She goes to church occasionally and she can even go to a Malam (a Moslem traditional healer) if she wants to achieve something. She left Ghana with ten Cedis (equivalent to R10) given to her by Papa Kodjo which she puts underneath her cloth box. This she says is to make her prosperous. She also has a cream which she uses every morning before she enters her shop, which was given to her by the same fetish priest.

After Agatha had told me this, I interviewed Susan and asked her whether she believed in traditional medicine, but she refused to tell me. Instead she explained to me how dedicated she was as a Christian, and told me that the only reason why she didn’t go to church every Sunday was because she had too much work to do. Agatha then suggested that I might check the truthfulness of her [Agatha’s] statements about Susan by concealing myself near Susan’s salon early the next morning and observing Susan’s actions immediately before she opened her salon to the public. And so I followed her advice and observed Susan approaching her salon. She looked around, took a container from her bag and rubbed her hands and face (as though she were using some cosmetic or face cream) before she opened the salon. I allowed some time to elapse for her to enter her premises so that she would not suspect that I had been observing her. When I entered the premises, I could smell a foul smell which Susan explained was caused by the fact that the salon was untidy. (While I had doubts about whether or not I was doing the right thing by engaging in this kind of behaviour, I justified it to myself by rationalising that capturing accurate data was the most important duty of a researcher in the field.) Agatha then described to me her first attempt to confront her sister about her practices.

When I asked her to stop believing in things that could destroy her, I was surprised at her response. She told me that when I refused to go to Papa Kodjo when I left, she, her father and her mother went there on my behalf. They bought drinks and poured libation and informed our ancestors that I had left for South Africa and that they should look after me. They even promised the ancestors that if things went well with me

they will slaughter a goat. When I heard this, I wrote a letter to my parents and warned them never to do that again because I don’t believe in it. I also told them that I was not going to send them money to buy the goat. Thereafter, I prayed and brought some of my elders to help me pray and cancelled the effect of what happened at home. I have made a conscious decision that whatever gods my ancestors served, I will not be part of such ceremonies.

All of my informants, whether or not they practise their traditional religion, claim to be Christians. This anyway was the dominant impression that I received from my informants. It is standard practice for my informants to attribute their well-being to “the grace of God” every time one asks them about their personal welfare or that of their businesses. Their persistence in this regard might well, however, be explained by the fact that it is expedient for them to be identified as Christians because Christians are widely regarded in society as exemplary citizens with good attitudes who never cheat or commit crimes.

### **The Religion/Cultural Embeddedness of Ghanaian Entrepreneurship**

After several months of fieldwork and long periods of active involvement in the lives of my informants (fifteen months), I realised that although they *all* claim to be Christians, these claims might well be motivated by their fear of the hostility they might encounter should they reveal the truth about their continuing attachment to their traditional religious beliefs and practices. While they understand on a rational level that they might indeed possess the skills and knowledge necessary to ensure their material success, they also instinctively understand that such knowledge cannot protect them from the illness, accidents and natural disasters that are common to all human beings. In the face of such incontrovertible circumstances, religion provides them with solace, comfort and the solidarity and practical support of their fellow believers.

Most of these women believe that in the face of the unavoidable adversities of living abroad and running businesses that might well disintegrate at any time (because if thieves break into their shops and steal everything they possess, they will be out of business), it is necessary to maintain the soundness and integrity of their relationship with God, as they see it. The situations in which they find themselves are precarious indeed, and even if their religion fails to accomplish absolutely everything for which they hope, it nevertheless provides them with explanations for inexplicable events and misfortunes. It is probably for this reason that they continue to identify themselves as Christians.

Among these women there is a general consensus that religion indeed lies “in the shadows” of their business lives. Whether or not they practise their religion to any great extent, they believe that their success or adversity in business is somehow predicated on their belief in God. Paullina Kesiwah, one of my informants, describes her belief in God and the following way:

I believe in God. If anyone does not believe in God, what does she/he believe in? At the end of each month I have to give something to God because I believe that he is the one who has blessed me. If he does not send customers to me, they will not come. My health is in his hands. Apart from this I also believe that if you don't know how to do hair, talk nicely to customers and use good products for customers' hair, God cannot make you to prosper. Although believing in God helps you to prosper, you must also know how to manage a business.

