

**The London School of Economics and Political Science**

**Relating as Children of God**

**Ruptures and Continuities in Kinship among Pentecostal  
Christians in the South-East of the Republic of Benin**

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology of the  
London School of Economics for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

This thesis constitutes an ethnographic exploration of the ways in which conversion to Pentecostalism contributes to redefining some of the principles of kinship in a patrilineal society. It looks beyond notions of individualism often emphasised in studies on Pentecostalism, in order to focus on people's relationships. In doing so, it explores how relational ruptures brought about by conversion are accommodated along cultural continuities. This study takes place in Pobe and Ikpinle, two semi-rural towns, in a pluri-ethnic and pluri-religious setting with a majority Yoruba population, close to the Beninese border with Nigeria.

Studies of Pentecostalism in Africa have emphasised kinship and family relations as one of the areas where, upon conversion, the Pentecostal command to "break with the past" and with "tradition" is most strongly expressed. Ruptures in these areas have been explained as the result of the influence of Pentecostalism in shaping individualist modern subjectivities. However, the ethnographic material presented here reveals that, although discursively these ruptures are often articulated as radical, in practice they do not always appear as such. Converts still depend on and cultivate their social relationships with their kin. Through a process of breaking and re-making, Pentecostalism opens a space for redefining forms of relating, through a selective re-appropriation of certain cultural norms and values. The thesis also looks at some of the dilemmas that Christian notions of kinship bring about in this context, and the specific ways in which Pentecostals - compared to members of other Christian denominations - deal with them.

This thesis draws on anthropological studies and debates on funerals, time, descent, marriage, gender, ethics and moral dilemmas, in order to explore how the Pentecostal project of "breaking with the past" shapes different aspects of people's kinship. It aims to contribute to the literature on the anthropology of Christianity by exploring the complexities of this form of religion, as it appears in one of its denominational variants in a pluri-religious setting.

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\* \* \* \* \*

All personal names in this thesis are pseudonyms. In Benin, it is a sign of respect to call people who have children as *maman* (mother) or *papa* (father) followed by the name of their first child.

Monetary exchange rates during the years of my fieldwork (2008-2010) ranged approximately between £1 – 700-800 XOF-CFA. An average monthly salary was between £30,000 and £50,000 CFA.

Photographs are owned by the author, except where indicated.

\* \* \* \* \*

## List of Key Characters

### Women

**Maman Jasmine:** married to the AoG pastor in Ikpinle and mother of three children. Mina background from Togo. Artisan (macrame weaver) and occasional seller of mobile phone credit. Converted from traditional religion and Catholicism.

**Maman Elodie:** member of the AoG Ikpinle, married to papa Elodie and mother of one girl. Gun background from Porto-Novo, teacher and primary director. Converted from Methodism.

**Maman Pascal:** member of the AoG Ikpinle, married and mother of three children. Fon background from Allada. Seller of household items in Ikpinle's market. Converted from Catholicism.

**Maman Sabine:** member of the AoG at Ikpinle's annex in Usine, widow and mother of three women. Yoruba background. Converted from traditional religion and Catholicism.

**Madeleine:** member of the Foursquare Church Pobe, divorced with no children. Fon background from Dassa and born in Ivory Coast. French teacher at the local Lycée, with university studies in Law. Converted from Methodism.

**Pelagie:** member of the AoG Ikpinle, married to Florent, no children. Yoruba background from Itchede, seamstress. Converted from Catholicism and traditional religion.

### Men

**Papa Elodie:** member of the AoG Ikpinle, married to maman Elodie and father of one girl. Yoruba background from Porto-Novo. Merchant, trades wood and owns various businesses. Converted from Islam.

**Papa Constance:** member of the AoG Ikpinle, married and father of five children. Gun background from Adjohoun. Primary teacher and director, converted from traditional religion.

**Papa Daniel:** member of the Foursquare Church Pobe, married and father of five children. Fon background from Cotonou. Worker at the cement factory in Onigbolo. Converted from Catholicism.

**Papa Honoré:** member of the AoG Ikpinle, married and father of three children. His wife is Catholic. Fon background from Bohicon. Primary teacher. Converted from traditional religion and Catholicism.

**Florent:** member of the AoG Ikpinle. Married to Pelagie, no children. Yoruba background from Banigbe. Mechanic and farmer. Converted from traditional religion.

**Papa Raymond:** member of the AoG Ikpinle, married and father of six children. Yoruba background from Banigbe. Vulcaniser, occasional driver and farmer. Converted from Catholicism and traditional religion.

### Youth

**Clarice:** member of the Foursquare Church Pobe. Yoruba background from Pobe. Eighteen-year-old and single. Studied the third and last year of Lycée. Converted from the Celestial Christian Church.

**Josette:** member of the AoG Ikpinle. Sixteen-year-old and single. Gun background from Porto-Novo. Studied the second year of Lycée. Maman and papa Elodie's nice, lived in fosterage with them. Grew up in the Pentecostal faith.

**Alice:** member of the AoG Ikpinle, papa Honoré's daughter. Seventeen-year-old single. Fon background but was born in Ikpinle. Studied the third and last year of Lycée. Grew up in the Pentecostal faith.

**Emmanuel:** member of the independent Pentecostal church Hall of Joy. Yoruba background from Pobe. Twenty-year-old single. University student in Porto-Novo. Grew up in the Pentecostal faith.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

On a hot Sunday afternoon, I was arriving home after the four hour long Pentecostal religious service, when I received a phone call from a friend asking me to join him and a group of friends at a funeral reception to which he had been invited. I went out to the street, and took a taxi-moto (*zemijan*) to the place where we had arranged to meet. Arriving at the place, after the customary exchange of greetings, I was invited to sit among a group of men and women. No sooner had I arrived and joined the group than one of the ladies in the house started to serve us food and drinks. As we ate, a lively debate began, concerning the ambiguity of certain aspects of the Bible. It turned out that this was a group of Catholic men and women and, having been to church that morning, they discussed aspects of the Bible that, according to them, contradicted local values and principles in relation to family life.

One man pointed out that in the Bible Jesus' siblings were mentioned once. He asked why Catholic priests insisted in calling his mother Mary a virgin, for if she had married Joseph it must have been because they wanted to have more children, otherwise, why would they have bothered getting married? One lady, shocked, replied saying that the Virgin Mary could not possibly have had other children, she was a virgin and she had only given birth to Jesus. Supporting her point of view, another man said that he did not think Jesus had siblings; otherwise one of them would have helped him to carry the cross. For him, it was inconceivable that his siblings would have let Jesus down at the moment of his death. The man who had started the debate then said that the reason why Jesus' siblings had failed to help him was because he had left his relatives (*ibátan*) behind, and had even encouraged other people to do the same in order to follow him. Instead, Jesus had his disciples. However, they too had failed to help him. Taking Peter's denial as an example, he pointed out that neither he nor any of the other disciples had helped him because, in the end, they were not relatives (*ibátan*). Another man intervened saying that, if Jesus had had siblings, then the siblings would have organised the Virgin Mary's burial, and the Bible would have talked about it. Then yet another man butted in. He said that the Bible was written long after Jesus' death; therefore, it was inevitable for it to be inaccurate. In the end, he said, the Bible was

brought by “the whites” and we, Africans, have our own traditions and culture, which are not the same as those described in the Bible.

At this point, the women present were getting uncomfortable about the way some men were speaking of the Virgin Mary and the Bible. One of the men defused the tension by saying that, in the end, it was not that important to know whether Mary had or did not have other children. The Bible’s purpose was to tell the story of Jesus. The man who was arguing that Mary had other children agreed and said that there are many things that are not clearly said in the Bible, but it is up to people to reason and to try to understand what it says in relation to reality. In this case, it was clear that the “reality” they were taking as a point of departure to understand the Bible was based on, or encompassed, African kinship relations.

This vignette highlights the way in which Christianity often poses dilemmas when it contradicts some of the articulating principles of kinship and family life. The discussion held among the funeral attendants reveals three very important tenets of kinship relationships. One is the importance of marriage as a place of reproduction, second is the principles of seniority according to which the role of younger siblings is to obey and support their elders, and third is that burying one’s parents is one of the main duties in a person’s life.

The type of contradiction that was evident during this funeral reflects the type of dilemmas that Christianity poses in many parts of the world. For example, it is similar to the one that Keller (2005:211-212) reports for the Seventh-Day Adventists in Madagascar. For these Christians who believe in a more literal interpretation of the Bible, the verse at Luke 14:26, in which Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters - yes, even their own life - such a person cannot be my disciple”, caused similar confusion. This passage did not make much sense because, for Seventh-Day Adventists, as for all people in Madagascar, family is still very important.

For Pentecostals in Benin, just as for the Catholics who were debating during the funeral, family is equally precious. Pentecostals, in a manner similar to the Seventh-Day Adventists described by Keller, also place a strong emphasis on reading and memorising passages of the Bible. However, in my conversations with people, this

passage did not necessarily cause the same sense of contradiction as illustrated above. This thesis explores why this was the case. It analyses different ways Pentecostals in Benin deal with dilemmas concerning the basic tenets of their religion in relation to their kinship relations.



**Map 1.1 Map of Benin** (<http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/benin-political-map.htm>)

### Pobe and Ikpinle: Two Pluri-Cultural and Pluri-Religious Settings in South-Eastern Benin

Pobe and Ikpinle are the two towns where I did most of my fieldwork. These two towns are situated in the south-eastern part of today's Republic of Benin, formerly known as the French colony of Dahomey. The Republic of Benin is located along the West African coast between Nigeria and Togo, in a territory that has been historically shaped

by the maritime slave trade and European colonialism. It has a population of approximately 9.05 million, and it can be described as a pluri-religious and pluri-ethnic society.

The Republic of Benin is divided into twelve administrative departments, one of which is the department of Plateau, where Pobe and Ikpinle are situated. Plateau Department, in turn, is constituted of five communes - Ifangni, Sakete, Pobe, Adja-Ouere and Ketou - and each commune is subdivided in districts also known as *arrondissements*. Pobe district is situated within the commune of Pobe, whereas Ikpinle belongs to the commune of Adja-Ouere.

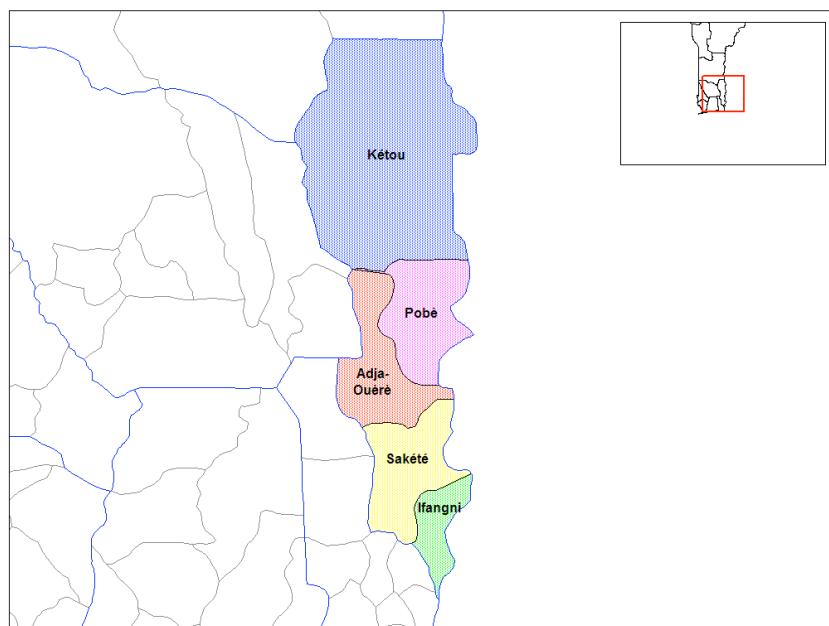
This area corresponds to what was formerly called Western Yorubaland, which as its name indicates, constituted the western part of the territory known as Yorubaland. This was a territory that comprised a series of small- and medium-sized kingdoms under the influence of the dominant Oyo kingdom (cf. Peel 2003:28-29), which nowadays is located in Nigeria. Western Yorubaland has been defined as a cultural “frontier zone” characterised by the coexistence of different ethnic groups, which over a long period of time have come to share similar cultural features (Adediran 1994:1).

Before the colonial period, during the nineteenth century Western Yorubaland suffered several invasions, as this territory became the battleground of Oyo and Dahomey’s struggles to dominate their influence in the slave trade. The French and British took these rivalries between both kingdoms as an opportunity to intervene and then consolidate their power in the region (Asiwaju 1976:9). At the moment of its partition in 1889, most of Yorubaland remained under British control, leaving a minor part, the western portion, under the French, who as a colonial strategy decided to support the primacy of Dahomey kingdom over the Yoruba, in order to oppose British expansion (Asiwaju 1976:45-53).

Nowadays, the area is populated predominantly by seven Yoruba sub-groups that share the territory with other ethnic groups such as the Bariba, and different sub-groups of the Aja cluster, such as the Gun from Porto-Novo, Mahi from Savalou, and Fon from Abomey, etc. (Adediran 1994:4-5). In the region in question, Pobe and Ikpinle, the

Yoruba sub-groups that predominate are the Nago<sup>1</sup> and Holi or Ohori. Some of these groups still maintain contact with relatives who remained on the other side of the border, in Nigeria, after partition. However, it is interesting that although the Yoruba in this area share a common ethnic background and are often related to each other, they also constantly try to differentiate themselves from the Nigerian Yoruba.

The commune of Pobe includes five districts (*arrondissements*), of which the administrative centre is Pobe district. It is situated 54 km north from Porto-Novo - the capital city of the Republic of Benin - in a strategic location between the ancient Yoruba kingdom of Ketu (nowadays Ketou) in the north, and a border post with Nigeria. According to the 2002 census, Pobe had a population of 33,249 inhabitants (INSAE 2003). It was originally founded by a group of Nago people, whose ancestors claimed to have come from Oyo kingdom. However, it is now an ethnically diverse town. They praise themselves and are known in the area for having been open to “foreigners” and for showing hospitality towards other ethnic groups that over time have established themselves in this town.<sup>2</sup>



**Map 1.2 Communes of the Plateau Department**

([http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0c/Plateau\\_communes.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0c/Plateau_communes.png))

<sup>1</sup> Nago is a term that apparently derives from the Fon to designate the Yoruba (Adediran 1994:11).

<sup>2</sup> This openness is justified by the claim that the *orisha* of the town (*Ondo*) had prescribed to be open to foreigners and to respect women.

The Holi, who until recently could be identified by their elaborate patterns of facial scarification,<sup>3</sup> mostly live in the marshland area that characterises the territory between Pobe and Ketou. They are historically known for their rebelliousness and resistance to submit to kingdoms such as the Danxomé and the neighbouring Ketu, prior to the colonial period, and later to resist colonial occupation (Asiwaju 1976:10). The main economic activity in this area is agriculture, due to the fertility of the terrain. However, many of these villages also lack infrastructure due to the geographical conditions, which make it difficult for them to benefit from other economic and commercial activities in the area. Therefore, many people have “migrated” and established themselves in Pobe and surrounding towns, keeping contact with their villages.

Other ethnic groups that later settled in Pobe include Gun, Fon, Fulani and Igbo Nigerians. Some of these groups, from colonial times, arrived to work as civil servants, merchants, or workers for the palm oil research station and plantation CRA-PP, previously known as IRO,<sup>4</sup> established in this town by the French colonial government in 1921 (cf. Asiwaju 1976:165). Since colonial times, this research station has given the area an important economic dynamism by promoting the semi-industrial production of palm oil. In addition to it, the cement factory SCB Lafarge, situated in the neighbouring town of Onigbolo since 1982, constitutes another hub of important economic activity, which has attracted migrant workers to the region.

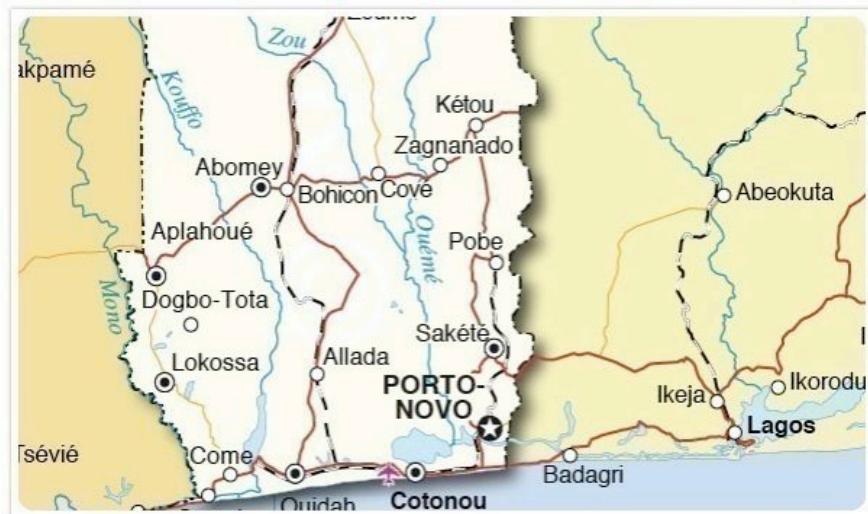
Ikpinle district, where my second fieldwork site is located, belongs to the commune of Adja-Ouere, which surrounds the commune of Pobe in its southern and eastern parts. Ikpinle is situated approximately six kilometres south-west of Pobe town following the same road that leads to Sakete and Porto-Novo in the south. In 2002 Ikpinle had an estimated population of 16,372 (INSAE 2003). This is a town that is consolidated around the commercial activity of its two markets: Mowodani and Ikpinle. In contrast with Pobe, this town does not have an original ethnic population, instead, it is constituted of various neighbourhoods with migrant populations that have settled in ethnic clusters: such as Gun, Fon, Mahi, and Ibo from Nigeria. Today, with its two markets, Ikpinle constitutes the main commercial centre in the region. It is also known for its cooperatives of women who work in the processing of cassava flour (*gari*), which

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<sup>3</sup> Facial scarification was used to identify members of the same lineage among different ethnic groups. However, with increasing religious conversion this practice has become less common.

<sup>4</sup> CRA-PP (Centre des Recherches Agricoles Plantes Perennes) and IRO (Institut des Recherches des Oléagineux).

every week is sold in large quantities in Mowodani market and is exported to several parts of West Africa.



**Map 1.3 South of Benin**

(<http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/benin-political-map.htm>)

Pobe and Ikpinle enjoy a strategic location by being connected to the main road that allows these two populations to benefit from the dynamic commercial activity in the area. Both towns benefit from the informal - often illegal - trade that circulates between Lagos and Cotonou.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in the area one can find a combination of more or less affluent merchants but also small-scale traders, who are mainly women. There are also those who work as civil servants and people who combine agricultural activities with other service-oriented activities. The main agricultural activities in the area include the semi-industrial production of palm oil and lower scale crops such as corn, yam, manioc, peanut, sesame, beans and tomato.

It is mainly through commercial activities across borders that residents of these towns continue to maintain a strong relationship with people in Nigeria. During the time of my fieldwork it was common to see men driving second-hand motorcycles loaded up with large plastic containers transporting gasoline from Nigeria destined to be traded all over Benin.<sup>6</sup> This gasoline, in turn, is sold by the litre to drivers at small stalls placed along the roads, where vendors, both women and men, keep the amber liquid in measuring

<sup>5</sup> The illegal trade happening between borders is a phenomenon that dates from the time of colonialism (see Asiwaju 1976:186). The links between populations on both sides of the border, the landscape and weak surveillance of borders present the ideal conditions for this trade to take place.

<sup>6</sup> In 2012 an initiative to ban the trade and transportation of gasoline by motorcycle was passed, on the grounds of health and safety risks imposed to the drivers.

glass bottles and carafes. At night, second-hand cars imported from France make their way across the local borders, coming from Cotonou to reach their destination in Lagos. But the exchange and mutual influence is not limited to the trade of goods. Along with people's mobility also comes the exchange of cultural ideas, tangible and intangible objects such as music, fashion, movies, and nowadays, Pentecostal churches and preachers (cf. Mayrargue 2001, 2005; Noret 2010b). It is to the religious scenario that now I turn.



**Fig. 1.1 Trade in south-eastern Benin**

### Religious Diversity in Pobe and Ikpinle

Throughout the year, different religious calendars mark the rhythm of life in south-eastern Benin. For example, during the dry season in the months of February or March, one can see the *Egungun*<sup>7</sup> on the streets roaming with their companions carrying sticks. During the month of August some towns in the area close their access as worshipers of *Oro*<sup>8</sup> wander around town. In Pobe, one can hear the ululating sound of what is considered to be *Oro*'s song at night announcing his presence on the streets. All women, regardless of their religious affiliation, must remain indoors since no woman is allowed to see him under the risk of death. The period of Ramadan, on the other hand, is strictly observed by Muslims and during those forty days the constant activity in the mosque is

<sup>7</sup> Masquerade that represents the ancestors.

<sup>8</sup> *Oro* is a male initiation group particular of the Yoruba population in this area.

heard all through the night. The same happens during Easter, when people fast and different Christian churches carry out the various celebrations according to the Christian calendar.

But religious worship and activity is not limited to these major ceremonies. It is part of everyday life. At 5.30 am, the call to prayer from the mosque awakens the population and continues to be heard through the day and in the evening. Pentecostals regularly read their Bibles and pray first thing in the morning after waking up in the intimacy of their homes, as well as praying at different times of the day. In the early evening groups of women head to church for prayer or biblical teaching. The local radio station transmits different programmes that either discuss religious matters or broadcast sermons, from the Ahmadiyya Muslims<sup>9</sup> or from different Pentecostal churches. Sundays are the peak of religious activity. The motorcycles start circulating in the morning with people who attend the Catholic services. Throughout the day one can see Celestial Christians dressed in white robes going to or coming back from worship in their temples. Others walk on the roads with their Bibles under their arms. Sometimes the wind brings the noise of the drums playing during Pentecostal worship or one can hear the sound of preaching coming from the loudspeakers of the closest Pentecostal chapel.

The largest single category of worshippers is Catholic, with Muslims as a close second. Protestant Methodists constitute the third important group followed by members of the Celestial Christian Church, the largest African Independent Church, and other Christian denominations such as Pentecostals. There is a minority of Jehovah's Witnesses and other African Independent Churches. Underlying all these different groups, aspects of the Yoruba religion such as *Ifá* divination and *oriṣa* worship groups remain the backdrop for the activities of all other religious groups. Many people combine these aspects of Yoruba worship with their major religious affiliation.

In a plural religious context such as this, Peel (1968b) has pointed to the difficulty of drawing a clear-cut line between different religions. In the case of the Yoruba in Nigeria that he studied, Peel has drawn attention to the instrumental nature of Yoruba ritual

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<sup>9</sup> The Ahmadiyya Muslim community constitutes an Islamic reformist movement that originated in British India in the nineteenth century. It holds a strong eschatological doctrine and a growing presence in Benin. From my experience, it is not always seen with the favour of other more "traditional" Muslim communities.

practice that explains why many people employ a mix of different ritual traditions, according to their efficacy at solving their personal needs (Peel 1968b:125). However, this does not mean that different religious practices are mere adaptations of the same “indigenous” cultural substratum (cf. Peel 1994:161-62). One must not forget that the symbols and ideology of the world religions have also left their own imprint as they have been internalised by many people (cf. Peel 1994:162; 2003:4). Similarly, although there is an openness to experiment with different religious traditions, all these religious groups constantly try to differentiate themselves from others.

Pentecostals, for example, stand out as a group that at least in theory radically opposes certain aspects of tradition, such as participation in ceremonies or worship groups, the performance of sacrifices, post-mortem ceremonies, *Ifá* divination, and polygyny. They are also opposed to other forms of Christianity, such as Catholicism and Methodism, which are considered to be more permissive of cultural practices, and in particular, the African Independent Churches such as the Celestial Christian Church. Like other Christian churches of the *Aladura* tradition (cf. Peel 1968a), Celestial Christians are also opposed to “tradition”, claim to follow the Bible, perform spiritual healing and prophesy through visions and dreams given by the Holy Spirit (Henry 2008:112). However, Pentecostals consider them not to be authentic Christians because of certain features of their worship, including the use of material objects such as candles, perfume, oil, the way the Holy Spirit manifests among members of this group and their permissive attitude to polygyny. Nevertheless, Pentecostals are by no means a homogeneous group, as will be later explained.

This plural religious landscape, where Pentecostalism occupies a particular space, needs to be situated in the broader context of Beninese society. I now turn to explaining the constitution of this plural religious landscape through its socio-historical trajectory.

### **Historical Background to Religious and Social Transitions in Benin**

The National Constitution of 1990 guarantees freedom of religion in Benin, and people proudly claim a peaceful coexistence of diverse religious traditions. According to the latest census, the Third General Population and Housing Census in 2002,<sup>10</sup> 27.1 per cent

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<sup>10</sup> This census is carried out every ten years, but the Fourth General Population and Housing Census is expected to be carried out in 2013 and its results will be available in 2014.

of the population declared itself to be Catholic; 24.4 per cent Muslim (mainly Sunni, with a Shi'ah minority); 23.3 per cent practised traditional religious traditions; 3.2 per cent Protestant Methodist; 5.0 per cent Celestial Christian; 7.5 per cent is constituted by other protestant Christian churches that include the Baptist, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses; 1.9 per cent other religions, such as Eckankar or Rose Croix; and finally 6.5 per cent declared no religion (INSAE 2003). As with any other census, these figures can only be taken as approximate estimations. For example, it is widely known that many self-proclaimed Catholics, Muslims and members of other Christian denominations continue to practise traditional religion alongside their major religious affiliation. Nowadays, the Christian population is concentrated in the south of the country, especially around major cities such as Cotonou and Porto-Novo. Muslims are still concentrated in the north, with the exception of an important part of the Muslim population among the Yoruba in the south-east.

We need to understand how this complex religious landscape came to be in the context of the broader historical and socio-political transformations that have shaped the trajectory of this country. The former French colony of Dahomey<sup>11</sup> was founded in 1892 in a setting shaped by the dynamics of the Atlantic slave trade between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. This trade allowed the flourishing of societies with highly centralised and hierarchical organisations, also called kingdoms. Examples of these kingdoms include Danxomé in Benin, Oyo in Nigeria, and the Asante in Ghana, which often competed with each other over the control of the slave trade (Fardon 1996:19). At the time of colonisation, the kingdom of Danxomé had become one of the most important slave traders of the region. It had secured its access to the ocean after having established its control over the neighbouring kingdoms of Allada and Ouidah (Law 1991:42). It was known for its brutality as a slave supplier and for having a permanent army. The fall of the kingdom of Danxomé was precipitated after the abolition of slavery and by internal divisions that were used by the French to expand their control (Claffey 2007:176-177; Strandsbjerg 2008:59-60). Its fall marked the beginning the formation of the colony Dahomey, which included the territory under Danxomé's control, the Bariba kingdom in the north-east, the Atakora region in the north, the south-eastern area of Porto-Novo (Claffey 2007:32), and a portion of the so-

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<sup>11</sup> Following some authors (see Claffey 2007 and Strandsbjerg 2008), I have used the name Dahomey to refer to the French colony and the original Fon name, Danxomé, to differentiate the kingdom.

called Yorubaland in the south-east, previously under the influence of the Oyo kingdom (Asiwaju 1976:9).

Historically, the introduction of Islam and Christianity into the Beninese territory dated as early as the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the case of Christianity, the first contacts are associated with Portuguese maritime trade in the coastal region, around the former kingdom of Allada (Law 1991:43). In the case of Islam, it is probably associated with the commercial activity and migration in the Borgou area and later Songhay and Hausa incursions (Abdoulaye 2003:3; 2007:48-49). However, the initial missionary efforts were not very successful and it was not until the nineteenth century that a more significant presence of Islam and Christianity developed (Claffey 2007:143; Strandsbjerg 2008:63-64; Abdoulaye 2007:53-61).

The first more enduring presence of Christian missionaries is associated with the visit, in 1843, of the Wesleyan Methodist missionary Thomas Birch Freeman to the kingdom of Danxomé (Claffey 2007:143). This was followed by a Catholic presence from 1860, which led to the establishment of the first Apostolic vicariate (*ibid.*). In the case of Islam, Muslim populations from the north, attracted by the growth of the slave trade, tried to establish themselves in the south between the seventeenth and nineteenth century without much success. It was not until 1850-1864 that Muslims of Hausa and Yoruba origin officially established themselves in Porto-Novo (Abdoulaye 2007:55-58), and their presence has remained important among the Yoruba in the south-east (*ibid.*: 59-60).

Catholic missions systematically expanded from the period of colonisation, mainly through the foundation of educational establishments that played a central role in educating an early colonial elite (Claffey 2007:183-184; Strandsbjerg 2008:63-64). Alongside these developments, at the beginning of the twentieth century there was a resurgence of African Independent Churches also known as *Aladura* (cf. Peel 1968). These churches separated from the rigidity of Protestant missions mainly in the neighbouring country of Nigeria and shortly thereafter were implanted in Benin. The first one was the Nigerian born African Mission *Boda Owa* in 1901, followed by the *Aladura* church, the Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim, established in Porto-Novo in 1933. This “Cherubim and Seraphim” church had a major influence on the

Celestial Christian Church, founded by the Benin-born prophet Samuel Oschoffa in Porto-Novo in 1947 (de Surgy 2001b:9).

After the Second World War there was a further expansion of new Protestant churches including the Jehovah's Witnesses church founded in Porto-Novo in 1948 (de Surgy 2001b:9), and Pentecostal churches. The latter were introduced in two main waves. On the one hand, there was an Afro-Christian Pentecostalism of Nigerian origin that arrived in Benin by the mid-1940s together with another type of Pentecostalism introduced from Ghana and by English missionaries in the 1950s (de Surgy 2001b:10). Another wave of US missionaries entered Beninese territory through Burkina Faso, represented by the Sudan Interior Mission (S.I.M) and the Assemblies of God (AoG), established in 1947 and 1946 in Kandi and Natitingou respectively (de Surgy 2001b:10; Claffey 2007:144). In 1949 after a zoning agreement between protestant churches, the Methodist Church withdrew to its "traditional strongholds" around Porto-Novo among the Yoruba and expanded in the eastern part of the country (Claffey 2007:144).

In 1958, the colony of Dahomey became a Republic and was granted national sovereignty two years later. By the time of independence, the Catholic Church had become a strong political force, due to its close relations with a local political elite (Claffey 2007:192). From 1960 to 1972 the country had a series of unstable government regimes and was victim of political and economic turmoil. It was difficult to consolidate an ethnically diverse and divided nation (Claffey 2007). During this period, five different constitutions were pronounced, ten different presidents were appointed and there were twelve *coups d'état*, of which five were successful (Amouzouvi 2005:39). It was during this period between 1962-1963 that the AoG church settled in Cotonou from where they started to evangelise the Porto-Novo region and other parts of the south of the country (de Surgy 2001b:25).

After a *coup d'état* in 1972, General Mathieu Kerekou arrived in power and two years later established a Marxist-Leninist government. In 1975 the country became the Popular Republic of Benin. During Kerekou's Marxist-Leninist regime (1972-1989), religious policies oscillated between a total rejection of religion and partial cooperation. During the early period of his government, Kerekou led a "witch-hunting" campaign against practitioners of traditional religion (Tall 1995a:197; Khan 2011; Strandsbjerg 2008:74), and some churches that were considered enemies of the regime, such as the

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Celestial Christian,<sup>12</sup> were also banned (de Surgy 2001b:9; 2001a:26-27). As a consequence, the growth of other churches, such as the AoG, also slowed down (de Surgy 2001b:25).

Towards 1980, Kerekou re-established a more flexible and pragmatic approach to religion and integrated members of traditional, Muslim, Protestant and Catholic sectors within his government (Tall 1995a:198; Strandsbjerg 2008:75; Mayrargue 2002:87). By the end of the 1980s, communist regimes around the world were falling and Benin faced a severe economic crisis. Given the circumstances, in 1989, Kerekou was compelled to sign an agreement with the IMF, which marked the end of the Marxist-Leninist regime (Strandsbjerg 2008:76).

A year later, the Catholic leader, Archbishop of Cotonou Monsignor Isidore da Souza, played a key role in summoning different interest groups during the National Conference (*Conférence Nationale des Forces Vives de la Nation*) that took place in February 1990. This conference opened the door to Benin's democratic transition, which was placed under "the sign of God" (Claffey 2007; Mayrargue 2002:113; Amouzouvi 2005:48). During this time, Christian groups, particularly Catholic, were mobilised for prayer vigils, and Sunday sermons addressed political topics that emphasised the need for reconciliation, repentance and forgiveness (Amouzouvi 2005:48). As a result of the National Conference, a new National Constitution was voted by public referendum in December 1990, where freedom of religion was proclaimed.

The noticeable increase of public presence of religion in the public sphere from this period, particularly of Christian groups, has captured scholarly attention (Amouzouvi 2005; Claffey 2007; Mayrargue 2002, 2006; Strandsbjerg 2008; Tall 1995a). Benin's peaceful democratic transition has been attributed to Christian churches, particularly the Catholic Church. Claffey (2007:63) suggests that these churches provided the necessary elements of symbolic capital to construct a new narrative and re-imagine the nation. He argues that the Catholic Church became key in providing the foundations for a Beninese nationalism that this country's history could not provide due to the scars left by the slave trade and the ethnic rivalries left after the Danxomé kingdom (2007:177-179). In

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<sup>12</sup> The leader of the Celestial Christian church, Samuel Oschoffa, fled to Nigeria and from this country, this church further expanded to other African countries (de Surgy 2001b:9, 2001a:26-27).

more recent years, however, he considers that it has been the new Christian charismatic churches that have come to play the role of establishing social bonds and the social cohesion, which appear to be lacking as Benin strives for modernity (Claffey 2007). Mayrargue (2002) affirms that “religious readings of events”, particularly Christian, have been crucial in mediating political evolutions, legitimising them and shaping the public sphere (2002:33-34).

However, the process of democratic transition was not exempt from contestation within the religious domain. The newly proclaimed freedom of religion opened the conditions for a proliferation of religious groups, partly in response to the relative restriction of religious practice during the years of Kerekou’s regime (Amouzouvi 2005:40). In 1991, Nicéphore Soglo won the presidential elections. As part of his political programme for democracy, in 1992 he organised the International Festival for the *Vodun* Arts and Culture in Ouidah, in an attempt to revive the religious tradition of the Fon as national heritage. This initiative prompted sharp controversy among different sectors in the country. The Catholic Church did not regard *vodun* influence on polities as positive, while members of new *vodun* and *oriṣa* worship groups that came from Ghana and Nigeria, as well as other ethnic groups, considered that the *vodun* promoted by this festival did not represent them (Tall 1995a:195).

In 1996, Kerekou returned to power after winning the national elections and having experienced a Pentecostal conversion. During his electoral campaign he deployed his “Born Again” identity and a Christian Pentecostal discourse, in which he stressed his distancing from a sinful past, corruption and the forces of evil (Mayrargue 2002; Stradsbjerg 2000, 2008).<sup>13</sup> Through the analysis of changing discourses of power in a long term perspective, Stradsbjerg (2008:298) concludes that behind Kerekou’s use of Pentecostal discourse one can see a continuity in the logics of political power, its personalisation by a single man and its relationship with religious practices in Benin. However, she also suggests that Kerekou’s Pentecostal “conversion” can be read as a political strategy to accommodate to new external sources of power, particularly the American donor community (2008:305).

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<sup>13</sup> Although it has been argued that regional affiliation rather than religious accounted for his re-election (see Bako-Arifari 1995:7-25 in Stradsbjerg 2000:400).

Pentecostalism, after Kerekou's conversion, seems to be the predominant political discourse in the country. This phenomenon has given rise to what Strandsbjerg (2005) calls a project of "Evangelisation of the State" that has happened in a broader context of evangelisation of society in general (2005:225). This project has taken place through the infiltration of informal personal networks, with connections of transnational character, into the heart of state institutions (2005:225). Although the numbers of Muslims have also increased and some new fundamentalist movements within Islam have emerged (cf. Abdoulaye 2003:1), compared to Christians, Muslims have tended to experience relative exclusion from national politics (cf. Abdoulaye 2003:2,13; Strandsbjerg 2008:62). However, from my experience, in some areas of the country, at a local level, Muslims are very influential in the political sphere.

The Pentecostal presence in the political sphere has continued in recent years. In 2006, the former President of the West African Development Bank (BOAD) and member of the AoG church, Thomas Yayi Boni, won the presidential elections. He was further re-elected in 2011 and is expected to remain in power until 2016. Although in 2006, Yayi Boni did not explicitly exploit a Christian discourse during his campaign in the way Kerekou did, he still pronounced publicly about his Christian beliefs and church membership (Mayrargue 2006:168-169). It is widely known that during the time of his presidency, several members of his cabinet and government offices have also been members of the AoG church. In 2010, before the run up to elections programmed for 2011, I witnessed the mobilisation of different Evangelical Christian groups for prayer meetings across the country.

So far we have seen that different religions have arrived and established themselves in Benin according to different historical moments. It is important to understand and situate Pentecostal Christianity as it coexisted with these other religious traditions that over time have created a space of mutual compromise and influence but also of competition over membership and influence in the public space (cf. Peel 2011). In the same way, the current Pentecostal moment with its influence in politics and in society can be considered as one episode of the many revival movements of different religious traditions that have influenced Beninese society (cf. Strandsbjerg 2008:16-17). For example, the wave of *Aladura* churches from Nigeria at the beginning of the twentieth century (cf. Peel 1968a), or the series of "*neo-vodun*" or *oriṣa* worship groups such as *Atinga* and *Glo vodun* (cf. Tall 1995b). Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the

current Pentecostal influence that can be perceived by the popularity of Gospel music among the general public, of movies, TV programs and radio broadcast that transmit debates or topics aiming to evangelise general audiences.

There is something revealing in the recent phenomenon of the growth of so called healing churches offering solutions to health problems that needs to be considered seriously. I do not deny, as Amouzouvi (2005) observes, that many people have taken advantage of, and profited from, religious services such as healing, deliverance and prophecy. I am more concerned, however, with another aspect that Claffey (2007) suggested: that the growing demand for these services can also be seen as a symptom of a society fractured in its deepest social tissue (2007:268). This was clearly expressed by one of his informants, a Nigerian young man, who explained to him that this phenomenon is not so much a problem of lack of health services, but rather, it is a problem of people's relationships: relationships within the family (2007:268-269). People search for solutions against the symptoms of the "enemy within", a phrase that he uses to describe the forces of *vodun* acting through family ties (2007:108). The contradiction is that family is the space where fear, mistrust and jealousy abound and from which people want to separate (2007:109), but this is also a society where "much is made of the idea of family solidarity" (2007:238).

Claffey acknowledges that the African family has been under strain since the colonial period. It has been the focus of attention of missionary churches and nowadays of the new Charismatic churches (2007:239). In the current moment of modernity, he considers that Charismatic churches are seeking to address and contain this generation's frustrations before they turn into something worse (2007:269). In Benin, as in many parts of Africa, Pentecostal preachers offer people deliverance from those "ties" - coming from their households - that hold them back and, through Jesus, they promise people access to a life of divine blessings (Claffey 2007:241-243). However, Claffey is also critical of preachers who promise "*miracles*" and "*breakthroughs*" but who, according to him, "appear to be building castles in the air, while failing to engage with the struggles of people on the ground" (2007:248). However, one of the objectives of this thesis is precisely to further explore, beyond Pentecostal discursive formulations, the way these churches engage with the struggles of people in their everyday relationships.

Therefore, I now go on to contextualising some of the studies of Pentecostal churches in Africa and what has been said in relation to their role in dealing with the family and kinship tensions mentioned above.

### **Conversion to Pentecostalism and Making “a Complete Break with the Past”**

Pentecostalism is a particular form of Christianity, in which its followers experience direct access to “the gifts” of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals affirm that the Holy Spirit still manifests today the way it did on the day of Pentecost as narrated in Acts 2:1-13, when tongues of fire descended over the twelve disciples. These gifts are manifest in ecstatic experiences, such as speaking in tongues, healing and prophesising. Its doctrine is often described as fourfold (foursquare), this means that it proclaims that Jesus Christ offers salvation, heals, baptises with the Holy Spirit and that he will return for the second time (Robbins 2004b:121). Its origins are traced to the early twentieth century and are particularly associated with the Azusa Street Revival, led by the African-American preacher William Seymour in the United States (Robbins 2004b:120).

Pentecostalism falls within the broader group of Evangelical Christian denominations that place a strong emphasis on conversion. In other words, a person is not born in the Evangelical faith, she chooses voluntarily to accept Jesus Christ in her life in a moment of conversion, often described as powerful and significant, after which she is said to be “Born Again” (Robbins 2004b:120). Given that salvation through conversion is potentially attainable by anyone, Pentecostals place a strong emphasis on evangelism. Anyone can evangelise, regardless of her educational background, as long as the person is “filled” by the Spirit (Robbins 2004b:124). These features have contributed to making it a very dynamic form of religion, to the extent that nowadays the Pentecostal movement is considered probably “the most dynamic and fastest growing sector of protestant Christianity worldwide” (Casanova 2001:435, in Robbins 2004b:118).

The rise of Pentecostalism around the world in regions such as Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania has coincided with the rise of processes of globalisation (Robbins 2004b:117; Meyer 2004:453). Despite its supposed “Western” origins, Pentecostalism has been demonstrated to thrive in a variety of contexts and to generate important cultural changes in different societies, while maintaining its core principles and doctrines (Robbins 2004b:117-118). This phenomenon has largely shaped

anthropological debates concerning the role of Pentecostalism in introducing cultural forms and values associated with modernity and globalisation (cf. Meyer 1998, 1999; Robbins 2004b:131). In particular, it has been seen as encouraging the partial abandonment of “traditional” forms of sociality focused on “the collective”, in order to favour individualist forms of personhood and of social organisation (Bialecki, Robbins and Haynes 2008:1141).

It is in this context that Pentecostal preachers’ command to “make a complete break with the past” has become a useful framework to analyse the kinds of transformations that people experience in their lives upon conversion (Meyer 1998). In her study of Pentecostalism in Ghana, Meyer (1998) illustrates the way in which this claim has both personal and social implications. At a personal level, “the past” is conceived in a metaphorical way, associated with a person’s sinful life. The break, therefore, is performed by demarcating a distance from what is conceived sinful, by following a strict ascetic moral code that permeates all aspects of individual lives (Meyer 1998:188). On a social level, this past is associated with “tradition”, including national and ethnic festivals, religious beliefs, family rituals, and the recognition of ancestors (Meyer 1998:192; Robbins 2004b:127). This break, therefore, also reinforces a certain separation between believers and non-believers (Robbins 2004b:127).

Meyer’s analysis is illustrative of how deliverance becomes central to performing this break with the past. It involves a continuous process in which the individual makes a conscious effort to distance herself from behaviour that is considered sinful. At a ritual level, it involves severing “blood ties” that are considered to keep people “tied” to ancestral spirits and to curses that impede their progress in life (1998:187-191). However, this does not mean that this break is achieved once and for all (1998:192). Rupture, with its rhetorical character, can never be completely achieved (1998:184). Meyer is aware of the impossibility of radically cutting ties with the past and the family; hence she concludes that Pentecostalism offers its members a discourse and rituals to oscillate *between* the past and the present, addressing the gap between modern aspirations and actual circumstances (1998:203). It also becomes a strategy for people to re-evaluate their “past” in order to construct future orientations (van Djik 1998:158).

Although, to some extent, the focus on modernity has been productive at trying to explain the way Pentecostalism contributes to addressing certain dilemmas and shaping

particular forms of personhood, there is evidence that this approach might also conceal more than it reveals (cf. Engelke 2010a). In other words, modernity may be striven after, but its opposite, tradition, is never far away. As will be seen in the following section, this is particularly the case when trying to understand the way Pentecostalism shapes other forms of sociality and transforms people's existing relationships, such as those of kinship.

### *“Breaking with the Past” in Relation to Kinship*

In African societies, where the recognition of ancestral spirits both legitimates and enforces relations of reciprocity and obligations towards the extended kin, a person's separation from “tradition” has important social implications. It has been seen as a way in which younger generations challenge the authority of elders in highly gerontocratic societies (Meyer 1998, 1999; Marshall-Fratani 1998:283; Maxwell 2005; van Dijk 1998, 2002a). In so doing, it has been suggested that it provides upwardly mobile believers with liberation from the economic obligations and exactions from their kin. This is particularly the case of churches in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, where there is a strong influence of the Prosperity Gospel. This is a doctrine that proclaims every Born Again has the right to access to God's blessings in the form of health and wealth (cf. Gifford 2001; Coleman 2000, 2002:8). These churches have been seen as promoting certain kinds of individualistic ethics, entrepreneurial values that encourage the formation of capitalist attitudes, and a moral justification to the personal accumulation and enrichment pursued by their members (cf. Gifford 2004; Maxwell 1998:350-354; Smith 2001:608; Meyer 1998:186).

In West African contexts where economic obligations towards kin are an important means of building and expressing solidarity, some scholars have used this argument to suggest that Pentecostal churches exacerbate people's lack of commitment towards their kin (Smith 2001; Newell 2007). These observations, however, tend to emphasise the “world-breaking” qualities of Pentecostalism over its “world-making” ones (cf. Robbins 2004b). They tend to give the impression that Pentecostalism is socially corrosive. For example, Smith (2001) suggests that Pentecostals in Nigeria have contributed to undermining people's reliance on forms of patronage based on kin relations, creating a situation where Pentecostals are seen to be dangerously close to the ambiguities of the occult (2001:602). In the context of the Owerri riots in 1996, he illustrates that attacks

against certain Pentecostal churches were motivated by suspicions of their involvement with the occult, in the pursuit of illegal enrichment (2001:588). In the case of Ivory Coast, Newell (2007) follows a similar argument. He suggests that Pentecostalism is a new form of witchcraft discourse, for if you want to effectively tackle witchcraft you need to command the same type of forces (Newell 2007:477). He also sees it as encouraging the same type of self-centred accumulation that Ivoirians, and many other Africans, attribute to witches (Newell 2007:484). From my experience, this was also a common popular critique from non-converts and even some Pentecostal converts in Benin towards the new wave of Nigerian Pentecostal churches and the Prosperity Gospel. However, too close an association between Pentecostalism and witchcraft discourse can be problematic. First, it tends to homogenise Pentecostal experience suggesting that all people become self-centred and, second, people's discourses tell only one side of the story.

Recent studies have warned against the risks of drawing too close an association between the Pentecostal claim to “break with the past” and interpretations about the embracing of modernity and individualism (cf. Englund and Leach 2000; van Dijk 2002b; Engelke 2010a:179; Lindhardt 2010:242). In particular, they suggest that one should be careful about concluding that Pentecostalism shapes individualist attitudes: attitudes that lead to people's disconnection from their family relationships and obligations (Lindhardt 2010:242). For many Pentecostals in south-eastern Benin, as for those in Tanzania described by Lindhardt (2010), loyalty and solidarity towards their kin are extremely important. Their wellbeing largely depends upon maintaining good relationships with their families (Lindhardt 2010:242). Moreover, these assumptions are often based on Western notions of individualism which run “the risk of denying the cultural and historical forms of individuality that have been in existence in the African societies wherein it develops” (van Dijk 2002b:57).

Similarly, Engelke has argued that an over-emphasis on discourses of modernity often overshadows the complexities of ruptures experienced by Pentecostals and many other Christians (Engelke 2010a:179). For him, this has produced a “certain myopia” when it comes to analysing what he calls “*the realignments of rupture*” (ibid.). In other words, breaking with the past is not just about breaking with a certain culture or “tradition”, but it also involves aligning oneself to an imagined Christian history and the inscription of *another* past - this time, a Christian one (ibid.). He reminds us that one should always

bear in mind what anthropological wisdom has taught: what people say is not always what they do. Therefore, it is important to complete the analysis of Pentecostal discursive formations, with observations of the way ruptures manifest in the context of people's everyday lives (ibid.).

Until now, we see that most studies on Pentecostalism in Africa have focused on how ruptures are performed, but less on the realignments accompanying it. There has been a tendency to leave unexplored the new forms of sociality that these ruptures also generate. This thesis aims to contribute to this area by portraying the role of Pentecostalism in shaping certain kinds of ruptures, but also realignments, among its converts within the specific domain of kinship.

This point brings us close to another important aspect to consider, which concerns cultural continuities. However, before going any further on it, there is another aspect concerning Pentecostal influence in the domain of kinship and the family that needs to be taken into account: that of ruptures in marriage and gender relations.

#### *“Breaking with the Past” in Forms of Marriage and Gender Relations*

In contrast to the position of Pentecostal churches towards the extended family, it is widely acknowledged that these churches around the world tend to place a strong emphasis on the importance of the immediate family, where relationships within the marital bond become central (Laurent 2003; Meyer 1998:186; Marshall-Fratani 1998:283; Mate 2002; Maxwell 2005; van Dijk 2002a). In African contexts, Pentecostal churches condemn practices of polygyny and provide specific guidelines and teachings on how to build and maintain monogamous unions (Mate 2002; van Dijk 2012; Laurent 2003; Maxwell 2005). In recent years, when economic and social changes have had an impact on intimate relations, Pentecostalism seems to be playing an important role as moral mediator (Laurent 2003:412; Pearce 2012; Bochow and van Dijk 2012:325-326).

One of the few ethnographic studies that have explored in detail the impact of this form of Christianity in shaping specific forms of marriage is Laurent's (2003) work on the AoG church among the Mossi in Burkina Faso. He illustrates how marriage is the domain where the tensions in and readjustments to kinship, partly derived from the ruptures required upon conversion, find expression. In a context where economic and

social changes influenced transitions from customary forced marriages towards marriages by mutual consent, Pentecostalism becomes an important moral mediator regulating these changes. In doing so, Pentecostals create an “institutional *bricolage*” where converts invent mixed formulas to navigate two worlds that in principle seem contradictory (Laurent 2003:412, 2005:305). One example of this “institutional *bricolage*” is the way the pastor becomes almost like a head of a lineage (*buudukasma*) who holds the authority to marry young couples, whereas in the past, marital alliances were firmly mediated by the extended kin (Laurent 2003:135-137). The interplay between “quasi” kinship ties, such as the one with the pastor, created through church membership and those of kin is a very important aspect that will be addressed in some of the chapters in this thesis. Meanwhile, it is enough to observe that aside from shaping the dynamics of marital alliances, Pentecostalism also plays an important role in shaping gender dynamics within the marital bond.

In Africa, until recently, there were relatively few studies focusing on the study of gender and Pentecostalism (cf. Meyer 2004:460). This was in contrast to studies in Latin America where the remarkable attraction of Pentecostalism for women had been widely documented and analysed (cf. Robbins 2004b:132-134). One of the few exceptions was the work of Mate (2002) among Pentecostal women’s organisations in Zimbabwe. Using the framework of “breaking with the past” and its role in creating modern subjectivities, Mate brings attention to “the gendered nuances” of the processes of social change, accumulation and class formation set in motion through Pentecostalism (2002:549). She argued that Pentecostal churches teach women models of femininity aimed at setting them apart from other women, as a sign of their modernity and their faith. However, she concludes that these models end up reproducing forms of patriarchal domination (*ibid.*). Although Mate raises important issues, I find it problematic that this interpretation echoes feminist assumptions about Western models of gender relationships. As will be further addressed in Chapter 5, these assumptions do not necessarily conform to local notions of gender and relationships.

Addressing this gap in the literature, a series of studies recently published in a special issue of the *Journal of Religion in Africa*, further explore how Pentecostalism influences local discourses and practices on sexuality, reproduction and gender (Bochow and van Dijk 2012:326; Pearce 2012; Cole 2012; Frahm-Arp 2012; Pauli 2012; van de Kamp 2012a). These essays aim to explore how “the break with the past”, rather than focusing

on the individual, manifests in the area of *relationships* (Bochow and van Dijk 2012:328). Taking as a framework Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" they suggest that Pentecostal churches open alternative social spaces within "real spaces" for women to negotiate their roles in society, where power relations can be contested or even inverted. In this sense, "heterotopias" are similar to the Pentecostal "break with the past", as they allow the construction of new temporalities with alternative visions for the future (Bochow and van Dijk 2012:329-330). These studies bring attention to an important phenomenon: the way in which Pentecostalism opens up the possibility to articulate alternative forms of relating in a context where intimate relationships have been also reshaped by economic and social changes and the spread of ideas of "romantic love" (cf. Bochow and van Dijk 2012:325-326). This approach is similar to Laurent's (2003) and one that I also subscribe to. It points to the role of Pentecostalism as a mediator of changes happening as the product of wider economic and social changes.

