Religion Crossing Boundaries
Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics
in Africa and the New African Diaspora

Edited by
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BRILL
LEIDEN • BOSTON
2010
CHAPTER FIVE

ON THE INSCRUTABILITY OF THE WAYS OF GOD: THE TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF PENTECOSTALISM ON THE WEST AFRICAN COAST

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Studies on the development of Pentecostalism in West Africa have multiplied in the last fifteen years, tracking the impressive growth of Pentecostal churches, missions, and ministries that has occurred in the last two decades in many West African countries. Various authors have examined the Pentecostal ambitions for a religious reform of society, the various social and personal changes that these churches promote, the aspirations to "modernity" that they reveal, as well as the ambiguities of their logics of rupture with "African traditions" and with the pasts of "the faithful" themselves (cf. Gifford 2004; Laurent 2001, 2003; Marshall-Fratani 1998; Mayrargue 2001; Meyer 1998, 2004).

In parallel to studies of the churches and ministries themselves, studies of the transnational historical dynamics of Pentecostalism in West Africa have burgeoned in the last decade. Pentecostal missionaries were present in West Africa almost immediately after the emergence of the movement in the United States, and certainly before 1910 (Anderson 2002). During the next decade, American missionaries from the Assemblies of God penetrated inland West Africa and settled in the Mossi region of Burkina Faso. From this hub, they explored and settled in the neighboring countries. Quickly however, Africans, too, began to play an effective role in the propagation of the Pentecostal "Good News." Mossi evangelists were active alongside American missionaries from the 1930s onwards, and Nigerian and Ghanaian Pentecostal evangelists started to propagate their faith among their colonized compatriots in the same years. Furthermore, the link between migratory flux and the transnationalization of religious movements is well known and documented. Pentecostalism in West Africa is certainly not an exception in this respect: the centers of immigration formed by the big cities of the West African Coast played an important role in the transnationalization of the movement.
Finally, the polycentric nature of the transnationalization of Pentecostalism, in West Africa and beyond, has also been strongly emphasized. The roles of Ghana and above all Nigeria as centers of propagation have been extensively noted: both countries sent missionaries to the whole of West Africa as well as to the West and in Asia. (cf. Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001: 1–21; Fancello 2003a, 2003b, 2005; Laurent 2003, 2005; Marshall-Fratani 1998; Mary 2002; Mary and Fourchard 2005; Mayrargue 2004; Moyet 2005; Noret 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Oio 2005).

Drawing on fieldwork in Benin, Nigeria and Togo, this chapter intends first to highlight the diversity of movements and logics implied by these phenomena, as well as the differences among several styles of transnationalization and multiple forms or types of transnational bonds. Second, the chapter will show how being part of transnational Pentecostal movements is today a form both of symbolic capital (see Bourdieu 2001: 107–113) and of socially recognized achievement for Pentecostal pastors.

To this end, I will build on three historical and ethnographic cases that will allow me to highlight these different points. The first case is the Assemblies of God of Benin, whose style of transnationalization is quite depersonalized, and which has taken on some aspects of a transnational religious corporation. The 2002 National Convention of the Foursquare Gospel Church in Nigeria (FGCN) and its aftermath in a Togolese village will constitute the second case. Finally, the third case will examine the logic of the construction of transnational connections by the Ministère d’Evangelisation et du Perfectionnement des Saints (MEPS), one of the most successful Charismatic churches in Benin in recent years.1

The Assemblies of God in Benin: A Transnational Religious Corporation

The Assemblies of God (AG) was among the very first Pentecostal Churches to settle in Benin (then known as Dahomey). American missionaries used the Mossi region of Burkina Faso (then Haute-Volta) as

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1 My research in Benin mainly took place between 2002 and 2004, but further research was also conducted in 2007. One-month research stays in Nigeria (Lagos) and in Togo took place in 2002 and 2003 respectively.
their hub to settle in other neighboring regions. For instance, a Mossi evangelist of their church was based in Dapaong (northern Togo, just on the other side of the border) beginning in the late 1930s, and American missionaries opened a missionary station in northwest Benin in 1945 (see Noret 2004a, 2005).