Some are my informants regard their business not just as a means of achieving worldly and material success, but also as a vehicle for carrying out God's creative and redemptive plan as they understand it. Understanding their business activities in the light of God's divine plan for them enables these women to feel that what they do and how they do it is significant and important. It is clear from what they have told me that these women have integrated their religious beliefs and economic activities by attributing their business success to God. This is illustrated below by what Mary recounts about her belief in God.

I am a Christian and did not come to this country to joke with my Christian life. I don't attend the church formed by the Ghanaian pastor any more. When it was founded in 2002, we all went there, trying to support what we called “a local initiative”. What I saw made me decide to leave the church before I compromise my Christianity. Ghanaian men and women were using the church as a place where they could dress and show their riches. Above all, there were lots of gossips around. The pastor also was always travelling out of South Africa and most of us concluded that he was using our money to travel abroad while most of us could not afford that luxury.

Most of my Ghanaian colleagues use traditional medicines brought from Ghana to make them succeed in business. I believe in my God and to feel that my business is part of his plan to reach the lost with the gospel and to prosper me.

Mary demonstrated her belief in the inextricable supernatural connection between her religious practices and the business activities of her daily life. She described her salons as a pulpit that had been given to her by God. She asserted that even though she was unable to preach in church, she was able to identify innumerable opportunities to “preach” to the customers who came into her salon. She felt that God had given her a salon, not only to dress women's hair, but also to address the spiritual needs of women in a convenient and natural setting. She also utilised the public space of her business premises as a meeting place for other believers. She did this by inviting selected Christians to come in from time to time for a word of prayer, especially early in the morning before the arrival of customers. Mary had therefore specifically dedicated her premises to God as a place for the conversion of unbelievers. Since I am a Pentecostal believer, I took the opportunity to attend Mary's early-morning prayer hours between 8 am and 9 am during the period in which I was engaged in fieldwork.

When women came to Mary to have their hair dressed and to speak to her about their problems, Mary used the opportunities that this interaction provided to preach to them the gospel of Jesus Christ. She then introduced them to someone else who would be able to solve their more specific life problems. When women “gave their lives to Jesus” after a specific intervention of this kind, Mary would ask them to start attending any conveniently nearby Pentecostal church of their choice. In this Mary was quite unlike other Pentecostal Christians who used to insist that their new converts should attend the same churches that they attended. Mary explained the attitude on this matter by saying that it was her duty to direct people to God—and not to a church. If, however, they chose to attend the same church that Mary attended (the Christian Revival Church), she would be pleased. But she never put any pressure on her converts to do so. The only radio station constantly playing in Mary's salon was the South African gospel radio station, Radio 2000. She explained that this gospel radio station gave customers the opportunity either to listen to the gospel while they were having their hair dressed or to listen to gospel songs. She therefore deliberately and consciously used her business as an evangelical tool. After listening to a preacher on the radio, customers, especially non-believers, were often ready to discuss what they had heard. Mary would then seize the opportunity to tell them about Jesus in her own words and to testify to them about what Jesus had done for her. Many women were thus moved to join a Pentecostal church because of Mary's religious witness in her salon.

My interviews led me to note that Pentecostal pastors tended to play a very active role in the lives of the women in business from their congregations. I deduced this from the frequency of pastors' visits to either the residential or business premises of their church members during my period of observation. I noticed how these pastors prayed for their female congregants during their visits, and how much these visits encouraged the business women with whom I was in contact, especially if the

pastor's visit coincided with a period of family or business crisis. As Weber (cited in Bendix 1966) notes, the general ethos of Protestant doctrine and practice are well-suited to entrepreneurial activities. Bonacich and Modell (1980) assert that each variant form of religion corresponds to a specific system of social and economic relations that are in turn determined to some extent by the religion itself. What would be required here is to explain religious affiliation in terms of the social relationships evident in churches themselves. Most people find it more congenial to engage in an affirmative social relationship rather than to regulate their lives by a set of rules imposed by a church. A common saying among Pentecostal pastors is "Friendship before function." This suggests that people are more likely to attend a church and express a religious affiliation if they are drawn into such commitments by the individual friendship and concern of religious people already established in an organisation.