These approaches to the study of gender, however - with some exceptions (Cole 2012) - focus mainly on socially upward mobile women from an urban background. Although the editors of this special *JRA* volume acknowledge the role of Pentecostal churches in shaping masculinities (Bochow and van Dijk 2012:327), they justify their focus on women on the grounds that previous forms of Christianity, especially mission churches, offered upward mobility to men, whereas it is "women in contemporary African societies who appear to be actors of present and future social reordering" (Bochow and van Dijk 2012:331). Although it is true that the Pentecostal churches where I carried out my fieldwork also attracted more women than men, the situation I encountered in Benin (Chapter 6) leads me to consider a wealth of contextual factors that might have shaped their participation. Specific context, generational factors and historical time matter when analysing the primary participation of either women or men in these churches, as historical studies reveal (see Peel 2002; Cooper 2010).

This thesis builds on this field of literature by exploring the Pentecostal project of shaping relationships within the marital bond, and the impact of this project on gender and reproduction (Chapters 5 and 6). However, I situate the analysis of these relationships within the broader context of kinship relations. For this reason, I have tried to maintain a perspective on the challenges faced by both men and women upon conversion. This balanced view, I suggest, is important in order to understand the reconfigurations of gender relations, especially in so-called "patrilineal" societies, such

as that of Benin. However, there is a further point to consider, it is the aspect of cultural continuities and the social context where ruptures take place, as I shall now discuss.

### *Ruptures, Continuities and Christian Diversity*

The dilemma presented in the opening vignette is an illustrative example of the complexities of “breaking with the past”. In a pluri-religious setting such as in south-east Benin, it becomes evident that different Christian traditions engage differently with the same Christian teachings: for example, Jesus asking his followers to leave their families behind. Similarly, in other settings, other forms of Christianity raise similar dilemmas when kinship obligations conflict with the demands of this religion, such as with the Seventh-Day Adventists in Madagascar (cf. Keller 2005). Moreover, in many cases, Pentecostals are not the only Christians who want to break with their pasts (Engelke 2010a:181). This reminds us that, after all, Christianity is a religion characterised by its paradoxes and a notion of time that allows for the possibility to create radical discontinuities (cf. Cannell 2006:7-8; Robbins 2007a:10-11), and these manifest differently in different contexts.

In recent years, scholars studying Christianity have brought attention to the need to theorise common topics in relation to the study of this religion (Cannell 2006; Robbins 2007a; Keane 2007). One of these efforts has been Robbins’ article “Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture” (2007a). In this article, Robbins argues that a persistent model of what he calls “continuity thinking” in anthropology has impeded the development of an anthropology of Christianity (2007a:9-10). This way of thinking, he says, assumes that things anthropologists study - “symbols, meanings, logics, structures, power dynamics, etc. - have an enduring quality and are not readily subject to change” (2007a:9). This is one of the reasons why anthropologists have failed to give proper credit to the claims of previously non-Christian converts about the radical changes that they experience in their lives upon conversion (2007a:10). Therefore, he draws attention to the need to look at the role played by discontinuities in the specific domains of Christian conceptions of time and belief. Robbins’ work among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea (2001, 2004a, 2007b) constitutes a fine example of his own engagement in taking seriously the study of discontinuities, and it has become

highly influential to the study of forms of Christianity that emphasise rupture, such as Pentecostalism.

In recent years, with the growth of Pentecostalism around the world, studies on Pentecostalism have tended to dominate studies on the anthropology of Christianity, particularly in Africa (Engelke 2010a:179-180). Similarly, the study of conversion as discontinuity has become somehow “a prevailing orthodoxy in the anthropology of Christianity and religion” (Chua 2012a:513). Therefore, some scholars have started to express the need to develop more nuanced approaches to the study of ruptures (Engelke 2010a) that also take into account to the role played by people’s discourses on continuities (Chua 2012a, 2012b). Adding to these observations, in Africa, even among studies on Pentecostalism, it is mainly only one type of Pentecostalism that so far has dominated the debates: one promoted by churches in urban contexts that emphasise the doctrine of the Prosperity Gospel. This type of Pentecostalism, however, is not fully representative of the demands for rupture as they manifests in semi-rural or rural settings such as in south-east Benin, where I carried out my research. Therefore, I agree with those who have observed the need to develop approaches that give account of the complexities of ruptures and of continuities in different settings.

Chua’s (2012a, 2012b) recent work on Christianity among the Bidayuh in Malaysia raises important points concerning the issues presented here. Her study takes place in a pluri-denominational setting with three congregations: Anglicans, Catholics, and a smaller presence of Evangelical Christians, which coexist with a small number of elders who practice *adat gawai* or traditional religion. Although Christians in this setting agree that their conversion to Christianity has involved a breaking from the past and *adat gawai*, this “sense of discontinuity is simultaneously tempered - and in many cases overridden - by a strong and pervasive sense of *continuity* with the old ways and its practitioners” (2012b:18). She demonstrates that in this context different forms of Christianity engage differently with notions of continuity and discontinuity: whereas Anglicans and Catholics tend to create a discourse of continuity between Christianity and *adat gawai*, Evangelicals radically oppose it. However, even if the latter oppose the old ways, the moral dilemmas that derive from this process of separation show that conversion involves “a series of temporal and relational negotiations by converts and non-converts alike” (2012a:512). After all, *adat gawai* and *adat gawai* practitioners are

not the same thing and people continue to be involved in a network of social, political, and moral relations (2012a:522, 2012b:19).

In contrast to Chua (2012b) who simultaneously analyses three types of Christianity, this thesis focuses only on Pentecostal converts and their own engagements with certain aspects of cultural continuities. However, I try to put into perspective and situate the analysis of people's life experiences and religious practices in relation to other religions and Christian traditions, which coexist in the same setting. I do not deny the value of focusing on discontinuity and of the points raised by Robbins (2007a). His observations in relation to the importance of taking seriously people's discourses of conversion and the discontinuous aspects of Christianity in relation to time (cf. Robbins 2007a:11) are particularly relevant for the topics addressed in this thesis (see Chapter 3). However, as Chua (2012a, 2012b) and Engelke (2010a) have pointed out, one also needs to ground the analysis of ruptures within the social contexts where they take place and the way they manifest themselves along with certain cultural continuities.

The ethnographic material presented here reveals that, although discursively ruptures are often articulated as radical, in practice they do not always appear as such. People still depend on and cultivate their social relationships with their kin. Instead, through a process of breaking and re-making, Pentecostalism opens a space for redefining forms of relating, through a selective re-appropriation of certain cultural norms and values. This view on ruptures and realignments resonates with the two-fold process described by Engelke in which "breaking with the past" involves a realignment with a Christian "tradition" (cf. 2010a:179), but also an engagement with or "continuity with aspects of 'African' sociality [which] are necessary to set the terms of what is otherwise considered a break" (Engelke 2010a:184 on Meyer 1999:139). In this sense, "a break with the past" is both discursive and strategic, in the sense that it is never fully realised, but it also constitutes "an exercise in boundary drawing - in being able to say what counts as Christian or traditional and on what grounds" (Engelke 2010a:184). This does not mean that these continuities represent or constitute unchanging and enduring elements of the past (cf. Robbins 2007a:9). In this process of double realignment, those elements that can be considered cultural continuities also acquire new forms and meanings as they engage with and/or are realigned with certain Christian values. This process, however, is by no means smoothly achieved; it is also fraught with moral dilemmas.

All in all, I consider that the notion of the “break with the past” associated with conversion continues to be a good framework to think with when studying those forms of Christianity that stress discontinuity. However, one needs to carefully situate the idiom of the break at the moment of framing the analysis. As suggested, associating too closely the “break with the past” with modernity and individualism might not always be the most productive approach (cf. Engelke 2010a; Lindhardt 2011; van Dijk 2002b), especially, when trying to analyse the role of Pentecostalism in shaping relationships. Similarly, this over-emphasis on Pentecostalism and its close association with modernity has tended to neglect similar engagements with modernity and transnationalism - which also challenge generational hierarchies - that happen at the heart of other religious traditions, such as with Islamic reformist movements (cf. Peel 2011) or *neo-vodun* or *oriṣa* worship groups (cf. Tall 1995a, 1995b).

Therefore, I suggest, it is important to take seriously the way in which this idiom or metaphor of the “break with the past” is understood and used by Pentecostals themselves (cf. Robbins 2007a:10; Chua 2012a:513). But also, it is important to see the way these discourses of rupture are enacted at different levels - either in relation to a person’s life, as a collective project and/or in relation to others, converts and non-converts alike - and the way they are accommodated along cultural continuities. I join the efforts of anthropologists in focusing on the relational aspects of Pentecostalism and its shaping of new forms of sociality (cf. Boschom and van Dijk 2012; Chua 2012a:512, 522), and in taking seriously the analysis of how religious ideas promoted by a particular type of Christianity, contribute to shaping kinship relations in contemporary Benin. Having considered the plurality of Christian traditions and their different engagements with ruptures and continuities, I now turn to portraying some features of the Pentecostal landscape as it existed in Pobe and Ikpinle during my fieldwork.

### **Pentecostal Churches in Pobe and Ikpinle**

All Pentecostal churches in Benin share the basic tenets of their faith such as the centrality of the Holy Spirit and the access to its gifts such as healing, prophesy, and the belief in the Second Coming of Jesus. However, there are also some differences between them (cf. Robbins 2004b:122). As mentioned before, the literature on African Pentecostalism has tended to focus on the emphasis that many churches, particularly in

urban areas, place on the Prosperity Gospel. However, during my fieldwork in Pobe, I realised that this was not the most relevant feature of some of the churches I visited. Although some aspects of the Prosperity Gospel have indeed informed Pentecostal practice, it has not been the same level of influence across the board.

Broadly speaking, there are three different types of Pentecostal churches in the region. First, there are the so-called classical Pentecostal churches, which are more or less well established in the region. These churches have North American origins and originally established themselves and expanded in the region as part of international missionary efforts. Second, there are the Nigerian-born Pentecostal churches that have achieved an international presence and which are often characterised as neo-charismatic (cf. Freeman 2012:11). Third, there are the small independent Pentecostal churches that are locally born and do not belong to any other transnational church or organisation.

Under the first category of churches we can list the AoG church and the Foursquare Church, which are the two most important Pentecostal churches in this region and those I shall say most about. They are the largest Pentecostal churches in Ikpine and Pobe respectively, and their numbers range from 200-300 each. The ethnic composition of Pentecostal churches in Pobe and Ikpine is representative of the ethnic diversity in both towns and services in the AoG and Foursquare churches were pluri-lingual. In both churches the majority of members were women between the ages of 30 and 50, with a minority of elders. There were a large number of children, whose parents were members of the church, and some young men and women up to the ages of 18 to 20. There was a gap in the population, between the ages of 20 and 30. This is because the majority of young people of this age move to bigger towns or cities such as Porto-Novo or Cotonou to continue their university studies or in search for jobs. This is particularly the case of men who at this age need to assert themselves as independent heads of household (Chapter 4).

The International Foursquare Church (*Église Evangelique Internationale Foursquare*) is the oldest Pentecostal church in this region. It first arrived in Nigeria from the United States in 1955. It was the Nigerian missionary, Reverend Simon A. Odeleye, who founded the first branch of this church in Benin, in the town of Pobe in 1969. Consequently, the church was established in Porto-Novo in 1981, and expanded in Cotonou in 1986 (de Surgy 2001:27). Compared to the AoG, the Foursquare Church has

smaller membership at a national level. However, it maintains a strong presence in the Oueme-Plateau region, where it has played a key role in the introduction and dissemination of Pentecostalism.

The majority of members at the Foursquare Church were Fon and Yoruba originally from other towns in the region. The services were sometimes held in French, but mostly in Yoruba, and someone translated simultaneously into Fon and/or Yoruba. Their pastor was Yoruba from the town of Sakete. He was a worker at the cement factory at Onigbolo, and combined his ministerial activities with his regular job. Therefore, he relegated many responsibilities to senior members of the congregation that also occupied positions of authority within the church. This church had one choir and a prayer group that specialised in deliverance (*prière combattante*). It also owned a piece of land between the towns of Sakete and Ikpinle that was popularly known as *montagne de prière* (mountain of prayer), where they held prayer retreats and meetings. This church supported and encouraged the formation of evangelists who in turn went to adjacent towns to open small church annexes. Some of the pastors who were leaders of the small independent churches at some point had also been members of the Foursquare Church and many of them continued to maintain relationships with this church. In addition to this, the Foursquare Church ran a private primary school that followed the secular national curriculum. Some of the members of the church worked there as teachers but not all of the teachers were Pentecostals. Similarly, the school was opened to students from all faiths.

The AoG is today the largest Pentecostal church in Benin, with a strong presence among the national political elite. However, its establishment in south-east Benin only dates from the 1980s. After Porto-Novo, the first church established in the area was in the town of Fouditi (second Adjohoun, third Ikpinle, followed by Pobe and Sakete) and it continues to grow through the opening of adjacent annexes to these churches. In Ikpinle the church was founded in 1994, under the initiative of two current members of this church who, after asking for support, were provided with the help of one French and one North American missionary, who temporarily assisted them in founding the church. Although this church benefited initially from foreign support, it is now completely self-reliant and no longer receives support either economic or ministerial from abroad. This church and the Foursquare Church are very strict on asking their members to pay tithes and this is how they fund most of the church activities.



**Fig. 1.2 The Foursquare Church in Pobe (above) and the Assemblies of God in Ikpingle (below)**

The majority of members of the AoG church were Gun, followed by Fon, Yoruba and a small number of Nigerian Ibos. The pastor always preached in French, followed by simultaneous translations to Yoruba and Gun. The group of Nigerians often sat together, since one of them translated the sermons into English. Some of the first members of this church first converted through the evangelising efforts of the Foursquare Church in Pobe and only later they contributed to opening the AoG church in Ikpingle. At the time of my fieldwork, the pastor in charge was of Gun origin and his wife was Mina from Togo. In contrast to the Foursquare Church, the pastor and his wife worked full time for the church and were closely involved with the lives of the church members. Given that the foundation of this church was relatively recent, the construction of the building had been gradually completed during my stay in which they completed the cement floor, the

window frames and main door. This church had three annexes in the towns of Oko-Akare, Usine, Banigbe and two aspiring pastors were assigned to Oko-Akare and Usine for one year as part of their formation in the ministry. The church had a committee with six deacons who were in charge of different aspects of the church and made important decisions together with the pastor. There were three choirs, one for women, another sang in French, and the third in Gun. The church had also created a small micro-credit organisation called *Sonaio*.<sup>14</sup> This was an initiative of the pastor in turn and was fully funded by contributions of the members of the church. It was initially opened to help widows and women to start their own trade and, later, they also started to include men. Many men complained that all micro-credit organisations were focused on women, whereas there were no organisations helping men who also needed funds to support their agricultural activities. Therefore, the church responded to this need.

The second category of churches is that of the Pentecostal churches of Nigerian origin, which are not so well established in the region compared to the first type. Nevertheless some of these churches have a strong presence in Nigeria and internationally. Some examples are The Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Christ Apostolic Church. In Pobe, the Christ Apostolic Church has a more or less large membership of around 150 people, but other churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church have between only 10 and 40 members.

There are important reasons why most Nigerian-born churches have not had much success in this particular area. There is a generally negative image of Nigeria in Benin and, in particular, the population living near the border tend to be very suspicious. Many people, including some Pentecostals themselves, said that Nigerian pastors, and those influenced by them, have dubious interests and many are only after money. Similarly, ethnic differences and language also play a role. A couple of Nigerian missionaries told me that they found that their lack of French skills was a barrier inhibiting their evangelising efforts in Benin. Although many of them were also of Yoruba background and spoke Yoruba, this was not enough to enable them to reach a wider audience.

Under the third category, there are a series of small independent churches founded by the initiative of a single pastor, often of Beninese origins. Some of these pastors, while being migrants in Nigeria, converted and started their ministerial activities and then

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<sup>14</sup> I was told that it means, “tomorrow will be better” in Fon.

moved back to Benin. Many of them are Holi from the marshland area between Ketou and Pobe, who have established themselves in Pobe town, but they maintain branches of their churches in their villages of origin. Other pastors are Yoruba Nigerians or Fon, who also speak Yoruba, and have established themselves in Pobe. Most of these churches struggle to maintain a constant fellowship and their memberships range between 10 and 50 people. However, taking them all together, their numbers become significant.

In Pobe, the small independent churches and some Nigerian-born churches demonstrate a stronger influence of the Prosperity Gospel. However, pastors from the bigger and better established churches in the region, like the AoG, openly expressed their reservations about certain aspects of it, in particular, its emphasis on material gain. But this is not the only aspect they feel suspicious about. These churches also condemn other features of the African version of Nigerian Pentecostalism (cf. de Surgy 2001b:25). For example, they often reject these churches' use of material objects such as oil or white handkerchiefs to heal or pray over people. Although the AoG church tends to be more rigorous in its rejection, the Foursquare Church at times is more permissive, especially when they have guest evangelists from Nigeria preaching.

Education is an important factor that influences churches' composition. Overall, in this context there are very important social differentiations between those people who are considered to be "literate" and those who are "illiterate". Someone can have money but be illiterate and will not be as well respected as a less wealthy but literate person. Being literate means that a person has been to school, speaks French and knows how to read and write. When someone has been to university, he is considered to be an intellectual. In Pobe, I observed that many intellectuals and literate people tended to stay in the Catholic Church and were part of the local "educated elite", who had been together to the local Catholic primary school and had built a strong network of friendships or support around those ties.

In the Evangelical churches these educated/non-educated distinctions played an important role. For example, one can see differences between well-trained Pentecostal pastors and those who did not have much training. The former were usually those who came from well-established churches. Their pastors were trained in the Foursquare Biblical Institute in Nigeria and, in the case of the AoG church, in the Biblical Institute

in Dassa. In contrast, the pastors who have not received formal training are normally those who, having been to Nigeria, received one day “the vision” or “the calling” from God and launched themselves into the ministry without pursuing formal biblical studies. Their ministry focused more on prayer rather than preaching the Gospel, in contrast to those who had a strong biblical formation.

Local people often criticised pastors from independent churches for being fake or motivated by greed. This was influenced by the fact that their lack of education at times led them to misread or misinterpret some aspects of the Bible, undermining their credibility among more educated sectors of the population. Similarly, there had been reported cases of some pastors who, taking advantage of their position, got involved in cases of adultery with women of their congregation, stole money from the church, or maintained polygynous marriages in secret. However, this does not mean that all independent pastors were alike. Many of them, despite their limited resources and lack of education, put a lot of effort into leading a Christian life and continuously searched for opportunities to deepen their knowledge. The evangelical association in Pobe was founded with the purpose of gathering these pastors into a group in order to support each other in their ministry. They often invited Nigerian evangelists to give courses or seminars on different topics. During my stay one pastor from Nigeria had established himself in Pobe and had set up a small and informal Bible school where he taught courses on discipleship to a group of pastors.

Although Pentecostal churches are purposefully open to all people regardless of their different ethnic backgrounds, ethnic factors tend to influence church membership. For example, I was told that people feel attracted by elements such as the way the drum is played and the type of songs of worship that make them feel more identified with their ethnic origin. The ethnicity of the pastor is also a factor that influences the ethnic composition of the congregation. This was for example, the case of the pastor in the AoG in Ikpinle, who is of Gun origin and the members of the congregation are mainly Gun.

Pentecostal churches in the Plateau region were more present in towns that were ethnically diverse, such as Pobe and Ikpinle, and not so much in towns where majority of the population were autochthonous. Followers of Pentecostal churches tend to be Nago from other towns in the region, Holi established in Pobe, Yoruba or Igbo

Nigerians, Fons or Guns, but very rarely local people from Pobe. The fact that local people hardly convert or join these churches has to do with family commitments that are still very strong for people who remain in their place of origin. It is revealing, for example, that in ethnically relatively more homogeneous towns like Ketou and Adja-Ouere where there are fewer “foreigners” evangelical churches exist only in small in numbers.

Given that most Pentecostals were “foreigners” or migrants in this region, their occupations were linked especially to the informal sector. Most of them did not have access to ancestral land. Many men combined their regular activities with minor agricultural activities for self-consumption in plots of rented land. Most women were traders in the market or at home. Occupations included tailors, hairdressers, carpenters, mechanics, and so on. Churches such as the AoG and Foursquare Church had a significant number of primary and secondary school teachers among its members, as well as workers at the cement factory in Onigbolo and the palm-oil research centre in Pobe.

Pobe, as a semi-rural environment, has both some of the characteristics of a growing urban settlement and also a very close relation to the rural life. I had the opportunity to see how autochthonous people in Pobe interacted towards their kin and the obligations they felt towards the elders of their lineages, and this allowed me to observe the dynamics that people often described as the life of the “village” or town of origin. Therefore, when I talk about the “traditional” way of doing things I take the Yoruba case as example, given that this was the one of which I had first-hand experience. However, at the same time, I had the opportunity to see the way the migrant population living in Pobe and Ikpinle experience the contradiction of not being part of the local population but also feeling both the obligations towards their kin in their respective “villages” of origin, as well as the need to distance themselves from them.

Despite the ethnic diversity that exists among Pentecostals in Pobe and Ikpinle, I can confidently say that there are many cultural commonalities in terms of kinship and religion. At least, the broader principles are the same. This is because throughout time, these ethnic groups have been in close contact with each other (Adediran 1994:2), to the extent that it is probable that the Yoruba influenced many aspects of the development of the Danxomé kingdom (Lombard 1967:71-72). This can be seen in the way the Fon and

Gun ritual practices and pantheons manifest Yoruba influences (Adediran 1994:6-7). Therefore, most Pentecostal converts, regardless of their ethnic origin, faced similar issues or dilemmas regarding the principles that articulate their kin relations and other aspects of their cultural “tradition”.

### **Fieldwork Methodology**

I first visited Benin in July 2008, during a three-week pre-fieldwork trip in which I decided to carry out my fieldwork in the south-east of the country. Due to its strategic position, at the cross roads of Cotonou and Lagos, I thought this place would provide a good opportunity to explore the influence of Pentecostalism taking place following ethnic lines across borders (cf. Mayrargue 2001, 2005). During this trip I decided that Pobe would be the town most suitable for me to live.

I went back to Benin in mid-December 2008 and conducted fieldwork until the end of July 2010. Originally, I wanted to explore how, in a pluri-religious setting, conversion to Pentecostalism and its emphasis on “breaking with the past” contributed to reframing social relations, particularly those related to the affiliation to kinsmen, and their manifestation in patron-client relations at a local level. I had planned that the entry point of my analysis would be the study of forms of authority rooted in kinship relations in everyday life in a Yoruba compound. On a second level I wanted to see the way in which discourses of power and authority played out in “public” political dynamics, through the constitution of patron-client relations and/or discourses of corruption expressed through rumour and national or local media.

As I embarked on this project I realised that things were not the way I had first envisioned and the methodology I had planned to follow would have to be modified. First, I faced the difficulty of looking at the life of the compound in a semi-urban environment such as Pobe. Before my arrival, a Beninese friend of a friend from London had arranged a place for me to live. When I arrived I realised this was not a typical Yoruba compound, and that living in one was not going to be easy. He had arranged for me to live in one of the brand new small flats that the landlord had built to rent to civil servants and employees of the cement factory in Onigbolo. The landlord, head of the household, was Gun born in Porto-Novo but raised in Pobe, married to a half-Yoruba woman. The fact that the head of the household was Gun meant that

everybody inside the house spoke and were considered to be Gun. We shared the compound with another Fon family composed of a young couple, a civil servant and his wife who was a teacher, who had two small children. The rest of the tenants were four young men, of both Fon and Gun origins, who worked at the cement factory. They often spent the week in Pobe while during the weekends they left to Porto-Novo or Cotonou. At the beginning I thought that this would disadvantage me in my project of analysing forms of authority rooted in the compound. This was not a typical compound where elders lived and where one could observe strongly the dynamics of seniority. Second, none of the members of the compound were Pentecostal. The landlord, his wife and most of their children belonged to the Celestial Christian Church. The landlord's eldest daughter was a Jehovah's Witness and the eldest of his nephews together with the rest of the tenants were Catholic.

The perception that I was living in the “wrong” place got reinforced when I first introduced myself to the local mayor. One of the first questions he asked was where I lived. When I told him, he said with relief and approval that it was a good choice. Although his reaction partly gave me reassurance, I also found it intriguing. This made me think that I needed to explore more thoroughly the compounds in the centre of town - of which he might have disapproved. Therefore, in the first month of my fieldwork, I embarked on carrying out a series of semi-informal interviews with each of the twelve neighbourhood chiefs in town - a structure that dates from the time of communism. Aside from using this exercise to introduce myself to the main local authorities, it helped me to gather an overview of the town and its structure that at times seemed to be overwhelming by its relatively large size. I also took this opportunity to locate the main churches in town and to interview some of the main religious authorities such as the Catholic priest, the Methodist pastor, and the pastor of the Foursquare Church in Pobe.

I realised that there existed five central neighbourhoods where the four founding lineages in town and its descendants had settled. These were, so to speak, the heart of the Nago population. They were located around the king's palace and the sacred forest where the shrines dedicated to the main *oriṣa* or deities of the town were located. The compounds of these neighbourhoods and the layout had kept, to some extent, the patterns of residency of the Yoruba towns (cf. Bascom 1969; Lloyd 1955, 1960, 1966). In other words, life was largely articulated around the compound where inhabitants kept their ancestral shrines. One can partly recognise where the descendants of these

founding lineages live because people from Pobe are normally buried in town. Among those who have converted to Christianity, their compounds normally have a tomb in their yards or in the middle of a group of houses, where their dead are buried.



**Fig. 1.3 Compound house with a tomb in the yard**

Not everybody who lived in these neighbourhoods was a descendant of these founding lineages. As mentioned before, a lot of Pobe dwellers were migrants who had settled in this town generations ago, and had been assimilated to life among the Nago population. However, whenever I asked these “foreigners” about their origins, they always referred to the towns from where their ancestors had come rather than Pobe. Only the descendants of the founding lineages traced their origins in Pobe.

I also realised that although people praised themselves for their openness to “foreigners”, penetrating the “heart” of these lineages and their ritual activities was not going to be easy. People seemed to be, and said that they were, very suspicious of any new “foreigner” arriving to live in these central neighbourhoods. I later commented on the mayor’s response to other people and asked about the possible reason for it. They said that he probably feared that if I lived in one of the central neighbourhoods my presence could raise jealousies and I or someone else risked being harmed by *gris-gris* (sorcery). This is why, in cases such as mine, the wisest thing to do was to live among other foreigners where, people said, other foreigners could protect me, as they have a tendency to do.

The neighbourhood where I lived was home to most of the “foreigners” who had bought a piece of land and had settled permanently in Pobe. Eventually, I realised that I lived in a not-so-unique compound compared to other neighbours. Similarly, the fact that none of the members of the compound where I lived were Pentecostal, turned out not to be a big problem since many members of the Foursquare Church in Pobe, including their pastor, lived in the same neighbourhood. This gave me the opportunity to observe the everyday life of the members of my household and the lives of their neighbours. I realised that the everyday lives of Pentecostal neighbours were not so different from the rest of the people in town. Pentecostals often build friendships amongst themselves but also with other non-Pentecostals. They engage in similar activities, go to the market, chat with each other on the streets, support each other in significant events such as funerals or the birth of a child. What is different, however, is the particular religious activity in which every person engages depending on her religious affiliation. Each person also tends to build closer - but not exclusive - bonds with the members of their church, compared to other friends or neighbours.

The local radio station proved to be crucial for the development of my research from the very beginning, due to the content of their programmes and the people who worked there. I followed the different religious broadcasts such as Pentecostal and Muslim sermons that were transmitted at various times of the day. The local news allowed me to keep informed of events happening in town, and current affairs programmes and debates allowed me to understand other aspects of the local culture. Both the director and the president of the radio station were two well-known and respected men in Pobe, who introduced me to some of the people who became key contacts (for example, it was at the radio station that I first met the pastor of the AoG church in Ikpinle, after his weekly Saturday evening sermon). They also helped me to make contact with the local association of Evangelical churches, and as a result, I got to know some of the pastors that belonged to it and to visit most of these churches.

The president of the radio station and a couple of the reporters who worked there turned out to be descendants of the core Nago lineages in town. Therefore, their friendship allowed me to have access to and to understand some aspects of the “traditional” culture and rituals that took place in more intimate spaces or where only Nago people participated. For example, I witnessed the annual public ceremonies, such as the *Gélédé* and *Egungun* masquerades, public ceremonies of the *oriṣa*, such as *Şango*. I also

witnessed other ceremonies with a more restricted participation, such as a *babaláwo* initiation, the enthronement of *Okéré*, one of the main religious leaders in the sacred forest in Pobe, a private *Ifá* consultation concerning a matter of witchcraft and one ancestral ceremony.

Due to the nature of my original project, I spent the first 12 months of my fieldwork trying to grasp the political and religious dynamics of the town, participating in public political events as well as religious events. I had the impression that my fieldwork was split. For a long time I had the anxiety of not having enough concrete material, especially as I faced a few obstacles in trying to look at political dynamics, clientelism and religion at a local level. The major obstacle turned out to be the timing of elections. Before arriving in Benin I was aware that national elections were going to happen in 2011. I had thought that I might have an opportunity to observe some of the political dynamics taking shape as candidates paved the road to elections. However, for most of the time, this was not a very easy phenomenon to observe. I managed, nevertheless, to gather some information but only to a very limited extent. It was towards the end of my fieldwork that traces of political clientelism and religion became more evident.

Second, I also realised that Pentecostals are not very prominent or influential in local-level politics. Instead, it was mainly Muslims who had a strong hold in local political dynamics and apparently it has been so for the last few decades. This is also probably related to the fact that some of the most economically powerful merchants and men in the region are Muslim. Similarly, the involvement of Pentecostal churches in politics or in mobilising people was not uniform. I found that there existed different and often divergent opinions in relation to it and it also depended on each pastor's position towards political matters. Even though Yayi Boni was known for being a member of the AoG church, I found that the pastors from this church, both in Pobe and Ikpinle, explicitly turned away from participating in anything that could be used as political clientelism.

Throughout my fieldwork, the Pentecostal church I visited most frequently was the AoG church in Ikpinle. It was in this church that I collected most of the material presented here. The reasons for focusing more on this church were determined by a set of both "objective" and "subjective" criteria. First, I was interested by the presence of this church in the local radio broadcasts and content of the sermons preached, which from

the very beginning and throughout my fieldwork I continued to follow. After having visited various churches, I realised that this was one of the largest Pentecostal churches in the region, together with the Foursquare Church in Pobe. The reason why I initially decided to follow the AoG church in Ikpinle, rather than the Foursquare Church located in Pobe, where I lived, was because I wanted to avoid being immediately associated with a specific religious group. Given the nature of my research, I did not want to be perceived as a missionary or another religious-related role that would make my access to other non-Pentecostal circles in Pobe, such as those of Muslim or traditional Yoruba religion, more difficult. In fact, I was not the only person who lived in Pobe and attended the church in Ikpinle. There was another family who did the same.

At the beginning, this strategy worked but it also turned out, because of the travel involved, to be exhausting. However, this experience gave me the opportunity to gather a larger picture of life in south-east Benin. I realised that people often commute from town to town and maintain close relationships with extended kin or friendships in the region. They attend funerals, meetings, graduations, or pay visits to their relatives living in other locations. I further realised that the activities of Pentecostals were not necessarily restricted to their place of residence or church location. Pentecostals often support each other in events such as funerals and marriages even if they do not belong to the same church. It was not until the last seven months of my fieldwork that I narrowed down my efforts to observing and following the religious activities of Pentecostals and also began to participate more openly in the activities of the Foursquare Church in Pobe. This allowed me to have a comparative perspective on these two Pentecostal churches. This is why the reader will find that testimonies and life stories portrayed include those of members of both churches: the AoG church in Ikpinle and the Foursquare Church in Pobe.

The second set of criteria that influenced my closer involvement with the AoG church in Ikpinle were more “subjective”, but not less important. After I met the AoG pastor outside of the radio station in Pobe, I arranged to meet him at his house in Ikpinle. After this meeting, I found myself feeling a genuine affinity for him, his wife and their three children. As my time in Benin progressed, they became like parents to me. I always appreciated the pastor’s openness and willingness to answer all my questions and to engage with me in a respectful but good-humoured way. His wife was always loving, welcoming and caring. The pastor took on board his role of teacher by helping me

understand the way in which Pentecostals in Benin conceive their faith. I spent a lot of time with them in their home, outside of church activities. In occasions of revival weeks or church events that finished late in the evening, I was always welcomed to stay overnight and often shared the children's room. Similarly, as I faced difficult personal moments in relation to my marriage and the struggles to make a relationship work while being away on fieldwork, the pastor and his wife became my confidants and a strong source of emotional support. It was through sharing the intimacy of our lives that I engaged in conversations about marriage and aspects of people's intimate lives that went beyond the mere interest of my research. I also felt welcomed by the rest of the members of the church and always found a space of comfort where I did not feel harassed with demands of money for being seen as a "white" person, in the way I felt in other contexts, including other Pentecostal churches.

I had originally planned that the observation of kinship dynamics would be my entry point of analysis. Therefore, my interest on kinship remained present throughout my fieldwork. In order to do so, I paid attention to the constitution of the compounds in the town in general. I also attended different life-related ceremonies such as funerals, one bridewealth ceremony and, in the case of Pentecostals, marriages, and the "presentation" of children in the church. In all these events and ceremonies, I paid attention to the way people interacted towards their kin, from the moment of the organisation, during and after the events. Although this thesis talks specifically about aspects of Pentecostal kinship, my inquiries regarding kinship dynamics during fieldwork were not limited to those of Pentecostals.

In all my encounters with people, I intentionally asked many questions about their kinship and family lives, even if my interlocutors were not necessarily Pentecostals. I paid attention to the position they had in relation to other members of their family and kin, the relationships they maintained and the way they interacted during the type of events mentioned before. It was during these interactions that I realised that people in Benin still hold a strong sense of obligations and normative expectations towards their kin, depending on the position they occupy. However, over the course of my fieldwork, I did not follow a genealogical approach to gathering information in relation to kinship. The reason for this was, on the one hand, the general mistrust shown whenever someone tries to obtain detailed information concerning people's personal lives. This was not just limited to my position as an outsider. In fact, during my fieldwork many people refused

to participate in the pre-electoral census carried out by the government. Similarly, churches often do not have a full registry of their members for the same reasons. I thus proceeded with discretion. On the other hand, my interest in kinship was related to the way in which people perceived models of authority and on the roles and obligations experienced as part of a kin group. I realised that I was able to gather this information without the need to be explicitly open in most of my enquiries.

I did the same when I interacted with Pentecostals. However, it was during the moment of collecting life stories that I spent more time looking in detail at people's kinship networks, enabling me to follow a more genealogical approach. I asked questions relating to people's positions within their lineages and information about the religious affiliation of the rest of their family and lineage members. I gathered a total of 48 detailed life stories, from 15 adult men, 15 adult women, 10 young men and 8 young women. I focused on how conversion had changed dynamics or relationships towards their extended kin and family members, the way they had experienced the main events in their lives, such as their marriages, the death of their parents and the way they had performed their burials. Throughout my fieldwork I also carried out informal conversations with other Pentecostals in more casual contexts, where I asked similar type of questions, the only difference was that I did it in a less thorough and methodical way.

Finally, I faced some linguistic challenges. Although this setting is predominantly Yoruba speaking, the lingua franca is often Fon. In this pluri-ethnic setting people normally speak two or three local languages and the majority speak French, even if it is just at a basic level. Before my fieldwork I studied Yoruba in London and this became very helpful. Some concepts I use here are in Yoruba language as they were used in the Pobe context. However, the people I interacted with the most were Gun speakers, both at home and at church, and many Yoruba Pentecostals spoke with dialectical variations of the Yoruba spoken in Pobe, because many of them came from towns in the surrounding area. This meant that I was never fully immersed in a monolingual setting, either Yoruba or another language. This linguistic diversity represented a challenge to me, since I found it difficult to develop full command of any local language in the time frame of my fieldwork. Therefore, I mostly interacted with people in French and in basic Yoruba as well as relying on the assistance of interpreters.

## Structure of the Thesis

In order to analyse ruptures and continuities and the way in which Pentecostalism contributes to shaping people's relationships towards their kin, each of the chapters in this thesis is dedicated to a different aspect of Beninese kinship: people's relationships with their ancestors, their extended kin, relationships within marriage and dilemmas in relation to reproduction.

I first start **Chapter 2** by exploring how, upon conversion, the basic Pentecostal tenet of building a primary relationship - that is, personal and intimate - to God through Jesus, contributes to shaping a form of subjectivity that is fundamentally relational. Although, in principle, this relationship concerns the individual and God, I argue that it is first made possible in relation to others and continues to be cultivated with the support of others in community. In order to demonstrate this, I explore some aspects of Pentecostal ritual practice and its social dimensions. I describe how during evangelisation crusades the message of Jesus dying on the cross is presented in a way that allows people to understand it as personally relevant to their lives. I then explore the ritual forms that allow people to continuously cultivate an intimate relationship with Jesus, such as prayer, being "filled" by the Spirit, and Bible study. These aspects will become important for us to understand the way Pentecostals approach their kinship ties and, in turn, articulate their relationships with their kin.

**Chapter 3** is dedicated to exploring the way in which Pentecostals' relationship with their ancestors is reformulated. I start with a chapter on death because ancestors are so important for many people in Africa: they are considered to be providers of wellbeing. Similarly, anthropological analyses in the past saw ancestor worship as legitimising African kinship systems (cf. Fortes 1970). This is one of the areas where Pentecostals discursively articulate one of those radical ruptures. They oppose people's recognition of ancestors by forbidding expensive funerals and participation in post-mortem ceremonies. I argue that Pentecostal displacement of the ancestors needs to be understood in relation to a change in the notion of temporality linked to "the regeneration of life" (Bloch and Parry 1982) that funerary rituals aim to address. This is made possible by the assimilation of a Christian Salvationist doctrine, as narrated in the

Book of Revelation, characterised by its discontinuous notion of time (cf. Robbins 2007a). In doing so, a cyclical notion of temporality linked to the regeneration of life - as sustained by the ancestors - is temporarily postponed to the moment of “rapture” that will accompany the Second Coming of Jesus, when every Born Again will be resurrected. Therefore, this change of temporality in the regeneration of life has implications for how people relate to their kin group, by placing a stronger emphasis on the present and in their relationships with their living relatives rather than the dead. The ethnographic material presented here reveals that ritual rupture does not necessarily translate into social rupture.

Having explored what happens when the ancestors have been displaced, **Chapter 4** further explores Pentecostals’ relationships with their living kin. I suggest that relational ruptures, when they happen, need to be situated within the system of Beninese kinship, and the normative expectations and obligations linked to notions of descent, descent roles, and patrilineal authority. I explore two cases of Pentecostal relational ruptures which reveal that long-term ruptures are not necessarily the result of people’s conversion. Instead, they are often produced by divisions and competition intrinsic to patrilineal dynamics and the enforcement of elders’ authority through witchcraft. When ruptures happen as the result of conversion, these are often temporary. Most of the time, people seek to restore their kinship ties. I argue that the notion of forgiveness, central to Pentecostal theology and born-again identity, can shed a different light on the notion of “breaking with the past” in relation to kinship. It allows people to re-establish their once severed kinship ties, but it also provides them with an alternative “ethical criteria” (Lambek 2010) from which they can articulate their social relationships with their kin group. All in all, this chapter demonstrates that some principles of patrilineal descent, seniority and gender roles remain important in articulating people’s kinship relations and how Pentecostals accommodate to them.

In relation to the immediate family, Pentecostal literature has drawn attention to the importance that these churches place on marriage as the means to shaping a moral Christian self and strengthening relationships in the immediate family (cf. Marshall 1991; Mate 2002; Meyer 2004; Engelke 2010a). Therefore, **Chapter 5** moves on to exploring the way Pentecostalism shapes marital and gender relationships in Benin. In a context where divergent values around monogamy and polygyny coexist, and where morals are perceived as having been disrupted by economic and political changes over

the last two decades, I explore the Pentecostal project of building “balanced” monogamous households. I argue that in order to understand the way Pentecostalism shapes gender and marital relations, it is important to take into account people’s notions of “spiritual” power that intervene in articulating men and women’s relationships to each other. In an effort to live according to biblical principles, Pentecostal men and women learn to submit to each other through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, which sometimes acts through the pastor. In doing so, women are prescribed to submit to their husbands and, in turn, men by becoming loving husbands, also learn to submit to their wives. In this process of realignment to a model of Christian marriage, “traditional” forms of masculine authority are also transformed.

Building on the issue of marital relations and the Pentecostal project of building monogamous households, **Chapter 6** deals with Pentecostal teachings on sexuality and fidelity between partners, which play a crucial role in consolidating this project. Pentecostals prescribe complete abstinence before marriage and sexual fidelity between partners when married. Therefore, a satisfactory life between partners is seen as an important element in maintaining monogamous unions. However, in this society where having numerous descendants is still regarded as a sign of wealth, having a satisfactory sexual life might not always be enough, particularly when monogamous couples face problems of infertility. Therefore, this chapter explores some of the dilemmas that monogamous marriages face when they cannot conceive children. I argue that Pentecostal men and women experience moral contradictions in different ways, depending on the stage of seniority they have in the social system which, at the same time, influences the way they make moral choices. In this chapter, moral dilemmas reveal that the value of reproduction and principles of seniority are still central in articulating social relations in Benin, and continue to shape people’s engagement with their faith. However, depending on a person’s moral decision, these dilemmas also have the potential to reshape prominent values in society.

The final and concluding chapter will evaluate some elements presented in this introduction, in relation to the material addressed in each of the chapters. It will also suggest an argument about the role of Pentecostalism in shaping people’s kinship relationships and in the lives of its adherents in the current neoliberal world.

## Chapter 2

### Relating to God through Jesus: Becoming Christian and Cultivating a Christian Relational Self

#### Introduction

Having witnessed the debate among Catholics during the funeral, narrated at the beginning, I was intrigued to know why matters regarding family life and Christianity seemed to be less troublesome to Pentecostals. I thought that it was very likely that at some point the same kind of dilemmas might arise among Pentecostals, but that I probably had not witnessed them. I decided to tell the AoG pastor about the funeral debate. Wanting to hear his point of view, I asked him how he explains this passage of the Bible to people, when these types of doubts or contradictions arise. He replied that other Christians, especially Catholics, often think this way because they have not really given their lives to Jesus. They do not understand that Jesus was not concerned to seek his younger siblings' respect but rather that he died for all humans in order for God to forgive and cleanse all of our sins. This is why Jesus had to carry the cross himself. If the people I was with at the funeral gave their lives to Jesus, they would know that they too will benefit from salvation. The pastor added that, in the end, it was irrelevant whether or not Mary had had other children. In fact, it was very likely that she *had* done so. However, he said, Jesus did not come to save just Mary or his siblings. Jesus was doing God's work and he was putting God first. That is what Pentecostals also should do: if one accepts Jesus in one's life, Jesus, as son of God, should become first and foremost. He explained to me,

Think of it as a pyramid. At the top of it, you need to put Jesus ... Then you can put the members of your family. You put your parents [if you are single] or your husband or wife [if you are married]. Then you have your children and so on. If you try to put other people at the top of the pyramid, instead of Jesus, then the pyramid will fall.

In this light, he said, people should understand the biblical passage of Luke 14:26, where Jesus encourages the crowds to renounce their families. It is not that Born Again Christians are meant to reject their families. Instead, it means that they need to put their relationship to Jesus at the centre of their lives.

This chapter aims to explore the way Pentecostals develop this primary relationship to Jesus. This becomes important because this primary relationship in turn influences the way they re-structure their relationships to other people, including members of their kin group, as will be further explored in the subsequent chapters.

### **Conversion and Pentecostal Ritual Life**

In Benin, as in other parts of the world, this relationship with Jesus starts from the moment of conversion, when a person decides to consciously “accept Jesus in one’s life”. As mentioned before, people’s narratives of conversion are often articulated as a turning point, a moment of change, that clearly illustrates the discursive emphasis of radically “breaking with the past” (Meyer 1998). However, I subscribe to the idea that although discursively conversion is often portrayed as a radical rupture, the process of *becoming* Christian constitutes a continuous process (Engelke 2004:104-106), where the person gradually becomes different to a prior self (St. Clair 2011:196). As clearly articulated by Marshall (2009:131), “*being* Born Again is an ongoing existential project, not a state acquired once and for all, a process that is never fully achieved and always runs of the risk of being compromised.”

One important aspect of studies on Pentecostalism has been the analysis of the formation of particular Christian subjectivities upon conversion. In her study of Pentecostals in Nigeria, Marshall (2009) uses a Foucauldian framework to suggest that Pentecostalism constitutes a mode of subjectivation. She explores the way Pentecostals constitute themselves as “subjects of God”. Following this line of argument, Pentecostalism “functions as a prescriptive regime” (2009:10) that produces new subjects “in the double sense of being subjected *to* and the subject *of* a practice” (2009:11). According to her, conversion constitutes a project that “involves the elaboration of new modes of government of the self and of others” which is fostered by “specific disciplines of the body and the mind, emphasising purity, rectitude, righteousness, and interiority” (Marshall, 2009:3). This framework has its value in

portraying Pentecostals' processes of self-formation. However, its focus on the individual does not lead on to provide an account of people's relations to others (see Lambek's critique of Foucault 2010:25). This is why Marshall portrays the moment of "giving one's life to Jesus" and the on-going process of conversion as a highly individual and solitary experience of "self-fashioning" (2009:163).

In this chapter, however, I argue that the process of conversion as well as the type of subjectivity that Pentecostals in Benin cultivate is fundamentally relational. Although individually experienced, this mode of subjectivation holds as its basic tenet the cultivation of a *relationship* with God. This is why becoming and being a Christian constitutes an on-going process because, as any other relationship, this one requires constant cultivation throughout time. Discursively, this relationship concerns the individual and God, however, I argue that this relationship is achieved in relation to others. It is initially socially fostered - mainly through evangelism - and, after conversion, it is cultivated and accomplished in relation to the community of believers and by a constant self-demarcation from the religious practices of non-believers.

My argument resonates with recent studies that also highlight the relational and intersubjective aspects of Protestant Christianity (cf. Luhrmann 2004:525-526, 2012a; Elisha 2011:20-21; Strhan 2012). After all, the desire for a personal and intimate relationship with God that Pentecostals in Benin expressed was not that different from, for example, that of Evangelical Christians in the United States or in Britain. As Foucault suggests, subjects constitute themselves through practices of the self that are socially, culturally and historically made available (Foucault 2000:291). This is observable in the current moment of globalisation of forms of Christianity in many parts of the world. Here Pentecostalism provides the framework of experience in which its converts experience in their bodies the power of the Holy Spirit and are encouraged to develop an enduring and intimate personal relationship with God through Jesus.

Although this general framework of experience might be similar to those described in other contexts, in this chapter, I will discuss the particular ways in which this relationship with God is achieved in Benin. For instance, for Evangelical Christians of the Vineyard movement in the United States, Luhrmann (2012b) suggests, developing a personal relationship with God requires that people experience God as a real entity. In this social context, where general scepticism and disbelief pervade, they cultivate "an

explicit as-if engagement in the spiritual domain”, with a “supernaturalism” that is vivid, concretely real and, at the same time, playful (2012b:372). A clear example of this supernaturalism is the exercise of pouring out a cup of coffee to God and inviting him to sit next to one for a conversation (2012b:372, 379). This way, they create circumstances where they “pretend” that God is present and, in doing so, they “train their minds” to perceive God as a real presence in their lives (2012a). In contrast, in the case of conservative Christians in Britain, who are opposed to the more emotional practices of Charismatic Christianity, their sociality with and their experience of God is shaped by their relationship with the Bible (Strahn 2012:180). It is through the Bible’s message that they get to know God’s personality and that he acquires a social agency of his own (ibid.).

In Benin where people present a wider familiarity with the spiritual domain, making God real is not the primary concern. Instead, people in Benin face the challenge of recognising particular types of experiences as coming from God, as opposed to other spiritual manifestations, such as that of the *orisha*. Therefore, in order to understand the way Pentecostals in Benin achieve and cultivate this relationship with God, we need to look at Pentecostal religious practices. These practices, I suggest can be considered to have a dual character. One the one hand they can be seen as “techniques of self-cultivation” in Foucault’s sense (cf. Marshall 2009), but, on the other, they can also be seen as rituals. In this chapter I follow the second approach because it is from this point of view that we can explore the relational aspects that Pentecostalism fosters.

Anyone familiar with Pentecostals will know that they are anti-ritual. They often condemn other religions and Christian denominations for their emphasis on the mechanical aspects of ritual, which contrast with the value they place on spontaneity and authenticity in their communication with God (cf. Robbins 2010b:58). However, Robbins (2010b:59) argues that Pentecostals do engage in rituals. If Pentecostal churches manage to thrive in contexts where other institutions have failed, it is precisely because of the intense ritual life that is at the basis of their “social productivity” (ibid.). According to Robbins, “to relate to one another as Pentecostals is to carry out rituals together” (2010b:59), in a regular way and in all kinds of settings, such as in the case of praying for each other in every situation (2010b:58-59). Pentecostal religious activity can be considered as ritualised in the sense that it provides a set of formulas aimed to bring people in contact with the divine (2010b:59). Robbins builds on Collins’ (2004)

concept of “interactional ritual” to understand how seemingly mundane situations can successfully bring people together in a ritual context. In order for this to happen two elements need to be present. One is “mutual focus of attention” or the way participants share a common definition of what they do together, and the second, is the “high degree of emotional entertainment”, which provides the “rhythmic synchronisation of bodily action” (Collins 2004:47-10, in Robbins 2010b:60-61).

In this case, however, I am also interested in giving an account of how ritual allows people to establish a relationship with God. It is to this purpose that Houseman’s (2006) approach to the study of ritual<sup>15</sup> becomes helpful to my analysis. His perspective opens the possibility to consider the way people establish relationships with each other, but also relationships with non-human entities, such as gods, spirits, ancestors and so on (2006:3). According to him, a ritual performance is “a distinctive way of enacting relationships” (2006:9), in which relationships with non-human entities become dependent upon those between people at the moment of ritual. These non-human entities “acquire the attributes of agency, becoming virtual subjects with whom a ‘relationship’ may be possible, precisely to the degree that the participants’ encounter with them is casually embedded in a network of interpersonal ties” (2016:3). In line with this approach, we can consider people themselves as vehicles that enable others to make contact with the divine.

A second element to consider is the way in which the senses are engaged through a series of “aesthetic forms” (Meyer 2010b) such as music, or visual material, which evoke the presence of the divine. Pentecostal ritual forms are highly emotional, but they are also regulated. It is at this level where the concept of “sensational forms” developed by Meyer (2010b) is useful in my analysis. According to her, sensational forms are,

authorised modes for invoking and organising access to the transcendental that shape both religious content (beliefs, doctrines, sets of symbols) and norms. Involving religious practitioners in particular practices of worship and patterns of feeling, these forms play a central role in modulating practitioners as religious subjects. Thus sensational forms are part of a specific religious aesthetics, which

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<sup>15</sup> He defines ritual as “a particular modality of embodied social action, defined by a number of presuppositions pertaining to the organisation of such action and to the experience of those participating in it” (footnote 3 in 2006:1).

governs a sensory engagement of humans with the divine and each other and generates particular sensibilities (2010b:751).

The advantage of this concept is that it allows us to situate ritual practices of worship and prayer as “modes of subjectivation” but also to give an account of the relational aspects that Pentecostals’ shared experience involves. After all, the demarcation of forms of religious experience in which Pentecostals in Benin engage, can only take place through the establishment of particular regulated forms of relating to the divine and to others, that convince them of the truthfulness of their experience. But most importantly, these sensational forms and the sharing of them contribute to constituting them as a community of “Children of God”.

Pentecostal ritual life is very rich. It involves so called “rituals of rupture” (Robbins 2004b:128), such as baptism by immersion, deliverance or “spiritual warfare”, but also those perceived as more “ordinary” and spontaneous ritual practices such as prayer, healing by laying on hands, worship songs or Bible study. The latter are rituals that are meant to become part of a person’s everyday life. Although baptism is an important ritual to mark the official belonging of a person to a “family” of Christians, in this chapter, I focus on those rituals that facilitate a person’s development of a relationship to Jesus. I focus here on evangelisation crusades, as the means by which people get to first know Jesus, and later, on the ritual practices that aim to maintain and cultivate this relationship such as prayer, “infilling” of the Holy Spirit and Bible study.

In this chapter I first portray the gradual character of the process of conversion through the testimony of a woman. Her story reveals the way in which her interactions with other people were crucial for her becoming Born Again. In a second section, I explore how the message of Christ is presented to people through evangelisation crusades and made powerfully vivid – for the first time, in many cases - through particular “sensational forms”, which are crucial to making people see the story of Jesus dying on the cross as *personally* relevant to their lives. Thirdly, in a context of *oriṣa* worship where relationships with the divine mirror those relationships among humans (cf. Barber 1981:724), I explain how the relationship with Jesus differs from those established with the *oriṣa*. Finally, I explore the different modes in which this experience is cultivated through a series of daily rituals, which are taught and practised in community. These include prayer, being filled by the Holy Spirit, and Bible study.