Simultaneously, in the southern part of the country, some African Pentecostal evangelists crossed the Togolese and Nigerian borders, starting missionary work in two places. They worked in Cotonou, Dahomey's economic capital, which was the destination for many economic migrants. They also worked in the Yoruba-speaking region along the Nigerian border, where ethno-linguistic similarity eased the settlement of Yoruba evangelists (see De Surgy 2001: 19–25, Noret 2009). These initiatives, however, were personal ones and depended on individual biographical trajectories. The AG settlement in northwest Dahomey, which was negotiated with the Fédération des Églises Protestantes d’Afrique Occidentale, appears to have been a more institutional and planned initiative, and was carried out far from the big cities of the West African Coast—places that otherwise played such a primary role in the transnationalization of West Africa Pentecostalism (see Fancello 2003b, 2005; Noret 2004a; Laurent 2005).

In 1949, the AG created a Bible Institute in Natitingou, the church's headquarters in northern Benin. Between the late 1940s and 1960, some American missionaries and Mossi evangelists, as well as a French-speaking Ghanaian, worked in the neighboring villages and towns, while American missionary couples taught the first generations of Togolese and Beninese pastors at the Institute itself. In 1956, the Dahomey-Togo church of the Assemblies of God (grouping the churches of Dahomey and Togo) became formally independent from the American mission. In Dahomey, 21 parishes were founded before 1960, in the northwest part of the country alone. The Beninese and Togolese churches of the AG were divided in 1965 and become two national bodies.

After independence in 1960, the AG was free to settle everywhere in the country, as the Fédération des Églises Protestantes ceased managing the settlement of churches. More branches were progressively opened all over the country, but mainly in the south. However, it was not until the 1990s, after the demise of the so-called Marxist regime of Mathieu Kerekou and the restoration of complete religious freedom, that AG growth really accelerated (cf. Mayrargue 2005, Noret 2009). According to the AG's own statistics, from 130 parishes in 1990, the AG grew to 488
in 2000 and to approximately 750 parishes in 2007. They are still the dominant Pentecostal church in Benin, as has always been the case (as they are in neighboring Togo, see Noret 2004b). They now attract faithful from all social strata.

The human and material support of American missionaries was key at the beginning, and it actually never stopped, even as the missionaries’ role in church development progressively decreased. Nowadays however, the AG of Benin is involved in more complex and diverse transnational networks and relationships than just with these missionaries. Though there are of course the individual connections between particular pastors and their foreign peers, one of the main characteristics of the AG transnational networks is that they can function without personalization, in a quite bureaucratic and anonymous manner. The AG is actually, at an organizational level, quite distinct from smaller Pentecostal churches or ministries built around the personality of a charismatic founder, as we shall see below.

In Benin, as in the other AG churches of the neighboring countries (Togo, Nigeria, Burkina Faso), the national chairman of the church is elected from among the senior pastors, as are most of the other members of the national council. From the local parish to the national-level organization, the church makes room for democratic procedures. The delegates who participate in regional and national elections are themselves elected in their own parishes. Nevertheless, this way of functioning obviously does not imply that this local democracy operates without ethno-regional logics and tensions, which have been transferred from the political field to the church. This is true even if this topic is not easily spoken about by the pastors of the AG whom I interviewed.

In electing its President and most of the members of the national council, the Beninese AG clearly distinguishes between the officeholder as a person and that office’s organizational function. This logic also applies to transnational ties and connections. For example, the last report of the executive board of the church (covering 2003–2007) called the American mission of the AG, which is still present in Benin today, the “privileged and traditional partner” of the Beninese church (Sambiéni and Bio-Yari 2007: 15). This transnational bond, whose seniority is underlined in this passage by the word “traditional,”

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2 On local democracy in Benin, see Bako-Arifari (1995).
is not here a matter of interpersonal relationships, but rather of collaboration between institutions. Missionaries and national Presidents may change without the cooperation being called into question. A personalized relationship may ease the collaboration, making it closer or more distant, but the latter is neither based on nor governed by personalities. Nowadays, the national board of the AG maintains regular relations with the American mission (which still has two missionaries based in Benin), as well as with the Action missionnaire of the French AG, as well as with the Swedish AG. These relations are personalized in different manners depending on the case. They may be highly personalized, such as when the widow of a former American missionary in Benin decided to fund a large part of the construction of a new church building in the village where her husband had lived some decades ago. But they may also be very loosely personalized, such as when a new national President is elected and inherits the church's transnational partnerships. This was the case in July 2007, when I interviewed the new President of the church while he was preparing to travel to France in order to meet his colleagues of the French Assemblies of God to discuss some cooperation projects.