In the following account, Mary described what she felt she needed to do if she wanted her business to be recognized by God and to be blessed by him.

When I found the shop in West Street where I opened my salon, before I started receiving customers, I called my pastor who came with other elders in church to come and pray and bless my business. This has helped me a lot. In 2001, I was failing to pay my rentals as well as my employees. I didn't understand what was going on so I invited my home-cell members. In our church, we are divided into different home cells which take place every Thursday at 6 pm at the home of our home cell leader. I approached them and told them what was happening with my business and we decided to hold a meeting in my salon and pray for God's intervention.

A few days after we held this prayer session in the salon, one of my employees came and told me that she was going to tell me something and she pleaded with me not to tell anyone else that she is the one who told me. She said two of her colleagues (Mary's employees) had gone to a traditional healer and taken some medicines which they had been using to chase away my customers. They were planning to direct these customers to their residence that same week, and quit their jobs to start their own hair salon at their residence. I couldn't believe how I left my country, came here and employed people who wanted to destroy my life. I called the two girls that same day and told them that they cannot succeed to destroy me because my God is the first and theirs is the last. When they heard this, they

started crying and asked me to forgive them. One week later, they managed to call back some women they had chased away. Unfortunately, they became uncomfortable in the salon because they realized that I knew their secrets and finally left the salon. Thereafter, the business started running well and became profitable.

I know that I cannot joke with God, so I do whatever He asks me to do. I know I should pay 10% of my profit as tithe to God, but I am unable. Whatever I have, I give to the church. When I give, my business prospers. It is also another way to support the work of God and the church ministers who are there to pray and support us emotionally. It is my responsibility to take good care of the church ministers. To pay tithe is good. The money we pay as tithe is used in taking care of the church. It is also good for my spiritual well-being.

Cecilia Yebua also believed that she could not run her business successfully without giving God the "first place" in her life and affairs. This is how Cecilia described it:

I am dependent on God for everything that I do in life. Before opening this salon, I called my pastor and he came and prayed for the salon. I attend the Durban Christian Centre. I believe that God gave me this business as a means of using me for his glory. I am happy because our pastors are very involved in our lives to make sure that we are succeeding in our businesses. Every Tuesday at 9 am, we have a meeting for business people, organized by our pastors. During these meetings, our businesses are prayed for and then we see success. I also believe that payment of tithes is very essential for the success of every Christian, not just for business people. I pay my tithes and I think it is one of the reasons why I am succeeding. With God, the rules are straight, "Give and it shall be given." If you pay your tithes, you will succeed in whatever you do, but if you do not pay, you will obviously fail.

Ada was one of my informants who decided to remain a member of a church founded by a Ghanaian pastor. This church, which is part of a transnational network from Ghana, was called Redemptive International Power Ministry. Meyer and Geschiere (1999: 160) have noted this new "internationalising" trend in the names of Pentecostal churches. Associations between local churches and churches



abroad create a social environment in which it is easier for Ghanaians to survive and to be cared for among like-minded people.

The expansion of Pentecostalism in Ghana offers a refuge to Ghanaians who are faced with the unavoidable and stressful challenges of globalization and modernity. Van Dijk (1997) has argued that Pentecostal religion has adapted itself effectively to the modern world because it celebrates ideals of transnationality, transculturality and international mobility while encouraging the expression of personal emotion in supportive group settings. In terms of this model, the ultimate measure of success for a Pentecostal Church in Ghana would be the establishment of branches abroad, and the church with which I was mainly involved was indeed the product of just such an outreach. The vital connections maintained between Pentecostal churches in Ghana and their overseas branches facilitate the movement of ideas, commodities and people throughout an international Pentecostal network (Van Dijk 1997).