Here, I also address the wider social context, showing how the sensational forms in these ritual forms contribute to differentiating Pentecostal experience from other spiritual manifestations such those of the *oriṣa* and even the Holy Spirit among other Christian churches, such as the Celestial Christian Church. It is precisely the intense frequency of this Pentecostal ritual life that makes it blend with the ordinary rhythm of everyday life. This happens to the extent that Pentecostals in Benin often told me that being a Christian is a lifestyle, not a religion. They contrast themselves with those who they see as only engaging in rituals. Therefore, the experience of God does not remain at a particular moment of the ceremony or as a doctrine. It has practical implications for people's everyday lives.

### **Conversion Made Possible in Relation to Others: the Case of Maman Elodie**

The testimony of maman Elodie, an active member of the AoG church constitutes an example of the gradual process in which a person becomes a Pentecostal Christian. I have chosen her case to illustrate that, although the initial experience of conversion is always different for everyone, what all these processes have in common is the way people gradually learn to develop a relationship to God, through Jesus, and to see their lives as different from the kind of life that other people - including Christians from other denominations - lead in this context.

At the time of my fieldwork, maman Elodie was 45 years old, married and the mother of one seventeen-year-old daughter. She is of Gun origin and was born in Porto-Novo. She was secretary of the women's committee in the church and worked as director of one of the primary schools in Ikpinle, where she had been a teacher for many years. She was born within a family that had a long tradition of being part of the Methodist Church; therefore, she describes herself as "having been born Methodist". She was the fourth daughter among five siblings - four sisters and one brother - from the same mother and had a half-brother, son of her father's concubine. However, she said, not everyone in her family "took their religion at heart", meaning that they were not very committed. She disapproved of her family's "ritualistic" attitude giving as an example that whenever there was a celebration, all her family went to church but, outside of church, they did not behave according to what was taught there. For example, her father had a concubine despite the fact that Methodists are supposed to be monogamous. He rarely went to church and at times consulted traditional healers and diviners.

Her parents migrated to Gabon when she was a child and for a long time she lived in fosterage with her uncles who were also Methodists. Her uncle, in contrast to her father, “really loved the Lord”. He categorically refused to participate in any traditional ceremony or consult traditional healers and was very devout. His behaviour influenced her and she developed “an interest in God” and a taste for going to church. However, she admits that even then she still did not know much about Christianity. After she finished primary school, she moved back to her parents’ house in Porto-Novo and lived under the tutelage of her elder sister, since her parents still lived abroad.

One day, one of her cousins visited her and her siblings. She knew he attended a different church, which turned out to be an AoG church. During that visit, her cousin started asking, “Who are those who really love the Lord here? Who goes to church?” She replied, “Everybody goes to church, what kind of question is that?” His question did not make sense to her as she thought that everybody loved the Lord. Her cousin suggested that they sit and study the Bible together and she agreed. However, her cousin started asking questions to which she was not sure how to respond. He asked her, “What do you hope for when you go to church?” She thought and thought, trying to understand what he was really asking. Not knowing what the right answer was, she said, “Ah! I don’t hope for anything. I go because my father and my mother are Methodist and I follow them.” Her cousin replied, “Ah-ah! That is serious!” He continued challenging her, “So, who is Jesus for you?” She replied that she knew he was the son of God and that he had died on the cross. He said that she was right but that it was not *only* that. She said,

He explained to me that Jesus had come to earth to die for *me* and for *him*, that he had been resurrected and was alive, and that whoever believes this, will have eternal life. So when we follow Jesus, our hope is that one day ... we will also be resurrected, we will eat at his table, we will be his children and, one day, we will see him face to face. Then, I really started learning about Jesus! These things opened my eyes.

After this conversation, her cousin invited her to attend the Bible study sessions at his church on Tuesdays and Thursdays. She agreed. His answers had awakened her curiosity to know more about it. In this case, the first vehicle for knowing Jesus was this

interaction with her cousin. This can be seen as an example of the way God acquires agency through people, in this case her cousin, as he preached to her in a context of one-to-one evangelism.

The first time she attended the teaching she was surprised by the differences she found between his and her church. First, she saw that everybody was carrying their Bibles, whereas in the Methodist Church very few carried a Bible with them. Second, she was surprised that at the end of the class people asked questions, something that did not happen at the Methodist Church. She enjoyed this session and decided to continue attending the classes during the week. On Sundays, she attended the Methodist Church. However, she kept this secret and did not tell her parents or siblings that she was attending another church.

Gradually, she was introduced to different aspects of Pentecostalism and started noticing more differences. For example, in the Methodist Church, she said, “We just sang and danced and followed the pastor saying ‘amen’ and repeated prayers we memorised. That was it! We came back home and the heart was not renewed.” During this time, she also witnessed her first evangelisation crusade that took place in a public square. During this event, pastors took turns to preach the Bible and invited people to “confess Jesus”. She was surprised at the deliverance sessions where people were prayed for and healed. After this, some members of the church took their address and contact details and said that they would continue visiting them to pray for their complete recovery. This was something she had never seen before. She thought that their Christianity was different.

Although she found all this very interesting and new, she was also concerned about whether or not the things she saw happening there were “part of the Word of God.” In order to find out, she decided to invite the Methodist pastor from her church to the last day of the evangelisation crusade and to hear his opinion. Given that she was an assiduous member of the Methodist Church, the pastor listened to her and accepted the invitation. When they arrived, as usual, the pastors preached. She stood next to her pastor and she saw how he took notes and said to himself, “it is true, that is true, that is also true, they haven’t lied.” However, the moment when he saw that they called the sick to the front to be prayed for healing by imposing the hands, the pastor started to doubt. She told him, “But that is also here in the Bible. It says that if you impose the

hands on the sick, they will be healed. Whoever invokes the name of the Saviour will be saved.” But the pastor rebuked her saying, “Hmm, in that case, the Bible also says that at the end of times there will be many fake prophets.” He turned around and left. Despite what the pastor had said, she stayed that evening until the end, and decided to continue attending the weekly classes at the AoG church while still considering herself a member of the Methodists.

However, a point arrived when she no longer felt encouraged to continue going to the Methodist Church on Sundays. She said, “I realised that there was a great difference, it was as if everything was death, there was no life, so I said to myself, I need to finish with this, I don’t feel anything.” In contrast, whenever she went to the AoG church she always left feeling motivated. Therefore, she decided to fully join this church’s activities. She described her experience saying,

Every time I went there, really, I would feel something within me. I would feel that God had touched me and that He had moved things inside me ... and when the Word of God came out, it came out with a great conviction! And you could see that there, really, there was life! There is life!

Notice here how her final decision to leave was driven by the evidence of her senses. Whereas in the Methodist Church she did not feel anything, in the Pentecostal church she felt that something was alive. This evidence provided by the senses is coupled with the effect that the spoken word had on her. It is not coincidental that she said, “when the Word of God came out”, without referring to the person that had uttered it. It is obvious that the pastor preacher was the one who pronounced it with such conviction. However, this is an example of “media becom[ing] so much entangled with what they contribute to mediate that they are not visible as such” and allow the person to experience a contact with the divine as direct (Meyer 2011:26). For Pentecostals in Benin the Word of God is conceived as almost having power of its own to penetrate people’s hearts. But aside from the immediate sensorial experience with the divine, there was a personal identification with the message itself. She continued,

I started discovering many things. Before, I was blind, we all were blind ... I didn’t have the assurance of my salvation, I didn’t know that Heaven was waiting for me because Jesus had died for *my* sins! ... I didn’t know that sins

were a blockage for the Christian to go to Heaven ... we just bathed ourselves in sin, living a life of immorality and we called ourselves Christians. [In the Methodist Church] there was nothing, not a single word that would touch the soul saying, “Attention! What you are doing is serious!” ... The Bible says that sinners will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Those who remain in sin, in infidelity, in idolatry ... the day when Jesus will return, He will say: “I don’t know you!”

Notice how she remarked on the lack of awareness she had as a Methodist regarding sin. In that church she had no warning or teaching about the things that were “wrong” and the implications for a person’s life. Adding to this, she said that nobody asked her why she had stopped going to the Methodist Church, as if they were not really concerned about her or her wellbeing. In contrast, she appreciated that in the Pentecostal church there was a constant teaching on moral behaviour and the concern this church had for people’s salvation.

Changing church, however, posed problems for her at home. Her siblings disapproved of her decision to join the Pentecostal church. Her elder sister, who was in charge of the rest of the siblings while their parents were in Gabon, told her parents that maman Elodie had joined “those who break the bottles of alcohol”, a mocking way to refer to members of Pentecostal churches. As a reprimand, her father decided to stop sending money for her studies, in order to force her to change her mind. However, her mother continued sending her money in secret.

It was not an easy period for her, but she said that she found the courage and strength to face her family’s opposition through the Holy Spirit. At the beginning, she did not know what the Holy Spirit was, since their Methodist pastor never taught them about it. The Methodist pastor certainly knew about the Holy Spirit but, according to her, “he did not believe in Him”, despite the fact he had a degree in theology. However, the Pentecostal pastor always told them that every Christian should seek to be filled by the Holy Spirit. This way, she said, “I started to ask, and ask [in prayer] and one day I was also filled”, meaning that one day she also started speaking in tongues. This was what she considered helped her to consolidate her faith and to give her strength to continue in this church despite opposition.

Three years after she first joined the AoG church, she was baptised. The fact that she decided to get baptised three years later, reveals that the process of becoming Christian is a gradual one. This is not uncommon among Pentecostals and they normally receive baptism once they are fully convinced that this is the path they are committed to follow. After a person gives her life to Jesus and she decides to be baptised, she officially becomes part of a community that is considered as a family of God. From this moment, the pastor often takes personal responsibility to assist a person whenever they face any problem, as will be seen throughout the following chapters.

In her testimony, maman Elodie clearly demarcates a separation between what she did as a Methodist and as a Pentecostal. As a Methodist she followed her parents for “tradition”, she went to church and participated in ceremonies. She led a “religious” life, meaning that she engaged in mechanical forms of ritual practice, but this practice was devoid of the conviction of knowing that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross had direct impact on her life. Maman Elodie’s example also reveals the importance of the role played by other people in a person’s decision to become Born Again. In her case, her cousin was an important vehicle for her to first discover the meaning of Jesus’ death and the fact that it had direct relevance to her: Jesus had died for *her*. Later, maman Elodie’s initial curiosity was further fed and cultivated through her participation in Bible study sessions and an Evangelisation crusade. Similarly, her case reveals the way her senses were engaged in specific patterns of feeling (cf. Meyer, 2010) during these events, which provided her with concrete evidence that what she was told during the Bible studies and sermons was “alive”: Jesus was alive, the Word of God was alive.

In this case, one could say that maman Elodie already had a reference to Christianity and Jesus. However, some people have no or little knowledge of Christianity before they convert. Among this category of people, being healed from a disease or experiencing a “miracle” become the means by which they are first convinced of the power of Jesus. This often happens for the first time in the context of evangelisation crusades, which I shall now discuss in more detail.

### **Encountering Jesus in “Sensational Forms” and in the Company of Others**

In order for a person to see Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection as personally relevant to her life, and to develop an intimate relationship to him, she needs

to be able to experience Jesus vividly. It is here that evangelisation crusades play a crucial role in making the message of Jesus accessible, understandable but also experientially available to many people. In this section I show how this is largely made possible through a series of “sensational forms” such as music, movies, and public preaching.

Evangelisation crusades can be considered as ritual performances that happen in community. Although they facilitate the individual experience of conversion, they actually make this event possible in relation to others. Similarly, evangelism works in two directions. In general, it is the means of reaching others to tell the “good news” of the Gospel, but in doing so, Pentecostals also reinforce their *own* faith. In the context of Benin, members of Pentecostal congregations often put themselves in situations that are considered potentially harmful, such as being exposed to the influence of “evil forces”. By witnessing the way in which these forces are neutralised, watching others heal and give their lives to Jesus, and listening to sermons again, they convince themselves of the power of the Word and the efficacy of their religious practice. They also position themselves as a community in opposition to those who are non-believers.

Although the specific format of evangelisation events varies depending on the church or pastor who organises them, they tend to follow a similar structure. They often take place over a period of three days, with activities during the morning and evening, or evenings only. They happen in public places such as squares or crossroads where large speakers and a podium for the preacher are installed. One week in advance, members of the congregation prepare themselves through prayer and fasting. The purpose of this preparation is to ask God’s intervention to “soften” the hearts of those who will listen to the Word of God and to ask for protection. Prayer neutralises any malign force or spiritual influence acting upon people to be evangelised or that could interfere with their activities. Prayer also sanctifies the place where these events will be held. During the day of the event loud music, in addition to visual material such as movies, become instrumental means of attracting people’s curiosity and encourage them to listen to the sermons. These visual and auditive materials constitute forms of “mediation” (cf. Engelke 2010b) that contribute to making the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit alive.

In one of the evangelisation crusades I witnessed in the village of Oko-Akare, which was organised by the AoG in Ikpinle, developing friendships or at least showing concern for people was one of the main ways of attracting people to Jesus. The purpose of this crusade was to increase the number of members in the annex that the church had built. The event was planned to have morning and evening sessions. Morning sessions consisted of visiting people in their houses. Members of the congregation formed small groups of three and were allocated a specific neighbourhood in town. The pastor advised them to approach people in a friendly way, showing interest in what they were doing. As the conversation progressed they were advised to ask if they knew and worshipped God and if not, to let them know about the importance of giving their lives to Jesus. If someone was receptive, they were invited to the evening session to watch a movie. Members of the congregation were also instructed not to be too pushy if someone was rude or reluctant to talk. The pastor said that the best way to bring someone to Jesus is through friendship and by showing a genuine concern for her life. After each morning session, members of the church went back together to Ikpinle, where everybody narrated their experiences of having met people in the different neighbourhoods. After listening to the stories, the pastor gave feedback. He recommended that, if someone they met in the morning went to the evening session, they should approach them in the evening again and engage with them in a friendly way. If the people they had talked to in the morning did not come to the evening session, he advised to visit them again next morning.

Evening sessions started at around seven. People gathered in the plot next to the chapel in Oko-Akare, where a screen, a projector and some benches for people to sit had been installed. The session started with prayer and a period of about thirty minutes of worship songs enlivened by the playing of drums and the singing of one of Ikpinle's church choirs. Music is a sensational form that requires a particular mention. In traditional worship, for example, drums play a central role. Ritual drums are greatly respected and only people who go through particular initiation can play them. They are considered to "speak" as they utter specific sounds. They build the atmosphere for any ceremony, but they are also the means through which the *oriṣa* are called to manifest in any ritual and through which they also speak back (Verger 1969:59, 1995:80-84). Although this is not the case with the drums played by among Pentecostals, worship music still plays a very important role. I was told that worship music, singing and dancing are important means through which the power of God manifests, and gospel

music is often called spiritual music. However, the main difference is that the tunes played in these churches are different to those that traditional worshippers use and anyone who has the ability to play drums, including children, can do it without the need of going to any particular initiation.

Attracted by the music and the knowledge that a movie was going to be shown, many people joined the crowd. The highlight of evening sessions was the projection of the movie called “The History of Jesus”, produced by the Campus Crusade for Christ, which portrays the life and death of Jesus based on the Gospel of Luke. The movie was divided into three parts of 20 minutes each, allowing it to be shown over the three days. The projection of the movie started after allowing some time for people to gather during the worship sessions. In addition to music, films are an important part of the repertoire of Pentecostal sensational forms. As Meyer reports for Ghana, they are authorised devices that act as “mediums” in support of religious revelation, by “laying bare what happens in the realm of the invisible” (2010a:125). In my experience, this was the way people in Benin also regarded films. As in many parts of Africa, Nigerian films were very popular. Very often these movies tell stories in which invisible entities, such as evil spirits or witches, are visually portrayed through special effects that illustrate how these forces act on people’s lives. As I watched these movies with people, they often told me that they reflected what happened in reality. Although the stories were seen as fiction, the phenomena portrayed there were not. In this case, the movie of Jesus should not be regarded as different from the Nigerian ones: it also constitutes a medium that supports religious revelation. During the screening of the film, women, men and children exclaimed whenever Jesus performed miracles, applauding, praising the Lord or voicing exclamations such as, “ah! Wonderful and powerful man!” The evening when the death of Jesus was shown, a woman next to me exclaimed, “Oh Jesus! Oh papa! All that happened because of me, because of all my sins.” It was a similar experience to that described by Cooper (2010:405-406), where she narrates the effects of watching the same movie in a rural town in Niger. Movies have a powerful impact on people, by portraying how Jesus healed the sick, revived the dead, forgave sinners, died on the cross and, finally, was resurrected from death. Jesus is not an ordinary man. After the projection of the movie, the pastor spoke to the crowd, further explaining the reason for Jesus’ death and reinforcing the message of the film. Those who during those evenings were “touched” by the message of the crusade were invited to give their lives to Jesus by coming to the front.

Another example of a crusade I witnessed, was the one organised by the Foursquare Church. This event happened at one of the main crossroads in Pobe. I was told that the place was chosen because it is considered to be under the influence of dark forces. On that occasion, loudspeakers were installed to enable worship music and sermons to be heard from a long distance. Benches and chairs were placed in a rough square leaving an open space in between where people could come to dance or, later in the evening, to receive prayer. The evangelisation crusade started in the evening when the choir started to sing and members of the church took their seats, while they talked, danced and joined in the singing. As the evening progressed, some people approached attracted by the crowd and sound of music. Once a large group were gathered, the pastor of the church introduced the guest evangelist to give his main sermon. The particular appeal of the evangelist that spoke on this occasion was the fact that he preached using his personal story as an example. He narrated the way in which, from a very young age, he had become a member of different traditional worship groups. He later contrasted this with his present practices, showing the way his life had changed since he had become Born Again. Although these narratives are very common among Born Again Christians, what was important here was that he dared to reveal in public the “secrets” (*awo*)<sup>16</sup> that only those who are initiated have the right to know. In Yoruba *orisha* worship, surrounding a person or an object with secrecy contributes to granting her or it spiritual power and authority (Barber 1981:739-40). Many people, including converts, showed surprise at the way in which he talked openly about his different initiations and the secrets revealed only to the initiated, without fear of being killed by vengeful *orisha* worshipers. His sermon therefore convinced the audience that, because of Jesus’ protection, he was now able to face any attack from such opponents. He stripped the *orisha* and its worshipers of their power by making their secrets public (cf. Barber 1981:738), which in turn, had a powerful bonding effect on the audience. By putting all equally at risk, a community of Pentecostals and potential converts became complicit in exposing, and repudiating these forms of formerly secret knowledge. In this case, the sensational form relied on was the power of the spoken word.

In every evangelisation crusade, the message is meant to provoke a powerful impact among those who listen to it. As shown in the case of maman Elodie, in these contexts the word tends to be objectified and the speaker is erased. However, this effect is only

possible through the existence of a speaker and an audience. In this sense, the act of speaking and listening is in itself relational (Coleman 2006:165; Strhan 2012:109), and has the capacity to transform both the listener and the speaker (Coleman 2006:168). In addition to this, in Benin the spoken word is considered to be powerful (Verger 1971:67; Strandsbjerg 2008: 258-259). It is considered to produce an effect on people's emotions, spirit and thoughts. The word, in its spiritual nature, has the power to "touch" the heart of a person. However, not everyone who listens to it is "touched" by it, even if in theory everyone could. This is why Pentecostals think of themselves as being chosen by God.

By the end of the sessions, pastors or evangelists encourage people to give their lives to Jesus. Those who are moved are invited to go to the front to "confess Jesus" by repeating a prayer led by the pastor. In this prayer, the person admits to having led a life of sin, manifests her repentance, and recognises that Jesus is her personal saviour. The prayer, with small variations, normally goes like this,

Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. But I believe that you died upon the cross for me. That you that you shed your precious blood for the forgiveness of my sin. And I believe that on the third day, you rose from the dead, and went to Heaven to prepare a place for me. I accept you now as my Saviour, my Lord, my God, my friend. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, and set me free from my sin. And, because you are my Saviour, Jesus, I shall not die, but have everlasting life. Thank you Jesus!

In turn, people are encouraged to get rid of all traditional or "fetishistic" amulets or means of protection. In many cases, pastors go to people's houses where they take out any *oriṣa* representation or material objects related to their worship. In order for the deliverance to take place a person needs to radically renounce their loyalty to whatever other religious or spiritual practice they had. As long as a person becomes loyal to Jesus and only him, that person will enjoy his protection and healing. However, people are not left on their own after destroying all the amulets or *oriṣa* representations, as maman Elodie told me, people continue to be visited and prayed for by other members of the church until complete recovery and deliverance is achieved. In this sense, relationships with other converts constitute part of the deliverance or healing process.

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<sup>16</sup> *Awo* means secret but it also conveys spiritual power or "sacred mystery" (Barber 1981:739).

In this section, I have focused so far on the way both relationships with people and sensational forms used in evangelisation crusades are part of the means through which people encounter Jesus and experience this encounter as powerful, vivid and truthful. A combination of concern for people, establishing friendship relationships to them, persuasive sermons, movies and music, all together create the conditions in which a person experiences the divine, in this case the message of Jesus, as real and personally relevant to their lives. However it is important first to explore the context of *oriṣa* worship and strong belief in the spiritual world in which this message is received. I will now explore the role and place occupied by Jesus in relation to other spiritual entities such as the *oriṣa*.

### *Relating to Jesus vs. Relating to the Oriṣa*

Having seen the above, it is important to situate the place that Jesus occupies in relation to Yoruba cosmology and *oriṣa* worship. It is worth noting that there exist some parallels in the way the human character of Jesus and that of the *oriṣa* enable people to establish a relationship to them. I am not suggesting that Pentecostals in Benin see Jesus as an *oriṣa*. However, the dynamic of the relationship established between humans and Jesus and between humans and *oriṣa* is similar and it remains as intense. In this section I will explore some aspects of these relationships with the divine, in particular what concerns the role that these divinities play as intermediaries in relation to God and the loyalty that is required from humans in order for them to deliver practical results.

There exist a variety of spiritual forces in Yoruba cosmology, whose particular features and presence vary from town to town and personal interpretations (Eades 1980:118-199). Despite this complexity, I depart from Barber's (1981) description of Yoruba cosmology as one in which humans are portrayed as solitary individuals who, assisted by their *Ori*<sup>17</sup> (destiny) - chosen by themselves before arriving on earth - make their way through life in a world surrounded by a variety of spiritual forces. These forces can

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<sup>17</sup> *Ori* means head in Yoruba. It is considered the place where a person's destiny is located. However, according to Verger (1971:63; following Bascom 1956:408) *ori* is the guardian of the soul of the ancestors, whereas *ipònrí* (the chosen head) is destiny and is also linked to the origin and ancestors of the person (Verger, 1971:66). The people I spoke to often referred to this notion of destiny as *ori*. They told me that in the past, and nowadays fewer people, bring their new-born baby to the *babaláwo* (diviner) to find out the *ori* or destiny of the child. However, many people refuse to do so as a means of "protection". They say that by consulting the *babaláwo* jealous people can see whether or not the baby's destiny is a good one and they become easier prey to those who want to block their way in life.

be either benign or malign or ambivalent (1981:729). Throughout their lives, humans associate themselves with these forces, sometimes to fight against their enemies in human society, or to be successful in life. Among the benign forces that help humans are the *oríṣa* and ancestors, but among the malign are the witches (*eniyán*) and other spirits associated with death, loss, sickness, etc. (ibid.) This notion of the universe and of men living in it, to some extent is also true for Pentecostals. They also find themselves in constant struggle against the spiritual forces that surround them or try to block their way in life. Similarly, the Yoruba notion of predestination has influenced the way Pentecostals believe that they, as Born Again, have a personal destiny that God has chosen for them (cf. Pearce 2012:354), and that gives them access to the promises that God, in the Bible, made to the people of Israel.

There is another aspect to consider, which is the notion of a Supreme God, *Olódùmarè*, also known as *Olòrún*, who is the creator of all things and remains above everything else. He is considered to be so powerful that he cannot be approached directly by humans (cf. Morton-Williams 1964:245; Eades 1980:119; Barber 1981:729; Verger 1982:20). Below him, *Eṣu* (or *Legba* in Fon) and *Orùnmila* also work as intermediaries (Barber 1981:729). *Eṣu* is an ambivalent trickster that missionaries translated as the devil, a term which Christians continue to use. *Orùnmila* represents wisdom and, through *Ifá*, communicates *Olódùmarè*'s will, as well as that of the ancestors and other divinities. The *babaláwo* is the religious specialist who knows how to interpret *Ifá* and people recur to him whenever they want to know how to proceed in any matter, ask for advice, or enquire about the source of any problem (cf. Barber 1981:729). However, ordinary humans can only establish a more direct contact to the divine through the *oríṣa* and the ancestors, who work as intermediaries between men and the great God (Barber 1981:729; Verger 1982:21).

The *oríṣa* or *vodun* have both a spiritual and a human character (Fadipe 1939:797-798; Verger 1995:23-24). Verger (1995) describes them as supernatural forces found in nature, which human intervention “fixates” in specific places or objects (Verger 1995:23-24). It is an alliance, a pact of interdependence, established between this force and the first human that makes it, also called *Alaṣe* (1995:23). By pronouncing a set of formulas of invocation - that only those who will later be initiated will know - the *Alaṣe* “fixates” the force in a material object consecrated to it, which will later work as referent or support to its power (*aṣe*) (Verger 1995:24). The first *Alaṣe* then becomes a

complement to the force by blending with it. Upon his or her death, he or she becomes a sort of divinised ancestor that acts as point of reference between the force and those who are alive and want to approach it (ibid.). This is for example true of *Sango*, the *orisha* of thunder, who is considered to have been the fourth king of Oyo. Stories say that when he was alive, he had the power to summon thunder at will and to expel fire from his mouth and nose (Verger 1995:164).

A religious specialist explained to me that Europeans, and what he called “religions of the book” (Christianity and Islam), had misunderstood Yoruba religion. He said, “the *orisha* are not gods and it is not to God (*Olòrún*) whom feed [with sacrifices]. God is not hungry”. He explained to me that the *orisha* are “messengers” between men and God. If a person has a particular need, she will send one of the “messengers” (*orisha*) to God to request the favour needed. In this case, the person will address the *orisha* that for her is more effective - normally the one to whom the person is initiated - and, if the request is urgent, the person will offer the *orisha* sacrifices as an “incentive” to hurry up. He illustrated this as follows,

It is as if you were cooking a sauce and need an ingredient urgently. You will probably call someone in the house, a messenger, to go buy in the market what you need. You will probably pay him a taxi or give him a bike so he can go quickly. This is the same with the *orisha*, they are fed so they can hurry up and get what you need quickly. The bike that humans give to the *orisha* are *sodabi*, a small cock, a sheep, and so on, depending on how urgent is your request or on the type of favour you are asking for. If the *orisha* is pleased then he will go quickly to God and get you what you need.

This testimony reveals the practical nature of *orisha* worship in which people approach these divinities in search for practical solutions (cf. Barber 1981). But the *orisha* also need humans, as their relationship is one of interdependence (Verger 1995:23). These are often relationships in which the devotee “throws herself heart and soul into its service, for she knows that enhancing its power is ultimately to her own benefit” (Barber 1981:741). The *orisha* protects the initiated in the same measure that the initiated performs the sacrifices or offerings prescribed. These sacrifices contribute to maintaining and enhancing the *orisha*’s sacred force or power (*aşe*). In return, the *orisha* will maintain humans by granting them what they ask and by enabling them to continue

offering these sacrifices (Verger 1995:23). The *oriṣa*'s power therefore is dependent on their having numerous supporters and devotees that glorify them. If men withdraw their support from the *oriṣa*, the *oriṣa* might also lose its power and eventually perish (Barber 1981:725). Alternatively, if a person's *oriṣa* fails to answer her request, she may approach other *oriṣa* until she finds one that responds to her request (Barber 1981:725).

In relation to the above, Jesus also has both human and spiritual qualities and also plays the role of intermediary between God and humans. What makes Jesus different is that, as the very son of God, he is the ultimate intermediary. The AoG pastor pointed this out to me when he was explaining the reason why it is so important to always end a prayer with the words, "in Jesus name". He referred to the passage of the Bible when Jesus promised to his disciples that whatever a person asked God in prayer in his name, this prayer would be granted. The pastor illustrated his point by saying,

It is as if you want to go open a bank account, and your friend knows the director of the bank. Arriving at the bank, you find a very long queue. However, if you go with the recommendation of your friend, they can let you see the director and he will be able to open your account in a shorter period of time than if you did not have any reference at all. It is like that with prayer. Jesus is the *son* of God and once you know Jesus, He guarantees that your prayer request will arrive directly to God through his name.

His example, like the one given by the other religious specialist, also reveals the practical aspects of prayer and of Pentecostal religious activity. It is a means of having certain requests or needs met. The way Pentecostals manifest loyalty to Jesus in order to benefit from his protection, has some similarities with but also differences to the way people relate to their *oriṣa*. For example, Jesus does not require animal sacrifices or food offerings. However, he requires a "sacrifice of the self". This sacrifice takes place in the form of fasting and keeping a constant life of prayer, purity and obedience to God by following the precepts of the Bible. In the Foursquare Church at least every month there was one week or few days of communal fasting and prayer. During those days, members of the church only drank water. They carried out their activities as usual, but during the two-hour midday break and during the evening went to church for a couple of hours of communal prayer. The same happened in the AoG church but communal fasting tended to be less rigorous than in the Foursquare Church, lasting only half day.

In both churches, whenever someone had a particular request, such as a search for job, or a child, the person was advised to pray and fast for a certain number of days. Sometimes groups of women or men would gather to support each other in prayer and fasting. In return, God manifests his favour through miracles, healing and the answering of people's prayers. However, in order to guarantee God's answer, a strong condition is to have a full and exclusive commitment to Jesus. Whereas people can worship more than one *oriṣa* at a time, this is not possible with Jesus.

Jesus' power, unlike that of the *oriṣa*, is not dependent on a person's support. This is a one-way relationship in which the devotee, the more loyal he becomes, the more benefit and protection he receives. If a person does not receive what she requests, she might always turn away, and Pentecostals know that this is always a possibility. Whenever someone is struggling to receive an answer to their prayers, they often say it is because the person does not have enough or sufficiently strong faith. They say that people might hold a secret loyalty to another *oriṣa* or spirit, or might be consulting *Ifá*. Some other times, the lack of answer to a prayer is seen as a test from God, to see whether the person is truly loyal and this test is seen as a means to grow closer in their relationship to God. If the person slides back and turns away from Jesus, she can always return to him and be "forgiven", provided that the person repents, follows the period of discipline given by the church and decides to commit herself fully again.

Finally, Jesus' humanity allows people to develop an intimate and emotional relationship with him. In the same way that the *oriṣa* have their character, attributes and personalities (Barber 1981:729), so does Jesus. Jesus' character is that of love, he heals and forgives people. One woman once told me, "My sister, you need to accept Jesus. When you accept Him, He becomes your husband, your mother, your father, your sister and your children." I asked her how this could be. She replied, "Jesus *loves* you more than any other person. When you accept Him in your life, you will never be alone." Similarly, I once asked a widow whose husband had recently died and whose children had already married and moved away, "So, do you now live alone at home?" She replied, "No, I live with Jesus." Even though this woman's relatives were no longer physically present with her, she showed no fear of being alone.

Just as the character of a devotee blends with the character of his or her *oriṣa* (cf. Barber 1981:736), a person whose heart is occupied by Jesus is meant to develop the

same loving character as Him. This happens through the relationship established with him, which needs to be constantly built and cultivated through ritual forms of prayer, being “filled by the Spirit” and Bible study. It is to the way this relationship is cultivated that I now turn.

### **Relating to God and Others through the Cultivation of a Christian Ritual Life**

The three techniques - prayer, infilling of the Holy Spirit and Bible study - cannot be seen as separate. They constitute and support each other. However, I will present them below in separate sections in order to highlight their importance. Let us start first with prayer.

#### *a) Communicating with God through Prayer*

Pentecostal churches are often known for their emphasis on prayer. Nowadays, prayer is considered an important activity among people in Benin. People often advice others, “You need to pray a lot!” As I walked down the streets, people often asked me where I was going. If I told them I was going to church, they would reply, “pray for me, *yovo* (white person)!” Similarly, when I asked Pentecostals what they liked about their church a recurrent answer was “because we pray a lot here”. This is because prayer is a fundamental way in which people maintain a communication with God, but also it is the means through which people are considered to be empowered and protected, by allowing people to tap into God’s power.

Prayer is a fundamental part of any activity carried out in the church and can be done individually or in a group. It usually happens at the beginning and end of any worship session, meeting, Bible study or crusade. During the Sunday service prayer is also a means to reinforce the main biblical message taught during the sermon. People pray to the Holy Spirit to open up their hearts and minds to hear the message and for God to change people’s lives. There are also specific prayer sessions organised to pray for a particular purpose, such as the organisation of a crusade, or even political elections.

Among Pentecostals, prayer is a ritual form that relies on a particular set of prescribed behaviours and movements. These “bodily techniques” are learnt by observing and imitating others. People raise their arms, shake their heads to one side or the other, walk

up and down, move the upper body back and forth, make movements with the hands with a fist as a sign of power, or while praying for deliverance, they simulate a knife that cuts the spiritual ties binding a person. It is as if the power of prayer was invoked with the body itself.

Prayer is also normally muttered aloud. Praying collectively out loud constitutes an example of how people establish a relationship to God in relation to others. There is always someone, the pastor or some other member of the community, in charge of leading prayer. This person first explains the reasons for a particular prayer and then encourages others to simultaneously make their requests. At a given sign, everybody's prayers mix in a cacophony of sounds that are stopped by the sound of a bell. Then the leader continues to give instructions to move into the next prayer request, repeating the same steps until the end of the session. Sometimes these sessions are also supported by reading particular biblical verses or passages.

Aside from being an activity shared in community, this form of prayer is an important way in which people learn how to do it correctly. The AoG pastor explained to me that many people do not know how to pray, they only move their mouths, not knowing how to make requests to God. Therefore, by hearing others pray aloud, people learn to do the same. A person can also benefit or be "blessed" by the prayer of the person sitting next to her. For example, the pastor said, if during prayer one person asks "God, please forgive me for my sins" maybe the person sitting next would realise that she had also committed the same sin. This way, she would also be reminded to ask for forgiveness. Had the person initially asking for forgiveness prayed in silence, the person sitting next to her would have continued carrying the same sin and his prayers would not be answered.

People are taught and encouraged to maintain a constant relationship to God by practising individual prayer at every moment in everyday life: while waiting for a taxi, before going to the market, and so on. For example, one Sunday afternoon maman Jasmine, the AoG pastor's wife, finally had some time for herself while the children were taking a nap and the pastor had started the men's meeting at the church. Days before, she had asked me to teach her how to use the second-hand computer that the pastor had bought. This seemed to be the perfect moment to start our lessons. We went into the pastor's office, removed the dusty cloth that protected the computer on the desk

and pulled two wooden chairs from the living room to sit in front of it. As I started to explain to her which buttons she should press to turn the computer on, she immediately stopped me. She said that she wanted to pray beforehand. I agreed and we bowed our heads. In a loud voice she gave thanks to God for taking me there to teach her lessons. She asked Him to help her to learn quickly, so she could better help the pastor in the work that He had assigned them to do with the fellowship. She closed the prayer saying “in Jesus name” and we both said “Amen”. As we waited for the programs to load on the screen, she asked me, “sister, do you pray in the morning and at night?” Knowing what was the right answer I said “yes”. She then said that I should also start praying every now and then, while I did my work to ask God to help me, just as we had done. She continued, “it should not be difficult to pray, just do it as if you were talking to a friend. Just imagine He is sitting next to you, as you are talking to me right now.” This was not the first time I heard this recommendation: another pastor in a different context had given me the same advice. This was maman Jasmine’s common practice. I often saw her praying before cooking, especially when she cooked for visitors, so they would appreciate and enjoy her food.

Pentecostals can also affect the world through their prayers in “bigger” matters by calling God’s intervention in cases such as deliverance or healing. Maman Jasmine continued saying, “Anybody can pray and perform miracles. You see the pastor? He is only a man, like anybody else. His prayer is not different to any other person’s prayer, any prayer should be equally powerful.” At church people learn how to pray for each other whenever someone is ill. They visit each other and pronounce their prayers by placing their hands over the afflicted person. They are taught to pray with authority by saying phrases such as “God, in the name of Jesus, heal this person!” or, “Thank you Lord Jesus because, in your name, You have already healed this person!”

The name of Jesus is conceived as if it had a supernatural effect of its own, people often said, “the name of Jesus is a very powerful name.” This is not very different to the way in which, in other contexts, Christians conceive the name of Jesus. However, in this context, where words pronounced can be powerful, Jesus’ name is considered fundamental to any prayer’s effectiveness. If the name of Jesus is not pronounced, a prayer is almost useless. Everybody, even children, learn to use Jesus’ name as a means of protection. For example, one day, maman Pascal narrated how she went to Porto-Novo to buy supplies for her market stall and she left her three children at home. As

they were playing outside, they suddenly saw an owl landing in their yard. Witches are normally believed to take the shape of owls. The children were very scared and started shouting at it, “in the name of Jesus, stay away!” repeating it until their father arrived from work and managed to kill the owl. None of the children or members of the family were affected by this owl’s visit. She emphasised that the name is so powerful that even children, by pronouncing it, can have authority over “dark forces”. It is a power available to anyone as long as the person is “in Jesus”.

*b) “Filled” by the Spirit of God in a World of Spirits*

One of the central ways in which Pentecostals build an intimate relationship with God, in Benin as elsewhere in the world, is through the embodiment of the Holy Spirit. The familiarity that people in Benin have with the spiritual world allows them to understand relatively easily the concept of the Holy Spirit (*Èmi Mimo*)<sup>18</sup> and the possibility to be “filled” by it. However, this familiarity also poses the challenge of recognising what type of spiritual manifestations come from God and which ones pertain to other spiritual entities, such as those of the *oríṣa*. This need to differentiate from other spiritual practices includes the way the Holy Spirit manifests in other churches, such as the Celestial Christian Church.

Being filled by the Holy Spirit can happen at any time during the journey of conversion. To begin with, it is said that for a person to become Born Again the Holy Spirit has to enter the heart of the person and, as the pastor of the AoG explained to me, “convince” her to become a Born Again Christian. The Holy Spirit then allows the person to start understanding things differently and to gradually change her former behaviour. However, this initial intervention does not equate to “being filled”. Although being a Born Again is a condition for “being filled”, not every Born Again receives the Spirit soon upon conversion. Similarly, receiving the Holy Spirit can happen independently of whether a person has been baptised or not.

Prayer constitutes one fundamental means through which the Holy Spirit is called to manifest itself among people. One of the conditions for being filled is that the person needs to desire it greatly and ask for it in prayer. People often told me that a person

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<sup>18</sup> In Yoruba, *mimo* means holy and *èmi* means vital breath or life force. *Emi* is also the word used to define the soul of a person. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the divine breath or life force.

needs to “pray with all her heart”. In principle, anybody can be filled with the Holy Spirit, in contrast to other forms of spirit possession where only a selected few are chosen to be “mounted” (*gùn*) or possessed by a spirit. However, no matter how strongly a person desires it, sometimes she can experience “blockages”. In these cases, it is through the support of other people’s prayers, offered by laying hands on her, that the first experience of the Spirit is triggered. In this case, other people’s touch becomes a central medium by which the Spirit of God acquires agency (cf. de Witte 2011). When this happens for the first time, it is said that a person is baptised by the Holy Spirit. After this, there will be a session where the pastor explicitly blesses the person who has been baptised by laying on his hands, in a moment called anointing or impartation.

The first sign that a person is “filled” by the Holy Spirit is when she starts speaking in tongues. This happens particularly during moments of prayer, either individual or collective. As the person prays aloud, her words suddenly turn into incomprehensible utterances. These moments, when the spirit of the person is considered to communicate directly with God, happen during prayer on Sunday services, or after Bible study or prayer sessions. Sometimes, during the service while the members of the assembly pray aloud, the pastor explicitly utters as a prayer request, “come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit!” Suddenly, one person after another start being “filled by the Spirit” until the whole room is flooded by a cacophony of prayers, crying, sobbing, shouting, accompanied by people’s strong bodily movements: heads shaking, arms raised, walking up and down the room, etc. Individually, this can also happen to a person while praying alone at home.

Personal awareness, however, is crucial to determine whether or not a spiritual manifestation comes from God. Despite the highly emotionally character of the sessions, a person should never enter into a trance. Although speaking in tongues happens involuntarily and the words uttered are incomprehensible, a person can stop the prayer when the pastor indicates it or at the sound of the bell. When people enter into trance, in other words, when they cannot control or stop their movements at the moment indicated, it is attributed to the work of an “evil spirit”. People who enter into a trance are often taken to a separate room where someone, either members of the committee in the AoG, or the deliverance prayer team in the Foursquare Church, intervene with prayers by laying hands on the person, in order to perform and spiritual deliverance.

In contrast to Pentecostal experience, trance is a central feature of *oriṣa* spirit possession and of the way the Holy Spirit manifests among Celestial Christians. However, these types of trances also differ from each other. In relation to the first, *oriṣa* spirit possession happens during public ceremonies dedicated to the *oriṣa*, in which the main vehicles are music, more specifically, the playing of particular drum rhythms, and dance. As mentioned before, drums play a central role, as they are considered to “speak” and call the *oriṣa* to manifest itself. Each *oriṣa* has its own rhythm and devotees recognise it (Verger 1969:59). As the drums play, devotees dance to their rhythm and, in those moments, the *oriṣa* mounts (*gùn*) one person in whom the spirit chooses to manifest itself. He can choose anyone among those whom he usually mounts, or it can also be a novice. These people are often called *elegùn* (those in whom the *oriṣa* mounts) *iyáworiṣa* or *iyáwo* (wife of the *oriṣa*), terms used for both men and women (Verger 1982:19).



**Fig. 2.1** *Şango* “mounted” on a devotee dances during annual public ceremony

These trances are involuntary. First-time possessions are violent and uncontrolled, but as the devotee goes through a long period of initiation he or she unconsciously internalises features of the *oriṣa*’s personality (Verger 1969:51). Therefore, subsequent possessions manifest a conventional behaviour in which the person reflects the personality of the *oriṣa* - which can be kind or aggressive - and performs specific forms of dancing and speaking (Verger 1969:65). In these moments, devotees interact directly with the divinities through the medium of the devotee in trance. People greet the *oriṣa*, recite his *oriki* (form of praise poetry), and in turn, the *oriṣa* listens to people’s

complaints, gives advice, resolves difficulties or conflicts (Verger 1982:19). I was often told that in these moments the person in trance is not aware and neither does he or she remembers what happens during the trance. This is because the spirit of the devotee leaves the body and wanders around, while the spirit of the *oriṣa* manifests through her.

In relation to the Celestial Christian, the trance experienced while being “in the Spirit” is different from the trance described above. In principle, any Celestial Christian can be “in Spirit” as long as she is sanctified and in a state of “purity”, but not everyone enters into trance. Only the visionaries (*woli*), those who have the “gift” of vision and prophecy, can do so (cf. Henry 2008:113-114). In these cases, the Holy Spirit manifests during certain moments of the service, where music and dancing also play a central role, but in this case it is Christian music. As people dance, some people enter into a sudden trance, sometimes violent. They fall to the ground and shake, without control over their movements, for the duration of the experience. Sometimes they utter unclear words and it is interpreted as the person speaking in tongues. In these moments, people in trance are taken to a different part of the temple complex, a sacred ground, where someone else is in charge of interpreting the messages revealed through the person “in Spirit”.

Pentecostals say that Celestial Christians, like *oriṣa* worshipers, experience these trances because the spirit in question is not the Spirit of God. They say it is an “evil spirit”. According to many, Celestial Christians worship the spirit of *Mami Watta*.<sup>19</sup> They argue this on the grounds that Celestial Christians’ main annual pilgrimage on Christmas Day takes place at Seme Beach, at the ocean, where *Mami Watta* lives. In addition to it, they say Celestial Christians use materials objects associated with *oriṣa* worship, such as perfume and snake oil. They are, Pentecostals say, *feticheurs* (practitioners of traditional religion) in disguise.

However, Pentecostals consider that the moment a person gives her life to Jesus and goes through deliverance, all other spirits are released from the body. Even if the person was previously *olóriṣa* or *vodunsi*, a person initiated, she will never experience these trances again. In order for this to happen, people need to completely give themselves to Jesus “with all their hearts” and to abandon any other religious activity outside of the Pentecostal church or the use of any material object for healing or protection purposes.

Only then, Jesus will fully occupy the heart of the person and there will be no more space for other spirits. This is where the support of others, and the existing social configurations in which a person converts, become crucial elements for a “successful” conversion (cf. Pelkmans 2009:144-145). As mentioned previously, members of the church often accompany others through the process of healing or deliverance with visits and prayers long after they initially give themselves to Jesus.

Among Pentecostals, however, the experience of the Holy Spirit is not limited to the ritual moment of collective prayer or worship. Once a person receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit, she is meant to develop a sharper intuition and perception of things that infuse the everyday life of the convert with miraculous experiences and events. It is through the Holy Spirit that people are healed in prayer, can prophesy, obtain success in a job interview, pass an exam, and so on. Similarly, the Holy Spirit gives Christians courage and strength to face and overcome problems in life. They often attribute to the work of the Holy Spirit their self-control, calmness and reassurance when confronted with a problem or difficulty. In the same way Jesus managed to overcome suffering on the cross, a person can also overcome difficulties in life. This was the case of maman Elodie, who managed to face difficulties and continue firm in her Christian path despite her family’s opposition to her conversion.

Prayer, in combination with the embodiment of the Holy Spirit, become the way in which God acquires agency through people as they tap into God’s power. Maman Jasmine, again, provides a clear example of this. During one women’s teaching session, in which the main theme was prayer, she insisted on the importance of living a constant life of prayer: without it, she said, one cannot access God’s favour for the household to run smoothly. In particular, she said, it was a woman’s responsibility to pray for and intercede for the members of her household. She insisted that it is not enough to run from one side to the other, going to the market or to take charge of other affairs. At any time, God can speak to the person and tell her to stay at home and pray but if a person does not have the habit of praying or is too busy, she will not hear God’s voice and, therefore, will miss his blessings. Then she gave her own testimony on how a constant life of prayer had an impact on her family life. The testimony concerned an accident the pastor had had a few months before, from which he had been miraculously saved. They

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<sup>19</sup> *Mami Wata* or *Mami Water* is a water spirit often represented as a mermaid. Its popularity is widespread and it is considered granting personal enrichment to those who worship it. It is also popular

had travelled to Cotonou in the car that the pastor had recently bought. That evening, the pastor dropped her at her sister's house in Cotonou where she was going to stay overnight and the pastor went back to Ikpinle as he needed to be there next day early in the morning. As soon as the pastor left, she felt a sudden urge to pray. She went inside the house, straight into her bedroom. No sooner had she knelt than she started to pray in tongues. She described that moment as very intense. She did not know what was going on or why she felt such an urge to pray. She had the feeling that something bad was happening somewhere, and as she prayed, she started crying. Tears rolled down her cheeks and she did not know why. She thought that she must have been interceding for someone else, but she did not know for whom. She prayed and cried, prayed and cried, while speaking in tongues. Gradually, she calmed down and started feeling a sense of peace and reassurance in her heart. She knew God had interceded somewhere.

At that moment, she decided to call the pastor but he did not pick up his phone. She called again, but there was no response. She suspected something wrong had happened. She told her sister what had just happened and that she wanted to go back to Ikpinle because she feared for the pastor's safety. Her sister tried to calm her down and insisted that she stayed. It was getting late and it would be dangerous for her to travel alone at night. However, maman Jasmine was not reassured. She started calling other members of the church in Ikpinle to ask if the pastor had already arrived. As soon as she was told the pastor was not there, she asked them to go and look for him on the road. Some members of the church left and found that there had been an accident between Porto-Novo and Sakete. They found the pastor's car completely destroyed. It had overturned on one side of the road. The accident happened when the pastor had tried to avoid hitting a motorcycle that had suddenly appeared in front of him. In this context, these types of road accidents are often attributed to sorcery. However, the pastor had managed to escape through the window, and when people found him, he was crawling away from the car. He had been miraculously saved. Despite the severity of the accident, he only had minor injuries. Maman Jasmine concluded that had she not been "filled" by the Holy Spirit through her constant life of prayer, she could not have "listened" to God's instructions to pray the moment when He needed to act *through* her. God, in this case, had acquired agency by acting through maman Jasmine's prayers.

However, claiming to be guided by the Holy Spirit is a double-edged sword. This is often the reason why many people contend that Pentecostals do as they please, using the excuse that they are being guided or inspired by the Spirit of God. Even among Pentecostals there is certain disagreement about the moments when a person is claiming to be divinely inspired. For the same way that God can speak and act through people, so does the devil. Therefore, Pentecostals are meant to keep an eye on the ideas that they perceive as intuitions. They are taught to always verify those inspirations according to what the Bible says.

*c) Bible Study and the “Renewal of the Mind” with the Word of God*

Pentecostals place a strong emphasis in assimilating the contents of the Bible through intensive study, which aims to “renew the mind” of a person. This process involves a person “aligning” her way of thinking according to the scriptures. Renewing the mind is both an intellectual, as well as a spiritual and emotional process, which is achieved by seeking to be “filled by the Holy Spirit” and a constant reading and memorisation of the Bible. For this purpose, the content of scriptures needs to be understood as relevant to a person’s everyday life. This way, the person will gradually learn to change her way of thinking, but also behaviour.

The aim is that God will gradually overtake the mind of the convert. Just as Jesus is meant to fully occupy a person’s heart, a person’s way of thinking needs to be replaced by “God’s thinking”. For this purpose, the passage of Romans 12:2 is often taken as reference. In it, the apostle Paul encourages early Christians not to conform to “the world” and to renew their minds. For this purpose, churches dedicate a significant amount of time to Bible study. At the AoG church in Ikpinle every Sunday morning before the service there are different study groups according to age and spoken language. In the Foursquare Church these groups are organised by language spoken and time of participation in the church, with groups for those who have not yet been baptised and those who have already received baptism. During the week, the AoG church dedicates Tuesday and Thursday evenings to general study and prayer. The Foursquare Church dedicates Wednesday to teaching and Thursday to prayer. In addition to this, women, men, youth and children have their own group meetings where they receive specific biblical teachings and topics relevant to their members.

In this context, where a large part of the population is illiterate, the emphasis during Bible study sessions is placed on understanding and memorising particular passages of the Bible. Those who know how to read and write are assigned to teach others the content of the Bible. The latter use their Bibles to highlight and to make annotations in their margins. The Bible is regarded as a book where the person keeps track of life events, prayers and significant passages. Once a person memorises the passage, she is encouraged to “meditate”, or rather, continuously think about the passage in order to extract its meaning for her life. They say that it is only in this way that she will know what is considered pleasing to God according to the scriptures. However, in order for this change to be effective, this exercise has to be continuous and become a daily habit that often starts and develops prior to the moment of baptism. As many people reported, once the person gets used to reading the Bible, she develops a taste for it and constantly longs to do it. The Bible is seen as the book where the advice from God is contained.

Sermons also play a crucial role in this process of “renewing the mind” and aligning it to what the Bible says. To close this section, I will illustrate this with an example of a regular Sunday sermon that addressed one of the main concerns of this thesis. In this occasion, the sermon was based on the content of the biblical passage of Isaiah 41:8-16. In this passage, God addresses the people of Israel through the prophet Isaiah and encourages them to rely on His strength. He promises to deliver them from the hands of their oppressors. After reading the passage aloud the pastor reminded people that whatever thoughts they had, whatever was in their minds, was the way in which they would look at things and therefore, behave. If they thought that they had enemies, then they would be fearful all the time. Therefore, he emphasised that people need to always “fill” their mind and thoughts with the word of God. In order to make this passage relevant to the audience, he insisted that this passage was directed to *them*, children of God, and whoever is Born Again can consider himself to be a child of Israel. He asked, “who is Israel? It is the one that God has blessed. Those who have received Jesus are a ‘New Creation’ and whatever concerns Israel concerns *you* directly.” From this point of view, he said, they should consider themselves as descendants of Abraham, as the passage said. He said, “you are no longer child of Adelabou, no longer a child of Bonou”, which are Gun and Fon surnames. He encouraged people to think of the characters of the Bible as directly related to them, as if they were their own ancestors. In order to close the service he led a prayer for the word of God to enter people’s hearts. He said,

We are going to pray over the Word that we have just listened to today. If in your life you see that there is something that will interfere with you being part of Israel, understand that God has already fought this battle because you are Israel. If there are people who have talked against you, God has already done what he said: they will be ashamed, they will be defeated. God will be with you. He will fight against the witches, against your enemies.