Finally, Ruth Marshall-Fratani (1998) argued a decade ago that, in the Nigerian case, most of the money of the Pentecostal churches and ministries was raised locally, through the gifts and tithes of the faithful. In this perspective, the Western (and especially American) contribution to the African Pentecostal field was essentially symbolic, as Western pastors first and foremost testify to the global nature of the Pentecostal movement, which was key in the "universalizing strategies" (see Bourdieu 1997) of the African pastors, and in the construction of their legitimacy. The case of the Assemblies of God in Benin only partially fits in this model, since this case also highlights that in a transnational religious body such as the AG, North-South transfers are real. Although an important part of the church's money is produced locally, the American and European contributions are certainly not negligible. Between 2003 and 2007, different European and American "partners" have invested more than 100 million cfasf (that is, more than $200,000) in Benin. To these contributions, one must still add the contributions of the American mission, whose budget has never been known to the Beninese national executive board. Gifts of motorbikes to pastors of remote rural zones must for instance be taken into account, as must the construction of a new Bible Institute (and its library) in the center of the country (in Dassa, a small town this is also known locally
to be the main Catholic pilgrimage center in Benin), both of which were entirely funded by the American missionaries (see Sambiéni and Bio-Yari 2007: 13–16).

Between Lagos and Togo: The 2002 Convention of the FGCN and Its Aftermath

The Foursquare Gospel Church is, like the AG, historically an American Pentecostal Church. It was established in Lagos in the mid 1950s by an American missionary couple. During the following years, the church started growing slowly in the Lagos region. The first Nigerian missionary of the church settled in Benin at the end of the 1960s (see De Surgy 2001: 27), and the Nigerian church became independent from the American Church in 1971, under the name of Foursquare Gospel Church in Nigeria (FGCN). Progressively, the church spread all over the country, and a department of foreign missions was created in 1980. Since then, the Nigerian church has sent missionaries to more than thirty countries, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa, but also to Great Britain, the United States, and Spain (on the history and developments of the FGCN, see Adeogun 1999, Noret 2005). By 2002, when I observed its annual convention in Lagos, approximately 1500 parishes had been established in Nigeria.

During this event—an “encampment” of between three and four thousand mainly Nigerian delegates, I witnessed several different aspects of the church’s transnational politics. Two months later, I had the opportunity to witness other transnational social effects of this meeting in a Togolese village, when I spent a few days with a Togolese pastor I had met at the Lagos convention. This portion of the chapter recounts these transnationalisms.

Patterns of Transnational Greetings

On 10 November 2002, the first day of the national convention, the national president of the church, Dr. W. Badejo, was formally introduced as “an international leader.” A few minutes later, in his welcoming address to the assembly, he underlined the presence of delegates coming from other African countries. With more emphasis, he highlighted the attendance of representatives from the American church, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. After Dr. Badejo’s welcoming address, the national choir sang various praise songs, before
Ron Kenoly, an African-American Pentecostal singer, entered the stage. Applauded with much enthusiasm, Kenoly was introduced with much more ardent verbosity than the short welcoming words that had been addressed to the delegates of the other African countries at the beginning of the meeting. Later on, the crowd was invited to provide a warm greeting to two Papuans coming from the Foursquare church of Papua New-Guinea, who came to Nigeria on request of the chairman of the American Foursquare church. They came in order to testify to the global outreach of Foursquare on the one hand and on the other hand to get to know the developments of the Nigerian church. Their presence, like Kenoly's, highlighted the Church's politics of imagination, which clearly aims at giving the impression that Foursquare is a global (or "international," quoting the typical local phrasing) church—a claim which the attendance of Papuans undoubtedly better illustrated than did the participation of pastors and missionaries coming from other African countries.

During the week of the Convention, speaker after speaker faced the crowds, giving speech after speech and receiving applause after applause. During the evening sessions, well-known Nigerian speakers—invited because of their religious legitimacy in the national Pentecostal field—competed to deliver the most powerful preaching and prayers. These speakers were introduced with much fanfare. Significantly, their links and "friendship" with Foursquare (rather than with its President, W. Badejo) were systematically stressed by the Foursquare pastor in charge of their introduction, who also listed their main achievements.