Contemporary Pentecostal churches affirm their identity as representatives of a particular kind of global Christianity by using words such as “world”, “international” or “global” in their individual church names. This tendency facilitates the “planting” (a term often used by Pentecostal pastors) of churches in the diaspora. This emphasis in church names is, of course, intended to draw attention to the concept of the church as being physically unbounded. The international ethos of Pentecostal churches makes them more attractive and desirable in the eyes of local people who are likely, on this account, to be more receptive to their message. The Redemptive International Power Ministry was founded in 2001 by Pastor Andrew Andoh as an affiliate church of the Redemptive International Power Ministry in Kumasi, Ghana. This church offers a social space in which new Ghanaian immigrants can meet and form social relations. It naturally also gives business people opportunities to assess the viability of niche markets. Newcomers often use the contacts they make in this religious space to learn how to go about renewing their visas since most of them enter the country with only a tourist visa. All this happens in a natural and supportive atmosphere because church members (known among themselves as “brothers and sisters in the Lord”) are expected to help one another both practically and spiritually. Although some Ghanaians use this church as a “bridge” to establish themselves in South Africa, some were already bona fide members of the mother church in Ghana before they emigrated. For such as these, being able to join the “sister church” in South Africa is one way of having a “home from home”. The church in Durban utilises premises that had previously been a cinema in The Workshop Shopping Mall in the city centre for its activities. Before it relocated to these premises, it carried on its activities in a hall in Albert Street in Durban. But when the membership passed the forty mark, the church moved en masse to its present location. It is interesting to note how migrant Pentecostal churches in South Africa utilise public spaces to hold their meetings and carry out other activities.

Meyer (1999) notes how Pentecostalism has colonised many hitherto secular

realms in Ghana. Most state-owned and private cinemas, for example, have been permanently converted into churches. Public spaces have been realigned to religious purposes in two ways: firstly, in the way in which buildings are used for various religious activities, and, secondly, in the way in which sound is amplified and projected for religious occasions. At the time of my research, the Durban branch of the International Redemptive Power Ministry had fifty regular members. Apart from the main Sunday meeting, Bible studies were held every Wednesday and revival meetings were held every Fridays. At each of these meetings, the pastor used microphones and sound projection systems despite the relatively small number of believers who were present. In fact, the sound coming from the church could be heard from as far away as one kilometre. Meyer (1999) explains how Pentecostal churches traditionally use high-volume loudspeakers as mechanisms for communicating their message, not only for the edification of their congregations but also to communicate their presence to the world outside. They customarily use very high levels of electronically amplified sound to force outsiders to become aware of their presence and activities within a building. They justify this practice to themselves by their belief that Pentecostals are obliged to preach their message not only to those who are willing to hear it—but also to those who are unwilling. This radical imperialisation and domination of public space is regarded as a means of attracting people or at least as a means of advertising the activities taking place in a building. Extreme sound amplification is also an established part of the contemporary youth music culture and is therefore also very likely to appeal to that segment of the population.

When I first visited this church with my informant, Ada, I could already hear the amplified sounds from about one kilometre away. My first impression from the outside of the church was that the congregation inside must have been enormous because of the level of sound that they were generating. Before we went inside, I asked Ada how many people there were likely to be in the church, and she told me to look for myself. I was rather startled to find that they were only about twenty people present in the meeting. All these people were engaged in praising God with song and dance in a typically Pentecostal way. The pastor was using the sound system I have already described to lead these activities and amplify his personal contribution to the meeting. After the service I was introduced to the pastor. Ada and I then returned to her house. She explained to me how the church’s membership had once stood at one hundred and fifty members but how most of them had departed because of their dissatisfaction with the way that the pastor had been using their money to travel to other countries to preach the gospel – and how he had been proud of the fact that he was travelling such a lot. She told me that when this crisis erupted, she had prayed to God and asked him whether she too should leave, but God apparently had asked her to stay on. Ada was the first person to take me to this church during my period of fieldwork.