Then he led the prayer by making it *personal* to the members of the audience. He said, “God, you chose me as part of Israel, I am Israel! Everything that has been destined to Israel it is also for me! I am a daughter; I am a son of Abraham. Let’s pray in the name of Jesus!” At that moment a cacophony of sounds started to fill the room. He encouraged the assembly, “pray to God! You are Israel!” People continued to pray in tongues louder and louder as he continued saying, “oh! Lord Jesus, thank you for this right. Thank you God Almighty for making me part of Israel. In your name, we are your children. You have already conquered our enemies! Pray the Lord Almighty that all your problems will be dealt with! What a wonderful grace!” People continued clapping and praying in tongues, “shakararalabalashala, sisibabajalalaba, shikaralala shalalabalashala.” He continued, “we are the family of Abraham, we are the family of Abraham! Thank you Lord Jesus! Alleluia.” The bell rang and people gradually stopped. The pastor then said, “you are going to pray again. Maybe some Christians have not understood this yet. God has said, ‘I am with you, I am next to you’ He did not say, ‘I will be’ He said, ‘I am’ So let’s pray, Lord, you are with me in this moment. You said, ‘I will not reject you’ You can reject God but He will not reject you! Alleluia. Pray!” The bell rang again and everybody prayed. The prayer continued this way, until the main points of the message preached were made personally relevant to the members of the assembly.

## Conclusions

This chapter has explored the way in which Pentecostal Christians in Benin establish a primary relationship with God through Jesus. As the pastor explained at the beginning of the chapter, the pursuit of an intimately personal relationship with Jesus is what makes Pentecostals or Born Again Christians stand apart from other Christian denominations. Due to this quality, I have argued, the type of subjectivity that

Pentecostals cultivate can be seen as fundamentally relational. Although in principle this relationship concerns the individual and God, it is primarily achieved in relation to others and, in turn, is meant to have an impact or influence on other relationships.

I have focused on Pentecostal ritual life in order to unveil the relational aspects of Pentecostalism. Ritual brings people together (Robbins 2010b) but it also allows them to establish a relationship with God. For this purpose, I have drawn on Houseman's (2006) notion of relationality in the study of ritual to explain the way in which relationships with non-human entities, such as ancestors, spirits, and in this case Jesus, are made possible in the context of interpersonal relations established during rituals. I have also drawn on Meyer's (2010) notion of sensational forms in order to explain the way in which Pentecostal ritual experience is regulated. Sensational forms serve the double purpose of being the vehicle by which converts experience and verify the presence of God as truthful and, at the same time, allow them to set themselves apart from other ritual practices that also engage with spiritual entities, such as *orisha* worship, and the way in which the Holy Spirit manifests among other Christian denominations, such as the Celestial Christian Church.

I presented evangelisation crusades as the ritual events in which the message of Jesus dying on the cross is first made available to many people, always in relation to others, through sensational forms such as worship songs, films, and prayer. Similarly, evangelisation can happen in more intimate contexts such as one-to-one interactions, where a friend or relative first introduces a person to Jesus, as in the example of maman Elodie who was first approached by her cousin. I further explored those ritual practices that allow people to cultivate and establish a personal relationship with Jesus, such as prayer, "infilling" by the Holy Spirit and Bible study. These practices are gradually learned and need to be practiced constantly in order to achieve and strengthen a long-lasting relationship with Jesus. These practices can be seen as practices of interiority (Marshall 2009:3) or "techniques of self" in Foucault's sense. However, in this case, I have tried to draw attention to their social and ritual dimensions, and the way they are learned and practiced in community.

Having learned the above, one should not ignore Pentecostal opposition to the practice of ritual and their efforts at differentiating themselves from those who, according to them, only engage in mechanical or "traditional" ritual behaviour, often performed as

maman Elodie explained, “because our parents did it before.” In this case, the difference between Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal ritual forms consists in the combination of ritual performance and “intellectual” assimilation of the Word of God that provides a basis in which the performance of ritual acquires new meaning. This happens in contrast to other ritual forms where the content or doctrine is not as important as the performance of the ritual itself (cf. Houseman 2006:8). Another difference consists of the frequency and intensity of their ritual engagements that, in the case of Pentecostals, is meant to infuse all aspects of everyday life.

I have also contextualised Pentecostal rituals in relation to local religious cosmology and ritual practice. Doing so reveals certain continuity in the logic of the relationship established between humans and the divine. In other words, *oriṣa* worship, as with the Holy Spirit, involves an intense relationship between the individual and the divine, which is often embodied. However, there are also major differences. The major one is that in this context, Jesus becomes the ultimate intermediary between people and God, and through the embodied experience of Holy Spirit, God also acquires agency through people in everyday life.

A relationship with Jesus, however, also has its own demands, including absolute loyalty. Putting Jesus first means having an exclusive relationship with him by turning away completely from other ritual practices, including those of ancestor worship that anthropologists have considered to be at the basis of many African kinship systems (cf. Fortes 1970). Therefore, the next chapter explores what happens with the ancestors when the primary relationship is now with Jesus. In order to do so, a focus on funerary rituals, the first step in the journey in which a person becomes an ancestor, will allow us to explore changing notions of death and time and the implications these changes have for people’s relationships towards their kin.

## Chapter 3

### “The Dead are Already Dead”: Changing Notions of Death, Time and the Regeneration of Life

#### Introduction

It was a regular Sunday service, early in my fieldwork, at the AoG church in Ikpinle. After the regular worship songs, followed by prayer and weekly announcements, the main pastor took the microphone and introduced his sermon by saying that he was going to speak about a problem that people in Benin, and Africans in general, face today. This was, he said, “the problem” of ceremonies after death and ancestor worship. He considered that these ceremonies were at the heart of poverty in Africa. He had taken the time to reflect about it, and had arrived at the conclusion that if the money people spent during and after a person’s burial was saved and spent for the family members’ benefit, or for the benefit of their community, the village’s development would be accelerated.

Then he told a story of a very poor convert. The man lived in a mud hut with a thatched roof. Every time the pastor visited him, he felt sorry because he did not have a better place to live and sleep. He thought about asking for the support of all the members of the church to gather money to build a small cement room for the man and his family. One day, a relative of this poor man’s wife died. As is the norm, this man, as husband, had to support his wife and her family in the funeral ceremony, and all the members of the church were also invited. Arriving there, the pastor had decided that church guests would not stay too long in order to avoid imposing major expenses on this man, who presumably would feel obligated to offer them food. So when the pastor approached him with the envelope of money that people from the church had gathered, which normally guests do in these events, the man asked the pastor to wait. He explained that he had killed a cow for the funeral and women were still cooking it. He pleaded for him to wait so they could all eat before leaving. Although this was a sign of good hospitality, with a tone of indignation the pastor told the audience,

He doesn't even have a place to sleep! But he had money to buy a cow that costs hundreds of thousand CFA! After that day, all the pity I felt for him completely disappeared, because this is something really paradoxical. Is this what is going to bring back the dead to life? No!

Stories like these are very common in Benin. People often commented disapprovingly on the way in which many peasants, who lead a very simple life, spent their life savings on big ceremonies to bury their dead. However, people in Benin hold contradictory notions of wellbeing. On the one hand, the money spent on funerals and ceremonies for the dead is considered to hinder local development but, on the other hand, the ancestors, as *providers* of wellbeing, cannot be ignored or forgotten.

As this sermon illustrates, Pentecostals encourage people to avoid excessive expenditure on funerals and to completely stop participating in and organising post-mortem ceremonies. But what happens with the ancestors and their supposed beneficial influence on people's lives? This chapter aims to investigate this question.

### **Funerals in Africa, the Regeneration of Life, and Time**

As in Benin, studies on funerals in many African countries point to the ambiguities that the issue of conspicuous consumption and display of wealth during funerals raises among people who engage in them (Jindra and Noret 2011; Lee 2011; Noret 2010a; Smith 2004; van der Geest 2000). In some contexts, funerals have become central in articulating relations across the rural-urban divide, despite increasing migration and economic changes (Jindra and Noret 2011:19; Lee 2011; Smith 2004:569). This is to the extent that there is an important industry around funerals, which in recent years has been developing (Lee 2011; Noret 2010a:82). New technologies such as photography and video and new funerary practices, such as embalming and exhumation, are changing the way in which the dead are remembered (de Witte 2011b). They have also contributed to creating new subjectivities and relations between the living and the dead (Lee 2011:227). Despite some criticisms of people's expenditure, this new industry, however, has not always been to the detriment of the local economy, as it has to some extent helped to "increase the circulation of money in African economies" (Jindra and Noret 2011:23).

Funerals have also been described as expressing and contributing to exacerbating large-scale social transformations and inequalities (Smith 2004:569). Among the Igbo in Nigeria, Smith suggests that “burials are events in which the conflicted dynamics of kinship, patron-clientelism, and rural-urban ties unfold in a ritual microcosm that captures both the growing value of these ties … and the strains inherent in the social transformations taking place” (Smith 2004:570). Here as in Ghana and other African countries, families build their prestige by demonstrating their social, political and economic position through their spending. This happens to the extent that van der Geest (2000) suggests that funerals are mainly social, rather than religious events, where “death is only an epiphenomenon, an ‘excuse’, as it were, to celebrate a funeral” (2000:107).

However, in Benin one cannot affirm that funerals are only social as van der Geest (*ibid.*) suggests. Other studies have demonstrated that economic expenses and their social implications are only one aspect of a much more complex process that involves, above all, the presence of “the ancestors and other spirits and powers that add to the cultural importance of these events” (Jindra and Noret 2011:1). In the case of Benin, Noret suggests that funerals and their related expenditure can be regarded as gifts - in a Maussian sense - where the mourning gather in a position of givers towards the deceased. In this sense, they play a crucial role in the psychological process of grieving (2010:13). But also, they allow the dialectical process of rupture and continuation of the relationship between the living and the dead, by leading to the transformation of the status of the deceased into ancestors (2010:30). If funerals and their associated expenses are the means by which people in Benin articulate and maintain their relationships between the living and the dead, then we need to consider why this is the case.

Anthropological analyses have demonstrated that funerary practices can contribute to legitimating particular forms of authority. Through the analysis of symbols of fertility and rebirth in funerals, Bloch and Parry suggest that funerary rituals create an ideology about the “regeneration of life” that legitimates the social order and its authority structure (Bloch and Parry 1982:1-42). They suggest “there is a logical connection between the conception of life as a limited good and the idea that death and reproduction are inextricably related” (Bloch and Parry 1982:9). In some societies that recognise the importance of ancestors, such as the Merina and the Lugbara, the social order “is built up by transforming the dead into a transcendent and eternal force”

(1982:41). Death is therefore transformed into fertility, and “this fertility is represented as a gift made by those in authority which they bestow by their blessings” (1982:41).

However, in contemporary Africa where the differentiation of the religious landscape has led to a complex and fragmented picture, the sources of authority and legitimacy are multiple (cf. Jindra and Noret 2011:4). Therefore, Jindra and Noret (2011) suggest, “the different ritual processes of the “regeneration of life” thus appear more fragmented, contested, and negotiated between different social and religious groups” (Jindra and Noret 2011:4-5). This is also the case of Benin where the plurality of the religious scene manifests in a complex ritual life, where multiple sources of authority and legitimacy coexist.

In my experience, however, the majority of non-Pentecostal people still continue to regard the ancestors as the ultimate providers of blessings, which are crucial for their wellbeing. Moreover, the question asked by the Pentecostal pastor during the sermon that opens this chapter - “is this what is going to bring the dead to life?” - indicates that at the centre of this Pentecostal problem around funerals and ancestors there is *still* an issue concerning the “regeneration of life”. Therefore, we need to ask what are the implications of Pentecostals’ rejection of expenditure during funerals, and post-mortem rituals, for this process of regeneration of life. In order to deal with this question, it is important to take into account the issue of time.

Ethnographic material on funerals in many parts of the world show that notions of death and time are tightly related to and are central to this process of the regeneration of life (Bloch and Parry 1982:9-15). As Bloch and Parry suggest, mortuary rituals play a crucial role in creating continuity between life and death (1982:10). They do so by denying the “unrestrained and insubordinate individuality” of biological birth and death and the contingency of death by “representing [it] as a cyclical process of renewal”, which contributes to create and justify an idea of the social order as eternal (Bloch and Parry 1982:12-15). In this case, in societies such as the one in Benin, where ancestors are considered central to the wellbeing of the living, mortuary rituals and ceremonies play a crucial role in representing time as cyclical. This can be seen for example, in the way descendants gather every year or certain number of years to commemorate the person who has passed away, and to be reminded of their belonging to a particular lineage as well as their “destination” upon death.

In contrast, Christian time has been characterised by its discontinuity (Robbins 2007a:10-14). This discontinuity is partly underpinned by the expectation of the arrival of the millennium when, in a moment of “rapture”, life as it is will be interrupted. This notion of discontinuity is particularly relevant for those kinds of Christian denominations that place a strong emphasis on conversion and on strictly following the precepts of the Bible, such as Pentecostals (cf. Robbins 2001, 2004a, 2004b) and evangelical Fundamentalist Christians<sup>20</sup> (cf. Harding 2000 and Guyer 2007). This notion of time is premised on the idea that at “any moment a future could arrive totally independent of the causal thrust of the present” (Robbins 2007a:12). Guyer (2007:416) describes it as a “punctuated time” where the immediate future is evacuated. This means that evangelical Christians and, in this case, Pentecostals live in the “interim between the first and second comings of the Messiah” (Guyer 2007:414), a time of suspension, which involves “living in the present with the knowledge that what it means will only become clear in the millennial future” (Guyer 2007:415). This notion of time has implications for how they conceive of life and death.

Therefore, Pentecostals’ problem with ancestors and post-mortem ceremonies needs to be understood in relation to this expectancy of the Second Coming of Jesus and the rapture of all those who have been saved. I argue that Pentecostal displacement of the ancestors is made possible by a change in the notion of temporality linked to the “regeneration of life”, which is postponed to the arrival of the millennium. Although we can say that Catholics, Methodists and Celestial Christians are also Christians, these denominations do not place the same importance on this notion of discontinuous time as Pentecostals do, which can be seen in the way they engage differently with notions of time during their funeral rituals.

In relation to the above, Christian Salvationist doctrine has implications for Pentecostals on three levels. First, Pentecostal time challenges the cyclical notion of time linked to the regeneration marked by non-Pentecostal funerals and “traditional” post-mortem ceremonies. Second, this regeneration does not need the ancestor’s mediation. In principle, it is accessible the moment when a person decides to give her life to Jesus.

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<sup>20</sup> Although Pentecostals and Fundamentalist Christians share in common aspects such as following a strict moral code, and the belief in the Second Coming of Jesus, there are also important differences between them. Robbins (2010:63) suggests that one of them is their model of ritual life. Another one is the way Pentecostals emphasise a more sensorial experience of the Holy Spirit.

However, this does not mean that Pentecostals renounce a life of blessings. By becoming Born Again they become entitled to a life of blessings that come from God, not the ancestors. In this case, Pentecostal regeneration of life is different to those notions held by some Christians from other denominations and Muslims, for whom ancestors still play a crucial role as intermediaries between God and humans. Third, this change of temporality influences converts' orientation in time by having an effect on their attitudes towards the present. This translates into people focusing on living a present moral life, which in this context, involves attending to their present engagements with their living kin, and not the dead. This allows them to flout economic demands imposed by the extended kin, which are presented as obligations towards ancestors.

In this chapter I first describe some aspects of the “traditional” view and role of the ancestors followed by some of the ways in which non-Pentecostals in Benin commonly engage with the dead through funerals and post-mortem ceremonies. Second, I present the Pentecostal critique of these notions and their notion of the afterlife based on the expectancy of the millennium. Here I suggest that the assimilation of this eschatological doctrine is, as with many other changes in converts’ lives, achieved through a gradual process in which converts are encouraged to “renew their minds”. Third, this process of renewing the mind is further reinforced during Pentecostal funerary rituals. I present the case of the funeral of a Pentecostal convert, maman Sabine who, as an old lady, represents the ultimate candidate to become an ancestor. My purpose is to illustrate how, in the same way that “traditional” funerals allow people to establish a relationship with the dead and elevate them to the status of ancestors, Pentecostal funerals also play a role in challenging those notions, by reinforcing the idea of “discontinuity”. In this case, rituals as enactments of particular realities and set of relationships also contribute to fostering relational change towards the ancestors, for “one of the hallmarks of ritual actions is that, for those who perform them, before and after are not the same” (Houseman 2006:9). However, this process is not exempt of contention (Geertz 1973; Smith 2004, Noret 2010a:12). In this case, conflicts at the moment of her funeral were partly the result of conflicting conceptions of time linked to notions of regeneration and the appropriation of the source of blessings. Finally, I will present a balance of the elements presented in this chapter, in relation to notions of the ancestors, time and the role of monetary expenditures during funerals and post-mortem rituals.

## Ancestors, Funerals and Post-Mortem Ceremonies in South-Eastern Benin

In Benin, as in many African countries, burying the dead and remembering those who have already passed away are very important aspects of people's everyday lives. It is common to hear people say that in Africa "the dead are not dead" and in public discourses to witness people entrusting the progress of a particular project to God and to their ancestors.

In classic anthropological analyses of patrilineal societies ancestors were considered to be the source of jural and political authority (cf. Fortes 1949). By perpetuating paternal authority through its sacralisation, ancestor worship was seen as the source of legitimacy for kinship arrangements (cf. Fortes 1970:190). Although the decline of structural-functional approaches led to an impasse in the study of the role of the ancestors in African societies, their presence continues to be evident in the life of many African people (cf. McCall 1995:256-257). One can say that today, ancestors play different roles. Through different activities and material culture, ancestral presence in Africa permeates the flow of everyday life by guaranteeing people's wellbeing and success, but also shaping people's identity (McCall 1995:258).

In the region where I lived, among the Yoruba or Nago, each family has a group of ancestors that give identity to the patrilineage, in Nago *àiyalé*. The *bale*, or head of the patrilineage, is the official custodian of the shrine where sacrifices and offerings to the ancestors take place. The same way, each town has a group of *àiyalé*, of which the king of the town is custodian. Although in Benin elders are to some extent representatives of the ancestors, it cannot be said that ancestors are elders as Kopytoff (1971) argued for the Tallensi. As Barber suggests, in chants addressed to them, people stress their spiritual and otherworldly nature (Barber 1981 footnote 15:742-743). Similarly, people do not need to approach the ancestors through a hierarchy of elders (Barber 1981:731). Individuals can approach them directly at the ancestral shrine or the grave where they were buried; through *Ifá* consultation, or summon them back by singing their *oríki* (Barber 1981:730).



**Fig. 3.1 *Egungun* at the public square in Pobe**

A public representation of the ancestors, among the Yoruba, is the masquerade called *Egungun* (ancestors) also referred to as *revenants* in French. Every year they affirm their presence among people in public demonstrations. This is reminiscent of the way Bloch and Parry suggest that death, the ultimate discontinuous process, is ritually incorporated into the predictability of the cycle of the year and “transformed into a process which is essential for the continuation of life” (Bloch and Parry 1985:10). In Pobe, there are six “convents” or groups of masquerades, normally from the same or related families, who are initiated in this group. They alternate every year to celebrate their annual festival during the dry season around the months of January and February. During these days, the masked men, *Egungun*, come out on certain days and walk

around the streets in town. Each masked man represents an ancestor. There are masks of many types, which represent ancestors according to their seniority. Each of the *Egungun* walks with one or two companions who hold a stick and discipline those who do not respect them. This facet of the ancestral presence makes the ancestors “arbiters of truth” (McCall 1995:265), since they enforce certain public morality by punishing those considered to behave badly. On the last day of the cycle of yearly ceremonies, the *Egungun* demonstrate their magic powers in the public square, making objects appear and disappear. However, nowadays, many people show different attitudes towards the *Egungun*. This is partly because Pobe is a pluri-ethnic town and many people do not identify with this tradition. But this is also because of growing religious diversity and the fact that recent generations have lost much of the knowledge that previous mask-bearers used to have. Nevertheless they are reminders of the continuous presence of the ancestors and their moral role.

Dreams, sacrifices and libations are the most common ways in which people in Benin maintain communication with the ancestors. Libations consist of offering water, *sodabi*, palm oil or kola nuts either on the ground or the ancestral shrine, in order to invoke and communicate with the dead (cf. Hallgren 1988:59). It is mostly old people and those who practice traditional religion who use this form of communication. Nowadays, it is through dreams that the ancestors most commonly communicate with the living, including people who no longer follow traditional ceremonies. In some cases the ancestors appear in dreams and transmit a particular wish or message. In other cases, a person can have continuous nightmares or just see a dead person in her sleep. When the message is not clear, an *Ifá* consultation is carried out to find out what it is that the ancestors want to communicate. Depending on the matter revealed in the consultation, the ancestors normally ask for the performance of a ceremony that includes the sacrifice of a specific type and number of animals, such as a chicken, rooster, male or female goat. Sacrifice was and continues to be a crucial way in which the living establish a continuous communion with the dead and aims to establish a good relationship with the ancestors. The blood of the animal sacrificed is offered to the ancestors as a form of exchange for life. Blood is considered the life essence and by offering the life of the animal, the ancestor in return provides life and blessings to the living (Hallgren 1988:59; Awolalu 1973:90-91). Sacrifices can be performed to show gratitude for the benefits, to secure a favour, or to guarantee protection (Awolalu 1973:82). However, if a person fails to provide what the ancestor is asking, the ancestor in return can cause

misfortune to their relatives. For example, they might fail repeatedly in particular projects or suffer constant ill health. This is why the relationship with the dead is so important and this begins from the moment when a person passes away. It is therefore through funerals that the duties towards the dead begin.

### *Funerals, Post-mortem Ceremonies and the Regeneration of Life*

Funerals are very important public and social events that gather people across different sectors in society. They are the moment when a dead person's journey to the afterlife begins, and it is their descendants' role to facilitate it. Burying the dead, in particular one's parents, constitutes one of the major duties in a person's life. This was one of the central aspects of the "filial piety", or the duties of a son to his father, that Fortes described in relation to the Tallensi (Fortes 1970:177). The word *isìnkú* in Yoruba, used to designate the religious ceremony for the funeral, implies just such a sense of reverence and duty. It comes from the words *sìn*, which means both to revere a divinity and to work for someone to repay a debt, and the word *òkú*, which means dead or corpse (Hallgren 1988:8).

During my stay in Pobe, almost every weekend there was one or more burial and/or funeral ceremonies happening in town. Among my acquaintances, it was unusual to find anyone who did not have a ceremony or funeral to attend at least one every month, either of a member of their family or someone from their circle of friends. In order to inform a wider public, every day the national television channel transmitted, during afternoon and evening prime time, a half-hour obituary section with announcements of recent deaths and funerals for both Christians and Muslims across Benin. At a local level, in Pobe, the radio station announced the funerals that would take place in town. They used a very specific format that followed the way the invitation cards were printed. First, they listed the names of the patrilineage (normally referred to as *collectivité* in French, *idile* in Yoruba, and *hènnù* in Gun) and sub-lineages or families to whom the deceased was related; the names of the brothers and sisters; the sons and daughters and finally the grandsons. Then they provided a detailed programme for the funeral, according to the religious affiliation of the deceased.

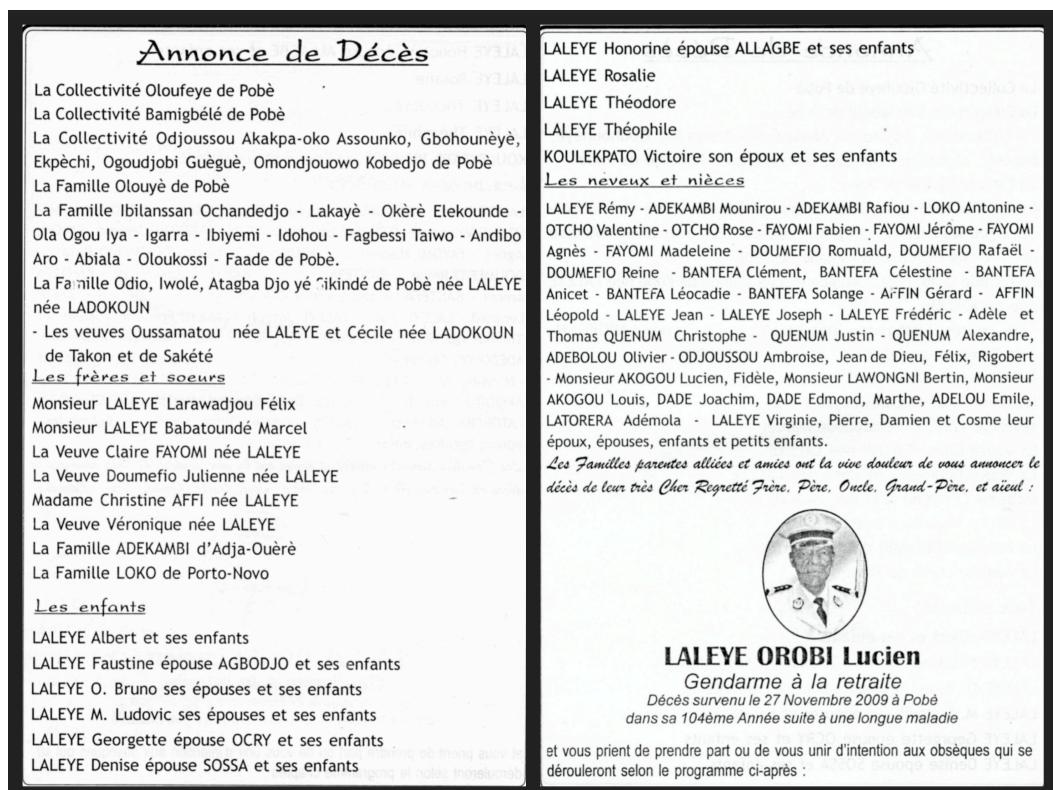


Fig. 3.2 Funeral invitation card

In a plural religious context such as in south-eastern Benin, it is expected that a person will be buried according to the rituals established by her religious affiliation. However, family members must decide together the kinds of rituals that should be observed. These decisions are not always agreed amicably, especially when the deceased belongs to a different religion from the majority of the family members. Although families are expected to respect the will of the deceased, a compromise is often reached depending on the preference of the majority. Funerals often include different kinds of religious registers and ceremonies in order to please all the different parties. The specific format of the funeral varies from case to case, but there are general parts that almost all funerals follow. I now describe some of the general features of funerals in Benin, some of which Pentecostals oppose.

There are different ways, according to their religious affiliation, in which people handle a dead corpse. When a person dies, most people take the corpse to a morgue where it is kept until the day of the burial and funeral ceremony. People do this in order to give enough time to gather the necessary resources for the funeral and agree on the date when most of the relatives can attend. Muslims are forbidden to take the corpse to the morgue and they require that the burial takes place as soon as possible, the same

evening or the day after the death. If the family does not have enough money to carry out a large ceremony, they have a small reception and wait until an appointed date to hold a bigger event. Catholics and Celestial Christians do not have a time limit on keeping the corpse at the morgue. Sometimes they keep it for years before they gather enough resources for a big ceremony. However, Pentecostals normally discourage people from keeping the corpse longer than one month, since they consider it futile to organise large ceremonies.

In Catholic and other Christian funerals, the day before the burial, the corpse is taken in a procession from the morgue to the place of burial. During the journey, the corpse is taken to the places where the person had a particular attachment: for example the paternal compound, the place where the person lived or where she worked. During this procession, people pay their respects to the deceased and offer their condolences to the relatives. This is a way of rendering honour, especially if it was a respected member of the community. The corpse is then taken to a house as agreed by the family members, such as the person's former home, or the compound of her father or the eldest son or daughter. The embalmed corpse is then exposed and a prayer vigil takes place. The next day a religious service is held before the burial.

The burial happens either at the cemetery or at a grave inside a compound. When a person is buried according to the traditional ritual, they are buried in a room inside the patrilineal compound. The ancestral shrine is commonly located in a corner of the room designated for that. The head of the deceased is placed below this corner, which is demarcated by being left bare of cement so family members can pour the blood from the sacrificed animal and the food that is offered during ceremony. With the influence of Catholicism, some people continued to bury their relatives within the compound but in a tomb explicitly built outside the house. Nowadays, many people bury their dead in the cemetery. In Pobe there are two cemeteries, one for Muslims and another one for Christians. Methodist and Celestial Christians normally bury the dead in the cemetery, whereas Catholics have the choice of doing so in the cemetery or in the house. Pentecostals normally suggest that people bury their dead in the cemetery, but in cases when the family rejects it, they allow the family to bury them wherever they decide, in order to avoid major conflicts.

The burial of those who in life were devotees of an *oriṣa* includes other rituals performed by the members of the same *oriṣa* group. Only those initiated can participate. It is believed that this is a dangerous moment because the *oriṣa* leaves the corpse of the deceased and only those initiated are not at risk of potential harm caused by the spirit. Traditionally, some of the rituals associated with burial were intended to ensure that the deceased would be reborn within the same lineage, guaranteeing its continuation (Bascom 1979:69). There is still the general belief that ancestors are reborn. For example, when a baby is born on the day of the funeral of its grandfather, grandmother or elder relative, they often believe it is the spirit of the deceased being reborn in the baby. Therefore, these children are normally called *Babatunde* for the boys or *Yetunde* for the girls, meaning that the grandfather or grandmother has come back (cf. Bascom 1979:71).

The burial of a person is normally followed by a large reception or ceremony where people offer food to their relatives and friends who attended the funeral. The ceremony of this type is normally called in Nago *ináwóòku* (expense for the dead) and usually involves a great display of wealth. People often acquire large debts and become visibly apprehensive when planning these ceremonies because of the financial burden they represent. However, they can hardly avoid these responsibilities as they also play a role in the grieving process (Noret 2010a; 2011:166). These are the type of ceremonies to which the pastor in the introductory account was referring and that Pentecostals try to limit, because of the expenses they entail, and for what they represent in religious terms.

The importance of this ceremony is such that, without it, a funeral is often considered incomplete and a person has not been properly buried. Failure to bury a person properly means that she remains a potentially harmful spirit. In addition, organising a great funeral will grant more honour and respect, both to the spirit of the deceased and to the family. People commonly say that everybody needs to eat and drink well, in order to guarantee that the dead will reach a good place in the afterlife. These are symbolic moments for sharing between the living and the dead, of “positive interaction between the two different active existences” (Hallgren 1988:66). During the reception, women married into the lineage of the deceased sing songs of praise to the patrilineage and process past its members asking for money. This money is meant to bring them fertility and wealth. Some people offer libations with food and drink on the tombs within the compound or the place where the person has been buried. However, not everybody is

entitled to have a large and expensive funeral. It depends on whether a person is considered to have had a good or bad death, and whether or not a person is worth being elevated to the status of ancestor.



**Fig. 3.3 Women married into the patrilineage of the dead sing songs of praise**

On the one hand, a good death is said to happen when a person dies in old age and leaves many descendants. These people are considered to have lived to the fullest, regardless of whether they were poor or rich, and successful or not in other areas of their lives. These are the people who qualify to become ancestors. Therefore, a lavish ceremony offered in their honour is meant to be a celebration of their lives. In this sense, a good death is the one that “suggests some degree of mastery over the arbitrariness of the biological occurrence by replicating a prototype to which all such deaths conform, and which can therefore be seen as an instance of a general pattern necessary for the reproduction of life” (Bloch and Parry 1982:15).

On the other hand, a bad death negates the possibility of this reproduction. In this context, a bad death can be when a person dies young or having never conceived children, or when a woman dies while giving birth. A bad death is also a sudden death, such as during an accident or as a victim of witchcraft. In these cases, depending on the circumstances and the family in question, religious ceremonies for the funeral are still performed. However, the family does not offer a large or expensive ceremony and it is carried out in such a way as to minimise its negative impact on other members of the lineage. For example, when a person dies young the elders often do not participate or eat from the food offered at their burial. Those who were not buried by their

descendants will never become ancestors. People believe that they risk not being able to reach a good place in the afterlife; therefore, they become a potentially dangerous influence for the living members of the family. This is why one of the main anxieties of childless people is not to have anyone to bury them when they die.

Funerals are crucial rituals that establish the terms of the transformation of the relationship towards the dead. But it is through post-mortem ceremonies and rituals performed after the inhumation that people guarantee that the dead will reach a good place in the afterlife. When the situation allows, they also aim to elevate a person to the level of ancestor. But above all, post-mortem ceremonies are the means by which people maintain a permanent relationship and contact with the dead. It is, therefore, to notions of the afterlife and post-mortem ceremonies that I now turn.

### *Post-mortem Ceremonies and the Afterlife*

Nowadays, ideas of the afterlife have been influenced by world religions. However, there is hardly a generalised or coherent belief. When I asked people their opinion of the afterlife, their responses varied: some were reluctant to talk about it, others made references to elements of the Yoruba cosmology, and others suggested Christian elements such as heaven and hell. People's notions of the afterlife rather seem to point to several places where the spirit of the dead go depending on the kind of death they had and whether or not they received the right funeral or burial rites (Hallgren 1988:68). Either they reach God, a "good place" (cf. Noret 2011:171), or wander around. For example, one man told me that, after death, the spirit of a person remains in an intermediary realm between the ocean and the horizon.

Whatever the exact destiny, it is only through ceremonies and sacrifices offered by their kin that the person is able to cross the ocean and reach the other side. Only when the person reaches a good place can she send her blessings and become an intermediary between her relatives and God (cf. Noret 2011:172). However, if the person does not reach this place, she can cause misfortune, ill health or failure to her relatives. In these cases, the dead continuously appear in dreams to the living until they are given what they ask for.

Depending on the traditions of the family, ethnicity and the religious affiliation of the deceased, each family establishes how and when post-mortem ceremonies need to be performed. Traditionally, a crucial part of these ceremonies included the sacrifice of animals and the offering of their blood. Nowadays, other religious rituals, such as prayers, wakes or Masses are offered in addition to, or have replaced traditional ceremonies and sacrifices. In these cases, one could say that Masses and prayer play a similar role to animal sacrifice and libations. They are a means to respond to the needs of the ancestors and to keep them appeased. For example, Catholics organise a Mass eight or fifteen days after the original burial. Muslims organise prayers on the third, eighth and forty-first days. Celestial Christians also hold prayers on the third, fifth and seventh days, with a religious service on the eighth and forty-first days. What is interesting here is that the number of days in question, although now pertaining to Muslims' and Celestial Christians' performance of these ceremonies, resonates with the way and number of days that the rites and ceremonies leading to ancestralisation were traditionally performed (Herskovits 1938:352-402; Noret 2011:166). Although praying for the deceased is now considered by many to be the element that allows the deceased to reach the hereafter, many Catholics and Muslims, and to some extent some Methodists, still continue to perform a traditional ceremony and sacrifice, in addition to a Mass or a religious service.

The contact with the ancestors and the dead continues long after the inhumation. In addition to the ceremonies mentioned above, some families celebrate the anniversary of the death every year. Others have a large ceremony similar to the funeral, five or ten years later. Similarly, as was mentioned before, whenever a person dreams of an ancestor or dead relative, it is required that she performs a similar ceremony to those carried out after inhumation, which often includes the sacrifice of an animal. In these cases, the descendants of the dead person are meant to participate and contribute to the ceremonies.

People who cannot participate in traditional rituals because of their religious affiliation or because they are absent, are expected to provide their economic contribution in order to buy the animal and the objects needed for the ceremony. On these occasions, giving money for ceremonies counts as much as if the person had been present. For example, at the beginning of the ceremonies for the ancestors, the head of the patrilineage or the person leading the ceremony invites the presence of the ancestors "to sit among them"

by reciting their eulogy. He then proceeds to name the members of the kin group who are present, including those who gave money for it. As Barber suggests, in this context, money represents a person's support and "the handing-over of money [is] both an actual transfer of resources and a symbolic act of recognition" (Barber 1995:216). Failing to participate in person or economically is considered as not having sufficient solidarity with the extended family and as a dishonour to the ancestors. The descendants therefore have a series of obligations not only to the spirits of the dead but also to the living family. Being able to fulfil family obligations gives individuals the prestige and reputation so important to becoming a respectable person.

Although Celestial Christians are radical in prohibiting their members from participating in these rituals, they continue to give money whenever their relatives ask for it. They, like many other people, often fear the use of witchcraft or "magical violence" (Noret 2011:162) by lineage authorities, who try to enforce participation in these rituals upon those who try to break with them. However, this is not the case with Pentecostals, despite these threats. They categorically prohibit any participation in, including economic contributions to, ceremonies of this sort. The general opinion is that those – like Pentecostals - who refuse to participate in ancestral rituals are simply no longer interested in, and therefore no longer included in family affairs.

### **"Renewing the Mind" in relation to Death, the Ancestors and Time**

The relationship of Pentecostals towards the dead is discursively articulated as one of those radical ruptures that accompany the "break with the past" that people have to go through after conversion. Pentecostals in Benin, and in many other African countries, say that they have inherited a curse, which is a product of their ancestors and parental disobedience towards God and their worship of the devil (cf. Meyer 1998:188). They often refer to passages in the Bible such as Proverbs 3:33, "the Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the righteous" or Lamentations 5:7, "Our ancestors sinned and [they] are no more, and we bear their punishment". Problems shared by many African countries, such as poverty, wars and hunger, are seen as manifestations of this curse. Commitment to traditions, such as post-mortem rituals and expensive funerals, is seen as a kind of enslavement that holds Africans back, causing harm, death and division among themselves.

In order to distance themselves from these ancestral ties and curses, Pentecostals completely reject any type of communication with the dead through *Ifá*, libations or sacrifices. They also reject excessive expenditures for funerals and severely prohibit of the performance of the post-mortem ceremonies that link Beninese converts to their ancestors. Although funerals continue to be relatively important events, these are performed in simplified versions. According to Noret (2004), this rupture leads to a genuine displacement (*basculement*) of the status of the dead that happens through a relatively fast assimilation of a Pentecostal doctrine about death, which replaces the traditional view (Noret 2004:150). He rightly suggests that conversion brings about a fundamental shift in the foundation of people's identity as sons of their ancestors and their lineage, in order to become, above all, children of God (2004:143-144). However, I suggest that this assimilation of Pentecostal doctrine about death is made possible through the gradual process of "renewing the mind" that I presented in the previous chapter.

As previously explained, renewing the mind means a change in people's way of thinking through biblical teaching and adaptation of the Bible to local contexts. For this purpose, the Book of Revelation provides an articulated metaphysical explanation of life, death and the afterlife, in which ideas of time and eternal life are central. Similarly, according to biblical teachings, Pentecostals are meant to live a life in this world but without belonging to it (cf. Romans 12:2), in other words, without following some cultural norms established and expected from those who are non-converts. Not being of this world means no longer doing what mainstream society does, but to following the precepts of the Bible. In this case, being attached to this world means continuing communication and contact with the ancestors. Therefore, Christians can no longer think in terms of local cosmology: they are not meant to communicate with the dead or seek to receive their blessings.

During the sermon on funerals mentioned before, there was a moment when the Pastor asked someone to read Deuteronomy 18:9-12. This passage narrates the way in which Moses condemned the practice of divination, sorcery and communication with the dead. The pastor chose this text in order to highlighting that they also should not use magic or witchcraft or talk to the spirits of the dead. He said, "the Bible says, you won't bother the dead." He continued by condemning those who organise ceremonies for the ancestors and consulted *Ifá* to know what the ancestors said. He also condemned the

sacrifice of animals and the consumption of their flesh. He continued, “this is something that is destroying the presence of God amidst the children of God today. Because if you act according to God’s will, you will never agree to do this! Never!” At that moment everybody murmured in agreement.

But the dead are not just the ancestors. Pentecostals also oppose the mediation of Catholic saints and any kind of prayer directed towards them. On this occasion, the pastor also expressed his disagreement with the way in which, during Mass, Catholics pray by calling the saints’ names. In this context, calling someone by her name during rituals equates to invoking her spiritual presence. For them, mentioning the saints’ names is also a way of invoking the dead. In addition to this, he invalidated the notion that prayers can help a person to reach a “good place” in the afterlife. He said,

Now listen, the person is dead today and you pray so she will have a good place to rest in peace. In the Mass you pray God to give her soul rest. Then you organise a great ceremony, and one year later you have the same Mass, the second year too, and then five or ten years later. Listen, if after ten years the person still has a bad place, this means that from the very first day, the person has remained in a bad place. Mathematically, I want you to calculate, if you do these things one, two, three times; it means that there has not been any change in the state of things. Those who listen to those teachings believe that they are helping the dead to reach a good place, but if after all this time the position of the person has not changed, do you think it can change any time with more Masses? We, Born Again, need to understand this truth and that these are not the teachings that we are supposed to follow.

In this case, for example, another aspect of renewing the mind is teaching people to think “logically” about the practical implications of celebrating post-mortem ceremonies. The pastor encouraged the assembly to analyse the futility of the expenses invested in Masses or ceremonies by highlighting the high costs that they entail. Therefore, he offered as the only remedy, or means to reach a “good place”, to follow Jesus and to give their lives fully. In this case, the version of the Bible read during the service ended the passage of Deuteronomy 18:9-12 saying, “You will belong entirely to God”. The pastor then said,

Underline this well in your Bible, “You will belong entirely to God.” Entirely! This means that you will not belong partly to your family, and do the things of your family. Then go to the witches, and do the things of the witches. And when your family wants to do their things, you call the elder and gather the family to do it ... you say, “in our custom is like this. Among us, the Nago, it is this way, or among the Gun, is like that; here among the Holi, or the Adja, is like this” No! You will belong EN-TI-RE-LY to God! ... We, who are children of God, need to understand that our mind needs to be according to a child of God. Amen! If we belong to Heaven, our reflections need to be according to those of Heaven. I no longer belong to a *hènnù* (patrilineage). I now belong to Jesus and accept the principles of Jesus. ... Let’s respect the principles of God, and life will be pleasant. You will be able to achieve good things.

This last testimony reinforces Noret’s (2004:143-144) assertions about the way Pentecostals replace their identity and affiliation to a lineage in order to become Children of God. Moreover, following God’s principles guarantees people’s protection and the possibility to live a “good life”, a pleasant life where a person will achieve good things.

The content of the previous sermon must be seen in relation to Pentecostal notions of death and time, which are based on the Book of Revelation. These notions have been assimilated to the extent that everyday life events are often read as demonstrations of the proximity of the Second Coming of Jesus, as described in the Bible. For example, during my stay in Benin, a young girl called Parfaite, in the town of Baname, claimed to be an incarnation of the Holy Spirit. She denounced witches and healed people. Many people in Pobe and the region, especially Catholics, organised in groups to visit her and to listen to her speaking. But Pentecostals said that these manifestations were products of the devil, they were false prophets wanting to divert Christians from their salvation. On various occasions I attended prayer sessions organised explicitly to pray for preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus and sermons warned people not to be deceived. Similarly, in 2010 the Harmattan season had been delayed in Benin, and very strong rains were falling after a long period of dryness. The casualties of Haiti’s earthquake that same year received widespread coverage in the media and many Pentecostals interpreted this event as God’s intervention to destroy a land plagued by *vodun*. Shortly after the earthquake in Haiti, the AoG pastor dedicated a Sunday sermon

to explicitly teach members of the church about the Second Coming of Jesus. In this sermon, the pastor explained in detail different chapters of the Book of Revelation, in particular chapters 19 and 20. During the sermon, he explained the moment of “rapture” that he referred to as the “first resurrection” as follows,

Listen well ... when Jesus will descend from Heaven, those Christians who have died in Christ, they will leave the earth and go to Heaven too. When the trumpet will sound, all those Christians who are already dead will become alive. Alleluia! This is why, I tell you today, if we believe! *[he shouted three times]* That Jesus resurrected from death. If we believe! That Jesus has resurrected from death, if we believe! We will also believe that Christians who are dead will also resurrect! They will leave this earth beeeeeeeeeeeeee (sic) *[simulating their corpses elevating]* Amen! ... The apostle Paul [said] we who are alive, after the others resurrect, we who are still alive, we will also be elevated to heaven beeeeeeeeeee (sic) This will be a universal event. This will happen all over the world, from the beginning of times, up to this moment. Amen! And in this moment, the Bible says ... the church will no longer be on earth ... in this moment all of us, you and me, will be with Jesus ... and we will meet the King of kings the Lord of lords. The Antichrist will begin his reign, the one they call “the beast” ... and what will happen then will be terrible.

In this case, the Pentecostal notion of death does not deny life after death. Neither does it proclaim that the death of a person will be the end of all existence. At the moment of rapture, an event that in principle could happen at any time, both living and dead will be lifted from Earth and those who were already dead will be resurrected.

I now turn to illustrate how this notion of death and life plays out in one funerary ritual. This is an example of how funerals, as ritual performances that enact specific set of realities and relationships (cf. Houseman 2006:8-9) also contribute to re-evaluating those connections towards ancestors and the extended kin: they reinforce relational change (*ibid.*)

## **Maman Sabine's Funeral**

During my whole stay in Benin, I had the chance to attend only one Pentecostal funeral towards the end of my fieldwork. This is remarkable given the frequency in which funerals happen in town, and the times a person is normally invited to participate in them. When I commented on this fact to a few Pentecostal followers, they normally laughed and said, “well, that is because we are children of God, we just don’t die like that!” This remark was interesting given that deaths are frequent, and are very often attributed to witchcraft. They reflect what the pastor said in his sermon: that if a person follows the path of God, they are guaranteed with protection from God. However, one also needs to consider that there are proportionally fewer Pentecostal converts compared to Catholics or Muslims.

Maman Sabine was a member of the AoG church in one of the annexes of the temple in Ikpinle, which was located in the town popularly called Usine (factory)<sup>21</sup>. She had died just short of her one-hundredth birthday and her funeral was announced during one of the Sunday services. Since she was one of the oldest and most devout members of the church in this town they had decided to perform the religious service for the funeral in the main temple in Ikpinle. This was announced well in advance, a few weeks before the appointed date, in order to give members of the church enough time to organise their cooperation that is to contribute economically towards the funeral.

Maman Sabine was widowed and had three daughters. She lived in Usine with her eldest daughter, who had converted to Islam after marrying an important Muslim man; and she in turn had become an important Muslim trader. According to tradition, the daughters were in charge of organising their mother’s funeral. Since she was an elderly woman, the norm and expectation was that they would organise a great event. Only a couple of her grandsons were members of the AoG church, however; none of her daughters was Pentecostal and they had difficulty accepting the notion of keeping the ceremony simple.

After their family meeting, the members of her family visited the pastor to arrange a date for the funeral and the terms in which it would be carried out. Despite the fact that the chosen date was a very busy day for the pastor, they decided to stick with their

decision. The pastor had insisted that they keep the religious service according to the desire of their mother. The agreement was that they would carry out a prayer vigil the day before the burial, which was a Friday, and the religious service would start early, at nine o'clock on the Saturday morning, followed by the burial. This way, they would finish everything by noon. Maman Jasmine had advised the family to go very early in the morning to pick up the corpse from the morgue in Sakete.

Women from the church had planned to go on the morning of the vigil, to help in the preparation of food to be served that night and during the funeral. However, one of the women later came to inform the pastor's wife that their help was no longer required and they were not really welcome to participate. Mama Sabine's daughter had already invited her friends and relatives and would take over the organisation herself. Later, maman Jasmine told me, "it is because they are not children of God. They don't understand that among us, we are happy to help because it was one of our sisters. But people who are pagans don't understand this". Pentecostals' offers to help had been disparaged and rejected.

#### *a) The Prayer Vigil*

The prayer vigil took place at the home of the deceased and was scheduled to start at nine in the evening. If the deceased was a woman, the vigil is carried out either in her compound of origin or in her husband's compound. In this case, mama Sabine was widowed, and the family had decided to carry out the vigil in the residence where she had lived with her elder daughter.

Most of the members of the church gathered in the church beforehand in order to arrive together. Arriving there, they found that family, friends and neighbours of the deceased were already present. There was a festive atmosphere as is usual at the funerals of elderly people. A large tarpaulin had been placed outside the house with a series of chairs organised in rows. There were large speakers playing loud gospel music with local popular and traditional drum rhythms. People came in and out of the house helping with the arrangements.

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<sup>21</sup> This town was built around a palm oil factory.

Some people were sitting chatting, and others drinking *sodabi* (indeed, a couple of young men who were already drunk had started dancing around). *Sodabi* is an alcoholic drink made of distilled palm sap, and is normally consumed at funerals and any other social gatherings. But this drink is used particularly in traditional religious ceremonies. Those who were drinking were not Pentecostals. The fact that gospel music was played while people drank, reflects the way in which, even though it was the burial of a Pentecostal convert, not all members of a lineage or family agree to the terms in which these events must happen. Therefore, one can observe that during funerals different religious and ritual registers often coexist (cf. Noret 2011).

The moment for prayer arrived. The pastors as well as the Yoruba and Fon translators gathered at the front where a table and some chairs had been placed for them. The two choirs were offered a place between the pastors and the rest of the attendants, and the remainder of the people were offered a seat in the chairs arranged for the occasion. The main pastor in Ikpinle gave the opening words, emphasising that the evening was in order to thank God that maman Sabine had died as a child of God. He made it clear that it was not an evening to pray for her in order to enter heaven - such as Catholic vigils normally proclaim. He assured the audience that maman Sabine was already “admiring the glory of God” and adoring him. That is why they were going to give thanks, because the Lord had saved her before her death.

Singing performed by both choirs in the church followed the opening words. After singing, the pastor invited someone to give testimony. The person who spoke was one of the visiting pastors, who was from Ikpinle and knew maman Sabine before his conversion. He remarked how devout, generous and hardworking she had been. He then started talking about death,

Death is a subject of fear. When you talk about death, nobody wants to die. But when one says, “you will inherit the *pagne* (clothing) of maman”, then everybody will be there. But if you ask who wants to join maman, nobody will want to do it. There are no candidates for death. This is because sin has separated us from God, and people are afraid of dying. Why? It is because sin has brought death. Listen my brothers; we all need to die, but what kind of death? ... The death of the rightful, or the death of the sinner? Here in Africa we say that those who die in accidents have a bad death. I tell you, death is death,

no matter how you die. But what kind of death do we need to look for? A rightful death! What quality of death do I want? Do I want to die in adultery? Die in theft? Die in fetishism? [sic] Die in sin, or die in Jesus? I tell you, die today in Christ, giving your life to Jesus! And when you do this, you will see that people who want to make you fall, will fail. Amen!

In this sense, Pentecostals challenge common notions about “good” and “bad death”. A good death is the Christian death, when the person has given her life to Jesus. It is good no matter a person’s age or the circumstances in which she has died. In this case, the quality of the death is no longer defined by the circumstances, but rather by an individual responsibility. Death, therefore, becomes something that should no longer be feared, since people become responsible for determining the quality of their death. If a person decides to die in Jesus, she renounces a death of sin and gains access to a death of the rightful. If a person decides to reject Jesus, they then they will have a bad death.

The event ended with the pastor exhorting the participants to give their lives to Jesus and to “find life in Him.” After this, the pastor invited everybody to join the ceremony the next day, emphasising that it was not a ceremony for the corpse but for those who are alive. The Bible said that people are not supposed to pray for those who are already dead. It is only while one is alive that one should prepare for one’s death. In this sense, he stressed the importance of taking advantage of the present time, as the only asset for preparing a good death.

The pastor then proceeded to pray for maman Sabine’s family and their wellbeing, and to heal any division that might exist among them. Then the eldest daughter approached the pastor with an envelope with money as a contribution to the prayer. The pastor called one of the deacons and handed him the envelope with money saying that they would use the money for evangelisation purposes. It was, he said, money for the work of God. The pastor then went inside the house where, as I learnt later, he gave the three daughters an envelope with money from the members of the church. When a member of the church dies, the church always gives a considerable donation to the family. This money is gathered from voluntary contributions. In principle, this money is given with the purpose of paying for the coffin and the tomb. Some families accept it and use it for these purposes but, others, as in this case, prefer to use the money at their discretion. Someone explained to me that very often, when the relatives are not Pentecostals they

want to show that they can cover all the costs of the funeral and do not want to feel “diminished”.

Coming back, I realised that this was not the only house that was prepared to receive a large number of guests. Each of the three daughters had prepared in their separate houses to receive their own guests, laying on a large tarpaulin, chairs, and music. The pastor commented, “you see how much money we spend here in Benin? All of this for nothing! When the grandma was alive, nobody would even come to bring her a bowl of rice, and now that she is dead, look all what they are doing!” The driver of our car and the other passengers agreed and animatedly commented on the fact that each daughter was going to kill a bull to feed her own guests. They considered it a futile and absurd expense. The cost of each bull at that time was approximately 300,000 CFA. Killing a bull is the sign that someone is rendering the highest honour to the deceased. The bigger the animal, the happier the dead ancestor will be. It is also one of the signs that the person has important economic and/or “wealth in people” (Guyer 1993); being able to recruit enough friends and neighbours to help them organise a large funeral. In this case, the daughters had both. It was clearly a very expensive funeral in which each daughter must have spent at least one million CFA in total, and was ready conspicuously to prove and display her economic power.