Reciprocally, the first thing invited speakers did on taking the microphone was to thank Foursquare (and its President) for having invited them and welcoming them so warmly. They returned every compliment with superlatives, exalting the greatness of Foursquare or its relative (and respectable) age among Nigeria's Pentecostal denominations. Invited speakers and their hosts thus engaged in ostentatious

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1 Mike Okonkwo, founder of the Redeemed Evangelical Mission (REM [see Noret 2005]) and then president of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), or Matthew Ashimolowo, founder of the Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) and another prominent figure of Nigerian Pentecostalism abroad, are both examples of the speakers at these evening sessions. Such pastors are evidently considered to be among the "new figures of achievement and power" in contemporary Africa (see Banégas and Warnier 2001, Marshall-Fratani 2001).
exchanges of reciprocal legitimization before the former began to speak—something that I have long witnessed in such Pentecostal meetings. However, at the FGCN Convention, these exchanges were less personalized than is typical in younger and less bureaucratized churches than Foursquare. These younger-church exchanges seem more like meetings between two big men of God. At the FGCN Convention, the speakers most often underlined the fame and prominence of the guest on the one side and the achievements of the Foursquare church as a whole on the other, instead of focusing on its current (elected) President (see Noret 2005, and below).

Hierarchies

As I knew from the inaugural session of the Convention that African delegates coming from neighboring countries were present, when I was walking around between the sessions, I soon found the Togolese pastors who had been quickly welcomed during the opening session. As mutual French speakers, we were all glad to converse together in this English-speaking environment where they hardly understood anything of the speeches. We sympathized with one another, and watched out for each other the rest of the week. In the middle of the week, one of the two Togolese discreetly asked me to buy him a sticker and a small badge of the Convention as souvenirs, which I of course did.

On the last Sunday of the Convention, the presence of Togolese, Ghanaians, Cameroonian, and people from the Central African Republic was again briefly acknowledged, and a French translation of the preaching and other presentations was finally officially offered to pastors and missionaries from French-speaking African countries. During this worship service, organized in the national stadium of Lagos, the President of the FGCN, Dr. W. Badejo, was surrounded by numerous prominent guests, with whom he exchanged ostentatious signs of camaraderie, warm handshakes, and embraces. Their presence attested to the national and global (or "international") social capital of the church, in showing the ability of the FGCN to gather prominent international guests. Among these guests, the presence of Dr. Paul Risser, the President of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (that is, the American church), as well as of two governors of states of the Nigerian Federation, the Oni of Ife, an Igbo prominent chief and other princes and chiefs, were particularly emphasized. Beside these high-ranking figures of power and prestige, missionaries
and pastors of other African countries appeared to be quite modest transnational guests and much smaller figures of the global outreach of the church. They were thus confined to more subordinate “employee” positions, being treated more as religious workers of the FGCN abroad than as guests attesting to the Church’s “international” connections. A hierarchy in transnational connections, perceptible since the inaugural session, was evident here again.

Social Capital

Two months later, in January 2003, I visited a southern Togolese village, where the pastor for whom I had bought a sticker and a badge in Lagos was in charge of a small Foursquare parish. The village parish was in a sense typical of the poorest version of West African village Pentecostalism, with its small church building made of traditional construction materials, canopied with a thatched roof and without electricity. However, a poster of the Nigerian church hung on the door of the church building, and the sticker that I had bought for the pastor was put on the door of his hut.

The pastor had obtained no material support at the Lagos Convention, where he could moreover hardly understand anything of the public speeches and could witness only the impressive size of the Nigerian Foursquare church, as compared to five small Foursquare branches in Togo at that time. However, this pastor was undoubtedly part of the Lagos convention, even if it had been at a more modest position than the prominent “international” guests who had been welcomed as real Pentecostal stars. The convention had, in a sense, ritually established him as a transnational actor: he had acquired a form of transnational social capital. Even if he attended the FGCN Convention in a marginal position, he was now one more transnational Pentecostal actor representing openness to the wider world. Besides, my coming to the village for a few days was the occasion to recall to the dozen of faithful that the two of us were part of the Lagos convention and to position him as an embodiment of the transnational religious imagination of the village faithful, whose experience of global Pentecostal networks was even more marginal.

The meps: Personal Charisma and Personalized Networks

In southern Nigeria, the local category of “one-man churches” refers to Pentecostal churches entirely built around the charisma of their
founder, who often appears to be their President for life, too. Actually, such an expression epitomizes the prominent place taken by charismatic figures in many West African churches and ministries, among them the MEPS.

Nowadays, Pastor Elvis Dagba, founding President of the Ministère d’Évangélisation et du Perfectionnement des Saints (MEPS), is a primary figure in the Beninese religious field. In 2002, the MEPS was still a small ministry, similar to hundreds of others in southern Benin. At the time a young and dynamic pastor, Dagba told me that his ministry was also established in Ivory Coast. In Cotonou, he was collaborating regularly with Ernest Oueounou, a founding figure of the “neo-Pentecostal” or “charismatic” wave of the 1990s in Benin (see De Surgy 2001: 58–60, Mayrargue 2005, Noret 2009). We had met at a “crusade” organized by Oueounou, where Dagba was in charge of the praise and the musical animation.