I also observed how the pastor regularly asked if anyone had tithed money to contribute at the end of every service. When this happened, those men and women who had brought tithes would go up to the front of the church and the pastors and elders would form a circle around them to pray for them before collecting their tithes. Members of this church practised tithing because their pastors have told them that people would prosper if they were to donate tithes to the church. This kind of “prosperity gospel” teaches that the more money one gives to the church, the more money one will receive. When such people become prosperous, they are seldom surprised because they have been taught to pray tirelessly for prosperity and to assume that a causal link exists between their evident prosperity and their practice of donating one tenth of all their income to the church in the form of tithes. Tithing is in fact used in Pentecostal churches as a measure of a member’s level of personal spiritual maturity. This church regards the regular payment of tithes as a sign that a particular member has established himself or herself in a local church and that he or she is a “mature Christian”. The converse also applies. These pastors not only visit the women at their business sites, but also in their homes.

Apart from services such as the one I attended, a variety of other meetings were held during the week. On Fridays, for example, deliverance and revival meetings were held, and were often preceded by all-night prayer sessions coupled with the practice of fasting and prayer. Bible study groups were held every Wednesday. All of these meetings were conducted in accordance with a predetermined and well-understood Pentecostal church formula. They all began with a few songs of praise and worship. After that, particular forms of prayer were introduced by the person leading the service or by the pastor himself. A common form of prayer in these services was the exorcistic injunction, *Any power blocking my blessings, scatter! In Jesus’ name!* Everyone was expected to repeat this prayer several times as loudly and violently as they could so that the offending powers would obey and depart.

Revival meetings were regarded by church members as times of encounter and confrontation between the power of God and the powers of darkness (Satan and his demons). Revival meetings such as these were intentionally organised so that members might be filled with the Holy Spirit and thus be empowered to cast out the demons that were hindering the progress of believers. These meetings were tremendously popular with church members because they believed that (literally) violent praying in tongues would be able to “take back what the devil [had] stolen from them”. During such meetings, people were told that the devil had no choice but to surrender and depart because of the violence of their prayers. The pastor in such circumstances would frequently make statements like: “Power must change hands!” Members therefore came to such meetings with the firm expectation that any evil power or force that was preventing their success in business and life would be effectively exorcised. In spite of this, there were widespread rumours among

women involved in hairdressing that some of them still used “black magic” (i.e. medicines from traditional healers) to succeed in business and to prevent their rivals and competitors from being successful. During revival meetings people will often pray loudly for the power of such magic to be destroyed.

It is a common belief among members of this kind of church that “there are powers that block their progress in life”. They also believe that such powers monitor their daily activities and that they will use any opportunities they can to stop them from being successful, and that they will even attempt to close down their businesses. Such assertions are not merely personal or theological. Even in church, members will counteract the prayers of their opponents and enemies by praying to God to blind the eyes of the “agents” that these malevolent powers have planted in churches to monitor their activities. They will use prayers such as: “May every evil eye monitoring me now be blinded by the blood of Jesus!”

There are also those among these Christians of African origin who believe that a curse of poverty has been operative in the lives of their ancestors and that such a curse needs to be broken. They logically therefore also believe that if the power of such curses is not broken, they can never prosper as businesswomen. The pastor in this church maintains that even migration cannot separate people from their ancestors, and that demons have been assigned to ensure that the curses are never broken. There are specific prayers that are commonly used in revival meetings and during night vigils to break the power of ancestral curses. One such prayer, for example, is: “Every power pursuing me from my father’s house, die in the name of Jesus!” Another is: “Every power pursuing me from my mother’s house, die in the name of Jesus!”