*b) Funeral ceremony and burial*

The next day, the religious service for the funeral was scheduled to start at 9 am. Very early, one of the members of the church arrived at the temple to decorate the place where the coffin was going to be placed. Everybody was gathered in the church on time, as normally services start punctually. As I mentioned before, the pastor’s wife had suggested to the family of the deceased that they should bring the corpse the previous night or very early in the morning, in order to be ready for the service. Most of the members of the church were already sitting inside and had started to pray and sing while waiting for the funeral procession. Half an hour had passed and there was still no sign of the procession. Fifty minutes later, somebody called the eldest daughter and learnt that they had left Usine at 9 am for Sakete. Even though people were by then upset about the delay, they decided to wait assuming that the procession would arrive soon. Another hour passed and they still did not appear. They called them again and learned that the

procession had gone to Usine to display the corpse in the house instead of going directly to the church as agreed.

Pentecostals from the AoG church discourage the practice of displaying the corpse because it means giving more importance to the dead than is appropriate. In a certain way, this equates to worshiping the dead. Unfortunately, the family had not respected the original agreement, which was to bring the coffin to the temple directly from the morgue. Having learned this, many members of the church expressed their discontent. They felt it was a lack of respect and consideration, given that they had all arrived punctually. Many started leaving because they had other commitments. For example, one woman went to apologise to the pastor's wife saying that she had to go and cook for her husband. The pastor's wife agreed and said that she should not apologise, that her husband was always more important. As we will see in a subsequent chapter, marriage takes a prominent role in the life of the convert. In this sense, this incident reflected the importance given to living relatives and family over the dead. Everybody was clearly very unhappy; some members of the church started saying that this ill treatment was a deliberate provocation from the family: a way of goading them for being Pentecostal Christians. However, the pastor gathered the rest and encouraged them to stay. He agreed that the family had been neglectful but they still had to hold the funeral.

Shortly thereafter the procession arrived. As normally happens, the procession was led by some of the grandchildren carrying large pictures of maman Sabine. A band of musicians, the car with the coffin and the rest of the people followed behind them. As it is the norm at these events, members of her kin group wore according to their age and family group membership, "group uniform" or clothes of the same fabric, also known as *aṣo ebi* (*aṣo*, cloth; *ebi*, kin). They all came inside the temple and the ceremony started right away.

The pastor expressed his discontent to the family and said that many members of the church had already left because it was already very late. An attempt would be made to keep the ceremony quick and short, since they had a marriage in Pobe to attend. After one song and an opening prayer, the pastor handed the microphone to the pastor, president of the sub-region, who as a guest was invited to lead the funeral.

The president of the sub-region used to be the pastor in Ikpinle before he was transferred to Porto-Novo. Therefore, he knew all the members of the church, including maman Sabine. He opened his sermon saying that he was also disappointed by the delay in the arrival. He mentioned that the pastor had acted like Moses, since Moses had rushed to sanction the people of God, so God would not destroy them, and this was a way to intercede for them. He criticised Africans' lack of punctuality and certain practices associated with giving honour to the extended family members,

Why on the day of the burial of the woman who was so punctual, there is so much delay? Why on the day of the burial of the woman who was so clean, there is so much filth? I attribute that to our costume. Beninese and Africans don't give much importance to time. See for example the way Beninese stop to greet each other. Salutations take so long! Have you seen what happens in our villages? If you see your grandfather you stop to kneel or prostrate to greet. That takes time, and then you will wait to receive the eulogies (*oriki*), yes the eulogies [he imitated an *oriki*]. We waste time in salutations, whereas in other places it is just simple. For many people in other places, time is money!

He continued with his sermon emphasising the good Christian behaviour that maman Sabine had exhibited during her life. In particular, he mentioned the way she used to arrive on time to the service every Sunday, despite the fact that she lived far from Ikpinle and had no means of transportation. Despite her old age she used to walk every day from Usine to Ikpinle to greet the pastor and arrived every Sunday on time. Her punctuality, for him, was a proof of her fear of God. All the assembly replied with a loud Amen! And he continued,

You have to open your ears to hear what God wants to tell you today. Our maman's life has reunited us this morning. God is saying, "get ready!" This morning you come like this, well dressed, you have bought nice *pagne* (clothing). But what did you give maman while she was alive? She lived in poverty! Sometimes she didn't even have enough to eat, and today it is the witches who come here to eat! I cannot enumerate the number of times that maman came to ask for prayer because of the witches' work.

At that moment, a woman sitting close to the front stood up and left the temple. She was wearing a piece of cloth wrapped around her body and beaded necklaces like the ones worn by people who belong to *oriṣa* worship groups. It was clear that she felt offended at being categorised alongside those who do “witches’ work” simply because of her adherence to tradition. For many Pentecostals and Christians in general, those who practice traditional religion are also those who practice witchcraft. The pastor continued,

Without God you cannot do anything! Adore God with all your heart ... you need to follow the steps of maman. I would like to encourage you today to take the example of maman. If you die in Jesus today, the recompenses that you can find are many. ... Jesus has said I am the resurrection; I am the life, for those who believe in me. But if you don’t believe, no matter what you will say, the life of those who are not in Jesus will go below the ground, but those who believe in Jesus after death there is a wonderful place. Alleluia!

Two ideas are worth emphasising from this testimony. The first is the idea that through Jesus people can experience resurrection and life, but in order for this to happen, a person first needs to give her life to, and die in Jesus. Secondly, there is the way in which he said that those who do not believe in Jesus will go below the ground. This second remark is very interesting because in Yoruba cosmology, this is the place where the dead normally remain: at least those who had not had a proper burial because they did not have a good death. For Christians, this place is associated with *Orun apadi*, which has been translated as hell. *Orun apadi* means the heaven of potsherd, which implies the place where the things that are no longer useful are thrown (Hallgren 1988:68).

The pastor continued emphasising that maman Sabine had already “reached a good place”, where nobody could harm her anymore, and where she was resting from all the hardships of this world. He said, “maybe you did to her a lot of things before she died, but she attached herself to Jesus and now she has reached Him.” He again reprimanded the family for having been late. He said that he was about to leave when they arrived. In the end, he was not concerned about whether or not they “buried” the grandmother, given that “she is already in Heaven!” At that moment, all the members of the church cheered and clapped. Then the pastor continued deprecating all the expenses incurred

for the funeral, for him, everything was just a burden. He mocked the expensive coffin, saying that it was too big for the grandmother. He also condemned those who had just gone there that day to eat and see what others had cooked for the ceremony. He spoke critically of the number of people who had attended the funeral given that nothing of all that mattered to maman Sabine anymore. He said, “Arriving in heaven, who will care about the coffin? Those who died in Christ will be joyful after death.”

The service closed with a final prayer and singing. Immediately, the procession, led by the music band, continued their way towards Usine for the burial. The members of the family had decided to bury maman Sabine in the place where she used to live, within the eldest daughter’s compound. In this case, since maman Sabine was widowed and her daughters were already adults, the family respected the wish of the eldest daughter to bury her in her own compound. Normally, maman Sabine should have been buried either in her husband’s compound or that of her patrilineage. In cases like this, it is usual for sons, as self-sufficient adults, to have the freedom to decide where to bury the corpse, and to do so in their own compound. If she had had male offspring, her son would have had priority over the daughters to bury her, even if he was not the eldest. In this case, however, it was the eldest daughter who had priority.

Following indications from the pastor, the majority of the members of the church did not follow the procession to the burial because they all had to go to the wedding that was about to take place in Pobe. In this case, they had already been present at the most important part of the funeral, which was the religious service. Only the pastors, two translators and a couple of deacons accompanied the procession and were present at the burial. The burial did not take much longer. They all gathered around the place where the tomb was dug and before placing the coffin inside, the pastor read a final biblical passage which reminded, “for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19). Each person then, starting from the pastor, threw a handful of soil over the coffin.

After the ceremony, the guests proceeded to the reception. The pastors and the members of the church were offered something to eat, which they accepted, but quickly left since the rest of the church members were waiting for them to go to the wedding. Not attending a funeral reception is also a way in which people often manifest their discontent towards the organiser. In many cases, friendships or relationships are jeopardised if the person organising the funeral does not feel the support expected from

the people invited. In this case, it was obvious that the church members were not much concerned about whether or not they would be judged for not attending.

Among the church members, there was much talk after the ceremony and the next day, all centred on what had happened at the burial. Everybody commented approvingly on the sermon and how strict the pastor had been. People also commented on how the relatives had been disciplined and the way in which the female traditionalist - self-evidently a witch - had left the temple in the middle of the service. They all enthusiastically commented on how “the enemy” had been defeated. At the Sunday service the following day, the pastor again reminded the assembly about the futility of the expense carried out in the funeral the day before and the fact that the grandmother had already reached heaven.

### **The Pentecostal Regeneration of Life**

From maman Sabine’s funeral we can see that Pentecostal funerals in Benin reinforce ideas preached during sermons in relation to death and the afterlife. In this section we will see the way in which various elements of the funeral described above have implications for the changing notions of the regeneration of life, and relate to the critique and dilemma posed at the beginning of this chapter.

The sense of immediacy and living in the present characteristic of the evangelical “punctuated time” (Guyer 2007) was evident in the way in which during the funeral the pastor emphasised the punctual behaviour of maman Sabine, in contrast to the lack of it on the part of non-Pentecostals. In this sense, punctuality was the means by which she was showing a “Godly” behaviour versus the lack of punctuality and consideration of time, which was traditional and “backwards.” Overall, the emphasis on punctuality in this church is worth noting, since being punctual and not wasting time is also a means of always being ready for the arrival of the millennium. For example, one day, I commented to maman Jasmine that my time in Benin had gone by very quickly. She replied, “Yes, that is a sign of the end of times. The Bible says that! It says that whenever the end will approach, time will go faster.” This gave her urgency to not waste time. She often taught women in the church to pay attention to their present lives, in order to not be caught by surprise living in sin and to young girls to take seriously their lives and not to waste time with young boys or neglect their studies. This concern

for time in everyday life is an example of what Robbins calls an “everyday millenarianism” (cf. Robbins 2001).

In addition to time, it is worth noticing the way in which the corpse of maman Sabine was treated during the funeral. There was a constant emphasis on minimising its material relevance. However, this lack of importance given to the body is not because it is a religion that ignores the body. Neither does it mean that death is the end of all existence. What happens is that the emphasis is not placed on a physical death. For Pentecostals, it does not matter where or how the person died, whether it was a “good” or “bad” death, or where the person was buried. This is no longer relevant because, according to them, in the Second Coming of Jesus, all the dead and the living Christians will be lifted from earth to heaven. What really matters is whether or not the person had given her life to Jesus because, upon the second return of Jesus, those who have “died in him”, death and alive, are expected to rise from the ground and resurrect.

As stressed during the sermons, one of the major tenets of Pentecostal doctrine is that people can no longer establish communication with the dead and the ancestors. At least in discourse, Pentecostals have assimilated in great degree the idea that if they do not communicate with them, ancestors or dead people can no longer harm them. A few times, while I was talking to a convert and he or she referred to the influence of bad spirits, I asked if it could possibly be the spirit of a dead person. They often denied it and replied saying something like “how can that be? The dead are already dead”. However, this does not mean that ancestors completely disappear from converts’ lives. They continue to be present often through “bad dreams”. These types of nightmares are commonly described the same way that non-Pentecostals experience the ancestors: they see a dead relative, or an *Egungun* running after them. The difference with Pentecostals is that they explain the source of these dreams differently. For them, it is not the dead who come and speak to them through dreams; instead, it can be a witch or a living relative who wants to cause them harm. They affirm that witches transport themselves in spirit form during the night and adopt the appearance of dead relatives in order to intimidate and torment them during their dreams. They trick them by making them think that it is the dead who are speaking, whereas it is the living relatives that are responsible for it.

Pentecostals deal with these torments with prayer. It is during the night when all these “spiritual attacks” happen and when occult forces manifest. This is why they constantly hold prayer vigils that last all night long, in order to neutralise their effects in the lives of the converts and people in town. During collective prayers before a service or during the day, they often pray for those who suffer from bad dreams, asking God to deliver them and give them strength to defeat their “enemies”. People normally sleep at night with a light bulb on in their bedrooms and pray for a good night’s sleep before going to bed. Prayers in the morning give thanks to God for waking up alive from their sleep. When a person has a bad dream at night, she is advised to pray right after she awakes from the dream. One young man explained to me, “when this happens, and you wake up from your dream, it doesn’t mean that the spirits are gone, they normally hide somewhere in your bedroom so when you go back to sleep they can continue tormenting you. That is why you have to pray immediately so the spirit will go away.”

There is also a crucial change in the way sacrifice is conceptualised. As seen before, whenever non-converts have been tormented by dreams, they appease the ancestors with a ceremony, a Mass or the offering of animal sacrifices. The blood of the animal offered to the ancestors is the offering of life as an exchange for life and blessings. Pentecostals no longer need to sacrifice animals; the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and his shedding of blood becomes the ultimate sacrifice that frees them from other sacrificial commitments. The blood of Jesus represents a powerful symbol in people’s lives. In fact, blood in this context has a very strong symbolic power. Aside from being the life offered to the ancestors, witches normally take and drink the blood of their victims when they take their lives. In this case, Jesus’ blood represents the life that Pentecostals receive in exchange when they give their lives to Him. His blood cleanses them from sin and protects them from harm. Pentecostals often pray saying “blood of Jesus, protect us” or “blood of Jesus, purify us”. Some people painted on the lintels of their houses the legend “protected by the blood of Jesus”, in the same way in which some other people wrote protective incantations against witchcraft attacks.

When a person gives her life to Jesus, the person becomes a child of God, who is entitled to receive his blessings, which include being able to keep good health and success in everyday affairs. Therefore, there is no need for mediation from the ancestors to ask for their favour thorough ceremonies and sacrifices. For Pentecostals, blessings come directly from God. But there is one condition for Pentecostals to benefit from

God's blessings. This is that a person needs to completely turn away from relying on practices associated with the recognition of the ancestors or on other means of protection, such as amulets. They need to rely completely in God.

All the above has implications for the regeneration of life. This no longer depends on affirming the permanence and continuity of a lineage, represented by the ancestors, through a repetitive or cyclical time marked by post-mortem ceremonies (cf. Bloch 1982:219). For Pentecostals, this regeneration becomes a matter of individual responsibility. If a person is Born Again, she will have a place guaranteed in Heaven when she dies. It is no longer required that a person's descendants perform ceremonies to help her reach a "good place". As one woman told me,

If I see that a person was a good person, I know she will go to Heaven straight away. Only the person knows what she has done. If we have talked to her about Jesus and she has not accepted Him, then only she knows where she will go. It is only to God to whom all things return.

By reaching a "good place", they no longer have the potential to become dangerous spirits. Equally, they no longer have the capacity to return to earth, liberating them from the cycle of rebirth that continues to attach people to the same lineage, or to earth. Upon the birth of a child, they no longer require to consult *Ifa* in order to know their *ori*. Similarly, they no longer give children those names that imply that a grandfather or grandmother has been reborn. As emphasised during the funeral sermon, those who are saved go directly to rest in peace in heaven "admiring the glory of God", free from their earthly work and burdens.

But if Pentecostals negate this continuity of the lineage guaranteed through the ancestors, and if they no longer become ancestors, what happens with the social ties that these notions represent, in other words, those ties with their extended families? From my experience, performing this rupture does not mean that Pentecostals are no longer concerned about their relatives. In fact, it is common to see that most converts continue to feel emotional attachment to the members of their kin and family. They feel responsible to evangelise them so they can also benefit from "salvation" and experience a constant anxiety if those members of their family to whom they are emotionally attached do not convert or refuse their evangelism. For example, maman Jasmine's

father and mother had not converted yet. She used to tell me how sad and worried she felt for her parents. She often prayed so God would “touch their hearts” in order for them to accept Jesus in their lives. She often called her brothers who had not converted yet and tried to encourage them to do so. In particular, the Sunday afternoon after the same sermon that addressed the return of Jesus, she phoned her elder brother and with concern asked him if he had ever stopped to think seriously about his death and what would happen to him afterwards. She encouraged her brother to take his life seriously by giving it to Jesus. She feared that the second coming of Jesus would take her family members by surprise. In the same way, maman Jasmine was concerned about her relatives; many Born Again Christians have the expectation of re-joining their loved ones in heaven, including the members of their family and the church.

Similarly, although being saved is, in the end, a personal decision and a matter of individual responsibility, this does not mean that the regeneration of life concerns merely the individual. This regeneration is a collective event. It concerns all those who have been saved and hence the need to evangelise other members of a convert’s lineage, in order for them to participate in this regeneration. Finally, as was shown during the sermon at the funeral, pastors normally render tribute to the deceased and try to draw life lessons from his/her life. This is in fact the attitude taught in all Pentecostal churches that people should adopt towards the ancestors and dead relatives. They are to be remembered for life lessons and not to be worshipped in ceremonies.

#### *Funerals, Economic Expenditures and the Extended Family*

Having seen the above, it is time to turn to the conflict that economic expenditures entail and with which this chapter started. In a similar way in which, during his sermon, the pastor rejected expensive funerals, better-educated people have started to question the expenditure of large amounts of money in funerals and related ceremonies. These opinions are often influenced by perceptions of mainly Western development experts who argue against the “inefficient allocation of resources” (cf. Jindra and Noret 2011:1-2 quoting the Economist 2007). For example, on one occasion, the radio director was expressing his opinion about the futility of organising a ceremony twelve years after a person’s death. One of the reporters working there said, “but it is not because people just want to do it. It is because the ancestors *ask* for it.” The radio director hesitated, unable to convince the other man not to carry out a ceremony merely on the basis of the

futility of the money spent. As I observed, even these better-educated people, like the radio director, still continue to hold ambiguous views about completely abandoning the ancestors, even if they acknowledge their relative economic disadvantages.

In contrast, Pentecostals find it relatively easy to give up expenditure on funerals due to the aspects analysed above. There is a common opinion among them that funerals and ceremonies are the means by which extended families make people fail whenever someone wants to progress in life. According to them, they use the ancestors' supposed anger as an excuse to enforce post-mortem ceremonies upon others. However, feeling protected, Pentecostals no longer fear threats of "magical violence" (cf. Noret 2011:162) that derive from dishonouring ancestral responsibilities. A Pentecostal follower says,

Here in Benin, this is our problem; we don't want to see our brother succeed. If he is going forwards people will notice and will plan a way to make him fail. He cannot become someone. If someone makes some money, people will look and say, "ah, he hasn't done the ceremony" and will put pressure on him to discuss when they will make the ceremony. Even if the person is not ready, they will start telling everybody "we will have a ceremony this day" so the person will not be able to say no. We spend on things that don't have any profit or advantage. If you want to buy a car, maybe you have some money and you still need more money to complete the purchase, and if you ask someone to lend you, you will never find someone who will give you money. But if you need money for a ceremony, people will immediately lend you, but not if you need it for a car. A ceremony doesn't bring any profit, only debts, but if you want money to make something profitable, nobody will lend it to you. In the ceremony, instead, everybody will come just to sit and eat, eat until they are full and only then people will be happy.

Eating during funerals, in this case, is both literal and metaphorical. It is the way in which relatives consume the resources of others. Therefore, these are the kind of expenses that are considered to hold them back. Pentecostals no longer need to spend on ceremonies because protection and wellbeing comes from God's favour. In this sense, they challenge the influence, and the claims, that the extended family has over them, by

breaking with the economic obligations that attach them spiritually to their families and from which they can also do them harm.

Not spending too much money also has practical benefits for “this worldly” life. The pastor encouraged the redistribution of money otherwise spent in ceremonies or Masses for the dead toward other more practical purposes, such as supporting widows or members of their church in need (his mention of maman Sabine’s poverty was an illustration of this), and towards the “work of God”. However, this does not mean that Pentecostals are encouraging capital accumulation (Maxwell 1998:354; Smith 2001:591). As it has been shown in this paper, even though they do not spend large amounts of money on funerals, they still continue supporting their non-Pentecostal relatives as a way of showing their solidarity.

Despite Pentecostals’ critiques of expenditure during these events, economic obligations during funerals are still present to some extent. Pentecostals continue to engage in economic exchanges that form part of this “economy of prestige” (cf. Noret 2004:146). However, they do so in a less compulsory way than those who are non-Pentecostal. The fact that Pentecostals still engage, to some extent, with their relatives in funerals suggests that they are not completely breaking their obligations with their living kin. In particular, they maintain these relations of reciprocity that keep their relationships with their kin running smoothly. For example, they continue to provide their economic support in funerals through the exchange of envelopes. Neither do they break completely with the expenditures for the burial of a person’s parents. In this case, they continue performing the socially accepted obligations that children have towards their parents, which are also important in the process of grieving (Noret 2010).

However, these situations can also be difficult to change, in particular when a parent is not a convert and his wish was to observe a non-Christian burial and ceremonies. In these cases, the pastor in AoG normally recommends that the convert buy the coffin as a way to show her good will towards the burial of the parents. By doing this, Pentecostals are encouraged to disengage from participating in the expenses required for the post-mortem and ancestralisation ceremonies. However, as I observed, parental authority and feelings of duty towards a father’s burial are still very strong. In most cases, people convert fully only after the death of the father, unless the father also converts. In many cases, this allows people to respect paternal authority and to bury them according to

their obligations. In some other cases, converts still contribute towards a burial. For example, one of the members of the church admitted to me that even though he was not present during the post-mortem ceremonies done for the burial of his father, who was an *orisa* worshiper, he did contribute economically towards them. However, he stopped contributing afterwards to any other subsequent ancestor-related ceremony. There is, in the end, always some room for negotiation.

## Conclusions

In this chapter I have explored the way in which Pentecostals reformulate their relationship towards their ancestors. This is one of the areas where, discursively, the “break with the past” is often articulated as radical. Pentecostals forbid people’s participation in post-mortem ceremonies and oppose large expenditure during funerals.

In order to explore this issue in more detail, I have drawn on Bloch and Parry’s (1982) concept of the regeneration of life. According to these authors funerary rituals contribute to legitimising a certain authority structure and guaranteeing the reproduction of society. They do so by negating the unpredictability and discontinuity of death, and the threat that the uncontrolled individuality of biological birth and death impose on the social order (1982:12). In a plural religious setting such as Benin, where ancestors continue to be seen as providers of wellbeing and where different religious traditions handle death differently, it becomes evident that the main issue here is not so much the legitimacy of a particular authority structure (cf. Jindra and Noret 2011). However, there are still issues concerning the discontinuity of death, life and its reproduction that are linked to the notion of the regeneration of life.

Therefore, I have argued that the Pentecostal break with the ancestors needs to be understood in relation to changing notions of time and death that are linked to the assimilation of a Salvationist doctrine as it is presented in the Book of Revelation. This Salvationist doctrine regards time as discontinuous as opposed to the cyclical notion of time that underpins ancestral ceremonies and their regeneration of life. Pentecostals assimilate this doctrine through Bible study and it is reinforced through ritual performance, which in this case consists of simplified versions of funerals and not participating in ancestral ceremonies or rituals that acknowledge the ancestors. According to the Pentecostal notion of time, the regeneration of life will happen at the

moment of rapture, when all those who have been saved, both dead and alive, will be resurrected and lifted from earth to heaven. This has implications for different levels of people's lives.

First of all, it becomes a person's responsibility to accept Jesus in her life and to guarantee that she has a "good death" that will allow her to take part in the resurrection. However, this does not mean that regeneration is an individual affair: it is still a collective event involving all Born Again Christians. Therefore, the main concern for Pentecostals is to evangelise those members of their families to whom they feel attached in order for them to take part in the resurrection. A second consequence concerns the role of ancestors as providers of wellbeing. For Pentecostals, ancestors are no longer those who provide them with the blessings of wealth and fertility. Pentecostals no longer need ancestors' mediation since they receive their blessings from God. Thirdly, Pentecostals place a stronger focus on living a moral and righteous life in the present given that the End of Times can potentially happen at any time. One example of this is the emphasis they place on the importance of time and punctuality, as a means to be prepared and take advantage of time. This also translates in saving unnecessary expense on funerals and ceremonies in order to use them to benefit other people in need, such as relatives or widows.

I have not explored in depth Muslim or other Christian denominations' notions of temporality and how these religious groups might shape their notions of the regeneration of life. However, for the majority of people in Benin, ancestors continue to be the source of blessings, which is evident in the way their funerary rituals give importance to the dead. Although I do not want to homogenise other groups' notions of ancestors: this is an aspect that is fundamentally different for Pentecostals, which I have tried to highlight by putting them in perspective with funerary rituals practiced by other religious groups. Similarly there is another aspect linked to the notion of the regeneration of life that needs to be considered: that is fertility. In the past, ancestors guaranteed people's fertility and the reproduction of the lineage. This is no longer the case for Pentecostals for whom these come from God. Therefore, this aspect will be further explored in chapter 6 where challenges of infertility reveal the dilemmas that arise from people's need to perpetuate a lineage.

All in all, the ethnographic material on funerals presented here reveals that some ritual and discursive ruptures do not translate into social ruptures. Although post-mortem ceremonies are completely rejected, Pentecostals still continue to perform funerals and maintain their obligations to bury their parents. They also participate in relations of reciprocity and solidarity with converts and non-converts alike by being present, helping or at least attending funerals when they are invited. Cutting “spiritual” ties with the ancestors does not translate into severing earthly ties. Pentecostals continue to be embedded in a network of social relations and, within their own limits, they manage to compromise and accommodate other ritual requirements, in particular when the majority of the extended family is not Pentecostal. Being a good Christian means maintaining good relationships with the living rather than the dead. Therefore, the next chapter will explore what happens when ruptures occur in people’s kinship relations, and the way Pentecostals deal with these situations.

## Chapter 4

### The Cycle of Forgiveness: Dealing with Family Ruptures and Witchcraft in a Patrilineal Society

#### Introduction

The previous chapter explored the way in which Pentecostal funerals contribute to reformulating people's relationship towards the dead and ancestors, and the way converts deal with the problem of expenditure during these events. In this chapter, I would like to introduce another dimension of the notion of the "break with the past" as manifested in relation to their "blood" ties. In other words, I explore what happens to Pentecostals' relations to their living kin, and the social and economic obligations that converts have towards them, once the ancestors have been displaced.

Taking further the question of "social entanglements" and related ruptures that was presented in the introduction of this thesis, I explore the way in which Pentecostal converts in south-eastern Benin engage with their non-convert kin. As mentioned before, in his study of Born Again in Tanzania, Lindhardt (2010) suggests that Pentecostalism allows converts to engage in processes of social reformulation. They do so by cultivating a particular type of agency through ritual forms of prayer, words and bodily gestures that allow them to feel empowered and protected to connect with their social world in new ways (2010:259). Moreover, upon conversion, Lindhardt implicitly suggests that converts hold an important ethical obligation to cultivate their relationships. As one of his informants clearly expressed, "if a person is "saved", she cannot forget her parents" (Lindhardt 2010:265). This aspect, I suggest, is important to consider in more depth. It indicates that Pentecostals have certain ethical obligations towards their kin that cannot be ignored when we analyse the way their relationships are being reformulated after the ruptures experienced upon conversion.

My ethnographic material, in line with Lindhardt's, reveals that "breaking with the past" in its aspect of cutting "blood" ties at a ritual level, does not necessarily translate into breaking with economic and social obligations towards kin. When looking closely

at converts' life stories, I realised that ruptures in the system of social and economic rights and obligations towards kin, when they happened, were not always linked to conversion itself. They were often embedded in local dynamics of descent, descent roles, patrilineal authority and processes of segmentation. Instead, witchcraft perpetrations accounted for some of the long-term ruptures that happened between people and their kin as they were trying to get away from those relatives using witchcraft against them. However, when ruptures happened as result of conversion, these were often temporary (cf. Lindhardt 2010:242) and in most cases, converts did not seek to intentionally sever their extended kin ties. I suggest that in order to understand these ruptures, one needs to attend to the deeper social, economic and gendered dynamics underlying them. Similarly, one needs to analyse how converts enact the idiom of the "break with the past" in relation to central elements of their faith. In particular, I focus here on a central aspect of Christian theology that I refer to as the cycle of forgiveness. When a person becomes Born Again, through her relationship to Jesus, she becomes a receptor of personal forgiveness. In turn, after having experienced personal forgiveness, the person will learn how to grant forgiveness to others. I argue that this notion of forgiveness, central to born-again identity, can throw a different light on understanding the "break with the past", but also it opens an opportunity for converts to reengage with and restore their once severed kin ties.

If witchcraft is a recurrent phenomenon in kinship relationships from which Pentecostals want to break, and forgiveness the element that allows them to restructure their once severed relationships, then we need to situate both phenomena at the same analytical level. For this purpose I draw on Lambek's notion of ethics as intrinsic to action (2010:39). For him, ethics goes beyond moral codes and prescriptions about what is right or good (2010:9). Instead, ethics entails practical judgement, or criteria, regarding certain actions, situations, persons or character (2010:43). In order to exercise judgement one needs criteria, and criteria, in turn, are established in the course of human action and speech (*ibid.*). The exercise of judgement, he suggests, contains a temporal dimension. It can be prospective, immediate and retrospective, which articulated as forms of action these "can be epitomised, respectively, as promising, beginning, and forgiving" (Arendt 1998: 237-46 in Lambek 2010:43). Therefore, from this perspective, forgiveness is a form of ethical act or criteria that retrospectively allows people to redress the past (Lambek 2010:52).

Witchcraft, in turn, also manifests in action, its “tenets are expressed in socially-controlled behaviour rather than in doctrines” (Evans-Pritchard 1937:82-83). But the quality of witchcraft action is paradoxical, ambiguous and uncertain. Witchcraft is practiced in secret (Geschiere 1997:22-23). However, those who respond to it do so in action (Evans-Pritchard 1937:82). Moreover, in Africa, witchcraft has an ambiguous quality that does not fit within categories of Western notions of “good” or “evil” (cf. Geschiere 1997:219; Verger 1965). Therefore, it cannot be considered only as “an expression of the negative moral dispositions of individuals, which is in turn considered motivation for unjustified behaviour towards others” (Zigon 2008:49). From this perspective, we can also consider witchcraft as a form of ethical act, in Lambek’s (2010) sense, and draw attention to the kind of criteria or judgement that underpin witchcraft, which in turn shape the kinds of relationships of those involved in it.

By situating witchcraft and forgiveness as acts that can establish certain ethical judgement or criteria, we can also see that they operate under different logics. Whereas forgiveness allows Pentecostals to perform a “break with the past” by retrospectively redressing it (cf. Lambek 2010:52) and by opening the possibility to start anew (Arendt 1998:241), witchcraft inserts people in a cyclical relationship of action and reaction, in vengeance (cf. Geschiere 1997:57; Evans-Pritchard 1937:26). From this point of view we realise that by becoming Born Again, Pentecostals acquire an alternative ethical criteria from which they can articulate differently their relationships with their kin. Although Lambek intends to apply the notion of forgiveness to a variety of ethnographic contexts, which are not necessarily linked to Christianity (cf. Lambek 2010:56-57), in this context we will see that it is specifically a Christian form of ethical action.

In the first part of this chapter, I present the general ways in which witchcraft constitutes part of people’s relationships to their kin. I first introduce the general features of the kinship dynamics, as they exist in the present day in Benin, and the role of witchcraft in these relations. I then present two different case stories of converts’ ruptures - which demonstrate that such breaks with kinsmen certainly do exist - and the way in which witchcraft is often an intrinsic part of them. I then proceed to show how, in an effort to lead a Christian life, Pentecostals reject non-Christian behaviour and often end up challenging certain forms of elders’ authority, which they often enforce through “occult” forces over members of the same lineage. However, people’s

relationship to Jesus allows them to feel protected against any potential harm. In a second part of the chapter I describe the way in which the practice of forgiveness is taught to converts and presented as a “freeing” force, and an alternative principle of relating towards the extended kin. Forgiveness allows them to re-establish their once severed kinship ties, and instead of blaming others for the source of evil in their lives, forgiveness allows them to take responsibility for and to gain control over the outcomes of their actions. In the last section I contrast forgiveness with witchcraft in order to demonstrate the way they operate under different ethical criteria that, in turn, articulate their relationships under different logics.

### **General Aspects of Kinship in South-Eastern Benin**

For most people in south-eastern Benin, loyalty and solidarity towards their kin are extremely important. During my fieldwork, I came to realise that people’s descriptions of their obligations and relations towards their kin echoed some of the general principles of kinship - including the importance of seniority, descent and their related roles - that are portrayed in some classic accounts (cf. Herskovits 1938; Schwab 1955; Lloyd 1955; Bascom 1942, 1969). In fact, certain aspects of the patrilineal descent model still play a part, at least, in how people conceive to be their relationships with their kin. However, as I will address further, these principles are not manifested in the static sense that the structural-functional model assumed. As processual approaches to kinship highlight (e.g. Carsten 2000), social and economic changes, individual creativity and negotiations, as well as religious diversity, add to the complexity of kinship dynamics, and the way they have been reconfigured over time. For the purpose of contextualising this chapter, I give a brief account of the main features of Yoruba kinship, both as portrayed in some classic accounts (but still holding some relevance today), and as observed during my fieldwork. I use some structural-functional terms, to help us understand the underlying kinship arrangements presented in this chapter, but I aim to explore the more dynamic aspects of these. I focus on the principles of seniority and segmentation, followed by the role played by religious affiliation and witchcraft.

Classic studies of kingdom societies - such as those of the Yoruba and Fon - defined their kinship as following agnatic segmentary lineage principles (cf. Fortes 1956). According to this system, descent is traced through the male line and the most important unit is a corporate localised patrilineage (Schwab 1955:352). In Yoruba this is called

*idilé*, and in Gun *hènnù*. In general terms, each male born within the patrilineage is a potential founder of a segment or sub-lineage which in turn is divided into further segments by his descendants (Schwab 1955:353-354; Pineau-Jamous 1986). The unity of the patrilineage is asserted by a religious substratum based on the recognition of a common founding ancestor and its successors, who are venerated in a shrine within compound of the lineage head and by the observance of common rituals (cf. Schwab 1955:363-364; Bascom 1969:43). Members of the same agnatic descent group are normally referred to as *ebí*, *ibátan* is used to describe relations of consanguinity and cognatic ties, and affines are referred to as *ána*.

Lineage and sub-lineage members (*omo-ilé*) tend to live in a territorial unit or compound (*ilé*), shared by male members' wives (*aya-ilé*), their sons and outsiders unrelated by blood (*alejo*) (Bascom 1942:37). Marriage is polygynous and virilocal. Upon marriage a woman moves to her husband's compound but maintains her lineage affiliation (Lloyd 1955:240). However, her children will officially belong to her husband's lineage. However, as was described in the introduction, nowadays in Pobe and towns with migrant populations, the life of the compound as described in the classical accounts has changed. For example, some men prefer to build separate houses for their wives, in order to avoid conflict among co-wives.

In addition to kin, there are other forms of association that cut across kinship ties. Yoruba and Fon societies are strongly associative. Some of these forms of association include groups of institutionalised friendship, age groups (*egbe*) of males and females and secret societies (Bascom 1969:47-48; Eades 1980:61). Also, sharing a common place of origin, living in the same compound and belonging to the same church serve to form solidarities that are often deployed as quasi kinship ties. The closeness created in the type of ties formed by these groups is clearly illustrated by the way that, in French, people call each other brother (*frère*) or sister (*soeur*) to describe their relationships of friendship, church fellowship or common origin.

However, these ties do not replace consanguineal ties no matter how close they might be. Even if they use the idioms of kinship to define their religious affiliation, friendships or place of origin, people clearly differentiate consanguineous relationships from others, and acknowledge the obligations and responsibilities that the former entail. In Yoruba, people make these differences by using the prefix *ará*, which conveys a sense of

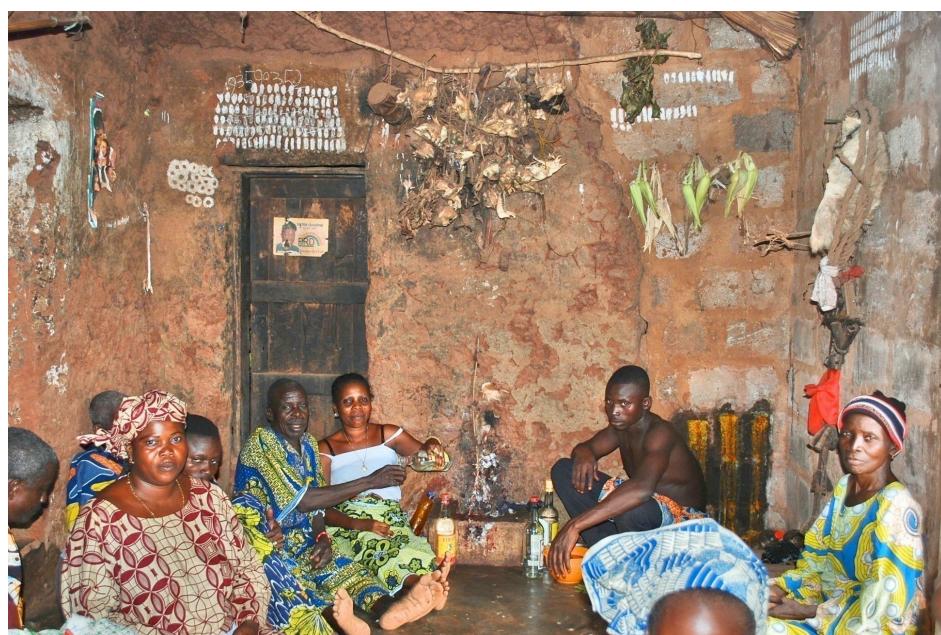
belonging or relatedness that derives from the processes in which people “make kin”. Those who become kin by living in the same compound are normally called *ará-ilé* (*ilé*, house); people from the same town are called *ará-ilu* (*ilu*, town); and people from the same church, in particular Christian churches such as Pentecostal, are called *ará-okurin* (*okurin*, man) and *ará-birin* (*obirin*, woman). This is crucial to clarify because, in the case of Pentecostal churches in Benin, people are aware of the differences between kin and the specific place that each type of relationship occupies and the obligations they entail.

Belonging to a patrilineage establishes reciprocal privileges and obligations among its members (Bascom 1969:42; Herskovits 1938:159). In the past, these included elements such as the right to reside within the lineage compound, to work on the patrilineage farmland, access to certain positions of authority, and the exchange of goods and services. Other benefits included contributions towards ceremonies including ancestral rituals, marriage and funerals. Failing to fulfil obligations required by the lineage, and depending on the gravity of the offence, would mean gaining disfavour from the ancestors and the withdrawal of recognition from other members of the lineage (Schwab 1955:358), often enforced and punished through spiritual means. A person will also maintain some reciprocal obligations towards her cognatic ties, however, these are less normative than those of the patrilineage. Similarly, a husband often has the social and economic obligation to support his wife in organising a funeral, in case of the death of one of her parents or lineage elders.

Nowadays, in general, people rely less and less on the lineage for access to traditional posts of authority or certain economic benefits such as access to land. This is especially the case for migrant or mobile populations, who rely more on types of economic activities other than cultivation. I observed that this was particularly the case among Pentecostals, who in the majority are migrants. Their main economic activities involve trade and other occupations, such as mechanics, teaching or tailoring. Those who were involved in agricultural activities did so only temporarily and in a small scale for self-consumption. Most of them lived in rented houses or in compounds where they had bought the land. Therefore, most of them were not directly related to or tied to observing the ancestral rituals of their family compounds. However, they did maintain some kind of duties towards their kin in one way or another, particularly in areas such as funerals and marriage payments. Similarly, as will be seen below, they were

influenced by the principles of seniority, segmentation and affected by choices of religious affiliation.

This is a society where principles of seniority articulate the roles of lineage members. Seniority establishes the criteria for stratification within the lineage and defines the exercise of authority and inheritance (Bascom 1942:37; Schwab 1958:303). There is a strong sense of respect towards elders, which is especially visible in the way people greet their seniors and the way younger members carry out manual tasks and menial works for their elders. Each lineage has a senior man called *bale* (father of the house) who represents all its members and operates as the main judge (Bascom 1969:44; Schwab 1955:364-5). Each generation group has a senior who stands as representative of his peers. Upon marriage, wives are also stratified by seniority within the compound. Due to the increasing mobility of the population and the presence of other forms of authority and justice, it is not always the head of the patrilineage who has the most influence on individuals. I noticed that it is mostly the authority of the father or grandfather - the head of the segment - that influences people's decisions and intimate lives most directly.



**Fig. 4.1 *Bale* (centre-left) and members of his patrilineage gathered in front of their ancestral shrine during a ceremony**

Nowadays, religious affiliation is tightly related to kinship and is where paternal authority is most noticeable. In the past, there was a close relationship between *orisha* worship group membership and descent (Bascom 1944:168). A person normally

attended and contributed to the cost of the rituals of the *oriṣa* that his parents followed (Eades 1980:120). As shown in the previous chapter, lineage loyalty is still very much expressed through participation in ancestral ceremonies, whereas family loyalty and paternal authority is expressed in terms of religious affiliation. In this plural religious environment, families seem to be open to religious diversity but in reality the father constitutes a major influence in religious choice. Even though some parents present themselves as being flexible towards the religious choices of their children, there is a common tendency that the father will expect that at least the first male will continue in the same religious affiliation as himself. This does not mean that daughters do not face opposition from their families or parents when they convert to another religion. However, when a woman marries, she is expected to follow the religion of her husband. She also joins her husband's patrilineage and becomes accountable to her husband's extended family, rather than her own. When people told me about their conversion to Pentecostalism, they often described the way in which their kin reproached them for leaving the religion of their parents. Pentecostals normally face the strongest conflicts when the father opposes and, in many cases, impedes the successful conversion. In fact, most Pentecostals found that their conversion trajectory was less difficult once their father died; in cases when he agreed to their conversion because he converted as well; or when they were already economically independent and - in the case of men - were heads of the family, often having achieved a solid assimilation of their new faith while living away from the paternal house.

Whereas the *idilé* or lineage is conceived as a constant framework, it may expand and change through a process known as segmentation (Schwab 1955:360). Segmentation thus happens due to two main factors. The first is dependent on generational differences among male members. As said before, in this society every man is a potential founder of another lineage or segment, which in time will be divided into further segments by his descendants (Schwab 1955:353). The second factor of segmentation is based upon reference to a common mother, what Fortes called "complementary filiation" (1953:33). In this case, the sons of the same father but different mothers separate in order to consolidate separate sub-lineages or segments (Schwab 1955:360).

There is an intrinsic element of competition in processes of segmentation. In relation to the first factor, it is usually the eldest son who inherits and takes over his father's property and business. Therefore, his younger siblings are forced to move out and

eventually consolidate themselves as independent men. It also involves problems of succession, in particular after a *bale*'s death. Although in principle the *bale* should be the eldest male, age is not always a guarantee that one will occupy this position. Upon the death of a *bale*, the successor is often elected by his fellow kin among those men who have managed to build a reputation of being honourable and showing qualities such as justice, solidarity, honesty and good judgement.

Therefore, many men engage in climbing up the ladder of gaining respect and recognition by consolidating a large circle of descendants, and asserting themselves as independent and honourable men throughout their lives. In line with Guyer's (1993) concept of "wealth in people", a man's ability to gather support, especially through his kin, his several wives and multiple descendants, was the basis for building up the necessary resources to support his bid for power (Bascom 1969:65; Barber 1991:193-5).

In relation to the second factor, competition mainly derives from rivalries among co-wives wanting to favour the position of their children vis-à-vis their father. Trouble sometimes arises when a man appears to favour the children of one woman over another, therefore each woman needs to look after the interests of her own children concerning the provision of money, education or land (cf. Eades 1980:48). Therefore, rivalries between men aiming to promote themselves, or jealousies between co-wives are often channelled through "occult means" or witchcraft. As in earlier accounts, "witchcraft accusations were an idiom in which the painful process of fission could be set going" (Douglas 1970:xviii). But in contemporary contexts, witchcraft also has other dimensions.

#### *Witchcraft: Kinship's "Dark Side"*

In a similar way to kinship, witchcraft has been a constantly present but changing and adapting force throughout time. Contemporary witchcraft and occult practices are a reality in the everyday life of people in Benin. In recent contexts, the term witchcraft has been taken to encompass a wide range of phenomena that include general occult practices, the use of magic and enchantment (Moore and Sanders 2001:3). Due to its ambiguity, this is a phenomenon that is at times difficult to pinpoint. It has both negative and positive connotations, dependent on the context and circumstances in which it is used (Moore and Sanders 2001:4-5; Falen 2007; Geschiere 1997:49).

Without trying to be reductionist and acknowledging the complexity of this phenomenon, in this chapter I focus only on the type of witchcraft with negative connotations, the one that happens “inside the house”. Because witchcraft first starts in the intimacy of the home, it constitutes a very dangerous and unavoidable threat. It is what Geschiere calls “the dark side of kinship” (1997:11).

Witchcraft in Benin holds many similarities with other African contexts. People say that witchcraft (*ajé* in Yoruba, *azeto* in Fon) is transmitted through a substance of the same name. This substance is often given to a person in food. Sometimes it is transmitted from mother to daughter or grandchildren, but it can also be given to non-relatives. People can voluntarily consume it when they want to increase their power (*aṣe*), but a person can also consume it without knowing it (cf. Kahn 2011:10-11). It is common to hear stories of old women giving children a piece of meat or fried cakes (*beignet*) with the substance, in order to turn them into witches. Once consumed, it rests in the person’s stomach and transforms her into a witch. Witches organise by initiation groups that include members of different lineages. Once initiated, witches become able to leave their bodies at night. They travel in spirit to gather with other witches in their nocturnal meetings that take place in certain trees. Witches are believed to take the form of animals, often owls or serpents in order to travel long distances or to do their “work” (Kahn 2011:10-11). New members are asked to enter the circle by giving the life of someone close to them, usually their own children. Subsequently, each member alternates the responsibility to provide a victim from among the members of their own household or lineage that will be eaten by all the members of the coven. If they do not provide a victim, they risk becoming the next victim (cf. Kahn 2011:11).

In contemporary contexts, such as the Maka in Cameroon, Geschiere suggests that witchcraft has a both a levelling and accumulative side (Geschiere 1997:10). On its accumulative side, people use witchcraft in order to increase their economic and political power. In the same way, in Benin, new forms of power and wealth are often associated with the use of witchcraft (Geschiere 1997:10). On its levelling side, witchcraft aims to balance inequalities or undermine the accumulation of money and power: it is a form of condemning illicit accumulation (Geschiere 1997:10). It can also be used to take revenge on others, or to seek self-protection. For example, it is believed that women can use witchcraft to block the advancement of their co-wives’ children or the members of their lineages (Kahn 2011:12).

The ambiguity of witchcraft resides in the fact that there is a fine line that separates the use of these powers acquired through these means for “good” or for “bad”. In many African societies, such as Benin, it is common knowledge that “traditional” healing specialists who combat witchcraft need to have consumed the same substance that gives witches their powers (Khan 2011:11; Geschiere 1997:49-50; Newell 2007:465-466). It can be used to kill or to heal. Similarly, elders are also known for standing very close to the world of the occult (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1937:30; van Dijk 2001:110). They are considered to possess the same powers that they deploy to punish and enforce their authority among members of the lineage. But they can also use them to protect their kin from the attacks of others. For instance, among the Yoruba, older women are considered to be very powerful witches. They are often referred to as *awon iyá* (our mothers) *àgbà* or *iyá àgbà* (old respectable mother) terms that convey reverence and respect (Verger 1965:142). But, they are also feared and need to be appeased every year during the *Gélédé* masquerade (Verger 1965:150-151).

All the elements described above in relation to kinship and witchcraft are important as a means to help understand the different kinds of ruptures and readjustments that Pentecostals faced upon their conversions. In the following section I will look at particular case studies, where the elements described above played an important role.

### **Pentecostals and Their Kin: Two Examples of Rupture**

While gathering and exploring life stories, I came to realise that although ruptures from kin sometimes happened due to conversion, at other times they were not directly related to it. In order to illustrate this point, in this section I provide two examples of rupture. One case is from a woman member of the Foursquare Church in Pobe and one man from the AoG church in Ikpinle.

#### *Case 1. Rupture Independent from Personal Conversion*

Madeleine is a member of the Foursquare Church in Pobe. She is divorced, and at the time of my fieldwork she was thirty-four years of age. She worked as a French teacher in the local Lycée. Her life story constitutes one of the examples of people who have

radically broken ties with her kin, in particular the paternal side. In this case, the rupture with her kin happened prior to her conversion to Pentecostalism.

Madeleine was born in Ivory Coast to Beninese parents. She traces her origins to Dassa, Benin, the town where her father and mother were born. Her father, the eldest of five brothers, had left for Ivory Coast *dans l'aventure* (for an adventure) with his young wife and two of his younger brothers. When people say that someone left “for an adventure”, they mean that he migrated illegally. However, in this context, the term has a positive connotation. In this society, men are required to prove that they can provide economically for themselves and their families in order to become recognised as adults. Migration is often the first opportunity for many young men to assert themselves as mature and independent men. Men who return to Benin after years of working illegally abroad are often highly regarded, regardless of the economic success achieved, since having travelled provided them with life-acquired wisdom. In the case of Madeleine’s father, he had apparently started to achieve success while living abroad.

Madeleine describes herself as having been born Methodist. Her parents were Methodist before she was born, and apparently their families had a long tradition of belonging to the Methodist Church. Both of her parents and siblings used to be active members of this church in Ivory Coast. When I asked about the way in which she broke ties with her kin, she said, “it was because my father was negatively marked by his family.” Problems started when her grandparents died in Benin. Her grandfather and grandmother died more or less one after the other; therefore, their funerals were celebrated in a joint ceremony. Since her father and her two uncles were making good money in Ivory Coast, they organised a splendid ceremony back home in Dassa, worthy of the honour and respect they wanted to grant to their elderly parents. However, she said, “as you know here in Africa, there are harmful evil powers; witches do not like to see this happening.” She further explained that members of her extended family got jealous witnessing her father and uncle’s earning capacity and the way they paid respect to their parents. As seen in a previous chapter, in Benin, organising a large ceremony not only grants honour to the deceased but also to the offspring who organise the funeral. For male descendants, this is a very important way to achieve positions of authority within the family: it enables them to assert themselves as strong and independent heads of their households and potential heads of a lineage.

After this funeral ceremony in Benin, no sooner had her father arrived back in Ivory Coast than they announced to him that his two younger brothers living in Dassa had died. “They were killed in a mystical way,” said Madeleine, meaning that jealous relatives had killed them with witchcraft. In this case, witchcraft had been used as a type of “levelling force” (Geschiere 1997:16) against her father. He had started to earn money and this awoke jealousy on the part of his kin, who tried to block his economic advancement through the means of witchcraft. The news made her father very sad and he thought that if his relatives had killed his younger brothers this way, it was very likely that they would do the same to his own offspring. Therefore, he decided that he would never introduce his children to his family. Given that both parents came from the same village, this would make it equally impossible to introduce their children to the maternal side.

Years later, Madeleine went back to Benin to continue her university education. She first stayed with one of her relatives living in Cotonou, who had also become estranged from kin in Dassa. Still later, she married and went to live in Pobe. It was only much later that she became Born Again. Upon her arrival in Benin she had stopped going to church: she “drifted away”, she said. However, once married, she started facing problems of infertility, followed by her husband’s infidelity and his uncontrolled jealousy. She had started looking for a church because, she said, she had been experiencing “hunger for God”. However, she did not re-join the Methodist Church. At that time, the Methodist Church in Benin was split between the Methodist “Conference” and the Methodist “Synode”, following rivalries of succession to the national leadership. She thought that these rivalries did not express appropriate Christian behaviour. One day, she had a fierce argument with her husband and her neighbour had to intervene. After this incident, her neighbour, who was a Pentecostal woman, invited her husband to the Foursquare Church. Although her husband was initially struck by the message and attracted to the efficacy of Pentecostal prayer, in the end, he did not fully convert. He later decided to marry his concubine and mother of his child. He separated from Madeleine and went to live in a different town. It was Madeleine who joined the Pentecostal church and decided to give her life to Jesus.