Until 2007, the history of the MEPS had known troubled periods. MEPS began as a small prayer center, then was later established as a church in the family compound of Dagba’s father. The growth of the group then forced Pastor Dagba to rent a meeting room in a hotel. Then he rented a building in a neighborhood where the church was quickly considered too noisy and was forced to leave. Pastor Dagba then rented a cinema, and finally one of the largest spectacle auditoriums in the city, whose rent was excessively—even prohibitively—expensive. Meanwhile, Pastor Dagba started to preach on various radio stations, which aided the growth of MEPS and allowed him to inform his congregation of the church’s moves. In May 2006, he also started to preach on television, and he was the first to have a weekly show on a private television channel, where he systematically invited viewers to attend his church services. Finally, in 2006, Pastor Dagba established the MEPS on a bare plot of land in an inner suburb of Cotonou, where he has now erected a temporary temple with a capacity of several hundreds seats. This church building is of course much smaller than the huge auditoriums of Nigeria’s most successful Pentecostal assemblies, which have capacities ranging from several thousand to tens of thousands of seats. In Cotonou, however, the MEPS is now among the largest of church buildings, and Pastor Dagba has become a renowned personage of the Beninese audiovisual landscape.

As the MEPS is currently built entirely upon the personal charisma of its founding President (there is no room here, at the moment, for a distinction between the person and that person’s position), its
transnational connections are similarly much more personalized than are the two groups discussed above. In May 2007, for the "Night of Excellence" that he organized to celebrate the first birthday of his weekly TV program, Pastor Dagba invited as a special guest the Ivorian soap actor Michel Gohou, who is well-known throughout Francophone West Africa for his participation in the "Guignols d'Abidjan" and for his character in the television series "Ma famille." Dagba had already solicited Gohou several weeks earlier to record a television commercial announcing the event and promoting the activities of the church: the teaching session on Tuesday evening, the "faith clinic" on Thursday morning, the "shot operation" (against satanic spirits) on Friday evening, and of course, the Sunday morning service, which is a marathon starting at 9 a.m. and ending at 1 p.m. By inviting Gohou, Dagba exhibited a clear intention to affiliate with another star of the Beninese audio-visual landscape.

However, it is of foremost significance to other important "men of God" that Dagba sought to establish cooperative relationships, which would testify to his significant renown in the neighboring countries—another form of transnational religious capital. For instance, one of the speakers, the Togolese "Apostle" Kodjo Adjognon, declared when he was invited to speak (according to the interpreter, whom the audience needed because Adjognon was speaking English): "We will thank the Lord for the life of Pastor Dagba. He is my friend. He is also my brother. We walked together. And God blessed us together. Each time he visits my church, it is always a time of benediction. The people in my church love him so much. I want you to clap for him one more time." He then blessed, as well, the wife and the son of pastor Dagba. Similarly, Rev. Jean-François Comoe, coming from Ivory Coast, declared at the beginning of his message (in French): "Be blessed in the name of Jesus. Today we give thanks to the Lord particularly for the life of the man of God who gathers us together today, that is Pastor Elvis Dagba. I remember yet the first radio program that we launched together. It was at Radio Capp FM [etc.]"

The style of this speech is clearly that of the evocation of friendships between big men of God. When pastor Dagba commented on the

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4 Apostle Kodjo Adjognon is the founder of the Église Biblique Salut et Vérité, whose rise to popularity in Togo took place very recently, as he was not a prominent figure during my research in Togo in 2003 (see Noret 2004b).
event to me some weeks later (in July 2007), he added, after having underlined the success of the event, "Gabon was represented, Ivory Coast was represented, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc. I invited my friends from all over the place [my italics]."

Transnational networks of the MEPS are thus highly personalized, and actually governed by personal relationships. But these transnational connections also seem to be limited to the construction and the periodical reproduction of relations of reciprocal legitimation between "men of God," who find occasions to (re)produce a transnational renown in the mutual invitations they address to each other. Through such occasions, their reputation as transnational speakers increases, both through the events of which they take part as guest speakers (as for Comoe or Adjognon in Cotonou), and in their own churches as well. There, it will be announced that "the pastor traveled," "the pastor is in Ivory Coast" (in Congo, in Gabon, etc.). One speaks anyway much more here of "invitations" of "friends" than of relations between "partners." During the same interview, for instance, Pastor Dagba further commented on the event: "when you invite somebody ... how does it work? Well, perhaps you take charge of his flight, you accommodate him, and finally, you give him an envelope [with money] to thank him. And when you are invited, it is the same for you."