Believers are taught that these demonic powers are stubborn and tenacious and that they will not submit if a believer prays quietly. And so believers are enjoined to pray such prayers very loudly indeed. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), in their article on occult economics and the violence of abstraction, have explained in some detail how people are in constant pursuit of (what they call) “new magical means” that will help them to attain otherwise unattainable ends. They regard actions of this kind as constituting a “new magic for new situations”. For the Ghanaian women in my sample, the malevolent intentions of their ancestors confront them with a practical problem with which they are obliged to deal. These women regard ancestral curses with the utmost seriousness because they themselves are so desperate to succeed in their entrepreneurial endeavours. They hope to succeed, not only for themselves but also for their family members who remain behind in their country of origin.

The prayers used to break the power of evil ancestral links are uttered in a manner that demonstrates the intensity of what I call “spiritual warfare” in the lives of the women in my sample. The activities described here can only be understood in terms of a worldview that asserts that human lives are a battlefield in which fierce

struggles rage between spirits that wish human beings well and those that seek to harm them. Once prayer requests have been announced by the pastor, the congregation shout their prayers as much volume and energy as they can muster. They shout violently, cover their eyes, shake their heads, jump up and down, stamp their feet, and kick and punch the demons who are visualised by the exorcising believers as the target of their violent physical aggression and antagonism. After a request for prayer has been announced and after the congregants have begun to pray repeatedly for the person or persons concerned with as much violence and aggression as they can muster, the pastor permits the prayer to continue until he senses, by means of his inner spiritual intuition, that the hostile powers have been adequately dealt with. Only once this desired state has been achieved, the pastor and congregation move on to pray for another person or situation. Whether these ancestral powers are real or imaginary, these Pentecostal Christians tacitly believe in their objective existence. They also believe that their use of aggressive exorcising prayer exercises a decisive influence on their present and future success in entrepreneurship and the degree of prosperity they will enjoy.

Apart from a few South Africans, most of the members of this church are businessmen or businesswomen from Ghana. All of them hope to succeed and become prosperous in their business undertakings. Meyer and Geschiere (1999) have pointed out that Pentecostals all over the world embrace what they call a "prosperity gospel". Others, more critically, call it a prosperity cult. In essence it encompasses the belief that God bless Christians who are genuinely "born again" with *material* prosperity. Throughout the time of my fieldwork, I witnessed men and women going up to the pulpit during services to give testimonies of how their faithfulness in paying tithes and giving generously to the church had helped them, and how they had been blessed in consequence with, for example, a new salon, a house that would have been able to build in Ghana, or a car.

## Conclusion

These women all believe that their beliefs lie in the shadow of their businesses. This is unsurprising in view of the strong Pentecostal influences to which they had been exposed before they left their homes. While most of them do not attend any church, most of them profess to be Christians. It is a matter of concern to hear everyone from Ghana professing to be a Christian even though some of them have never even attended a church since their arrival in South Africa. It is correspondingly difficult for me as a researcher to assess the sincerity of these women because they tend to express and justify their beliefs and actions in a very personal and (to me) unconvincing way.

At a certain point during my fieldwork, I realised that these women were not being open with me about their use of traditional medicines. Even though they

were often ready to point out to me that others were using such "medicines", they would never admit to doing so themselves. While it is clear that eclectic religious beliefs of various kinds play a defining role in fostering entrepreneurial success in the lives of these women, there was no single, obvious combination of beliefs (that I could ascertain) that positively correlated with their entrepreneurial success. This might explain why some Ghanaian women in Durban are not all that successful and still have to work for others in order to survive.

My in-depth interviews led me to realise that the Christian religion in Ghana forms part of the socialization process. Christian doctrines and "values" form a basis for numerous school rules, for example, and exert a decisive influence on Ghanaian community life, especially in villages. Because Ghanaians are constantly confronted with Christian values of a certain kind during their childhood, adolescence and adulthood, and because they constantly encounter these values in churches and schools, it becomes extremely difficult for them to distance themselves from such values, beliefs and rituals when they attain adulthood (whether or not they actually believe in them or practise them). I was therefore not surprised when one of my informants asked me the following question: "If someone does not believe in God, what does that person believe in?"

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj13/amanor.html>

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