When her father died, Madeleine’s mother and younger sister left Ivory Coast. They returned to Benin, and went to live with Madeleine in Pobe. Her father was buried in Ivory Coast and two of her elder brothers remained there. One of her mother’s elder

brothers living in Dassa visited Pobe as soon as he knew her mother had returned to Benin. This was the only maternal relative she had met so far. She thought that unless their relatives came to visit them, as this uncle did, she would probably never meet the rest of her kin. When she visits Dassa, she says that she goes as a tourist, but nobody really knows her. She knows where their paternal compound is because, in one of her visits, someone pointed it out to her, but she was not introduced to those living there. I asked if she felt any desire to meet them. She said that she was not really interested, as she had never had any type of relationship with them. However, it is interesting that she was curious at least to know where her origins were. When I asked whether she cared about the fact that her father was buried abroad, she said that since her father was Methodist, as Christians, they “should not care about those things”. In a similar way, she was not worried about the moment of her mother’s death and the lack of support from her kin to carry out the funeral. Given that her mother was also a member of the Foursquare Church, it was most likely that the necessary support to carry out her funeral would be provided by the members of the church.

Not surprisingly, when I asked who she felt was her family she said, “first of all, my mother, brothers and sisters. Afterwards, people from the church.” She continued, “for example, when I was very ill, people from the church supported me a lot. They came to visit me every day, brought food and prayed for my recovery. I know I can always rely on some of them.” In her case, church members had replaced, to some extent, the support that the extended family could provide. However, she had also gained this support by being a fervent follower and respected member of the church. She was leader of the choir, directed the group of children for the Sunday biblical lessons, behaved in a manner appropriate to Christian character, and supported other members of the church by visiting when needed.

This is a clear example of a social and economic rupture from the extended family. However, it is interesting that Madeleine did not intentionally seek to sever her kinship ties upon her personal conversion to Pentecostalism. Neither did she frame this rupture as a result of it. Her distancing from her kin was initiated by her father, an upwardly mobile young man, who was a victim of rivalries and jealousies from his extended kin. He was not intentionally seeking to sever his social and economic obligations towards them either. However, he decided to radically cut ties with his relatives in order to

protect his offspring from witchcraft. This case reveals that ruptures can also be the outcome of other social and economic dynamics in place.

In this case, Madeleine's father was not Pentecostal, but Methodist and continued to be an active member of this church for the rest of his life. This case supports the argument that this notion of rupture is not exclusive to Pentecostals (Engelke 2010a:180; Meyer 1998:183). Other Christians, from African Independent Churches, such as the Friday Apostolic studied by Engelke (2010a) and, in this case, older mission churches, also want to break with the past. They engage in denouncing the ancestors, members of their extended family, and "African" jealousy and envy, as much as Pentecostals do (Engelke 2010a:181). However, there is a fundamental difference between her father's break in a non-Pentecostal context and the type of break experienced by Pentecostals. Madeleine's father, as a migrant, broke ties with his relatives and probably had the chance to start anew in a different setting, relying on his belonging to a church and new networks of support. Having been buried in a foreign country also constitutes a manifestation of this Christian rupture. This was the type of break characteristic of mission churches, such as those described by Meyer, in which "the boundary between 'heathendom' and Christianity [is crossed] once and for all, ... there is no need for Christians to look back" (Meyer 1998:187). However, this break came with a cost. It meant total alienation for him, his wife and his children from both paternal and maternal kin. This is why, in order to avoid this alienation, many Methodists and Catholics continue to be involved in traditional practices alongside their main religious affiliation. However, as the following case will illustrate, the difference with Pentecostals is the way in which they manage to deal with ruptures and fight against threats imposed by witchcraft, without having to go through a long-term alienation from their kin, or having to lead a "double life".

### *Case 2. Rupture after Conversion*

The second case - of papa Elodie - represents the type of rupture that happened as a result of conversion to Pentecostalism. At the time of my fieldwork, papa Elodie was a forty-seven-year-old man and one of the first members of the AoGod church in Ikpinle. His case is particularly interesting as he converted from Islam to Pentecostalism, something that happens rarely and with difficulty. In fact, he is the only Christian in his paternal lineage. He was born in Porto-Novo to a Yoruba family with a long tradition of

commitment to Islam. He is the eldest son of his father and the only son of his mother. His conversion happened when his father sent him in fosterage to live with the family of one of his uncles on his father's maternal side. This uncle happened to be Christian. His uncle knew that his nephew was a practising Muslim and he respected that. He never asked him to join them in church. However, the uncle and his family always prayed at home, where papa Elodie used to watch what they did and listen to what they said.

His conversion happened after he was healed from an affliction of strong migraines. In the first place, it was his uncle who prayed for him. Having seen the efficacy of his prayers, he started going to church where the pastor and congregation also prayed for him until he was completely healed. However, what attracted him the most to his uncle's church was the behaviour he observed among Christians, which pleased him. I asked what kind of behaviour attracted him in particular and he said,

I could see they liked telling the truth, they prayed for each other in case of need, they were generous and respectful towards others, something that you don't see very often among Muslims. You could see their real devotion to God.

He stayed with his uncle for two years and then he went back to Porto-Novo to continue his studies at his father's house. At the beginning, he did not tell anyone about his conversion because he feared family rejection. His father learned from rumours that he had started going to a Christian church. Although he denied it first, he was bound to admit it later when the rumours increased. At first, his family tried to convince him not to leave Islam but he refused. Forced by his relatives' pressure, his father told him to leave the house and never come back. All the members of his lineage were told not to greet him and they excluded him from all kin-related affairs. He sought refuge with one of his non-Muslim cousins on his maternal side.

His relatives tried to enforce their lineage authority through the means of witchcraft. For Muslims, a son who leaves the path of Islam to convert to a different faith becomes a source of shame. This is to the extent that many people told me that, in many cases, parents prefer that their children die rather than face public shame. Papa Elodie describes this period, which lasted three years, as a period of "constant battle against nocturnal and diabolic forces". His relatives tried to kill him as a punishment for not obeying the lineage elders and the ancestors. One of his uncles, who was a member of

the *Egungun* worship group, threatened him many times during their public appearances in town. His own mother tried to bring him back to Islam through various means, including traditional remedies, concoctions added to his food, and performing traditional rituals, which he described as Satanic. He had constant nightmares and faced illnesses that he affirms were sent by his relatives. However, he constantly prayed and fasted in order to fight against these attacks. After a period of failed attempts to harm and kill him, his relatives realised that, no matter how much they tried, he was unassailable in his new faith. His relatives remarked on his respectful behaviour. When his relatives were rude to him, he would not react and he continued to greet them even if they did not reply. They saw that he never stole or created problems with other people in town, whereas other devout Muslims in his family had a record of doing so.

Noticing that he had nothing to be blamed for, his family, including his father, gradually started replying to his greetings. He says, “this change happened because I used to pray for them all the time, and it was God who touched their hearts.” After some time, his father asked him to come back home. However, he had already made plans to leave Benin “for an adventure”. He spent some time in Libya and then in La Palma, Spain. After four years abroad, he came back because her mother was very ill and he feared her sudden death. He married his then fiancée and settled in Ikpinle, where his fiancée was working as a primary school teacher. With time, he became an important merchant. Over time, he also gained the respect of his relatives. He achieved this by showing solidarity and support towards them, both economically and emotionally. By the time I was in Ikpinle, he was fostering one of his Muslim nephews. Moreover, one day when I arrived in his home, he was coming back from Sakete, a nearby town, where he had just gone to visit the Muslim family of the boyfriend of one of his nieces, who was also a Muslim. It turned out that the young man had recently made the girl pregnant. His uncle, who became head of his paternal lineage after his father’s death, had asked him to go as representative of the lineage to pay respect to the boyfriend’s family, and ask for compensation for his niece’s pregnancy. When I commented that he must feel proud for now being considered in this way after the rejection he experienced, he said,

Now I have become someone important. You see? My uncle, the same one who threw me away and threatened me, is the one who now calls me to ask for my support. If there is a problem concerning the extended family (*la grande famille*), he calls me and asks for my advice. Thank God I haven’t become a

crazy man or a failure. Had I become no one, people would have said “it is because you left Islam and you did not obey your parents and ancestors.”

Being able to become a successful and affluent merchant, together with his respectful behaviour, solidarity and commitment, led to his re-gaining the respect and support of his kin. Furthermore, he participates in lineage matters within the limits allowed by the church. For example, at ancestral ceremonies he does not give money, but he participates as mediator in lineage meetings and mobilises his siblings’ support when they need to contribute towards a matter concerning their kin.

In contrast with Madeleine, papa Elodie’s case is an example of those for whom conversion was the original reason for breaking ties with his kin. He did not seek to sever ties with them; instead, they cut ties with him for having abandoned the Muslim faith. He was attacked with witchcraft as a means of punishment and to coerce him back into the Muslim faith. But papa Elodie, unlike Madeleine’s father, did not isolate himself. Through his Christian faith he countered these attacks. He resisted them through constant prayer and fasting. Pentecostals, as opposed to other Christians, “dwell” in the boundaries between “heathendom” and Christianity and engage in a continuous battle against Satan (Meyer 1998:187). These techniques gave him the protection and empowerment to fight against harm (cf. Lindhardt 2010). But, in addition to the efficacy of papa Elodie’s prayers, his demonstrations of good character gave his relatives good reasons to start recognising him again through their greetings. With time, and by extending his forgiveness, as will be later explored, he successfully managed to restore his kinship relationships and became a recognised member of his kin group.

### *Re-evaluating Ruptures*

The examples presented in this section allow us to address a key point in the existing debates on rupture: the gap between discourse and practice. I agree with Engelke (2010a) and Lindhardt (2011) when they suggest that over-emphasising Pentecostal discourses of “making a break with the past” can overshadow the complexities of ruptures happening in relation to family and kinship ties. It goes without saying that conversion often does play a role in post-hoc understandings and rationalisations of such ruptures and, in some cases, mediating them. However, as the examples above have demonstrated, conversion to Pentecostalism itself does not always account for

ruptures concerning the provision of economic responsibilities and support towards convert's extended kin. The case of papa Elodie is an example of an upwardly mobile man, for whom his success as a merchant was not an excuse to cut ties and support towards his relatives. In the end, as this case demonstrates, Pentecostals in Benin, like those described by Lindhardt in Tanzania, continue to be embedded in their social relationships (see Lindhardt 2010:240).

Although the stories of Madeleine and papa Elodie are only two examples of the different ways and conditions in which converts live and deal with these ruptures, in most cases I witnessed, descent roles, patriarchal authority and sanctions through witchcraft seemed to play a crucial role. Therefore, the position that a person occupies within the kinship system is crucial to understanding the way people experience and deal with these ruptures. Papa Elodie's position in his family made it both a great dishonour for his parents to lose him to another faith, and for him, a shame to lose his parental support. This resulted in greater pressure to try to amend his relationship towards his kin. However, Madeleine, being a woman did not have the same pressures to position herself in relation to her extended kin and probably this also played a role in her lack of interest in re-establishing links with her kin whom she had met. Therefore, as Engelke suggests, "rupture gets limned through actually existing social relationships ... it is in what people do and with whom they relate that rupture gains much of its force and meaning" (2010a:196).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that conversions to Pentecostalism are free from conflict. Very often these conversions bring changes to people's behaviour that challenge or pose threats to the authority of elders of a person's lineage. It is to these kinds of ruptures that I now turn.

### **Daring to Challenge the Elders Under Jesus' Protection**

Literature on Pentecostalism in Africa highlights the way Pentecostals often challenge the authority of elders, who in gerontocratic societies are primary representatives of the authority of the lineage (cf. van Dijk 1998, 2002; Meyer 1998, 1999). Benin was not an exception. Pentecostals' rejection of participation in ancestral and post-mortem ceremonies, including giving money for their performance, also posed challenges to lineage elders. However, most of the time the opposition that challenged elders'

authority and the conflicts derived from it, tended to be a by-product of converts' efforts to comply with Christian biblical principles of behaviour. This is because worshiping anything other than God and communicating with the dead is considered idolatrous, which is one major sin. In some other cases, this was as simple as rejecting alcohol consumption, or refusing to be complicit with it by buying alcohol for either ritual or entertaining purposes.

In addition to the above, Pentecostals deliberately flout certain "traditions" or practices by which elders enforce the recognition of ancestral presences or influences a person's life that affirm his person's spiritual affiliation to a lineage. However, doing so is not always easy, as elders commonly enforce the observance of these practices through "occult means". The only way Pentecostals manage to avoid them is by reaching a level of protection gained from having given their lives to Jesus. As seen in the example of papa Elodie, being loyal to Jesus, and a fervent attitude of fasting and prayer, guaranteed his protection against the attacks performed by his relatives, even his own mother.

An example of the way in which Pentecostals put Jesus first is the way in which they prohibit participating in the exchange of greetings in the form of eulogies shared by members of the same lineage (*oriki idilé* in Yoruba). These greetings normally take place when elders greet younger members of the same patrilineage. Whenever elder members of the family, particularly the grandmother and aunts, meet their grandchildren or youngest descendants, the children or descendants are meant to kneel or prostrate themselves in front of the elders. Once they do so, the elder person starts reciting their family eulogy as a means of reminding a person of her origins. When someone kneels in front of an elder, it is an honour for the elder. When I asked Pentecostals about their family *oriki* they often told me that they no longer knew or remembered them. This is because people are taught that they should no longer observe and give importance to these practices.



**Fig. 4.2 Descendants and relatives gathered during the funeral of a Muslim man**



**Fig. 4.3 Relatives arrive to funeral ceremony dancing and singing**

As seen during Mama Sabine's funeral, the pastor mentioned in his sermon that kneeling and prostrating oneself to receive a eulogy from a grandparent was a waste of time. One woman explained to me that she no longer kneels in front of her paternal aunts or elders during family reunions or events, neither did she teach her children to do so. When people do not kneel, some relatives take this as demonstrating a lack of respect and this would be a strong reason to discipline a person through "occult means". She said,

If a person is not really in Jesus, firmly, and she refuses to kneel, the aunt can say, "ah, you don't kneel in front of me" then the child can say, "ah, auntie, it is to God that one needs to kneel, it is our Lord creator". If the person is not firm in Jesus, the aunt can use occult means to persecute the child. They can throw them bad luck or curse them. But if the child is in Jesus, the aunt cannot do anything against him.

As this Pentecostal woman declares, loyalty towards Jesus, therefore, should come first and foremost, before any other kind of loyalty, such as to the lineage or the ancestors. But it is important the way in which she says that if the person "is not really in Jesus", in other words, grounded in her faith, she can become vulnerable to harm caused by their relatives when they refuse to kneel. People often told me that if a person is loyal to Jesus, Jesus in return never abandons the person but gives the guarantee of protection. Moreover, this Pentecostal woman did not mean that she refused to greet - or taught her children not to greet - her relatives. What she refused was to kneel or prostrate herself, since it is to God and not to the elders that a person should give honour. This does not mean that greetings towards elders are no longer important among Pentecostals. In fact, greeting is one of the most important signs of respect in Beninese society, especially when it is done to elderly people. Pentecostals, as much as other non-Pentecostals, value greetings and encourage children to learn how to properly greet an elder person properly.

In this case, what Pentecostals prohibit is to engage in greetings that remind a person of their belonging to an ancestral lineage. By not kneeling this woman aimed to impede the mystical bond which *oriki* recitation is claimed to establish. Barber (1990:315) suggests that reciting an *oriki* to someone establishes an intense and powerful bond between the

addressee and the performer, allowing a profound and intimate access to her inner nature. This is the kind of exchange that Pentecostals avoid. In fact, they recognise the power of these eulogies and the spiritual influence that its recitation can have in their lives. By rejecting these practices, what they avoid is opening a channel to intimate spiritual access or exchange with non-Christian relatives.

Another example of things that Pentecostals no longer comply with is the observance of certain dietary or customary restrictions, commonly associated with totemic practices in relation to the lineage. These are particularly relevant among the Gun. Some prohibit the members of the same lineage to eat food from the totemic animal, for example, a particular kind of fish or goat. They also include other kinds of interdictions such as wearing a particular type of clothing, or shoes inside the house. When a member of the lineage breaks this interdiction, the person can develop a skin rash, which stubbornly resists healing until a sacrifice for the ancestors is offered. Many Pentecostals think, as one member of the AoG church told me, that elders use these interdictions to cause fear and exert their authority towards members of the same lineage. He explained,

Why do I say that everything is based on witchcraft? In my family ... we are not supposed to eat a particular kind of goat. But, for example, if there is a member of the family, who goes to Porto-Novo and then sees that they are selling this type of goat there, and then looks around and realises that nobody knows him, then he eats, this person can come back to the village and nothing will happen to him. However, if the head of the family suspects that this person or someone else has eaten the goat, they will send them the illness, the skin rash, and they will say that it was the “fetish” that has sent them the disease and has punished them.

This man, like many other Pentecostals, attributes the manifestation of the disease to the intervention of their living relatives through witchcraft, rather than to the spirit of the ancestor or the *oriṣa* intervention. Pentecostals think that it is not the ancestor, the *vodun* or *oriṣa* that causes the illness, instead they think that the relatives disguise themselves as ancestors or intentionally “send” certain diseases, in order to cause fear.

Other “customary” practices, such as for example table manners, can be considered more trivial, but elders nevertheless use their observance as a means of exerting their

authority. Towards the beginning of my fieldwork, I was eating with the AoG pastor and his wife. We were sitting around their coffee table, taking a piece of corn dough (*akassa*) with our fingers and dipping it in the same plate of fish stew, as is common practice in Benin. The pastor finished eating first, and cheerfully said that he was leaving the rest to the younger ones, his wife and me. They both explained to me that this was something I should be aware of. In Benin, while eating from the same plate, people should not stop eating before an elder. If a person does, it is considered disrespectful. Since elder people have been eating for a longer time in life, they are meant to stop eating first as a sign of courtesy to the youngest. But if a young person stops eating first, it is considered a serious offence. They explained to me that some parents even punish their children with *gris-gris* (a type of talisman or “medicine” used with both positive and negative purposes). They said, “Do you think this makes sense? Of course not! It is not right, how can a parent do so to his own child?” According to them, this went against the love that should exist between parents and children. Although Pentecostals continue to observe these types of practices as a sign of courtesy, they do not enforce it through the use of *gris-gris*, neither do they take offence or attach too much importance if a junior fails to comply with them.

The feeling of protection gained from their loyalty to Jesus is crucial when they challenge the observance of these practices. It diminishes the fear and possibility of being harmed by relatives or any person who uses witchcraft. This is why Pentecostals insist that once a person becomes Born Again, he or she has to completely stop seeking or relying on other means of “spiritual” protection, such as talismans, consulting *Ifá*, or offering sacrifices in ancestral rituals. For example, sometimes I heard people saying that those who are baptised and have received Jesus possess a glowing light that only witches can see. It is known that witches can see inside a person’s body and detect those who have consumed *aze* (Fon) or *ase* (Yoruba), the substance that is thought to give a witch its powers (cf. Khan 2011:10-11). In a similar way witches can see if a person is a witch, they can see if a person is in Jesus. This way, if a person is “in Jesus”; witches know that it will be more difficult for them to take them as prey.



**Fig. 4.4 *Ifá* consultation**

Being loyal to Jesus means being a good Christian, such as being a regular church-goer and participating in all church activities, including prayers and fasting. It also means refraining from drinking alcohol, smoking, adultery and other actions that are considered sinful. The case of papa Raymond is one more example of unintentionally challenging elders' authority as a result of conversion and adoption of a Christian behaviour. Papa Raymond converted to join the Foursquare Church in Pobe. At that time, he did not have to face his father's opposition because when he converted, his father had already passed away. Instead, the conflict he faced was with his paternal uncle who was the head of the patrilineage. The rift between the two became evident when the uncle, knowing that he had already converted, tried to test him and sent him to buy *sodabi*. Papa Raymond, trying to behave as a good Christian, refused to buy alcohol for him. The uncle insisted, saying that it was with his money that he was asking him to buy it. Therefore, he had no reason to refuse. Papa Raymond replied saying that even if it was not his money and he was not going to drink, he was absolutely prohibited from buying alcoholic drinks. Drinking alcohol is a sin and he would be sinning if he contributed to making others sin. The uncle took his rejection as a lack of respect towards him and his elders, and declared that from then onwards papa Raymond would no longer be recognised, and withdrew all his support. On the day of papa Raymond's wedding, his uncle refused to lead or to attend the bride-wealth ceremony. Fortunately, his fiancée's family were also Born Again Christians and understood the situation.

Instead, another relative who was also Born Again took the uncle's place to represent the head of the family. Later, when his children were born, papa Raymond's uncle did not pay a visit to his wife, an omission which is regarded as dismissal of his own descent. Moreover, papa Raymond no longer received help from his relatives to cultivate his land. However, like many other Pentecostals (and increasingly many people regardless of church affiliation), he has to pay money to people to help him work and he combines his agricultural work with his activities as vulcanizer and occasional driver.

Some Pentecostal attitudes towards elders and members of their extended family narrated here seem to jeopardise their relationships. Many temporarily break their relationships with their kin. However, Pentecostals, through their relationship with Jesus and, as Lindhardt (2010:254) suggests, by their participation and empowerment through ritual, deal with the threats of harm inflicted upon them and manage to re-engage with their non-convert kin. But being protected against harm is only one aspect of how they deal with ruptures. There is one more element, which plays a crucial role in the way Pentecostals manage to reposition themselves in relation towards their kin: this element is forgiveness.

### **The Cycle of Forgiveness: Breaking Bonds, Restoring Ruptures and Re-engaging with Kin**

Forgiveness constitutes a crucial element that allows Pentecostals to reformulate their relations towards their kin. This central element of Christian theology can shed a different light on the way this notion of breaking with the past is understood and lived among Pentecostals. Through this element, people manage to understand their relationships differently and to re-engage with their kin by restoring their broken ties. But most importantly, it allows them to take control of their lives in a different way. Forgiveness opens the way for them to become the agents rather than victims (cf. Lambek 2011:65) of some unfortunate events that happen in their lives.

One sermon given during a regular Sunday service at the AoG in Ikpinle illustrates this point. During the message, the pastor encouraged people to stop being tied to their "past way of thinking" which, according to him, hinders people's advancement in life. As mentioned in previous chapters, this pastor placed a strong emphasis on the notion of

“renewing the mind” that Christians must have when they convert and become children of God. In this sermon, he insisted that the Born Again had to change ways of thinking that included regrets and guilt for having committed sinful actions, as well as resentment or grudges towards other people. According to him, when people were tied to the same way of thinking, they kept coming back in circles.

In order to illustrate his point, he asked two men from the assembly to come to the front. He picked a young man wearing a Western outfit and an older man wearing traditional clothes. He said that the young man represented the new way of thinking, whereas the older man represented the old thinking. The pastor took a scarf and tied his arm to the man who represented the old way of thinking. He instructed him to stay still where he was standing, while the pastor tried to walk pulling him with his arm. He showed the way in which he struggled to walk easily. Every time he wanted to move forward, the weight of the older man pulled him back. However, if he decided to change that, he had to completely cut the tie with that “thought”. As he untied the scarf tied to the old man, he said, “what happened in the past has already gone, it does not exist anymore.” He approached the young man and tied his arm to his. Once tied, he instructed the young man to walk forward. As the young man started walking, it became evident to the assembly that this way it was easier for the pastor to walk. He explained to the assembly that if one manages to untie oneself from past thoughts and, instead, tie oneself to new thoughts, then one will be able to walk better towards the future and achieve great things. These new thoughts were the promise of God’s blessings for those who are Born Again. If a person has committed sin in the past and was regretful, then through repentance and confession to Jesus she gains the assurance that God has forgiven her. This way, a person is freed from her past sense of guilt and regret. He emphasised that only God can help people to do that. Then he explained that one can also relinquish past grudges by forgiving others, and deciding to move on into a life of love. He said,

All the things that people have committed against you in the past are already gone; forgiveness is a way of breaking these ties to the past. You can only move on by learning to love the person you forgave. You then can move to a new life, a life of love.

When I listened to this sermon, I thought this was an interesting alternative way of looking at the notion of a “break with the past”. In this case, forgiveness allows one to

perform the “break” by leaving behind what happened, both one’s own actions and the actions of others. But also, people can forgive others because they know that God first forgave them when they became Born Again. They repented and gave their lives to Jesus who died for their sins. Here, having been forgiven by God, after sacrificing the self to Jesus, a person is entitled to receive the promise of God’s blessings. This promise allows her to look up to the future and move on to a new life of love, free from grudges, fear and resentment. In this sense, forgiveness, the capacity to undo and reach redemption from irreversible acts (Arendt 1998:237) “retrospectively redresses the past”, while the promise of God’s blessings “prospectively charts the future” (Lambek 2011:52).

Moreover, forgiveness can also bring deliverance. It was presented as an effective remedy in another sermon by the AoG pastor, broadcast by local radio, explicitly dedicated to the topic of forgiveness. After reading the passage Mark 11:25-26, the pastor explained, “in this passage, [Jesus] is giving us a medicine that one cannot find anywhere else in the world.” He said, “forgiveness is a force (*agbára*) that liberates men.” At the moment of the programme, the Yoruba translator used the word *agbára*, which is a positive term used to describe spiritual power. God, for example, is often described as *Agbára Olòrùn*. But this is also a term used to describe the power or efficacy of prayer used in the context of deliverance and healing. He continued,

There are a lot of ill people in the world because of what they have kept in their hearts, because of their brothers’ offences. Can you understand this tonight? You are most probably ill because you have kept grudges in your heart against your brother. You have kept that offence and it has started to gnaw your heart … you don’t want to forgive, to leave aside, your head is full of that, and you are ruminating on what your brother has done. Now you have nightmares, you cannot sleep at night, your heart no longer works, your nerves no longer work … There are a lot of illnesses and troubles at people’s homes, curses at work, a lot of bad things happen in society. All that because of the things that you have refused to let go.

In this passage, interestingly, the pastor traces the origin of the source of illness, curses and troubles to people’s lack of forgiveness. When a person keeps grudges in her heart, the person falls ill. The person, therefore, has the capacity to change that. Furthermore,

he also changed the chain of causality. The source of certain ills or problems was no longer witchcraft. He said,

Many people unnecessarily blame the witches. They say, “Oh, I don’t sleep at night, the witches came towards me”; “Oh, I had nightmares, it is the witches”; “I am sick, it is the witches”; “I have headaches, it is witches”; “It is the grandmother over there, it is the grand-aunt who lives there”; “It is that woman who is a witch”; “It is all those people who want to kill me”; “I’ve lost my appetite, it is the witches.” You say, “work is not going well, it is because of the witches”; “There is no longer peace at home, it is because of the witches”, and everything is because of the witches! I want you to listen tonight: not everything is witches, no! Not everything! I tell you, when you refuse to forgive your brother, when you refuse to forgive, you allow a flow of maledictions enter into your life! Do you understand? When you refuse to forgive, you put obstacles between you and God, and when you do that, you are also telling God not to forgive you. When you refuse to forgive, you close Heaven’s doors against yourself.

Instead of attributing harm to relatives, the pastor opens the possibility of attributing it to oneself: to a lack of forgiveness on one’s own part. The source of illness, instead of arising from witchcraft caused by the grandmother or grand-aunt, may come from one’s own resentment. In this case, forgiveness places people in a different position vis-à-vis witchcraft. They are no longer helpless victims of it. Instead, they also have the capacity to turn into agents, responsible for their own healing, by taking responsibility for their own actions and forgiving others, no matter what they have done in the past. According to Lambek, “taking responsibility for historical events, acknowledging our role in them, is not only the way to make peace but also turns people from the victims of history into its agents and finds in suffering not resentment … but forgiveness and reconciliation” (Lambek 2011:58).

However, forgiveness in this case does not depend on the utterance or performance of an apology from the part of the offender, as suggested by Lambek (*ibid.*). Forgiveness needs to be offered regardless of the acknowledgement of the transgression made on the part of the offender. In this case, the “conditions of human plurality” (Arendt 1998:237) required for forgiveness to happen are made possible through a person’s constant

relationship with Jesus: because Jesus forgave those who are Born Again, they in turn are meant to do the same. Similarly, the logic of Christian, in this case Pentecostal, forgiveness is based on the existence of certain level of “sincerity” (cf. Keane 2002). As Arendt very clearly illustrates, “Man in the gospel is not supposed to forgive because God forgives and he must do ‘likewise’, but ‘if ye from your hearts forgive’, God shall do ‘likewise’” (Arendt 1998:239). This is the type of forgiveness that Jesus on the cross granted to his offenders, which at the same time, Christians are also encouraged to practice. The reason for the insistence on a duty to forgive the offenders is voiced as the product of the offender’s ignorance “for they know not what they do” (*ibid.*).

For example, in the case of papa Elodie presented before, this type of forgiveness was important. Papa Elodie, instead of holding grudges against his relatives who attacked him with witchcraft, continued to pray for them and greet them even if they did not greet him back. He kept doing good despite the harm he was receiving. Later in his life, he continued supporting them, despite the fact that they had rejected him. He first extended his forgiveness towards those who “did not know” that by their actions they were condemning themselves. As will be seen in the next chapter, this dimension also plays a role in the notion of Christian submission.

But there is also a very practical side to the practice of forgiveness. If a person forgives, then God will also forgive the person and will answer a person’s prayers. This was clear again in the broadcast sermon mentioned before. The pastor said,

You say you are Christian; you go to church; you cry to God every day and expect to receive things from Him. You want to have your prayers answered; you want to progress at work; you want to God bless your children; you want your trade to succeed; you want to go to Heaven one day. But I want to tell you this truth: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of the living God ... tells you today ... if while you are praying, you remember that your brother has something against you, and you also have something against him, he said, forgive! Forgive! So your father in Heaven will forgive you too! But if you don’t forgive, your Father in Heaven won’t forgive you either. Do you understand well what this means? ... Reflect a little bit today. If you are refusing to forgive, what can you receive from God? ... What answers will you have for your prayers? In your death, where will you go? Do you see the consequences behind your heart filled with

grudges? ... Because you, who are human in this earth, you also commit offences against God. Who does not commit sin? ... God said that he will forgive those who repent ... He is the God of forgiveness and He wants to forgive you tonight. When God forgives, a great miracle will happen in your life, you will receive peace in your heart; you receive the healing; your prayers will be answered. When He forgives you Heaven's doors will open for you, and after your death, the angels of God will welcome you. Do you see the great riches that are found in forgiveness?

This is the way deliverance happens. A person will be healed and his prayers will be answered when she decides to forgive. But when a person forgives it is also because she acknowledges her condition as sinner vis-à-vis God. God has forgiven the person, therefore, she understands that any human needs forgiveness. The person has the responsibility to acknowledge her condition as sinner and repent. This is something that needs to be continuously done. This is why the pastor emphasises that those who call themselves Christian need to constantly repent and ask forgiveness from God, and forgive others. Only then will she receive God's blessings.

But most importantly, forgiveness is the crucial element that allows converts to restore their broken relationships with their estranged relatives, and to re-engage with them in a positive way. A clear example of this was the case of the pastor of AoG in Ikpinle. He had been the first one who had converted among his family members. Sometime later, he convinced his parents, his sisters and one of his brothers to convert. He always expressed his pleasure he was that his parents had "accepted Jesus" before their death. However, his stepmother had continued for a long time to practice traditional religion. The first time I asked about the religious affiliation of his family members, he clearly told me that his step-mother had resisted conversion and was still *feticheuse*. By this he meant that she still practised traditional religion and what Pentecostals normally associate with it: witchcraft and ancestral rituals. However, he affirmed with assurance that soon she would join the church with them. On many occasions his siblings had problems of witchcraft coming from "inside the house" and he implied that his stepmother had something to do with it. Despite this, and even though he is not the eldest male in the family, when his father died, he had taken responsibility for giving his stepmother money for her expenses and her business. Providing funds for business is normally a husband's responsibility towards his wife, or, in absence of this, the eldest

male son. Every time he visited his paternal house in Cotonou, he always reserved some time to pray for her and greeted her respectfully even if she did not do the same. It had taken a long time before she started to have a kinder attitude towards him and his wife.

One day, I arrived at the pastor's home in Ikpinle and found that the stepmother was staying for some days with them. She had been ill and last time the pastor had been to Cotonou, he convinced her to come and stay some days in Ikpinle. This way, she would have time to rest and recover without having to work and worry about food. She spent a whole week with them in which she just rested. I noticed how, during this time, the pastor's wife lent her some of her best clothes. She was also encouraged to join activities in the church, even though she was still not used to them and, at times, she would fall asleep during the religious service. By the end of her stay, the pastor asked her in public during the service if she was going to give her life to Jesus. She said that she would. Even if this was more a statement of politeness than of actual intent, at least her relationship with the pastor and his family was now different, erasing some frictions that existed in the past. His forgiveness of her harsh attitude had reaped a reward.

This element of forgiveness is often implied but normally understated in some cases presented by the literature on Christianity. For example, Lindhardt implies the role that forgiveness played in his informants' re-engagement with their relatives. Hilma had forgiven her father for not having supported her studies and, later, she looked after him while he was ill (Lindhardt 2010:261). He also provides the example of Mama Jimy who, after having suffered from witchcraft attacks from her paternal aunt, feared and resented her. After her conversion, however, she later ran into her on a bus and was able to restore her relationship with her because she no longer saw her as a threat (Lindhardt 2010:264). Similarly, I was interested in the way in which Engelke's friend, Sirus, initiated a radical break with his mother with whom he had a troubled relationship. He displayed anger and sadness towards her for having used witchcraft against his own son. Despite this, he did not forget his duty towards her by providing her with economic support in her old age. However, this support was offered through his nephew. He delivered his economic gift for support outside of "the channels of a normative social exchange" (Engelke 2010a:194-195).

Until now we have seen that forgiveness allows Pentecostals to re-engage in a different way with their relatives. Converts kept a distance from extended family members as a

way to avoid harm, but not to avoid people themselves or their obligations towards them. In this sense I agree with Engelke when he affirms that Christians “often make a distinction between ancestors/kin and the un-Christian things they do or represent” (Engelke 2010:189). I now turn to demonstrate how forgiveness and witchcraft are fundamentally different forms of ethical acts.

### **Forgiveness vs. Witchcraft: a Different Way of Relating**

The way forgiveness is enacted among Pentecostals in Benin is something important and remarkably different from the behaviour of those who continue to perform ancestral rituals and/or participate in traditional forms of divination for protection and healing. In regular conversations, people often said that Beninese in general, even one’s parents, hardly ever forgive. People live and die with grudges and unspoken enmity towards their own kin. The secrecy of witchcraft conceals actors “in a veil of rumours and mystery” (Geschiere 1997:22). This contributes towards living a life of constant mistrust and fear, even towards those who are closest to a person. One of the most common pieces of advice I heard from people was, “one must be wary” (*il faut se méfier*), as anyone could be a potential enemy causing you harm.

The “traditional” way of dealing with witchcraft is counter-witchcraft, either for protection or for revenge (Geschiere 1997:49; see also Evans-Pritchard 1937:26). In the logic of witchcraft, someone necessarily has to die (cf. Kahn 2011:11). If the person attacked is healed, someone else within the family will be the next victim, unless the remedy involves reversing the harm of witchcraft against the person using it and then she becomes victim of his or her own actions. Similarly, when a person recurs to *Ifá* divination to unveil the source of evil, the person becomes spiritually vulnerable to the same forces that have been used to affect her life through negative means. Even if the person recurs to *Ifá* only in search for protection, a person will continue to be attached to a system that gives support to witchcraft’s logic and that recognises a person’s ties with her ancestors and the people who can potentially cause her harm.

For example, papa Honoré converted while he was a young teacher and was living and working in the north of Benin. At the time, he had a younger brother studying at the University in Abomey-Calavi. One day, his brother suddenly got ill. He could no longer see well or focus on his studies and, at night, he had nightmares. He was advised to

consult a traditional healer (*Bokono*). During the consultation, this person told him that it was a matter of witchcraft and gave him a list of sacrifices that required to be performed in order to solve his problem. When papa Honoré learnt what was happening, he remembered that one of his elder cousins had started going to a church in Cotonou - an AoG church - where they prayed for people who were victims of witchcraft. He had been at this church with his cousin before and decided to take his younger brother there. He told his younger brother, "listen, all that money you are paying to the *charlatan*, stop it. We will go to Cotonou and we will see the pastor in the church there. You will tell him all the things that you are experiencing now, and he will pray for you." So that is what he did. He took his brother to the church and the pastor prayed for him. The pastor insisted that he had to stop completely his visits to any other healer and to trust only in Jesus. He told him to throw away all the things and protective amulets that the healer had given him. Then the pastor wrote a letter to the AoG pastor in Abomey-Calavi and advised the young man to continue going to this church. His younger brother did what the pastor indicated. He threw away and burnt all the *gris-gris* he had and went to the church in Abomey-Calavi where people prayed for him until he gradually found complete deliverance. He resumed his studies and continued without problems. However, this was not the end of it.

After this, papa Honoré went back to his work in the north. However, he started having nightmares, he could not sleep and had pain in several parts of his body. He did not understand what was going on, until one day he had a crisis. One evening, while he was having dinner, he felt a sudden shock and fell unconscious to the ground. People who were there with him tried to help, some even brought their own amulets to protect him. Gradually, he regained consciousness. The next day he went to see the doctor, but the doctor did not find anything wrong with him. This is when he suspected that it was a matter of witchcraft revenge. He said, "you see the scandal? Satan and the witches witnessed that it had been me who led my brother towards deliverance, and now they wanted to take me. At that time, I didn't go to church, so I was not protected." Therefore, he did what his brother did. He went to Cotonou and saw the pastor that had prayed for his brother. After this event, he gave his life to Jesus and continued going to church for prayer until he was completely delivered. This is an example of how Pentecostal deliverance prayer allows people to break the cyclical dynamic in which witchcraft captures people, and from which is often hard to escape.

From this perspective, forgiveness, as a form of deliverance, has a fundamentally different logic from the ambiguous logic in which witchcraft operates. As seen above, witchcraft leads people to engage in a constant cycle of vengeance, whereas deliverance and forgiveness makes it possible to break this cycle in order to start anew. In witchcraft, as in vengeance, “everybody remains bound to the process, permitting the chain of reaction contained in every action to take its unhindered course” (Arendt 1998:240). Forgiveness, in contrast, “does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore by freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven” (Arendt 1998:241). The requirement, however, is that a person turns away completely from any means of protection other than Jesus.

However, even among Pentecostals, this logic of relating is sometimes difficult to change. Therefore, Pentecostal pastors place a strong emphasis on changing people’s way of thinking in relation to witchcraft through biblical teaching. For example, as mentioned in the introduction, a Nigerian pastor had opened his biblical school to teach other independent pastors in Pobe. After one of the lessons, one of the pastors asked if it was possible during deliverance prayer to ask to reverse the evil of witchcraft to the person causing harm. The pastor leading the teaching replied firmly saying “no”. He emphasised that Christians are meant to forgive as Jesus had forgiven all sinners. A pastor can never pray to cause another person harm, God will not answer those prayers. It is only God’s work to deliver and to judge people for their actions. This incident was interesting as it demonstrates that this Pentecostal pastor was still guiding his actions with the ethical judgement of witchcraft. Even if he wanted to protect someone, his actions required him to reverse the evil and eventually harm someone else. However, by doing so, he was reproducing a form of behaviour based on an ethical judgement that was incompatible with the Christian one.

Having considered the above, this is why Pentecostals’ capacity to deal with the “occult” cannot justify the assertion that Pentecostalism is “unintentionally caught up in the same ambivalence over power” as “traditional” witchcraft (Newell 2007:462,484). Pentecostal deliverance requires a different kind of ethical judgement or criteria. Similarly, I differ from Lambek who applies the notion of forgiveness to a variety of settings that even involve relationships with spiritual ancestral entities (Lambek 2010:56-58,61). As this section has tried to demonstrate, redressing the past through

forgiveness, in this case, pertains to the realm of Christian ethical behaviour. This does not mean that witchcraft no longer exists or has an effect in Pentecostals' lives. The threat of witchcraft continues to be present, even sometimes from witches that infiltrate as members of the same church. But in this case, forgiveness, can be seen as an additional form of deliverance (cf. Meyer 1998:187) that can be deployed at any time.

## Conclusions

This chapter has engaged with the issue of ruptures in social relations in people's extended kin groups. The ethnographic material presented here has demonstrated that ruptures in social relationships need to be understood in connection with the intrinsic dynamics of a patrilineal society, where male prestige, competition and witchcraft - as a means to deal with jealousies and rivalries - play an important role. The examples presented here demonstrate that long-term ruptures are often the result of witchcraft and people's desire to break away from those relatives wanting to cause them harm. Through their Pentecostal affiliation, converts find a means to move away from the logic of witchcraft. Deliverance and Jesus' protection allow converts to distance themselves from behaviours considered un-Christian and harmful and they also challenge certain forms in which elders enforce their authority.

However, this does not mean that Pentecostals break from their obligations or relationships with their kin. Building on Lindhardt's (2010:265) observations regarding Pentecostals' responsibility to look after their kin, I have explored how Pentecostalism introduces a new ethical criteria (Lambek 2010) from which they can relate anew to their relatives. One of these criteria is forgiveness. When a person gives her life to Jesus, she is personally forgiven and therefore, acquires the obligation to do likewise to others. Forgiveness, therefore, brings a new light to the issue of "breaking with the past". As seen from the pastor's sermon, it allows people to break with the kinds of thoughts that keep a person tied to her past by holding grudges and resentment, often associated with witchcraft. In practising forgiveness, Pentecostals are encouraged to develop "new thoughts" that will allow them to achieve "great things" and move on to a more promising future. This new way of thinking has specific social implications.

First, instead of blaming others for the presence of evil in their lives, forgiveness allows them to take responsibility for and to gain control over the outcomes of their actions.

Converts are no longer passive victims of witchcraft. Second, forgiveness allows converts to restore their once severed kinship relations. Being protected by Jesus they no longer fear the possible effects of other people's actions in their lives. Similarly, they are no longer caught up in the cycle of action and reaction set up by witchcraft. Therefore, they can reengage with a new logic of relating. However, this does not mean that witchcraft disappears from people's lives, it just becomes less pervasive. Similarly, they acquire the tools to counteract witchcraft outside of the ambiguous logic and vengeful behaviour in which it captures people.

This chapter has revealed that descent, seniority and gender roles remain important as principles that articulate people's kinship relations. Similarly, the examples of Madeleine and papa Elodie illustrated that gendered dynamics play a role in the need for converts to reconnect with their kin and the stakes raised when long-term ruptures happen. For men, in particular, having and maintaining networks of support among kin is a key element that enables them to gain "wealth in people" (Guyer 1993), respect and recognition that is so important in Beninese society. Even if churches provide converts with new networks of solidarity, those found in the family of origin are still crucial.

The material presented here also challenges the argument largely held in Pentecostal literature suggesting that whereas traditional means of fighting against evil aim to restore bonds between kin members, Christian deliverance aims to untie them and, in doing so, Pentecostals strive to become "modern independent individuals" (cf. Meyer 1998:201). As shown in the previous chapter, it is true that deliverance and ruptures at a ritual level aim to "untie" people from their "spiritual" kinship ties. However, this does not mean that these ruptures translate into breaking social relationships or some of the social and economic obligations these relationships entail. As seen so far, Pentecostals sometimes break but also remake these relationships with their relatives through forgiveness, in new and different ways. In this sense, converts first create distance from extended family members as a way to avoid harm caused by witchcraft and other "occult" means, but not to avoid people themselves or their obligations towards them.

This is an example of how ruptures are accommodated along cultural continuities. In this case, there is continuity in the importance of the patrilineage but a rupture in the logic that articulates people's relationships with their kin group. Although the logic of the relationships is transformed, the relationships or obligations of support towards

them are not. Having explored some aspects of Pentecostal influence in relation to people's extended kin, the next two chapters will explore Pentecostal influence on the immediate family.

## Chapter 5

### Submissive Wives and Loving Husbands: Teaching Monogamy and “Balancing” Gender Relations in Marriage

#### Introduction

*“The church starts from home. If the household is not at peace, the church cannot be at peace ... the word of God is accomplished at home.”* - opening words of a sermon given by the Pastor of the AoG church in Ikpinle, during a seminar for women.

Different authors have pointed out that in Africa, marriage and gender relations constitute one of the crucial areas where Pentecostal ruptures manifest and play a particular role in shaping a moral Christian self (Engelke 2010a: 183; Meyer 2004). Benin is no exception. Marital and household relations here are of central importance in the life of Pentecostal Christians. Building a Christian household requires “re-education”, where all members - men, women, young, and children - need to know their roles and desirable behaviour. Pentecostal churches in Benin dedicate a considerable amount of time and church activity to teaching their members how to behave. In relation to marriage, the main goal is to shape a particular model of Godly-intended companionate monogamous marriage.

Given efforts by Pentecostal to build this form of companionate marriage, studies on gender and Pentecostalism in non-Western contexts have debated whether Pentecostalism has generated among converts notions of gender equality that resemble those of Western societies. They find a contradiction between believers’ acceptance of Pauline notions of patriarchy and the potential for liberation and equality found in their faith (cf. Brusco 2010: 78-79; Robbins 2004b:132, 2010a:170; Martin 2001). In contexts with strong patriarchal societies, such as those in Italy and Latin America, Pentecostal studies highlight the empowering and liberating effects that conversion has for women (Cucciari 1990:688; Mariz and Machado 1997; Smilde 1997; Brusco 2010: 85-87). However, in Africa, the study of gender and marital relations among Pentecostals has not been as widely explored as in other regions, despite its acknowledged importance. One of the few exceptions is the work of Mate (2002) on

Pentecostal women's organisations in Zimbabwe. Interestingly, Mate's argument, to some extent, runs counter to the main arguments about women's empowerment mentioned above. Mate asks the question "what roles are expected of 'born-again' men and women?" (2002:549). She argues that Pentecostal women's organisations "focus on domesticity as a way of setting born again women apart from other women, as a sign of their modernity and faith" (2002:549). However, she suggests, "the teachings simultaneously tighten the patriarchal grip on women" (2002:549).

However, when studying Pentecostalism, it is important to consider the complexity of gender differentiation in different settings. Studies of gender in West Africa have pointed to the particularities of gender relations and differentiation in this region, which do not conform to those notions and categories highlighted by Western feminism (Peel 2002; Falen 2011). For example, Falen argues that among the Fon in Benin, men and women often have equal but different forms of access to power (Falen 2011:3). He suggests that Fon women do not necessarily question male forms of public authority; instead they willingly comply with them, but this does not mean that they are powerless vis-à-vis men. For it is through their creativity and sexuality that Fon women exert their agency and that they influence men (Falen 2011:24). Similarly, taking his cue from Oyewumi's critique of notions of gender among the Yoruba, Peel (2002) examines the relevance of gender to the reception of Christianity in the missionary encounter. Oyewumi's main thesis is that notions of gender based on biological differentiation between men and women in Africa are a product of the colonial encounter. What have always ordered and divided Yoruba society, in contrast, is principles of seniority based on age differentiation (Oyewumi 1997:41-43). Peel questions Oyewumi's assertion that before European contact Yoruba did not have categories of gender. Through his study of the religious encounter, he reveals the importance of female/male differentiation, which played a role in the way conversion happened (Peel 2002:138-139). He suggests that Oyewumi is right in considering age differentiation and seniority as a crucial element in defining Yoruba society. However, his study reveals that although "seniority can override gender, it usually works as a co-ordinate, rather than as an alternative, to it" (Peel 2002:139). As the studies mentioned above suggest, it is important to look at the way in which local forms of gender differentiation, including seniority, and power dynamics are redefined or negotiated in the light of men and women's experiences of conversion and their level of engagement with their faith.

In this chapter we will see that in an effort to make the Gospel relevant to their lives, Pentecostals in Benin aim to build “balanced” households in a context where divergent values around marriage coexist and where morals are perceived as having been disrupted by economic and political changes over the last two decades. As a response to this, Pentecostals in Benin aim to build successful monogamous unions by shaping the way in which men and women negotiate power dynamics. Some of these tactics include, in the case of women, gossiping or using their sexuality to obtain economic rewards or, in the case of men, withholding economic provision and having extra-marital affairs (cf. Falen 2011). However, for Pentecostals, these tactics are often perceived as being the major source of conflicts within the household. For this purpose, Pentecostals aim to articulate gender roles through a Christian moral code that emphasises submission, particularly on the part of women, as the ultimate behaviour that builds a virtuous Christian self. While it is true, as Mate (2002) points out, that Pentecostal women in Benin are asked to be submissive to their husbands and to comply with certain elements of “traditional” male authority, in this paper I suggest that this submission does not necessarily restrain women’s power or influence at home.

I argue that it is important to take into account people’s notions of “spiritual” power that intervene in articulating men and women’s relationships to each other. These “spiritual” dimensions are crucial but tend to be overshadowed when the analysis is framed in terms of patriarchal models of authority. For example, Mariz and Machado (1997) point out that in Brazil women revalue the self in relation to God and acquire autonomy from their husbands’ authority (1997:41-42). Similarly, through the concept of “religiously-bounded patriarchy”, Smilde (1997:354-355) explains how women in Venezuela, through their direct communication with God, at times may disregard men’s authority because they are obeying God. Building on this notion, I argue that in Benin, both men and women revalue the self in relation to the Holy Spirit and align their actions according to what they consider is God’s will. In this process of realignment to a Christian model of marriage, men are also required to submit to their wives by becoming loving husbands. This masculine form of submission necessarily transforms “traditional” masculine forms of authority and modes of behaviour.

God, therefore, through the Holy Spirit, and sometimes acting through the pastor, acts as a levelling agent between women and men. For Pentecostal men and women, the Holy Spirit becomes the source of spiritual power that guides them through their lives,

from the moment they select a partner and for the duration of their marriage. Men and women, through their relationship with the Holy Spirit and assimilation of biblical principles, find the strength to comply with the demands of giving up behaviours that would in other circumstances secure their personal power. In this sense, they submit to God through their partners and, in the process, they are meant to become obedient and accountable to God, and not just to their partners.

In this chapter, I first present the general context of Beninese society where changes in the legislation on marital unions have raised dilemmas for the general public. These changes have largely been influenced by ideas about women's rights introduced by international organisations, as Benin strives to become a "modern" nation. Second, I portray some of the dilemmas expressed, particularly by men, in relation to changing roles of men and women and in opting for monogamous unions in a predominantly polygynous society. This is followed by the way in which Pentecostal churches aim to address what they consider "imbalances" in the household and the types of teachings that they provide: from selecting a partner, to the specific roles that women and men should play within the household. All in all, we will see the way in which submission becomes a central element that allows this "balancing" of gender relations as they incorporate other relationships with mediating agents, such as the Holy Spirit and the pastor. Here, I will mainly engage with the gendered aspects of the relationship between men and women within the marital bond. However, in the next chapter, I will further explore how some aspects of sex and reproduction, key elements that articulate principles of seniority, play out in people's efforts to build their Christian lives.

### **Polygyny and Monogamy in Transition**

The institution of marriage in contemporary Benin is in a state of constant change. Dilemmas caused by this became very evident in my fieldwork. Young people, particularly men, debated whether it was better to choose being monogamous or polygynous. Adults often asked me questions about the way in which monogamous marriages are in the "West", including why people decide to have no or few children, and what I thought about marriages in Benin.

As of 2004, monogamy is the only form of union legally recognised in Benin. This initiative was largely promoted by the work of women's NGOs claiming that polygyny

violated women's equal rights, and by government efforts to appear as a "modern" nation vis-à-vis international donors. Such initiatives at a national level, together with economic changes affecting men and women's differential access to resources and religious diversity, have contributed to a context where differing values around forms of marriage coexist, and raise dilemmas among people in Benin. Monogamy is increasingly seen as a modern form of marriage whereas polygyny is considered what people used to do in the past. Young people debate the pros and cons of entering either form of union and many aspire to build monogamous households. However, great numbers of men in Benin still sustain polygynous unions, and even those who claim to be monogamous often have secret girlfriends or second wives that they keep *en cachette* (hidden).

The institution of marriage in contemporary Benin presents the same outlook that Fadipe (1970) described for Yoruba marriage at the beginning of the twentieth century. In other words, it "is one of the social institutions ... which has been most in a state of flux as a result of the diffusion of foreign ideas and the quick process of economic growth" (1970:91). In this case, Fadipe referred to ideas brought by European colonisation and Christian missions. Today, ideas about marriage in Benin have continued to be shaped by Christianity but also, as mentioned above, by the work of international organisations, the promotion of women's rights, and government efforts, which are reflected in the national laws regulating marriage.