Friendship and personalization of relationships are of course not absent in churches such as the Assemblies of God or Foursquare. Pastors of these churches who have transnational connections are similarly likely to invite friends from abroad to preach in their parishes when occasions come. The relation between the person and the institution is, however, not the same as in the MEPS. Whatever their personal charisma, pastors of the AG always involve themselves in transnational networks as members of an institution that encompasses them, and not as founders of an organization that extends them (as it is the case for the MEPS and other recent and highly personalized churches). The different relationship between individual and organization in the two cases can even be what motivates those pastors who think they can become religious leaders based only on their personal charisma, to found or create their own churches or ministries: the figure of the transnational entrepreneur is certainly a model of success, having a strong appeal for many African pastors today (see Banégas and Warnier 2001).
Centers of immigration in the big West African coastal cities and linguistic and ethnic continuities across colonial (and now national) borders have certainly both played an important role in the crossing of borders by Pentecostal pastors and evangelists in West Africa, as this discussion of Pentecostalism in southern Benin illustrates. However, other modes and forms of transnationalization have also shaped the current Pentecostal landscape in the region, as the case of the Assemblies of God clearly demonstrates. Planning is here most evident, and different ways of crossing of boundaries can actually easily be distinguished between, on the one hand, the cases of itinerant evangelists, crossers of borders inscribed for instance in broader migratory dynamics and, on the other hand, the much more planned initiatives such as those of the AG (see Noret 2004a for a broader picture of their progressive settlement in West Africa).

Moreover, depending on how much room churches or ministries make for strong personal charismas (the two poles being here recent and still highly personalized churches built around the personal charisma of their respective founders, and more bureaucratized churches as the AG or the FGCN), the nature of their transnational links may also vary in substantial ways. There is a wide gap between the vast networks of “partners” of the executive board of the Beninese AG, and the highly and inescapably personalized transnational connections of Pastor Dagba. These cases hence illustrate some of the varying transnational dynamics of West African Pentecostalism.

Finally, modernity is certainly not only an ensemble of processes and institutions shaping conditions of existence, but also a local category in African popular discourses. To be or not to be “modern” is at the very heart of many social debates and personal dilemmas. Indeed, “modernity” is a “floating signifier” (to quote Lévi-Strauss 1950) and is seen as highly desirable in most contemporary African societies (see also Karlström 2004). Being mobile, well-traveled, having international experiences and relationships; being part, in other words, of globalization, is valued per se in many African countries—much as being a mobile tourist and traveler is often valued in the West (Bauman 1998). Conversely, disconnectedness and a sense of being marginalized by global flux may be experienced as alienating and frustrating (see Ferguson 1999). Yet, Pentecostal churches and ministries typically
"deploy notions of identity and belonging that deliberately reach beyond Africa" (Meyer 204: 453). In such a context, there are actually forms of religious legitimacy that derive from the possession of a capital of transnational relationships. In other words, transnational social capital is also for African pastors a symbolic capital—a legitimate resource, whose value is known and recognized by social agents (Bourdieu 2001: 107–113, 201–211).

As we saw at the Foursquare Convention, transnational connections are, like other social relations, organized into a hierarchy. Missionary "employees" cannot expect the same degree of public recognition as famous guest speakers or singers, for instance. All social actors surely do not have the same experiences of globalization (cf. Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 1–36). However, participating, even in marginal positions, in a transnational religious community assures the village pastors and missionaries of forms of local recognition. For Pentecostal entrepreneurs, such as Pastor Dagba, being able to exhibit a network of transnational relationships, as well as being regularly invited abroad, is similarly key in what makes them successful international men of God in the Beninese national religious field. Widely recognized as desirable and culturally legitimate, membership in transnational networks are certainly today among the important symbolic resources West African pastors seek to accumulate in their sometimes tumultuous religious careers.5

References


5 I wish to thank Anne-Laure Cromptbout, Philippe Lemay-Boucher, and Robyn d'Avignon for their kind assistance editing my English. I am extremely grateful for their aid. Responsibility for any mistakes remains mine.