The laws regarding marriage and partnership are regulated in Benin through the *Code des Personnes et de la Famille*. This code was originally conceived in 1994 and based on the national constitution of 1990, which declared equal rights between women and men in Benin (Boko Nadjo 2004). This code was formulated with the intention of unifying the legal system, which was previously divided between customary law and French civil law and of acting according to the new Constitutional context. Practices recognised by the customary law, such as levirate, widowing rites, genital mutilation and forced marriage, were deemed to violate women's rights (Boko Nadjo 2004:1-2; Agbodjan 2010). The first initiative, voted and approved in 2002 declared, in general terms, the practices previously mentioned to be illegal and established that marriage could only be contracted by mutual consent, with the parties being of at least 18 years of age. Similarly, the payment of bride wealth became optional and of symbolic character and women were allowed to inherit property from their fathers and/or husbands (Boko

Nadjo 2004:2-3; Agbodjan 2010). Additional modifications to this code were voted and approved in 2004, when monogamy was finally declared to be the only legally recognised form of union in Benin (Boko Nadjo 2004:5).

The first initiative received strong opposition from male members of parliament. Some of them argued that the code was against local culture and customs. Others thought that it was an initiative promoted by urban “intellectual” women with loose morals, facing household problems, who wanted legal means to justify their libertinism (Adjovi 2002), and international NGOs wanting to impose marital practices imported from the West (Idrissou-Toure 2004). In fact, it was through the awareness-raising work and advocacy of women’s NGOs such as Wildaf-Benin (Women in Law and Development in Africa) and others such as RIFONGA, with the support of international donors, that the first and final versions of the code were finally accepted. The predominant view of these organisations in relation to polygyny is that it constitutes a form of discrimination against women (Boko Nadjo 2004:3-4).

In addition to the above, one must also consider the influence of Christian discourses in this process. On the one hand, the formulation of the National Constitution in 1990, and the transition to democracy in Benin through the National Conference *Forces Vives de la Nation* was strongly influenced by Catholic movements and Bishop Isidore de Souza. Similarly, after President Matthew Kerekou returned to power as a born-again Christian in 1996 and 2001, he gave impulse to the presence and work of international organisations (cf. Strandsberg 2008:220-250).

Despite the successful approval of this code, the majority of people in Benin still do not marry legally. For example, in 2008, only five marriages were registered at the local civil registry in Pobe and in 2009 there were only six. When I commented to the woman in charge of the civil registry on the small number of marriages in town, she laughed and said ironically that this number was high. In her opinion, men do not marry because they like to have many wives, so if they marry in the civil registry they need to be subject to the law. In fact, the laws do not necessarily prohibit polygyny. What happens is that people who marry under the civil law, in case of divorce or death, are subject to compliance with the rules of inheritance aimed at protecting the children and the wife. However, this does not mean that people who decide not to marry legally have not been affected by these initiatives or are unconcerned about it.

Today, the national curriculum prescribes the teaching in school of the constitutional law, and the declaration of equal rights between men and women in school. All these ideas are debated in class and young people are asking questions about whether polygyny is something that people should continue practicing. Similarly, the work of international NGOs continues to have an impact in the country through programmes aiming to raise awareness about women's rights and promoting gender equality. During my stay in Benin, there was a two-year programme sponsored by American USAID (Women Justice and Empowerment Initiative) aiming to raise awareness in relation to gender-based violence. In addition to this, the increasing presence of Pentecostal churches has also played a role in promoting different marriage values, which emphasise monogamy as the ideal form of union.

The arguments given by the members of parliament against the approval of the code reflect the contradictions and dilemmas that changing forms of marriage and gender roles provoke among ordinary people. Current affairs programmes broadcast by the local radio station in Pobe reflected these concerns and there seemed to be no uniform view around what form of marriage should be practiced.

### **Changing Forms of Marriage and Gender Differences: Men's Views**

Dilemmas around monogamy and polygyny in marriage were often articulated and justified based on gender differences. On the one hand, men often said that polygyny is in their blood and justified their sexual encounters outside marriage saying that their wives neglected their domestic duties. They complained about women lacking respect, and perceived them as being rebellious and hungry for money. On the other hand, women tend to perceive men as hypocrites, because they look for women outside wedlock, and lazy because they only want to have children and do not care about providing for their family's economic needs. On many occasions I heard people say that democracy brought disorder as everybody now does as they please. In my experience, concerns about gender roles in marriage were mainly voiced by men and not so much by women. And as will be demonstrated later, through their teachings, Pentecostal churches try to "balance" these gender dynamics.

In the past, polygyny was a marker of men's status and wealth (Falen 2011:20). Today the choice of being monogamous or polygynous is not exclusively linked to economic power or resources. As Falen rightly suggests, "marriage choices tend to follow more personal and practical motives and are influenced by questions of economics, prestige and power" (Falen 2008:52). In addition to this, I noticed that factors such as education, generational differences, family pressures and religion also play a role.

Although monogamy tends to be associated with Christian marriages, and religion is an important influence in the choice of a spouse, religious affiliation alone does not determine whether a man will choose to be monogamous or polygynous. For example, during my stay in Benin, I met two Muslim men who were monogamous. Similarly, differing views and practices in relation to monogamy and marriage among followers of diverse Christian denominations have brought about unions where so-called monogamous men take second or third wives in secret. Although some men, particularly Catholics and Methodists, lived with one official wife to whom they had been married in the church, they kept clandestine concubines popularly known as *seconde* or *troisième bureau* (second or third office), or admitted having girlfriends outside of marriage. Similarly, Celestial Christians normally accept polygynous unions, on the basis that it is hypocritical to claim fidelity to the marriage vow while living in concubinage (Falen 2008:57).

Education has also been an important factor. For example, in Pobe I came across a few mature men who were monogamous, particularly those who studied in Catholic schools during the colonial period and had become part of a first generation of the educated elite. The economic aspect of choosing to have only one wife and fewer children was especially remarked upon by educated men who had chosen to have fewer children in order to give them a proper education. However, men who think this way are still in the minority.

In relation to generational differences, young people, in general, are becoming more aware of about the need to turn to monogamy as a marriage choice. In fact, when I commented on this to a young Pentecostal man in his twenties and university student, he said that for young people such as him, being monogamous also opens doors to apply for a civil service post. He used to tell his colleagues at university that they, as young men, should beware whom they marry and chose to be monogamous, since as

*intellectuels* (intellectuals) they can later go on to occupy government positions. Apparently, as he told me, the government has also encouraged young civil servants to become monogamous by giving compensatory salaries when their marital status is monogamy.

The most frequent complaint made by people living in polygynous unions concerned co-wives' jealousy and rivalry. Men have developed different ways of dealing with this. Whereas in the past all the wives tended to live in the same compound, today the majority of men tend to have only two official wives and, when possible, try to keep them in different households to avoid conflict. Even though two households can be more expensive than one, this is possible because some women manage to be economically independent and contribute towards the domestic expenses. This, however, also comes with a price, in particular when the woman makes more money than the man, and the woman refuses to comply with her husband's authority at home.

Various men seemed to present contradictory views on monogamy and polygyny. Many men acknowledged the problems that came with having a polygynous household; however they said that in the end they had no choice. This feeling of having no choice was often reinforced by family pressure on the male members of their household to have more than one partner and several children. Men in these families who decide to be monogamous are considered to be lazy, because they cannot support more than one woman. In fact some men admitted that, ideally, their preference would be to have one wife who cared for them properly, instead of many who did not care for them. They said that they were forced to look for other women because they were not well treated by their wives. This became evident for me with one of my acquaintances, a non-practicing Catholic in his early forties, who had five wives and ten children. In appearance he was the model of the successful polygynous man and he often bragged about his success with women in front of other men. He seemed to be content with his situation, since he was also an important merchant and customs officer, and enjoyed material success in all his endeavours. However, during a conversation he confessed that none of his wives cooked for him. He had to either cook for himself or eat outside the home. He also admitted at times feeling lonely as he lived in a separate house from his wives. It was at these moments that he was forced to look for the company of his girlfriends, which at the same time, exacerbated the jealousy of the rest of his wives.

Men in general justified their choice of union based on gender differences and behaviour. Men, on the one hand, justified their sexual attraction and encounters with various women outside marriage saying that polygyny is in their blood. Women, on the other, would often comment with resignation that if a man decided to be polygynous it was because this is the way men are and women in Africa are meant to bear suffering.

Lack of respect on the part of women was one of the reasons most mentioned by men when they sought other women. When I asked what they considered to be lack of respect men mentioned women not obeying but neglecting them or the children. As soon as a woman felt safe as a wife, she would stop cooking for him or taking care of the children in order to focus only on herself, her business or chatting with friends. When their husbands spoke to them, women talked back, raised their voices, insulting their husbands and behaving rebelliously. Sometimes they spoke behind their husbands' backs with their friends. Gossip in general was condemned. In a context where speaking has a spiritual power over people, gossip becomes also a way of making people vulnerable. Similarly, it was interesting to see the way in which men reacted to the programme sponsored by USAID mentioned above. For example, during one of the awareness-raising meetings held with local neighbourhood chiefs in Pobe, men were shown a series of images with battered women to emphasise that what these women's husbands had done was not right. However, some of the men present in the meeting complained saying that these images were biased towards women and did not show the man's side. Many women are witches and harm their husbands and others were even battered by their wives. Therefore, men had no other resource but to beat them as a way to discipline them.

Women's education is also seen as a factor causing problems in the marriage. This issue was debated during a local radio programme. Whereas some people defended the importance of educating women to fight against gender-based violence and other problems in society, others mentioned that educated women are often less respectful towards their husbands than uneducated ones. Opinions varied but the majority thought that educated women who go to university become rebellious under the pretence of defending their rights, and that they want to force men to remain monogamous as a means to having more control over them and their earnings.

## **Monogamy, Polygyny and the Christian Marriage**

Among Christians in Benin there is a generalised idea that God is the one who grants a partner and allows marriages to happen. For Pentecostal Christians, marriage is fundamental and considered a sacred institution established by God. Christians often explain that the way God instituted marriage was based on Genesis, which explains the way the union of Adam and Eve was meant to be, “therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

According to this view, polygyny is not God-conceived and within the church is not accepted. However, it is not uncommon that some men convert once they are already living in polygynous relationships. In these cases, different pastors adopt different measures. In general, they recommend that the man who converts should not divorce his wives. Men are encouraged to treat their wives fairly and equally. However, in practice, this is difficult to attain, given that in polygynous relationships having a favourite wife among others is very common. In these cases, it is often the case that only one wife will decide to convert and join the husband, whereas the others refuse. When this happens, the other wives are given freedom to choose whether they want to remain married or divorce. Although divorce is not allowed among Pentecostal Christians, non-Christian partners are meant to be granted divorce as long as it is according to their own volition. If the woman decides to leave her husband, in these cases, men are meant to continue providing for their children.

In the majority of Pentecostal churches, polygynous men cannot become pastors or occupy positions of authority within the church, even if the person is a devout Christian. In the smaller independent churches, this rule is often overlooked, causing disagreements among Pentecostal pastors and followers themselves. During my stay in Benin, the local association of evangelical churches decided to place a stronger proscription on accepting polygynous pastors within the association. A few of these churches had been founded by former members of established Pentecostal churches who, claiming having been called by God, created their independent churches and often adapted the Christian message to their advantage. This type of situation normally gives a bad image to local Pentecostal churches, and is often one of the reasons why many non-Christians claim that Pentecostal pastors are “fake” and only after money. Therefore, the position of more established churches such as the AoG or Foursquare

tends to be stricter in enforcing and ensuring polygyny is not accepted or reproduced among members of the church.

However, it is important to note that Pentecostal marriages still constitute a minority. In fact, many people mentioned that becoming Pentecostal was unpopular, precisely because of these churches' rigour in areas such as marriage. The few Pentecostal marriages that I came across were exposed to the same problems and dilemmas that the rest of the people face in today's Beninese society. The main difference I noticed in relation to other non-Christian unions was related to the way in which they tried to manage their problems and household dynamics following what they learnt at church.

In this sense, Pentecostals try to comply with a stricter view of marriage based on the Bible than is common for other Christian groups. They often criticise Catholic and Methodist Churches for not having enough teaching on marriage and failing to take marriage seriously as a God-made institution. In particular, they condemn the way people hypocritically keep the monogamous façade, while lying about their hidden concubines. Similarly, they condemn the way Celestial Christians justify polygyny based on the argument that some characters in the Old Testament, such as Abraham, David and Solomon, were also polygynous.

According to a Pentecostal view, polygyny in the Old Testament was a manifestation of the fall of man into sin. It was only after Jesus' atonement that men were completely liberated from the sin committed by Adam and Eve. According to the AoG pastor, polygyny in the Old Testament created many problems as it does so in today's Beninese society. The pastor from AoG voiced it this way,

Polygamy has created wars. Children of another woman are like another nation. It is like the children of Israel and the children of Iraq (sic). We are told in history that Iraqi people are the descendants of Ismael. And Ismael is the son of Abraham. The children of Israel are descendants of Isaac, who was also a son of Abraham. Ismael is son of Hagar and Isaac is son of Sarah. It was Abraham who fathered Ismael with Hagar, and Isaac with Sarah. Now they have become two nations who are in a war that never ends. So polygamy needs to draw a lesson to know that when you have two women, you have two nations in your household.

He drew a parallel between the way these two descendants of Abraham went to war when the patriarch died, and the way children of polygynous households act when their father dies. Children get into wars in relation to inheritance and other matters. Similarly, jealousy is seen as an inevitable problem whenever there are two women in the same household. In relation to this, the pastor said,

God hasn't created men to have two women. Men and women have only one heart and it is normal that a man will love only one woman. If the man has two wives, he will inevitably love one more than another. The heart of men cannot be shared.

His opinion about the heart of man being one was a recurrent comment that I heard among women who condemned polygyny. The pastor continued, explaining that in the same way that the heart of a man has to be shared, so too will the salary. Men will be less able to provide for their wives, putting them at risk of falling into prostitution and acquiring sexually transmitted diseases. Therefore, in his view, being monogamous brings advantages of having more salary for the family, less risk of acquiring diseases and avoiding jealousy.

### **Selecting a Partner**

A way in which Pentecostal churches strive to ensure that marriages remain monogamous is through careful planning of the unions from the moment of selecting a partner, with special attention to learning gender roles within the household. In addition to following a set of principles, Pentecostals are encouraged to marry under the civil law, based on the biblical teachings in Romans 13:5-7, which says that believers should be submissive to authorities. In fact, celebrating the marriage in the church cannot be done without a certificate of civil marriage. And it is even rare to find marriage ceremonies among Pentecostals themselves. The reasons why many of them do not undertake civil marriage varies: sometimes it is related to legal expenses or because one of the partners has not regularised their birth certificate.

Pentecostals are also aware of the risk involved in the voluntary choice of partners. Since families no longer intervene in evaluating the compatibility of the couple, the church committee and its pastor often assume the responsibility of minimising the

possibility of a wrong decision. Declaring oneself to be Christian is not a guarantee that the person in question is reliable. So even if the potential partner is Born Again but belongs to a different church, it is necessary that the groom presents a certificate or letter from the pastor of his church so they can know that he is a regular member and has not been married before. In a context where secret second marriages are increasing, it is often the case that men lie to a girl for the purpose of marrying them, without telling them that they will become second wives or that they have other girlfriends. This is not always reliable and it is often the case that the pastor has to intervene in order to make an investigation. By following these procedures, pastors can make sure that the man is single and does not have another wife in secret.

When I was talking to Pentecostal youth, they often told me that in order to find the right partner “one has to pray a lot”. There is the general belief that though prayer, God will communicate or orientate the person as to who is the right partner choice. What was otherwise determined through the divination system in local cosmology now is achieved through prayer. However, views on the correct way of praying and interpreting God’s will through the Holy Spirit vary. I was told that some people take it as a way to justify their own interpretations, and at times this carries the risk of validating choices based on a person’s caprice.

That is why some pastors, like the AoG pastor, try to provide people with other kinds of guidelines on how to choose a partner. According to him, prayer alone is not enough, because prayer itself is the basis of a Christian life. A Born Again is expected to pray every moment and more so if she has to make a decision, in order to make the right choice. For the pastor, behaviour and testimony of the person were more important elements than prayer alone. He mentioned,

Today people say a lot of things that I personally don’t agree with. They say “you will pray until God will show you who is the woman or the man” ... they ask “God, where is my wife? Show her to me! Is she in our church? Is she in the United States? Is she in Porto-Novo? Where is she?” And people will fast and pray. No, it is not like that! If someone does that, the devil can betray the person. God, in his fidelity, can show the person who will be their partner. Yes, God can do that! But it is not only God who can show it. The devil can also trick a person. For example, what if one day God shows the girl to the young man, but

the girl has a long nose and is not very pretty? However, she is a girl of good character; she is filled with the Holy Spirit and has the wisdom of God. She is not that pretty, but it is God who created her, right? Now, God has shown him that, but the man has seen that she wasn't pretty. Another day the young man goes to bed and sees [dreams] a beautiful woman, fair skinned. He will say, "I am sure it is this one." But appearances deceive. He will think that it was God who showed her to him, because she was beautiful, whereas in fact it was the devil. The next day he will wake up and will say, "God has shown me that girl when I was sleeping! I saw her clearly." But this girl who is apparently beautiful, is a girl whose tongue doesn't speak good words, she says a lot of bad things, she insults people, and she doesn't fear God. Do you think it was God? Of course not!

It is interesting how, in this testimony, the pastor describes the method in which people ask God to manifest his will. It is similar to the way in which people proceed in consulting *Ifá* to find out specific answers to their questions while seeking advice. For example, the consultation proceeds by posing a series of yes or no questions into a set of options suggested by the client, and the answer is revealed by the way the palm nuts manipulated by the *babaláwo* fall into the ground (cf. Bascom 1941:44). Similarly, dreams are often the way in which *oríṣa* deities or ancestors manifest their will to people. The pastor, in this case, did not deny the validity of acquiring knowledge through these means, but in this case, it is God, not other spirits, who imparts that knowledge. Relying on dreams or divination methods such as *Ifá*, people risk hearing or getting the answer from the devil. Therefore, in order to be sure that the answer came from God, he encouraged young people to verify their decisions in the light of the Bible. He often said that the Bible "is a lamp in a world of darkness".

During a teaching session aimed at young people, he taught them how to follow certain biblically inspired criteria to choose a partner. He took as the text Acts 6:1-4, which describes the way the apostles chose new leaders from among the new converts to carry out the activities of distributing food. According to the Pastor, this passage provided a guide on how to identify reliable people, which would surely give a "guarantee" for the marriage to be successful.

Those elements mentioned in the Bible passage included having a good reputation, being filled with the Holy Spirit and having wisdom. In the first place, a person should screen a potential partner to see whether he or she had “good testimonies” at home, at church and work. For him, the most important area to observe was their home. In particular, he encouraged paying attention to whether the person in question respected his parents and was obedient towards them,

If you pray a lot but don't have a good life, what will God give you? What father will take his son to a girl who is recalcitrant and doesn't respect her parents? Who will do that? You are praying, but you are a girl who doesn't respect your parents, you don't have a good language towards people, what man will God give you? You see? But if you are a girl with good testimonies at home, at the church, in her work; and is filled with the Holy Spirit, I believe God will give you a good husband quickly. People who are interested in you will notice it ... many young people don't think about these things. They just fast and pray, fast and pray, but no, it is not only that!

The second criterion consisted of the person being filled with the Holy Spirit. This was for him a condition that could not be overlooked as it guaranteed that the person was truly a Born Again. And in case of tension or conflict, the Holy Spirit would guide the person in question to think twice before committing sin or bad behaviour. The third requirement consisted of the wisdom of God. This fear and wisdom of God involved looking for ways in which the person seeks to live according to the commandments in the Bible and seeks to please God. In particular, he stressed that a wise person knows how to use his tongue, by not speaking with harsh words, and pursuing peace.

Some people find it uncomfortable consulting the pastor about all their decisions, and it is not always guaranteed that they will do so. Some followers even rebel against these measures and sometimes young people leave the church because they do not find support for marrying according to their own wishes. However, pastors maintain the opinion is that, for their own good, and to avoid further disappointment, it is their duty to survey the behaviour of their congregants. In the end, if the person decides not to comply with these guidelines it is at their own risk.

## **Building a Monogamous Christian Household**

The few Pentecostal married couples I met were exposed to the same problems and dilemmas faced by people in today's Beninese society in general. However, the main difference I noticed in relation to other non-Pentecostal unions was the way in which they tried to handle their problems and manage their household, following what they learnt at church.

As mentioned before, Pentecostal churches tend to dedicate a considerable amount of time and church activity to teaching each member of the household their roles and desirable behaviour. But this education, particularly in relation to marriage, is not limited to life within the church. Pentecostal influence in Benin nowadays is also present in wider society through the role of the media. The local radio station in Pobe synchronised every week at noon with the Trans World Radio, a global Christian radio project transmitting from Ivory Coast. The Trans World Radio provided technical maintenance and support to the local radio station. The Pobe station, in return, transmitted one hour of Trans World Radio programmes. The time of the synchronisation often coincided with a programme called *Harmonie Conjugale* (Conjugal Harmony), which addressed relevant issues for African households. Although it was a Christian broadcast, it enjoyed wide popularity even among non-Christians. It was transmitted at noon, the time when most of the population goes home to eat their lunch and take a siesta. One day, the radio station decided to evaluate the popularity of this program to see if it was worth continuing its transmission. They invited people to call and vote if they wanted to continue listening to it. Many people called saying that they found the programme very useful, since it addressed topics that were relevant to contemporary household problems. Even though not all Pentecostal marriages in Benin are monogamous, these types of programmes reinforce and help to spread ideal models of gender roles for men and women to build and sustain monogamous unions.

The Pentecostal view of an ideal Christian marriage is based on a Pauline vision expressed in Ephesians 5:22-33 and Colossians 3:18-19. According to this view, women should submit to their husbands and husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church. The majority of churches place a particularly strong emphasis on women's education since their behaviour is considered to be crucial for building a successful monogamous marriage and sustain the harmony of a household. Unfortunately, not

every church places the same emphasis and importance on educating men. But, as I will show in the rest of this chapter, the pastor in the AoG church in Ikpinle and his wife dedicated important time to teach both men and women about their roles in the household. I turn now to looking at the role of women.

### *Submissive Wives*

Teaching for women in the two churches that I attended most frequently, the AoG church in Ikpinle and the Foursquare Church in Pobe, normally took one of two forms: weekly or fortnightly meetings and seminars. Seminars varied from organised days for regular members of the church, to week or weekend-long regional seminars and annual national conventions. During my stay in Benin I attended seminars for women in both churches, one local and one regional, and regularly attended the fortnightly meetings held at the AoG church in Ikpinle.

The women's group in the AoG church is part of a larger national organisation called the *Association des Servantes de Christ*, and meets every second Friday. Fortnightly meetings are normally given by pastor's wives, whereas seminars are normally led by the pastor. Members of the women's committee in the church decided the topics covered during the sessions, depending on what they considered to be the prominent needs of women at that particular moment. During my stay the topics varied from the importance of hospitality, through the importance of dressing modestly, and how to raise and discipline the children, to hygiene, and even seducing and pleasing their husbands sexually.

Christian notions of gender relations tend to highlight the differences between men and women, which seem to be at odds with the type of education promoting women's rights and equality by international organisations mentioned before. Based on Genesis 2:18, one of the pillars of the teaching is that a woman's role is to be her husband's helper. Therefore, a good Pentecostal wife should submit to her husband and help him accomplish his role as head and leader of the household. Although these teachings might appear to be repressive for women, in this particular context, they are adapted to encourage and promote the kind of behaviour that many men find attractive and desirable in their wives. It responds to men's desire to obtain "respect", which the majority of men often mentioned as lacking among contemporary women in Benin.

I focus here on two of the main aspects addressed during one of the seminars for women at the AoG church in Ikpinle, which are the way women spent their earnings and the way they spoke. These teachings resonated with the main complaints voiced by men against women mentioned before. The biblical text Proverbs 31:10-31 was taken to illustrate the ideal Christian wife: a virtuous woman. This describes a virtuous woman as trustworthy, kind towards her husband, always doing good and never evil. She is hardworking, entrepreneurial and economically independent. She is provident and generous. She is strong and honourable. She always speaks wisely and kindly. She is always joyful and, most importantly, she is a woman who fears God. Among the many qualities described in it, during one of the main sermons, the pastor who was preaching stressed two in particular. One is that a virtuous woman is industrious and provident. The other is that she is always kind to her husband and speaks wisely.

In relation to the first point, he said that an industrious and provident woman should not see her economic success as a reason to become proud towards her husband, even if she earns more than him. Instead, she should be generous and share her earnings for the benefit of the household regardless whether he provided or not. This way of encouraging women to share their earnings is important in this context in which “women’s mobility and agency afforded by relative economic independence have long posed a challenge for securing female compliance” (Cornwall 2002:967). He also condemned those women who borrowed money from other men, even if their husbands did not provide for them adequately. In a context where women use their sexuality to obtain economic favours from men, a woman’s economic independence can contribute to building her husband’s trust in her, since she would not have the need to ask or seek other men to supply for her needs.

Secondly, a virtuous woman speaks wisely. The pastor said that God had made women of a kind nature, with the capacity to soothe, heal and restore. A woman who is a daughter of God had to be kind with her words. When a woman knows how to speak, there is peace in the household. This is relevant in a context where women often initiate heated verbal arguments with men, which in extreme cases become physical assaults on the part of the woman. He said,

It is deplorable to see the way in which some women speak at home. It is enough that her husband says something unpleasant to her and it is over! A faucet of words is open. She demonstrates her husband the way she knows how to speak, she tells him that she is no longer a child and that she is worthy of respect. And if she is a woman whom God has blessed with some money, she will reproach her husband that he doesn't do anything at home, she will say, "I am the one who does everything. I pay the school fees, the bills, buy food and now you come to bother me telling all this!" Dear sister, this way of opening your mouth is not wise.

Gossip was also severely condemned, since in Benin, the act of speaking can exert spiritual power, both positive and negative, over others. Therefore, gossip contributes to making people vulnerable to spiritually inflicted harm and also diminishes the reputation of the husband. Therefore, a submissive virtuous woman is bound to do good to her husband even if he mistreats her. She is meant to bear, forgive and pray for her husband, in the same way that Jesus had borne suffering. Sooner or later God will reward her and she will reap the fruits of her actions,

God is not crazy, He is not blind, and He knows your suffering. It is true that you suffer ... but do not curse your husband, do not speak negatively of him, do not wish him harm, instead, pray for God to forgive him. That is the Christian life ... [on the cross] Jesus had said, "forgive them Father, for they don't know what they are doing." It is true. When your husband mistreats you, he doesn't know what he is doing. If he knew, he would not do it. The Bible says, "Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" [Galatians 6:8]. If your husband knew what he is sowing for himself he would not do it ... if your husband knew that by mistreating you he is opening a way that will bring you a large recompense, he would not do it.

The same way that a man sows and reaps destruction for himself when he does harm, a woman, by bearing patiently this suffering, will reap her recompense. Therefore, a woman's role is to bear suffering and forgive, since sooner or later God will reward her behaviour and will reap the fruits of her actions. He continued his sermon, emphasising

the role of woman as a helper of men and the way in which she should behave in these situations,

It is true that your husband bothers you; it is true that your husband is a drunkard; it is true that he doesn't even sleep at home. It is true that he doesn't do anything; it is true that he is not good. But let me tell you the truth today, do you want to know the truth? It is because of all his weaknesses and all his vices that God has allowed him to be your husband, so you will be able to help him. God knows that he can be transformed ... Dear sister, if you can understand that it is because your husband is like that, God has sent you towards him so you will help him. Accept him as he is and start opening your mouth wisely.

However, submission does not always mean diminishing the power/influence that women might exert over their husbands. Mate argues that Pentecostal churches “romanticise female subordination to men ... [since] submission is said to ‘liberate’ women by enabling them to avoid and to overcome marital problems without being confrontational” (2002:557). However, more than liberation through submission, submissiveness was presented as a means through which a woman can positively influence her husband. A woman, therefore, in her “weak” nature can be spiritually and morally stronger than the man.

Papa Constance is an example of a man who converted as a result of his wife's submissive behaviour. Before becoming born-again, he was a member of the *Sakpata* (earth divinity) *vodun* worship. He used to have problems with alcohol, since ritual consumption of alcohol is an important part of *vodun* worship ceremonies. He remembers getting drunk and becoming lost, wandering around town for days, talking and drinking with friends, and on various occasions he risked losing his job as a teacher. This also had an impact on his family life, especially with his first wife with whom he cohabited and who is also member of the AoG church. She converted long before he did and she was already Born Again when he experienced his worst problems with alcohol. Although he says that never beat his wife, he remembers that he used to insult her for no reason when he was drunk. He now acknowledges that he caused too much pain and trouble to his wife and children, and with admiration he told me, “but she never said anything, she never answered back. Sometimes she had to go out at night and look for me to bring me back home because I was totally lost.”

He attributes his conversion to his wife's prayers, because one day he suddenly felt tired of the life he had been leading. One Sunday, while his wife and his children had gone to church, he remembers sitting in front of his house, watching people passing by. He saw that many were going to church and he thought to himself, "there might be something there. If all these people go to church it is probably because they get something good out of there. Otherwise, why would they bother going?" So he decided to find out himself, and next Sunday he told his wife that he wanted to join her. After the first visit, he remembers that he liked the way he was welcomed and thought that people in the church were of "good character". He realised that he had been bonded to the devil through his belonging to *Sakpata* and his addiction to alcohol. Everywhere he went, he used to carry with him a bag with *gris-gris* in order to protect himself, but after that day he decided to get rid of them by throwing them into the latrine. Through the support of prayer, he gradually stopped smoking and drinking.

This could be seen as one of the many examples where women's submission achieves the end of influencing and changing their husbands. However, being submissive does not always produce positive results. That is why Mate argues that Pentecostal churches "romanticise female subordination to men" (2002:557). However, it is not necessarily the case that they romanticise submission. I noticed that women tended to see positive changes in their husbands when they were correctly advised by their pastors and when the pastor himself tried to do some work with the husband. When submission does not work and the husband refuses to change, pastors often intervene in order to mediate in family or marital disputes.

For example, let us go back to the case of papa Constance and his wife. One day I arrived at the AoG pastor's house in Ikpinle and found him and maman Jasmine sitting in the living room talking about a matter that had just been discussed in a church committee meeting. As I sat in the living room next to them, the pastor was in the middle of his conversation saying, "from the part of the man, it is a matter of pride. He cannot see the woman evolve more than him. Now he is jealous and wants to stop her." He continued, "this is men's nature, but that is why it is important to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When a man is truly filled with the Holy Spirit, he understands things differently."

Then they explained to me that they had a problem with a couple in the church. She had been elected deacon and member of the committee but her husband had started to be jealous. Even though he had grown considerably in his Christian life, he was not able to occupy a position of authority because he had a second wife from the time before his conversion and polygynous men are normally not allowed to occupy positions of authority. I knew they were talking about maman and papa Constance, since she was the only female deacon in the church. During the meeting, the pastor had shown his support for maman Constance but now they were concerned about the possible impact on their household. So the pastor was contemplating talking privately to the man to explain him why he had done that, and to avoid causing major trouble. After reflecting a bit, he added,

You see? The Bible says that the woman was created to help the man. If a person wants to help someone, the person who helps needs to be stronger than the other. For example, you cannot ask a child to help you carry a sack of cement. His help will not be as efficient as the help from someone who is stronger than us. This is what happens with women. Women are spiritually stronger than men. That is why it's not bad when women earn more money than men or progress more in other areas. Men need to see this as an advantage ... because this way their wives can better help them. But this is precisely why it is very important that women first be submissive and generous towards their husbands, then the husband can trust her.

His remark is interesting, as it reflects local conceptions of women's powerful nature. Women in Benin are considered spiritually and supernaturally stronger than men. In fact, many men very often express apprehension, especially when this spiritual power is negatively used, such as in witchcraft (cf. Falen 2011:26). But the pastor did not deny or condemn women's power. Instead, he embraced it as something positive. If women are able to submit to their husbands by voluntarily withholding their power, then men can trust them and will be able to undertake their role as heads of the household. If women know how to use their spiritual power, it becomes an important means to legitimate their authority in the household. This is not very different to the way in which Falen (2011) describes women using their creativity to influence men. However, in this case, female power is channelled and the dangerous aspects of this kind of power are neutralised.

### *Loving Husbands*

Compared to women, men tend to receive less teaching but these are nonetheless important. Pentecostal men are taught to “love their wives as their own bodies” (Ephesians 5:22-33), and are encouraged to show their affection publicly. This is especially significant by comparison with non-Pentecostal marriages, where love and affection between married couples is normally not expressed. In Benin as many African contexts, being a husband means “taking control over someone else … husbands are not companions, but regard themselves as directors” (Cornwall 2002:974). In Benin men are often wary of showing too much affection to their wives for fear of being controlled by their whimsical behaviour. As a result, they try to check women’s power by withdrawing their economic support or seeking other women (Falen 2011:79).

The way Pentecostals encourage demonstrations of love is partly influenced by new trends of romantic love (Falen 2011:54-58; Thomas and Cole 2009). For example, during one of the radio broadcasts of *Harmonie Conjugale*, one of the pastors suggested various opportunities for men to show their love, such as offering gifts to their wives on Valentine’s Day. Similarly, the AoG pastor encouraged men to praise, hug and kiss their wives in front of others, including their children. But Christian love is also deeper than just the initial attraction or romance often associated with the stages of romantic and courtship. It is mostly taught as the love manifested in actions proclaimed by the Bible. The pastor explained to me,

Love needs to flow within a person and manifest in acts … if I say that I love my wife, what does it mean when I insult her, I beat her, I cheat on her, I betray her, and then I say I love you? What kind of love is that? So even if I don’t tell my wife “I love you” and I try to use my tongue kindly, I know how to do her good, I search and pursue the peace between us, I am filled with Holy Spirit, I do my job well, I give good testimony at home and church, I respect and honour my parents and my wife … Even if I don’t say I love you, she can see that I love her. The love is lived. I want couples to prove their love for each other, more than just telling each other “I love you”.

But Pentecostals also draw on local idioms to express affection, such as eating the food that a wife prepares at home, even if it is not very good. If the food is not good, the husband can kindly correct his wife. Food is one of the signs of courtship and seduction often used by women in Benin. Therefore, eating one's wife's food rather than another woman's food diminishes opportunities of being seduced outside marriage. The pastor explained to me,

Some men, even if his wife has cooked at home, he will go and buy food outside with the vendors. He then has reduced the value of the woman in the kitchen. Even if her food is not good, he should honour her by eating her food. If the sauce was not good, you can still tell her that after you have eaten, but it depends on the way you say that, whether it is with love or with anger. If you say it with love, then the woman will say "ah, the sauce that I prepared today displeased my husband" and then she will try to improve. Love does not mean that if the person is uncomfortable with something, the person cannot manifest that. That is not love. The person will manifest it but if the person loves peace, the other can say "sorry" and leave it behind, so things can continue.

But one of the most important ways in which men are encouraged to show their love is through fulfilling their role as providers, even if the man earns less than the wife. In this context, spending money on someone is "a sign of the love of the spender" (Cornwall 2002:967), and what makes a man a husband is his role of provider. This is an aspect that women often confront men with, when they do not comply with it (Cornwall 2002:970). According to the pastor, by doing this, not only are men fulfilling their role as good husbands, they also prevent their wives from committing infidelity for the sake of money.

But in this process of building a balanced household and becoming a loving husband, men also need to learn to show their vulnerability toward their wives by showing their affection and accepting their decisions when this is appropriate. And all this is reached through the Holy Spirit's intervention. Papa Honoré is an example of a loving husband. I often saw him taking his wife on his bike wherever she needed to go and treating her kindly. He and his four children are very active members of the AoG church, whereas his wife is Catholic. But he had come to terms with, and respected, his wife's decision of not participating in the church. Before his conversion, he and his wife had decided to

get married in the Catholic Church. However, he was sent to work in a village in the north of Benin. While he was working there, he faced an incident of sorcery caused by his relatives. He found deliverance at the AoG church and as a result of this, he decided to give his life to Jesus. According to Beninese “tradition”, when a woman marries, she is meant to follow the religion of her husband, so his wife would have been required to join him in the Pentecostal church. Instead, she disagreed with his conversion. This did not impede their union but she became resentful because they never married at the Catholic Church. Papa Honoré, his children, the AoG pastor and maman Jasmine had tried to convince her to join the church but she did not accept. Given her strong reluctance, he decided to stop insisting. He said, “I don’t want to enter into conflict with her. Jesus hasn’t advised us to reject our wives or husbands because of our faith, no! ... I’ve tried to be a good husband. I provide for the family and always treat her with respect. She in return never causes problems at home.” He told me that whenever they have disagreements or conflict, he tries to handle them with the help of the Holy Spirit. He said,

God sustains the Christian household, even if there are problems, the spirit of God will guide its members to manage the situations ... if God is not there, Satan will take advantage to enter and create problems. If there is a situation where the man humiliates himself to ask for forgiveness, Satan can take advantage of the woman ... if the man is not in Jesus the tension will just raise.

In this case, it is interesting to see that only through the help of the Holy Spirit can a man ask for forgiveness and not be humiliated by his wife. The man then will have the wisdom to handle the situation, steering it towards a positive outcome. Also, the Holy Spirit provides men with a different understanding of situations. As the AoG pastor said in the case of papa Constance, men are considered to be proud and jealous by nature. Only through the assistance of a higher power than themselves can they change their behaviour and “understand things differently”.

Similarly, with the help of the Holy Spirit, men are more likely to accept their wives’ advice and decisions, particularly if the woman is also Born Again. For example, during my stay in Benin, the AoG Pastor had a knee injury. He was required to keep his knee immobilised for one month but because of his many commitments in the church, he did not observe the required rest and it was taking him very long to heal. In the meantime,

one of his colleagues at Parakou, a city in the north, invited him to preach for a revival week in his church. He invited him to stay for one week afterwards during which he could rest, read the Bible and pray. He was very excited to go, but I knew that maman Jasmine was not very happy with the project. Whenever he left for long periods of time, she had to take over his role in the church, which added an extra burden to her regular church and domestic duties. Besides, she was afraid to stay alone at home with the children for long periods of time since previously, while the pastor was away, someone had tried to force the main entrance at night.

She did not want to contradict her husband and decided to say nothing. So the pastor made plans and got ready to go. However, two days before his departure, I arrived to see them. As I greeted him, he told me that he had cancelled his trip. I asked why, and he said, “maman Jasmine spoke to me last night and said that, in her heart, she did not feel like it was good for me to go … maybe traveling for long hours on a bus would affect my knee.” I said that I had travelled on the bus to Parakou and I thought it was a fairly comfortable bus ride. But he answered saying, “I need to listen to my wife. I know there is a reason why she told me this. Maybe it is the Spirit of God talking through her and I need to be attentive and listen.”

In this case, he considered himself to be obeying not the wishes of his wife, but those of God and the Holy Spirit speaking through his wife. Modifying Smilde’s (1997) notion of “religiously-bounded patriarchy” I suggest that we look at it rather as a “religiously-bounded marriage”, in which giving priority to obeying God is also the responsibility of men - although, in this case, they obey Him through their wives.

## Conclusions

In a context of changing and often conflicting values around marriage in Benin, Pentecostalism provides people with a specific set of guidelines on how to articulate gender relations according to an ideal model of a monogamous Christian household. This chapter has not taken into account the way in which Pentecostals deal with principles of seniority that shape gender relations in polygynous unions and other areas of kinship dynamics (cf. Peel 2002). It has focused only on the way in which Pentecostals in Benin try to rebalance gender dynamics between men and women, in order to conform to an ideal model of Christian monogamous marriage. Although in an

effort to become a modern country, Beninese government and international NGOs have pushed to implement monogamy as the only legal form of union, this does not mean that Pentecostals aspire to monogamy just because they want to become “modern”. Pentecostals aim to comply with what they conceive as a Godly-ordained model of marriage, where one man joins one woman to become one flesh. This does not mean that polygynous unions do not exist among Pentecostals. In this case, men who were polygynous before they converted are equally encouraged to love and treat their wives equally and fairly.

In this process of realignment to a model of Christian marriage, patriarchal authority is also redefined. Both women and men learn to exert different types of authority within the household. In the case of women, Pentecostal teaching tries to change those aspects of women’s behaviour of which men normally disapprove. Through their submissive behaviour, women bear the responsibility of building successful monogamous households. They learn to respect their husbands in the way they speak and by sharing their earnings in a context where women increasingly have access to higher earner capacity than men. Women are encouraged to be economically independent and their spiritual power is positively assimilated instead of being restricted. In this sense, we cannot always agree that Pentecostals tighten their patriarchal grip on women (cf. Mate 2002:549).

Pentecostal teachings also try to change the way in which men behave towards their wives. In particular, they encourage men to be more loving towards them and to fulfil their “traditional” roles as providers, even if women earn more money. Similarly by loving their wives, men in polygynous unions can lessen the impact of women’s jealousy, which often manifests as a destructive spiritual force such as witchcraft. Although men manage to keep their position as heads of households and obtain respect, they also give up other advantages, such as to not being able to have more wives and conceive as many descendants as they wish.

Similarly, the Pentecostal project of rebalancing gender relations is not always successful. Feminine submission tends to achieve positive results when men also comply with a model of Christian behaviour. But this is not always the case. When this happens, the intervention of the pastor, as mediator, is crucial. He intervenes in disputes

between husband and wife that in the past used to be handled by the head of the patrilineage, or *bale*.

Throughout this process, the spiritual power acquired through the Holy Spirit is crucial, as it provides a different understanding of reality based on scripture. In a context where women are considered to be spiritually stronger than men, women are encouraged to voluntarily withhold their power in their marital relations by being submissive. In addition to this, men can also access the spiritual power of the Holy Spirit, which contributes to rebalancing spiritual power in their relationships. By acquiring this type of spiritual strength, men can become loving husbands by showing vulnerable aspects of their affection, and accepting their wives' advice without fear of being controlled by them. In this case, men and women tend to relegate their personal agency to God, and align their decisions with an external source of power. This allows them to better handle tensions and power struggles manifesting in their everyday domestic lives.

Having seen the way in which gender relations are re-accommodated in the context of a monogamous marriage, I will now explore some of the dilemmas that arise from living in monogamous unions, especially when a couple cannot conceive. The next chapter, therefore, will bring attention to certain aspects of seniority and the continuing importance of reproduction in Beninese society.

## Chapter 6

### **The Pitfalls of Reproduction: Monogamy, Fidelity and the Problem of Infertility**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented the way in which Pentecostal teachings aim to address issues and “imbalances” in the household and society as a whole through shaping gender relations in marriage. I showed how building and sustaining a monogamous marriage was part of building a virtuous Christian self. This picture would not be complete, however, without taking into account the central role of teaching on sexual behaviour.

In this chapter, therefore, I deal with Pentecostal teaching on sexuality, which takes a prominent place in the life of the church. I build on Mate’s work (2002:557-565) that has highlighted the importance and prominence that teachings on marriage and sexual behaviour have for Pentecostal women in Zimbabwe. In Benin, it became clear to me that these teachings aim to address some of the main moral concerns expressed by the majority of the population. Some of these include the increase in premarital relations among young people and the use of sexuality to manipulate partners and exert material benefits, as discussed in the previous chapter.

For Pentecostals, fidelity towards God when single and fidelity between partners once married is presented as one of the central values and part of the ideal life that a Born Again should lead. It is assumed that a satisfactory sexual life, restricted to the context of marriage, plays a crucial role in building a successful Godly-intended monogamous union. However, in this context where having numerous descendants is still regarded as a sign of wealth, and men feel social pressure to have at least one male successor, having a satisfactory sexual life might not always guarantee success. This is particularly the case when monogamous couples face problems of infertility. This chapter, therefore, presents the way in which Pentecostal churches, in particular the AoG church, teach their fellowship to manage their sexual lives. At the same time, it presents the types of

moral dilemma that people experience when trying to follow this path and to deal with the temptation of committing sin by engaging in sexual relations outside the marital bond.

In order to analyse the way in which Pentecostals in Benin deal with moral conflicts in relation to their sexual lives, Robbins' (2007b) theory of morality constitutes a helpful framework to my analysis. One of the virtues of the theory of morality developed by Robbins is that he highlights the importance of cultural values in shaping moral decisions and actions. According to him, society is constituted of different spheres, each one having a dominant value that governs it. Where harmony within and between spheres exists, a morality of reproduction is in evidence, in which most of the moral action happens unquestioningly in everyday life. However, conflict between or within these value spheres lays the ground for a morality of freedom and choice, where "people become consciously aware of choosing their own fate" (Robbins 2007b:299-300). He identifies two types of conflicts that arise in these moments where morality of freedom comes into play. One type is stable conflicts and the other type is conflicts of social change. According to him, these conflicts occur because,

new values are introduced or because the hierarchical relations that hold between traditional values have been transformed. When values change in either of these ways, conflicts between them are destined to arise as old values assert their importance in the face of new ones or previously dominant values attempt to hold their position in the face of the growing importance of previously subordinate ones (Robbins 2007b:302).

For the purpose of this chapter, this second kind of morality of freedom is relevant; in particular the cases presented here fall into the category of conflicts caused by social change. Pentecostals in Benin present a few parallels with the Urupmin as described by Robbins. They have experienced a similar shift in values connected to their conversion. They also share a willingness to work hard to meet Christian moral standards because they believe in the imminent return of Jesus, which is reinforced by the constant teaching and moral sermons that they receive at church. In addition to this, Benin presents a plural religious context where different moral systems in the realm of religion coexist. As presented in the previous chapter, recent changes in Benin have reinforced people's perception of the "disruption" of moral values, to which Pentecostals try to

provide moral guidance, particularly in the arena of their sexual lives. But although Pentecostals in Benin share some similarities with the Urapmin charismatic Christians, the nature of moral conflicts they experience is different. In the case of Pentecostals in Benin, not everybody experiences moral dilemmas in relation to their sexual life in the same degree. Neither do they live in a constant moral torment, despite the fact that they also experience conflict as a result of change.

The reason why Urapmin live in a constant moral conflict experienced in everyday life is, Robbins argues, because life is still regulated by two opposing and conflicting values: one of Christian individualism and one of Urapmin relationalism. However, his account does not really show the way in which this dilemma might be experienced by different sectors of society differently. This is why I consider that Zigon's critique of Robbins's theory is pertinent, since it is important to take into account the personal experience of people facing moral dilemmas in order to understand their struggles and anxieties during the process of moral questioning (Zigon 2009:256). Particularly relevant for this case is the way in which Zigon conceptualises ethical moments that happen in these moments of moral questioning. According to him, the ethical moment happens after a person has experienced a moral breakdown, which occurs "when some event or person intrudes into the everyday life of a person and forces her to consciously reflect upon the appropriate ethical response" (2009:262). By basing his argument on Foucault's view of the ethical process as "work on the self", he suggests that once the moral breakdown was experienced, the person through ethical tactics of work on the self creates "a new moral dispositional person" with the capacity to alter the morality of her social world (Zigon 2009:262). However, these ethical tactics that people use to reinsert themselves in society as moral persons need to first be learnt. As will be seen in this chapter, the ethical work on the self does not happen exclusively at moments of failure or breakdown, it happens from the moment people learn the new values and when they choose to act morally once they experience these moments of questioning.

In this chapter I demonstrate that the individual experiences of people dealing with moral dilemmas, reveal that the value of reproduction and principles of seniority are still central in articulating social relations in Benin, and continue to shape people's engagement with their faith (cf. Peel 2002). Although Christian teachings on how to manage peoples' sexual lives offer successful ways to navigate changes and often address negatively perceived aspects in this society, they also pose moral conflicts.

These teachings often negate and try to change the value of these principles of seniority and the centrality of fertility. Therefore, they pose moral dilemmas particularly among people who find it impossible to conceive. I argue that Pentecostal men and women experience moral contradictions in different ways, depending on the stage of seniority they have in the social system which, at the same time, influences the way they make moral choices. Whether a person decides to commit sin through adultery or premarital relations depends on matters of honour, her prestige, social position and personal choice. Depending on a person's moral decision, especially when deciding to abide by the moral principles dictated by her Christian faith, moral dilemmas also have the potential to reshape these prominent values. However, these moments of moral questioning should not be seen as moral torments, as happens among the Urupmin that Robbins describes. For Pentecostals in Benin, Christian ideas of repentance and redemption offer a positive side to moral questioning where, as suggested by Mayblin (2010), the moral paradox can be seen as a challenge rather than a problem. It then becomes an opportunity to get closer to God, "a source of spiritual vitality in and of itself, if, and only if, one knows how to rework it" (Mayblin 2010:7). I suggest that it is precisely in this reworking on the self through voluntary confession and discipline that Pentecostal "ethical techniques" (Zigon 2009), aim at making people stronger in their faith. This is where, in the end, the possibility of having a long lasting change of values resides, since it constitutes an opportunity for people to rethink and later reinforce what it is taught as a new value system.

In the first part of this chapter, I will explore the way in which Pentecostals aim to build a moral self through the management of their sexual lives. This happens mainly through teaching that promotes chastity among unmarried young people and the exercise of sexuality with an emphasis on pleasure only within the marital bond. In this process of shaping and channelling sexual desire people embody a moral behaviour through practices of the self, such as prayer and fasting. The role of the Holy Spirit is crucial and seen as the source that makes possible this self-control. At the same time, they transform the underlying values of what could be considered traditional cultural forms, such as the importance of virginity before marriage and the payment of bridewealth. They also channel common discontent with those "traditional" forms, particularly with the marginality of women without children or with the jealousy that results when women are forced to live as co-wives. In the second part of this chapter, I will show how the importance of reproduction is central in this society. Through looking at

specific cases facing moral dilemmas, we will have the opportunity to see the way in which people deal with conflict, both by aligning themselves through the new moral values and also by disrupting them. However, the disruption also works as a way of reinserting people into the moral system with an even stronger sense of morality for themselves and the community.

### **Sex and the Importance of Reproduction in Benin**

In Benin, people say that someone who has many children is a wealthy person. In popular songs and sayings among the Yoruba, children are often described as precious beads and silver (Makinde 2004:167). And “the voices of women, in *oriki*, praise their husbands’ families for providing them unstintingly ‘with money and children’” (Barber 1995:213). In many parts of Africa, the importance of having numerous children has been for a long time a matter of anthropological attention. It has been argued that children allowed for both economic and social wealth. On the one hand, they contributed to generating a larger work force to produce in the fields (Goody 1973:188-189). But also, on the other, a large progeny contributed to building wealth in people (Guyer 1993) and provide social security for the parents when they arrive at an old age (Falen 2011).

Many authors agree that matters of reproduction continue to be highly valued in contemporary Africa. In his study of marriage among the Igbo in Nigeria, Smith argues that “the continued primacy of the fertility and family and the reputational imperatives of social reproduction” shape marital relations and negotiations of love, money and infidelity (Smith 2009:159). But most of all, fertility and reproduction are still the means by which principles of seniority are articulated in this society. They constitute the main ways in which a lineage is perpetuated and men position themselves in the social ladder as heads of lineages (Schwab 1955). Similarly, they allow women to occupy various important positions throughout their lives (Falen 2011:152; Makinde 2004:166; Lawal 1996). Depending on her stage in life, a woman can have the role of daughter, wife, mother, priestess or witch (Makinde 2004:165). Among all these attributes, being a mother is the most appreciated. Popular songs describe mothers as being precious as gold (Makinde 2004:165). And it is only when a woman has a child that she acquires a status within her husband’s lineage “and the power to exercise authority in her husband’s home” (Makinde 2004:167).

In this sense, women hold a key role in the reproduction of society through their fertility and because of this, women in Yoruba and Fon societies are seen both as powerful and dangerous beings that need to be respected and feared (Makinde 2004:167). Given that the capacity to procreate is in the hands of women, sexual relations are often at the centre of power struggles between partners. Women are aware of the power they hold as guarantors of their husband's lineage reproduction. Therefore, many women manipulate their husbands' dependence on their fertility to their own advantage in order to obtain what they want, in particular, economic rewards (Falen 2011:153). At the same time, men often manifest a strong anxiety about the fidelity of their partners or wives. On various occasions I heard men expressing with certain anxiety that women, as opposed to men, are the only ones who know whose child they are carrying in their wombs. There exist many ways in which people try to secure fidelity. It is known that men recur to the use of *gris-gris* or rituals performed for these purposes. For example, several times I heard of the popular use of *mágùn*, a magic drug that a man applies to a woman in order to ensure that she will not have sex with a lover; if she does the lover is meant to die on the spot (Schiltz 2002:338-339). Similarly, some people described another method consisting of young women and men going at midnight to the fields where they perform the ritual of mixing their blood so they will be loyal to each other for life.

In response to this, Pentecostal churches place a strong emphasis on shaping a particular kind of morality where fertility and sex, the means for reproduction, are given a different value. Pentecostal teachings give marital union a much more prominent place than reproduction. This is different to non-Pentecostal unions, where the primary reason for a marriage is to have children and “without progeny, there is little justification for a couple to remain married” (Falen 2011:150-151). Knowing and learning how to manage one's sexuality is at the centre of leading a good Christian life. Pentecostal churches place great importance on this aspect and different teachings are directed to both men and women depending on whether they are married or not. Although teaching is addressed to both men and women, the stress is mainly placed on women. In general terms, young people are encouraged to practice chastity, restraining themselves from physical contact until the marriage takes place. It is only in the context of marriage that sexuality is to be fully enjoyed. It is through the control of sexuality that a person builds a virtuous self and manages to have a successful marital union.

## **The Practice of Chastity before Marriage: Reshaping the Values of Virginity and Bridewealth**

Two differences between regular non-Pentecostal and Pentecostal unions are the importance they assign to a young girl's virginity before marriage and payment of bridewealth by the family of the groom to the family of the bride. In their efforts to make themselves stand apart from the rest of society, and to make it clear that they are "not from this world," Pentecostals give prime importance to re-establishing and preserving these two values that - paradoxically - could be seen as "traditional" values. However, they do so by attributing a different meaning to those of the traditional forms.

According to classic accounts, the payment of bridewealth officially sealed the union between two people. It represented the two families agreeing with the union. In this sense, one of the main roles of paying bridewealth was to secure the affiliation of the child born in the marriage to the father's lineage (Goody 1973:16). This is why it was so important that the girl who was given in marriage was a virgin, as her virginity secured the honour of the lineage she was about to join. It assured that the woman would only bear a child to the man she had joined in marriage. As Fadipe reported among the Yoruba, this is why virginity before marriage was one of the most valued elements of families arranging a marriage and was often rewarded by the payment of money and a hen sacrificed to the *ori* - also known as head or destiny - of the bride (Fadipe 1970:84).

Nowadays, young people in Benin become sexually active at a young age, and it is frequent that a marital union happens because a girl has already become pregnant. Older people complain that virginity on marriage is one of the values that has been lost, and condemn young people's behaviour and lack of morality (cf. Cornwall 2002:964). Today, with the payment of bridewealth being optional by Beninese law, some couples, particularly educated people, decide no longer to ask for it. However, what happens more often is that families consider that this practice is no longer feasible because girls have had premarital relations and are no longer virgins when they marry, saying that the girl "had already given herself". However, this is different for Muslims, who normally deliver large bridewealth after the birth of the first child. Although unions without bridewealth happen very often, these unions are normally frowned upon, since they are interpreted as showing lack of commitment or seriousness on the man's part. In Benin, I observed that having paid bridewealth helped to ease tensions between families when

something unexpected happened, for example, if a woman dies due to neglect during childbirth. In this case, the man whose wife had died had paid bridewealth at the time of their union. Due to this he was able to return the corpse of his wife to her patrilineage in order to have a proper burial. If he had not done so, the family of the wife could have rejected the corpse and let the husband deal with it which, in this context, I was told, represents a curse on the family of the man. This demonstrates that even though bridewealth payment is no longer a requisite to carry out a union as it was in the past, it is still a symbolic practice indicating that the person has married properly (Falen 2011:67).

Pentecostals' enforcement of the practice of virginity and bridewealth has both moral and practical implications. In relation to virginity, when a young woman arrives as a virgin in marriage, she is considered to gain God's favour and to receive his blessings in reward. During youth formation classes, Pentecostal young girls are encouraged to keep their "hearts" and their virginity before marriage. Young girls are meant to show their commitment to God by keeping themselves pure. According to maman Jasmine, when a woman marries as a virgin and wears a white gown, "the glory of God manifests in the woman and everybody glorifies her." The honour of her virginity, therefore, does not fall only on her lineage and that of her husband but mainly on herself. She is seen as a good Christian in front of the fellowship and everybody praises her.



**Fig. 6.1 A virgin bride wears a veil at her wedding day**

On a more practical level, young girls are encouraged to test the sincerity and love of a man by asking them to wait until their marriage to be sexually involved. This way, when a girl focuses on maintaining her virginity, she has the time to focus on building the skills that will allow her to have some income later in life. Maman Jasmine often quoted Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” She used to quote this passage to encourage young girls to set their hearts on Jesus and not on their boyfriends. She encouraged young girls to focus on their studies while they were single and to avoid wasting time dating young men. On one occasion, I was invited by the pastor to give a talk on how to develop and pursue a vision, in particular, he wanted me to talk about how to plan their futures and encourage them to continue their studies. He told me he was keen that, as Christians, young people in the church should develop aspirations to become “someone in life”. Before I gave this talk, when I was sitting in the kitchen with maman Jasmine and talking about what I intended to say, she offered her opinion,

Girls nowadays are only interested in dating young men and do not have a plan for their lives. I struggle to make them understand the importance of fidelity. When they are young they should be loyal to Jesus and not wander around with one young man after another. That is why they end up catching pregnancies (sic). Afterwards they end up crying and crying because they have lost their youth. But time does not come back and there is nothing one can do, but to face the consequences.

Teachings about the importance of fidelity and abstinence before marriage hold some attraction for Pentecostal girls. In everyday contexts people tend to talk openly but indirectly about sex. Men and women often make joking references to the sexual act and popular sayings and songs also make implicit sexual references. However, some women told me, there is not necessarily a detailed or concrete sexual education. In fact, they found that Pentecostal churches provided education that they normally did not receive at home, such as the importance of avoiding premarital relations and the way a married woman should behave. For some, these teachings were one of the main reasons why they converted. When I talked to these girls, some said that they were looking forward to the day of their wedding and cherished the idea that they would one day wear a white gown. This was the case of Clarice, who started attending the Foursquare Church, and later converted, after having attended her uncle’s wedding at this church in Pobe. She

told me that she had never seen anything like it before, despite having previously attended the Celestial Christian Church. She was attracted to the way in which the whole assembly had honoured the bride and the way in which, during the sermon, they had said that the man should love his wife and become one flesh. In other words, she was attracted by the idea that a Pentecostal marriage should be monogamous, as opposed to Celestial Christian marriages, where polygyny is permitted. Similarly Josette, a young woman at the AoG church thought that nowadays many young people “live in the world” they “give themselves” to premarital sex, hypocrisy and sin. She liked the way maman Jasmine encouraged them to be loyal to Jesus and to marry in the church because, according to her, when a woman keeps herself a virgin until marriage, she then is exalted. Similarly, maman Elodie mentioned that in her youth, foremost among the things she liked when she joined the AoG church was the education on marriage that young women and men received. In the Methodist Church, where she previously attended, there was no advice about the need for dating couples to avoid sexual contact. As a Methodist, she observed how many girls became pregnant with impunity for themselves and their partners. Two of her sisters had premarital pregnancies and nobody at the church provided support or gave attention to finding the men who had been responsible. This, she decided, was contrary to the Word of God. As seen in the first chapter, this was one of the main reasons why she resolved to leave the Methodist Church. Although the Methodist and Catholic Churches both preach monogamy, it is widely known that many Methodist and Catholic men have second secret partners and that the practice of abstinence is not enforced among young people.

In Benin, Pentecostal churches tend to be the most rigorous among Christian churches regarding sexual practices. But arriving as a virgin to marriage does not mean that a girl arrives without knowledge. It is common that elder women talk and teach younger ones in matters related to their marital life. Prior to their wedding day, young engaged women are encouraged to attend the meetings for married women. They similarly learn from their older or more experienced counterparts when taking advice from the pastors’ wives who normally take responsibility for teaching the rest of the women at church (the Biblical Institute for the AoG church in Benin provides seminars for young women who are engaged to pastors, in order to prepare them for their role as pastors’ wives).

In relation to bridewealth, Pentecostals recommend making a symbolical payment as a means of showing respect to the bride’s relatives. In this sense, observing this practice

is not so much a payment made to fix the paternity of the children born in the marriage as one which allows them to engage with their relatives in a positive way and to be regarded as respectable people. In general terms, bridewealth ceremonies involve members of the groom's patrilineage and his closest friends. They gather at the groom's home then go together to the bride's home, while the groom remains at home, where they meet members of her patrilineage. The negotiations are normally made between members of the extended families, with the *bales* (household heads) speaking on behalf of the married couple. The parents do not have as strong a voice as does the extended family. It is also the woman's relatives who determine or set the kind and amount of goods and cash to be paid, in order to accept or reject the offer. Sometimes they set different stages of payment until the groom's family satisfies the request. Bridewealth nowadays normally consists of an amount of cash set by the family, a certain number of fabrics, kitchen articles, alcohol (*sodabi*), tobacco, and other articles. Pentecostals perform a truncated ceremony, which is devoid of traditional religious elements. For example, ancestral rituals and sacrifices are no longer performed, as seen in the previous chapter, where I give an account of how consulting *Ifá* to see if a union is favourable and compatible has been replaced by prayer, and how instead of *sodabi*, non-alcoholic beverages are offered.

However, even if Pentecostals offer to pay bridewealth to non-convert relatives, it is not always a guarantee that the family will accept the union, especially if they are the only converts in their family. In these cases, an offer is still made and it is up to the family to accept it or not. For example, when maman and papa Elodie got married, none of the families, particularly hers, approved of the union. She came from a Methodist family and he came from a Muslim one. Her father disapproved of the union and insisted that she should have married a Methodist man. Nevertheless, they proceeded with the wedding given that they had the approval of the church. At first, papa Elodie's family, which by then were on better terms with him, offered to give the initial payment to the bride's family as a gesture to formalise the union. However, maman Elodie's father refused saying that they had not approved of the union. Nevertheless the young couple proceeded with the ceremony. This was not an issue for maman Elodie who, by then, had started working as a teacher and was economically independent. Since her conversion she had to do things without the approval of her family. Her father, seeing that the couple were determined to carry out the union, the day before the wedding sent a message to the groom's family saying that they accepted their offer. His reasoning

was that at least it was better to receive something rather than nothing. Since papa Elodie's family is Muslim, it was not until the day that their first child was born that his family arrived in the bride's household with a large bridewealth and carried out a great ceremony. Although this was not essential for the couple, they nevertheless accepted and respected the family's observance of their tradition and gesture.

Marital unions celebrated when the girl is a virgin are the most lavishly and prominently celebrated in the church. These weddings, which occur only rarely, are public events carried out with great honours from the community particularly towards the bride. Pentecostals from different churches come together and support these events. The purity of the girl is exalted and the couple is blessed for their union. During my fieldwork, I attended only two weddings: one in Pobe and another one in Banigbe. The Pobe wedding took place at the AoG church, whereas the one in Banigbe took place in an independent Pentecostal church. In both cases, I observed that people belonging to different Pentecostal churches in the region attended these events. I realised that regardless of the differences that exist between the various Pentecostal churches, there exists a network of Pentecostal Christians that support each other in moments such as these. In particular, friends supported the successful development of the events, especially to honour the brides, who in both cases had kept their virginity. For example, maman Jasmine had fitted her own wedding gown to give it to the girl who got married in Banigbe. The girl had been her macramé apprentice in the past, and she retained a particular affection for her. She described her to me as an obedient and respectful girl and told me that offering her wedding dress was the least she could do for her. Similarly, the AoG pastor, during one of his trips to Cotonou had bought a second hand suit for the groom, which he had offered him as his wedding present. When he came back that day from Cotonou, he proudly showed me the suit and reminisced about the day of his own wedding remembering how proud he had felt walking down the aisle looking elegant in his new suit. He wanted, he told me, to share some of that happiness with the couple.

In the case of the wedding in Pobe, several pastors from the Evangelical association had separately told me before the event that I should not miss attending that wedding, since the bride was a girl who "really knew how to respect". On the day of the wedding, I heard a conversation between maman Jasmine and another wedding guest, who in this wedding, had been the person who bought the wedding dress for the girl, just as maman

Jasmine did for the bride in Banigbe. “She is such a good girl, and as soon as I knew she was getting married, I offered to buy her a dress!” this woman said to maman Jasmine. The church was full of people and many of them offered several gifts. As I learned that day, many had voluntarily contributed to the expenses of the ceremony.

The next day, during the Sunday service, the AoG pastor took advantage of the previous day’s events to draw moral lessons from them. He told the young girls in the church that they should learn from the example of the girl who got married the day before. He said,

Nowadays many girls are arrogant because they believe that since they are more educated, they can do as they please, I tell you that this is not true! As you saw with the girl yesterday, it is the purity of your heart and the meekness of your behaviour that makes you respectable and honourable.

So even though girls in the church are encouraged to pursue their studies and continue to develop their skills, they are also encouraged to be humble and keep the “purity of their hearts”. He also encouraged them to keep their virginity because, as they had seen, they would be recompensed the day of their wedding by the honour given by the assembly and their own husbands.

It is not always guaranteed, however, that a young Pentecostal girl will preserve her virginity before marriage. When a girl is no longer a virgin but has not had sexual intercourse with the groom, she may still wear a white gown and have a ceremony at the church, the only difference is that, as a sign of having lost her virginity, she wears no veil. In cases where the groom and bride had premarital sex, however, they are no longer allowed to have a ceremony in the church. In these cases, the pastor carries out a blessing ceremony in the domicile of the couple where they invite the members of the church to attend. Although maintaining chastity before marriage is highly praised within the church and society, there are also good reasons why some young people sometimes break this rule. As it will be further explored later in this chapter, maintaining premarital chastity poses insoluble dilemmas among young people in Benin.

## **The Sexual Life of Women and Men within the Marital Bond**

Pentecostal attitudes towards sex within marriage differ from those of non-Pentecostals marriages in this part of West Africa. For many women, the sexual act within marriage is mostly seen as an act of procreation rather than a pleasurable activity. As Cornwall mentions, once women have children, they are expected to put up with unsatisfying relations for the sake of looking after children and sex is seen as a duty, “an element in the package of a relationship that women ought to endure” (Cornwall 2002:966-967). In contrast, Pentecostal churches not only encourage married women to be sexually active but to fully enjoy the sexual union, as long as it happens within the marital bond. As one of Matte’s informants voiced it “you have only one husband. Enjoy him!” (Matte 2002:557).

According to many people’s opinion, women are to be blamed for their husbands’ infidelity because they are not being able to properly satisfy their husband’s sexual desires (Smith 2009:173; Matte 2002:558; Falen 2011). In this sense, Pentecostal teachings reinforce the idea that men’s infidelity is to be blamed on women’s behaviour. Based on biblical teachings, Pentecostal women are taught that once they are married, the body of a wife belongs to her husband and the body of the husband belongs to his wife. Therefore, they should be always available to their husbands. This is the reason why, at least in the group of AoG church, teachings on sexuality had a very important place. If a woman knows how to please her husband, it will be easier for her to retain him and to maintain a monogamous household.

During my fieldwork, maman Jasmine organised a series of three-session teachings on sexuality during the fortnightly Friday gatherings for women. Each session covered different aspects of women’s sexuality. While opening the first session, she gave the testimony of a woman who, after having followed the teachings from the church, had become her husband’s favourite wife. This woman was the only Christian wife of her polygynous husband. As commonly happens in polygynous households, men normally have a favourite wife with whom he spends most time. The woman in question was not considered to be her husband’s favourite wife, and even less so after she became Christian. However, she started putting into practice the teachings that she received at the church. After some time of following the teachings from how to cook, welcome her husband, and seduce him, she gradually became her husband’s favourite wife and the

rest of the wives started to complain. In this context, co-wives often compete for the husband's favour. A favourite wife is more likely to receive more money and attention from her husband, she is more likely to exert influence over him and, in social events, she is the one who most often accompanies him. Although fertility is important, a favourite wife is not necessarily the one that has borne more children, but the one who knows how to win the husband's attention. When maman Jasmine told this story in the church, the rest of the women in the meeting received the testimony with cheering and praises to God. Maman Jasmine then encouraged women to be submissive and to learn how to seduce their husbands so they would keep coming back to them as it happened to that other woman.

The first session consisted of teachings related to personal care and intimate hygiene. Maman Jasmine encouraged women to look after themselves and to always try being attractive to their husbands. Women often neglect themselves while getting distracted in their daily chores and the care of children, and during men's sessions, some of them had confessed that they were often put off when they approached their wives because they were not very clean. She also gave advice to women about intimate health and encouraged them to either approach midwives or nurses to assist them with their concerns. The second and third sessions consisted of the art of seducing their husbands. She advised women to cook their husband's favourite foods and give variety to what they cooked. A woman can show her affection by occasionally feeding her husband in the mouth, removing the bones of his fish, and making sure he had a pleasant time while they shared their meal. Although women are taught to dress very modestly in public by not wearing revealing clothes, she advised women to reserve those revealing clothes for the bedroom. She also encouraged them to be the ones who approach their husbands to have sexual relations, instead of always waiting for him to initiate. She finally advised women to always be available to their husbands whenever they approached them and to soothe their husbands by offering their bodies when the man is sad or angry.

During one of our many conversations about our personal lives, maman Jasmine told me that at the beginning of her marriage with the AoG pastor, it had been very difficult for her to be physically affectionate and even more to be sexually open. She had grown up in a polygynous household in Togo. Her father had seven wives of which five lived in the same compound at her village of origin. She had grown up being exposed to the jealousies and discussions between co-wives. Her own mother had left the paternal

compound to live in Lome after she had been diagnosed with diabetes and required medical treatment. However, she says that the relationship between her parents was never very close. Therefore, she never knew what conjugal love was meant to be. She feared men's behaviour, since she had been witness to domestic violence within her own household and her elder sister's marriages. Therefore, she was never physically affectionate and found it very difficult to be affectionate in her marriage. As a result, the pastor often felt frustrated because he thought that she was rejecting him. Given that she wanted to please God by being a good Christian wife, she approached the pastor's wife in the church where she used to attend before her marriage and she gave her recommendations and books to read. She said that what helped her was that she read a lot of books. In fact, she showed me one of the books that are sold at the AoG headquarters bookshop written by a Christian counsellor. The book is called *Le Banquet du Seigneur. Le Super Sexe* (The Banquet of the Lord. Super Sex). In this case, the book refers to the act of marital sex as a Banquet, something that is meant to be enjoyable and originally designed by God for that purpose. After having put in practice the things that she had learnt, she had noticed the difference that having a good sexual union had done to her marriage. She knew that many women in the church were in the same situation that she was before, and that is the reason why she invested herself in teaching women about their sexuality. Whenever some women were in doubt, they approached her and she was always ready to try to listen and help the women as much as she could.

More importantly, women are taught to use their sexuality in a way that is aimed at building their marriage, rather than destroying it. Maman Jasmine often quoted Proverbs 14:1 saying, "the wise woman builds her house, but the foolish one pulls it down with her hands." She taught women to be wise in the way they used their sexuality. It was meant to bring them closer to their husbands and not to manipulate them. This way they could prevent their husbands searching for or justifying their extra-marital sexual liaisons. In some cases, women withhold sex to obtain either money or to coerce men into acceding to do what they want. As Falen suggests, "such strategy may reinforce men's characterisation of women as manipulative, deceitful and greedy" (Falen 2011:154).

For example, during one of my conversations with the AoG pastor about the way in which he deals with cases of adultery, he told me that often when the man committed adultery, the woman is at the source of it. He said,

At night, the man probably wants to sleep with her wife and the wife dresses with trousers and belt. The man has made all his efforts and the woman doesn't do anything. She does this all the time whenever her husband approaches her and they only have relations when the woman wants. It can happen that one day the man cannot contain himself anymore, then a prostitute passing by seduces the husband. If this is the way it happens, we have to ask the woman, "is it true that this day your husband really asked you to give him your body?" then the woman says, "yes, it is true" then the woman can say, "I do that because I don't like it." I ask, "how is it that you don't like it? The Bible has said that one cannot refuse it ... madam, the Bible says that upon marriage your body is no longer your body but your husband's body and your husband's body is no longer his but yours. Why have you refused? Look what you have caused! Your husband couldn't contain himself and that is why he went outside to look for someone else. So that is why madam you also need to be disciplined because you were also the one who caused it."

I offered an alternative point of view, suggesting that it might have been the man's fault. It could have been that the woman did not like having relations with her husband, because maybe he hurt her or did not have the necessary emotional closeness. He replied referring to the manipulative behaviour that women sometimes have towards their husbands,

There are women who have a bad character and they do this because they maybe have a grudge against their husbands or they think that, without her, the husband is nothing. Then they try to prove this by dressing with trousers to go to bed and so on, just to bother their husbands and cause them pain. If this is the case, that is not right.

However, he explained to me that if the lack of sexual relations is due to the man's way of approaching his wife, then he tried to approach the man to explain to him how to treat his wife correctly. He said, "everything is learned. It is true; there are men who do not know how to approach their women ... they treat them with violence and the woman is hurt and that removes the pleasure." Although I was unable to attend men's

sessions, the pastor told me that he also tries to include teaching addressing these issues to complement what his wife teaches to the women in the church.

### *Men and Self-Control*

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, men often justify polygyny, claiming it is in African men's blood. Many men consider that the desire for more than one woman is a natural need that they have to fulfil (cf. Smith 2009:166). This is also a society where masculinity is measured in terms of sexual activity (Cornwall 2002:966). Therefore, even if some men are said to be monogamous and are officially married to only one wife, the majority have extramarital affairs. Many men think that way, and as long as these affairs are kept secret from their wives and they continue to provide for their families, they are allowed to continue doing so (Smith 2009:171).

However, Pentecostal teachings emphasise that in order to be monogamous, a man should develop a strong sense of self-control. Their teachings seem to go in line with what Smith rightly points out, "sexual desires do not emerge or operate in a vacuum. Men's extramarital sexual behaviour is socially produced and organised" (Smith 2009:167). One might take this as implying, in the Benin context, that men need to avoid succumbing to peer or family pressures and, as part of this, steer clear of the temptation to seek other women. Given that it is something that is difficult to achieve for most of them, the only way in which they manage to build this self-control is through the spiritual help of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

For example, papa Daniel, a member of the Foursquare Church, even before his conversion, had decided that he wanted to be monogamous. He remembered the bad experiences he had while growing up in a polygynous household, where he was living in fosterage. Witnessing the jealousy of the co-wives and the discord among their children always displeased him. It is common to hear people attributing witchcraft attacks to co-wives. Rivalries and jealousies are channelled through witchcraft and sometimes these are directed towards the other woman's children. If the children of the other woman are more successful, it will be the co-wife who will try to "block" the children's progress in life. That is why papa Daniel had decided to take only one wife upon his marriage. Although he was officially married to only one wife, he confessed

that before he converted, he used to have other hidden girlfriends, and even had rented another apartment where he used to take them,

Before I met Jesus, I had my wife, but I used to date other girls, to the point that I had rented another apartment to take them. But when I received Jesus, I closed that door and gave back the keys to the landlord. The people I used to hang out with, they used to say, “That is not true, you will not do this.” I said, “It is true, it is you who haven’t understood, I have understood. I don’t want to lose; I don’t want to die young.” I thank God He has called me. That is why when God calls someone, it is important that the person answers this calling soon. The person should not harden his heart; otherwise it might be too late. If I hadn’t replied quickly to the call of God, I don’t know where I would be now. Maybe, I would have probably died and my children would be with another father. I don’t know! My wife would be a widow. You see? So it is really good to receive Jesus.

When he was telling me about the things that changed in his life when he gave his life to Jesus, it was precisely that he had been able to leave his “vice” for women. He said this as he had left another addiction, such as alcohol or tobacco. He said,

There are some who have a drinking addiction with friends. For me ... I didn’t like to drink, maybe once or twice, but it wasn’t every week. I never smoked, I avoided it, and I don’t like it. I have never smoked. But for me it was fornication. I have looked for girls, and my neighbours’ wives. Because at that time, we said that we were living, whereas we were on the road of sin, on the road of death, on the road of perdition. We said, “we are young and we are living” whereas all this is not true. When we are not in The Light, it is easy to fall. At that time, I was a son of darkness, I was not a son of Light ... I thank God that He has called me and I have kept firm in this decision.

It is important to highlight the way in which, in his testimony, he represents peer pressure as having played an important role in his previous life, whereas his current life is portrayed as one in which he was able to withstand this pressure and which enabled him to change direction. One of the things that made him change his mind about extramarital affairs is that the church often preaches that men who have extramarital affairs are more prone to contract HIV, or die due to spells put on them by the women with

whom they sleep. This is why he said he feared dying young. He stressed that it was Jesus in his life that gave him the strength to change his way of life, but in the end, it was also a matter of personal choice, self-control and the strength of a person's faith. He said,

You see? Temptations are everywhere, in the job, at home, with friends, in the family ... but the person who has Jesus is different to the one who doesn't have Jesus in his life. It also depends on the faith and the strength of the faith of each person ... you can always have temptations. It happens among members of the church, or even between pastors and followers. But if you really know The One [Jesus] you have received, then you will be strong ... Satan will tempt you to see if you are solid, if you can resist. But with prayer and fasting you can always resist, [temptation] will pass.

As papa Daniel pointed out, this is a matter of choice that every Pentecostal has to make and everyone is equally exposed to the same temptation. While talking about this topic with the AoG pastor, he also admitted that being monogamous is not easy, but it can always be possible with the help of the Holy Spirit. He had also grown up in a polygynous household and had seen that this was the standard model of relating within a marriage. I once commented that it must be difficult for men to adapt to a monogamous marriage when they grew up in a completely different context when the norm was to be polygynous. He answered, saying that having grown up in a particular model of household did not determine their choices either. He said,

Yes it is not easy to be monogamous ... but we are bound to adapt. It is not easy, it is true, because while the eyes are here, we are going to see women of all sorts and not every day we will have the same strength. But with the help of the Holy Spirit ... we will be able to resist and we won't overpass our limits. For example, we have a mouth to eat, but not everything that is out there is for us to eat. If I am already satisfied, even if I like something very much, I won't be able to eat, because there is no longer space in my stomach. That is why we have to work a lot in the household so the home is balanced. The man loves his wife and the wife loves her husband. They both need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, have fear of God and love each other. That is good!

As this testimony demonstrates, having a balanced household means that each member will know how to fulfil his own duties according to his place at home. As seen in the previous chapter, this self-control needs to be complemented by teachings based on biblical principles and with locally appreciated values, such as providing for a wife and children, authority and obedience. The only thing that would guarantee the success of a monogamous household would be all these elements in combination.

### **The Challenges of Infertility**

By following Pentecostal teachings, people find the means to build and maintain a monogamous household, which has certain important advantages, such as avoiding jealousy among co-wives. However, there is a downside to monogamous unions and that is when a couple cannot conceive a child.

In Benin, adulthood is normally marked by conceiving children, and those people who are unable to conceive, often express their frustration for not being considered adults by the rest of society. Childless people are far less respected than those with children; their opinion is hardly valued or taken into account at family reunions. During my fieldwork, a famous popular singer in Benin called Affo Love passed away at thirty years of age. The reasons for her death were unclear and there were rumours about it being caused by sorcery or by HIV. Over the news and on the streets people commented that the most tragic aspect of her death was the fact that such a beautiful and talented woman had died before conceiving any children. For in Benin, people who die without having conceived a child are considered to have lived a futile life, no matter how wealthy, famous, talented or successful they might have been.

Although the consequences of infertility affect both women and men, in general, it is women rather than men who tend to bear the public stigma of being barren. This can be a heart-breaking experience for many women, especially when they are the first wives, since their position within their husband's family is devalued. In the local context, women receive strong criticisms and accusations for not being accomplished women. They even become targets of witchcraft accusations, because it is thought that if a woman cannot give life, then she can only take the life of others. A childless man does not carry quite the same stigma. When a couple is not able to conceive and the source for it is thought to be the woman, a man compensates for the lack of offspring by having

sex with other women and getting them pregnant. In fact, this is one of the justifications for polygyny and the reason given why many men enter into plural unions. Men in this sense are socially allowed to increase their procreation, and even encouraged to engage in promiscuous relationships if this is necessary. Although in these cases women are often seen as being victims of their husbands' infidelities, what is less often mentioned is the way in which many men are also pressurised, mainly but not exclusively by their paternal families and peer groups. When it is the man who cannot conceive, in the past, as Fadipe (1970:91) reports, his wife who was considered to be married into the husband's family, was allowed to have sex with a member of the same household and remain nominally her husband's wife. I did not witness any such cases, but as far as I was told, some women look for ways to become pregnant through affairs to avoid accusations of barrenness. Other times, women divorce their husbands and these divorces are normally not frowned upon.

The importance of fertility has always been so central that people engage in different methods to secure fertility. In particular, as Peel reports, *oriṣa* worship played an important role among women in securing the reproduction of the lineage (Peel 2002:147). Nowadays, it is widely known that women who are having difficulties conceiving recur to perform rituals and sacrifices to specific *oriṣa*, so the *oriṣa* will grant them children. However, according to many people, when children are sought through these means, parents are compelled to "give" their child to the *oriṣa* worship group, once the child is born. With increasing religious diversity, many people try to avoid this path given the distress it causes to those whose conversion leads them to alternative religious paths. When the parents refuse to give the child to the *oriṣa*, it is said that these children tend to die young, because they are thought of as being reclaimed by the *oriṣa*. There are also numerous traditional healers that claim to help women conceive by giving them concoctions and herbal remedies. However, many of these healers cynically profit from the situation of such women. As I witnessed with one of my neighbours, women who are eager to conceive can spend a lot of money and time trying different methods that in the end do not bring any result.

Pentecostal churches offer alternative ways to secure couple's fertility. They offer prayers for people wanting to conceive a child. During my stay in Benin, I witnessed two cases where non-Pentecostal women claimed to have become pregnant after having received the prayers from a pastor. Some people consider that Pentecostal churches are

highly efficacious. For people who no longer practice traditional religion, they offer the advantage of freedom from involvement in traditional rituals, with the obligations and expenses often associated with having to offer sacrifices to the *orisha*. In some cases, people convert after having obtained the gift of fertility from God but this is not always the case; neither is it a precondition for conversion. Once women are pregnant, Pentecostals accompany them in prayer. At church and during women's meetings or prayer gatherings, prayers are often offered for those women who are pregnant and for those who are about to conceive. Many miscarriages or haemorrhages happening during childbirth are attributed to the work of spirits. In fact, among the Yoruba and Fon, dying during giving birth is considered one of the most spiritually dangerous deaths and it is a moment where women need the most protection from their prayers. But, even if Pentecostal prayers can be very efficacious in securing fertility, in some cases, they do not work. Not having prayers answered poses serious challenges to Pentecostals who face the impossibility of conception.

In this search for fertility, Pentecostal men and women face equally strong challenges to those who are non-Pentecostal. However, counter-intuitively, it is probably men who end up losing more privileges or ways of coping than women. As will be seen in the example below, childless women in the church face the same criticisms as non-Pentecostal women, the difference is the way they cope with these struggles. However, this becomes particularly difficult for Pentecostal men who do not have the possibility to increase their procreation outside of the marital bond.

### *Challenges of a Childless Couple*

Florent, a man in his mid-thirties, was born in Banigbe, a town 5 km from Ikpinle. He converted during his teenage years after being healed from a disease he attributed to witchcraft. He and his immediate family used to be *feticheurs* (practitioners of traditional religion). At the moment of his conversion, he did not receive strong opposition from his parents because they noticed the effect his conversion had on his health. In fact, his mother and father converted some time later. The positive changes in his health and wellbeing convinced his parents that his conversion was something positive. Therefore, he never experienced any conflicts with his extended family for not participating in ancestral ceremonies. These possible tensions were somehow mediated

through his father, who by then was a recognised and respected head of family, with more authority to assert his decisions regarding these matters.

Florent's problems with his extended family in Banigbe were particularly in evidence after his marriage. Florent married Pelagie, also a Pentecostal convert. During the five years of their marriage, they had not been able to conceive a child. He indirectly attributed their fertility problems to family jealousy. Although there were biomedical reasons - his wife had been diagnosed with blocked fallopian tubes - in this context, the condition is associated with witchcraft. It is believed that fallopian tubes are being tied through occult procedures, normally attributed to the work of relatives trying to prevent a woman from conceiving. They block the woman and her husband's future by preventing them to become someone recognised in life. I often witnessed them praying to be delivered from malign forces - particularly those acting on Florent's wife. She would often fast and pray together with the pastor's wife.

During a conversation, he shyly confessed that this situation had been a great challenge for his Christian life. This is the reason why he no longer goes to Banigbe, his town of origin, as he does not like to hear criticisms from other people. He commented that it was particularly difficult with his maternal aunts who insisted that he took another wife. He said, "I love my wife very much and hearing these comments makes me feel very sad. Besides, it is a sin! Christians are supposed to attach to one woman and become one flesh." Outside of the church, his wife Pelagie faced similar criticisms and difficulties, as do other women who cannot conceive. She struggled to come to terms with her situation and at times feared that her husband would at some point try to find another woman. However, she said that the only thing she could do was to keep praying and trying to be a good wife. In this case, maintaining virtuous behaviour was for her the means to earn God's favour and sustain her marriage.

From the way in which they treated each other, it was evident that there was affection between the two of them. But Florent expressed his anxiety in relation to the moment of his death. He said,

In Benin, a person is not complete if they don't have children. When you die and you don't have children, people say that you just die like that! You don't have a

future; you don't have someone who will be called "your son". Nobody will bury you and represent you after your death.

I asked if he was concerned about it. He replied,

I don't care much about my burial. They can throw my corpse away and let it rot - I won't care. Those who don't know Jesus are those who worry about the corpse. We Christians know that the flesh is just flesh and it will disintegrate. What matters is the soul that goes to heaven.

When I asked how he dealt with his family problem he said, "I just pray". He also tried to convince himself that this was not really important. He said, "for people, the honour of this world is what matters most ... I think God will give me a child and if He doesn't, I cannot worry about this honour." He gave me as an example the people who lose all their children after they are born. He said that in the end they ended up being in the same situation, with nobody to bury them. Although it is also considered a tragedy when all your children die before you, at least these people were not equally stigmatised as those who are never able to conceive a child.

From his testimony, it was clear that he held concerns about having to die without children. He did not appear to be very concerned with what would happen with his corpse or his soul at the moment of his funeral. I suspect that much of his anxiety was mostly related to not being able to achieve a position in which he would be fully recognised as head of family or lineage. It is not insignificant that people have concerns for not having someone to bury you. It is during funerals that most members of the lineage are reunited and where people are also judged as to whether or not they lived life to the full, and managed to become "successful" in life (Schwab 1955:362).

The case of Florent and Pelagie demonstrates that when people decide to comply with the moral precepts of their faith, they are shifting the focus of their union to their marital bond and away from the idea that children, and therefore the patrilineage, are central. In these cases, unlike in non-Christian unions where the lack of children justifies the dissolution of a marriage (Falen 2011:150-151), men are forced to remain married. Both Pelagie and Florent were known and respected for being good Christians. Although she did not occupy any particular position within the church, Florent was a member of the

committee of the church who occupied the role of deacon and at times helped as Fon translator. Therefore, abiding to a moral behaviour allowed them to position themselves within the church as respectable Christians.

Florent and Pelagie received a lot of support from other people in the church, particularly in the form of prayers. It was especially moving one day, when one of Pelagie's best friends from the church and her husband presented their new-born child to the whole assembly during a Sunday service. This was the couple's sixth child. As normally happens, the pastor took the baby in his arms and presented the child to the assembly pronouncing his given name and then prayed for him. Then he passed the microphone to the parents of the child, so they could also voice their prayers. When the mother of the baby took the microphone, she thanked God for her children and asked him to help them by not giving them any more children. She said they both were happy with the number of children they had reached. Instead, she asked God to give children to other women in the church who were trying to conceive, in particular her friend Pelagie. At this point her eyes filled with tears and started praying in tongues, as normally happens when a person is praying intensely or considered to be interceding for someone.

As we can see from the example of Florent and Pelagie, gender differences are relevant in the way people deal with moral difficulties. Although being a childless woman is one of the worst stigmas a person can have in this society, those women in the church who had difficulties conceiving were treated with more dignity within the church, as opposed to the treatment they received outside of the church. Their self-worth was not necessarily questioned. They were treated equally to other women in the church. For example, all married women, regardless of whether they have children or not, belong to the group of women who are familiarly referred to as the group of mothers or "*mamans*". Calling a woman *maman* is a sign of respect and all married women in the church were addressed with equal respect. Similarly, they were offered the opportunity to occupy positions of leadership, as any other woman with children would do. Or, as in the case of Pelagie, she could compensate for her lack of fertility towards her husband, by following the teachings and behaving as virtuous woman. Examples of biblical women, in particular Sarah, wife of Abraham, are often mentioned during sermons and teachings as examples of hope for those women who wanted to conceive. During prayers and preaching, the example of Sarah was always presented as a woman of faith

who patiently waited for the miracle of God and finally managed to conceive despite her very old age. These women were encouraged to keep praying and were told that their situation was temporary. Sooner or later they would be able to conceive and they should take their condition as a test from God to increase and strengthen their faith.

In this respect, things tend to be more difficult for men. Not having children is a serious problem for many Pentecostal men, since the permanence of a patrilineage depends upon having descendants, in particular, male descendants. By practicing monogamy, they find limited opportunities to have many offspring or at least secure one male descendant. As Florent did, many people express their anxiety about not having offspring in terms of not being able to have someone to bury them or to carry their name and guard their home. However, at the same time, Pentecostal ideology tries to diminish the importance of this value. By living these kinds of challenges people are encouraged to become stronger in their faith, and trust God's will. In this case, we can see that the challenge of being childless is used as an opportunity to get closer to God. However, people also have the choice to abide with God or not. In this case, choice can become a means to build a virtuous self, as long as the person chooses "to align oneself with God despite forces that pull one away" (Mayblin 2010:7).

However, many people do not manage to overcome these kinds of dilemmas arising from society's pressures and end up committing sin. Sometimes, men who cannot have children decide to give in to the pressures from the family to have another wife. Sometimes single women or young couples fail to keep their chastity before marriage. Therefore, adultery and premarital sex become the choice of those who find it difficult to overcome these moral dilemmas. Whether a person ends up "committing sin" in this way depends on her social position, personal choice and generational differences. It is now to these moral dilemmas that now I turn.

### **Gender and Generational Differences in Relation to Sin**

It was a regular Sunday morning. The service started and proceeded as usual, but just after the general announcements and before the sermon, a girl called Alice was invited to come to the front. She was a seventeen-year-old girl, who used to be a very active member of the church. At the time she was the children's Sunday school teacher. The deacon who was leading the service that day gave her the microphone and asked her to

explain her case. She first apologised towards the children in the church and then to the assembly, she said she had “fallen” and asked for their forgiveness. She addressed the children and youth and urged them to be strong and to not follow the bad advice coming from some people. She encouraged them to be true to themselves and to follow what the Bible says. She hesitated for a minute and the deacon encouraged her to go on and explain her case. She continued talking and explained that for some time her maths teacher, who used to court her, had been pursuing her. Following some people’s advice, she fell for him and they had sexual relations. In Benin it is very common that teachers flirt with female students and many of them say that it is a means by which they can obtain better grades. Teachers also coerce girls into giving in to their advances by threatening them with lower grades.

As Alice spoke, I could hear sounds of disapproval from the people sitting nearby. She lowered her face and avoided looking at the assembly. It was clear she was embarrassed, but at the same time her voice was firm. She was about to give the microphone back to the deacon, but he asked her to finish her story. At that moment, maman Jasmine approached her and whispered something in her ear. I reckon she gave her encouragement or advice on how to present the issue to the assembly. Alice then continued saying that after she slept with the teacher, she realised it was wrong and wanted to confess her sin to the pastor. However, some people from within the church, whose name she was not going to mention, told her to not do it. So she kept it secret for some time. In the end, she had decided to talk to the pastor because she could feel in her heart the call from the Holy Spirit urging her to tell him. That is why, after she talked to the pastor, he had advised her to present the case in front of the whole assembly.

By the end of Alice’s speech, the deacon invited the members of the church committee to form a circle around her and to pray for her while laying on their hands. She was asked to kneel and everybody put their right hand on her, while the rest of the assembly stood and prayed for her forgiveness and repentance. She was told to go back to her seat and maman Jasmine went to the front to give some words on behalf of the pastor who was absent that day. She said, “the work of the devil is among us. Some members of the church are agents of Satan by impeding the others to come close to God.” She encouraged the assembly not to listen to the sinners that encourage others not to obey God’s word. The main reprimand here for the assembly, and one of the main points in the testimony of this girl, was the fact that people within the church had been those who

had given wrong advice to her. The girl rightly encouraged young girls to not listen to bad advice and not be weak to it. After this sort of general reprimand, the service continued and the deacon gave his message.

This was not the first time this happened in the church. In the AoG church, whenever there is a case of major sin like this, people are presented in front of the assembly as a means of making them accountable for the period of discipline they are being subject to. In cases of adultery, the pastor and the members of the committee intervene to make an investigation to determine the origin of the problem. When it is adultery, they talk to both men and women to find out the original cause. Once they determine whether it was the woman or man's responsibility, or both, they are submitted to a period of discipline. During this period, the length of which depends on each individual case, the person has to sit at the back of the church and take last place as they participate in the service. If the person is already baptised, she is not allowed to participate in Communion, nor to take part in any activity that requires commitment and responsibility, such as teaching during the Sunday sessions, singing in the choir, preaching or occupying a position such as deacon or leader of a group. The length of the discipline varies from one to several months, up to one year, or until the person has demonstrated that her behaviour has changed. In Alice's case, her discipline lasted for one month, during which she did not teach the children at the Sunday school. Although this kind of discipline is generally the same for most of the Pentecostal churches, the pastor at the AoG used to put a lot of effort into solving the problems arising in the household. During the period of discipline he regularly talked to both parties and tried to find out ways in which he could help by giving advice and implementing actions that could help the couple reconcile.

During my stay papa Elodie, like Alice, also went through a period of discipline within the church for having been unfaithful to his wife. It is important to note here that papa Elodie and Florent had one thing in common: they did not have a male descendant to preserve their own lineage. Papa Elodie was the father of a single female child and his wife could not conceive more children. During one of my conversations with his wife, she confessed that not having conceived soon had caused huge pressure on the couple from her in-laws. Her husband's parents had started putting pressure on him saying that they would bring him a new wife so he could conceive. He resisted the pressures and, luckily, sometime later his wife conceived a baby girl. Although his family had been happy then, they later continued putting pressure on them to conceive a male child.

Papa Elodie had more or less resisted the pressures, however, he was also a successful merchant and spent large periods of time away from home. It is often these men in positions like papa Elodie, who receive strong peer and family pressure to look for other women (Smith 2009:167). I can imagine that this happened to papa Elodie. Having achieved a certain position through his business, he might have given in to family or peer pressures to look for other women and have another child. When I first arrived in the church, he had been living with another woman in a different city. However, he later retracted from this path, came back to Ikpinle and started a period of discipline. Although papa Elodie used to be a very devout Christian and had played a pivotal role in implanting and building the AoG temple in Ikpinle, he had to be removed from his responsibilities, because he had committed sin living with the other woman.

Having or not having descendants has a strong impact in the way people in Benin position themselves in relation to the rest of their kin, and challenges their ability to establish themselves as respectable men. However, given the harshness of the discipline, many men think twice before committing adultery, particularly if a man has achieved a respectable position within the church. Falling into adultery not only means gaining God's disfavour but mainly losing face among church members jeopardising his credibility and respectability. During my stay in Benin, there were two cases of discipline for adultery, and none of these men decided to marry a second wife. If this had happened, they would have been expelled from the church, as normally happens in these cases. Whether a man decides to commit adultery and risk his position might depend on different factors including his own position within his family and other circles in society. For example, papa Elodie was the first-born son of his father and his mother's only child. He had managed to build a reputation as a successful merchant and provided important support to his extended family in case of funerals and other matters. Although Florent also supported his family at funerals, he did not have a solid economic position and I am sure this also limited the support, and therefore, the position that he could hold among his family members. Florent did not succumb to the pressures of his family, at least during my fieldwork. He struggled to resist family criticisms and tried to resist this difficult situation by attaching himself to prayer and to the church. Papa Elodie at some point could afford losing his status in the church but this was not the case of Florent, at least when I did my research. Similarly, in Florent's case, it is interesting to see that the pressure of taking another wife also came from the mother's family, more than his father's relatives. When a man is a single male child or the eldest

male of his father's children, the pressure from the patrilineage tends to be stronger, as in the case of papa Elodie. However, in the case of Florent, I suspect the honour of his mother as a woman was at stake. As Cornwall suggests, women's identities are not only shaped by their status of motherhood but also "by their association with their children especially if they are successful sons" (Cornwall 2002:973).

As we have seen above, the impossibility to conceive poses serious challenges for men, who in cases like that of papa Elodie, end up being sanctioned for entering polygynous unions or committing adultery. In contrast, women even if they are childless are offered positions of authority within the church. This phenomenon resonates with an interesting gender and generational phenomenon highlighted by Peel (2002). In his study of conversion in Nigeria he shows that both men and women were equally attracted to Christianity, however, it was mostly young men who were able to convert because they were not subject to the same domestic control that young women had. However, age shifted patterns of conversion. As men got older, they were drawn into social commitments, such the imperative to enter polygynous marriages, which jeopardised their conversions. Similarly, some men who had converted while being young had later reverted towards polygyny. However, the same did not happen for women, who were not sanctioned even if they were in polygynous unions. And as their child-rearing years finished, they had greater freedom to participate in the church. As men were banned from church activity for entering polygynous unions, women were offered positions of authority within the church and even women without children became important evangelists (2002:157-158).

In the case of Benin, the challenges faced by adults due to infertility also have an impact on young people's attitudes towards marriage and their level of engagement with their faith. In the same way that Peel (2002:157) mentions that young men more easily converted and participated in the church, it was interesting for me to see that young men still tend to be most active in the church, compared to young women. The AoG church in Ikpinle often organised prayer sessions during lunchtime, in which the majority of attendants were mature women and young men. Young men are often very active in praying, since for them, it becomes an aid in being able to succeed in life. This becomes particularly evident during exam periods, in which they pray for their successful performance. Many people mentioned to me that whenever relatives want to block a young man's progress in life, they block their road to education by sending them

diseases or lack of concentration, which makes them fail. For young men, education has become the main way in which they can progress in life and become successful independent men.

However, young women tend to be less devout than men. They hardly participated in prayer sessions and, when I was trying to carry out interviews with young girls in the AoG church, these girls often avoided having conversations about their faith with me. When I commented on this to maman Jasmine, she said, “ah, these girls are hypocrites”. She knew them very well because she used to teach them during the Bible studies every Sunday morning. I realised that most of the girls avoided having more intimate conversations with me because they knew I was very close to the pastor’s wife. However, in the Foursquare Church, I managed to talk and become closer to a few young girls. From my conversations with them, I noticed they were very curious about their sexual life and wanted to know about different methods of contraception. I came to the conclusion that in relation to young women, the situation that Peel (2002) presents has changed. It is no longer the case that women participate less in the church because they are subject to parental supervision. If anything, the opposite scenario is true. This is the period of young girls’ lives, especially those who attend school, where they enjoy relatively more freedom. As daughters living within their father’s compound, they occupy relatively more privileged positions compared to young childless wives who enter virilocal marriages and are expected to serve their in-laws, in many cases, I was told, as if they were slaves. Young women are aware that once they marry they will no longer have the freedom they enjoyed when they are young. Many of them use their sexuality to obtain presents from their boyfriends and others, as in the case of Alice, are encouraged by their peers to sleep with their teachers in order to advance at school with good grades.

But there is also the case of young Pentecostal couples that decide to engage in premarital relations. The reasons for this became clearer for me when I had a conversation about chastity with one of my research assistants, Emmanuel, a young Pentecostal man. He told me that nowadays, many young couples do not want to arrive as virgins to their marriage. It is said that during public and massive gatherings such as weddings people become the most vulnerable. These are the spaces where so-called friends or relatives can send a *gris-gris* to the couple in order to block their fertility. Although being honoured in the church brings reputation to the couple for being good

Christians, not everybody is ready to put at risk their fertility. He told me that many young women consider getting pregnant *en cachette* (secretly) so they can secure that the day of their wedding, they will not be target of their relatives or friends. But, Emmanuel said, it is mainly young women who do not want to jeopardise their fertility and the possibility of becoming pregnant, whereas young men are also caught in the dilemma of not wanting to lose face with the members of the church. It all comes down to doing everything within the right time, in order avoid being caught by the assembly. However, given that procedures to set up a marriage within Pentecostal churches tend to be long, not everybody manages to do so.

All this indicates that attitudes towards marriage and Christian values around monogamy, chastity, fidelity and fertility need to be placed within a generational context and in relation to gender obligations. The cases presented here reveal some parallels with the historical situation. Now, as then, dilemmas around sexuality affect men and women differently. However, one should also bear in mind that moral dilemmas can be seen as ways in which people, collectively, have the opportunity to rethink and later reinforce what they have learnt as part of the new value system. The case of Alice demonstrates that there is an opportunity for “redemption” in the way in which repentance and confession open the possibility for change. In other words, people work on the self to reinsert themselves into a new moral life. By doing so, they reinforce the importance of the new values to themselves and, through their own experiential example of shame and redemption, to others.

## Conclusions

In this chapter I have looked at the way in which Pentecostal churches teach their congregations to manage their sexual lives. These teachings play an important role in the project of building Christian monogamous marriages and shaping Christian moral selves. Young people are taught to practice fidelity towards God by remaining abstinent before marriage, whereas married people are prescribed sexual exclusivity and fidelity towards their partners. In the case of married couples, they place a strong emphasis on teaching women to please their husbands sexually on the grounds that a sexually satisfied man will not have sexual encounters outside of the marital bond. However, in this society where having numerous children still defines a person’s self-realisation and is considered a sign of wealth and success, sexual fidelity is hard to maintain when a

couple cannot have children. Therefore, this represents one of the areas where Pentecostals in Benin face numerous dilemmas, which sometimes represent important challenges to their own faith.

I have drawn on Robbins' (2007b) theory of morality to frame the analysis of the moral dilemmas presented here, which according to his model, can be considered to be dilemmas derived from conflicts in the sphere of values as a result of social change. Following Robbins' model, in this case we can say that the prominent value in place constitutes the importance of reproduction of the lineage: in particular, conceiving a male descendant that will be able to perpetuate the lineage name. According to this value, when a woman cannot conceive, polygyny is seen as the alternative means to achieve reproduction. However, religious and economic changes have been shifting the balance towards a model where monogamous marriages and having fewer children are becoming more important than having numerous children. In particular, Pentecostals give primary value to strengthening and building a bond of love between partners, rather than focusing on conception. From this perspective, fertility and reproduction are assigned a secondary value, given that it is considered necessary to depend on God's will.

In their efforts to live according to this model, we have seen that Pentecostals carefully guide and accompany people in the process of building their marital unions. As seen in the previous chapter, the church begins by teaching young people how to select their partners, and once engaged, they teach young women how to prepare for their wedding day and life as a married woman. In particular, married women are taught to strengthen their marital bonds by seducing and pleasing their husbands sexually, whereas men are taught to practice self-control. Moreover, Pentecostals engage in a selective re-appropriation of what can be considered to be "traditional" values, such as virginity and the payment of bridewealth. These "traditional" values are seen as compatible with the demands of living a Christian moral life that prescribes purity and Godly behaviour. However, in this process of re-appropriation of values, these also acquire new Christian meanings, which do not necessarily correspond to the meanings they originally had.

However, this process of realignment to a model of Christian marriage is challenged when a monogamous couple face the problem of infertility. It is here where moral dilemmas reveal the prominence of the value of reproduction and conflicts of social

change arise. Pentecostal men and women who cannot conceive often face severe opposition from their extended family and social ostracism, which normally threatens their path in their faith. As seen in the case of Pelagie and Florent, some people decide to take these challenges as an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with God through their moral behaviour, whereas others end up giving in to social pressures and committing sin. The cases presented here reveal that the way in which a person faces these moral dilemmas depends on the position she occupies within the social system, gender, generational context and personal choice. In fact, there is evidence that these elements also influence the level of participation of either men or women of certain ages within the church.

Moreover, these moral dilemmas also present the potential for change. In contrast to Robbins' informants who live a life of constant moral torment, Pentecostals in Benin find ways to deal with these dilemmas. The case of Alice was an example of how after having failed to live up to the principles prescribed, a person can also work on the self through "ethical techniques" (Zigon 2009) to reinsert herself into the moral system. In this case, repentance, confession, and discipline by the church serve the purpose of reinserting people into the new moral system, sometimes by reinforcing a stronger sense of morality among its members. But also, in this process, they contribute to transforming the prominent values.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions: Navigating Between “Tradition” and “Modernity” and Being African in Today’s World

One Saturday morning I had been watching films with the children of the AoG pastor in Ikpinle. Seeing my interest in Pentecostal films, their mother, maman Jasmine, told them to show me the movie *Yatin*. This film became very popular among Pentecostal circles in the years 2000, and many Pentecostals are familiar with it (see also Mayrargue 2005:249-250). At noon, the children left to eat their lunch, play outside and take their afternoon nap. I continued watching the film as I was fascinated with its scenes involving “occult forces”, which portrayed some elements of the stories that during my fieldwork I often heard about. At some point during the film, the pastors from the AoG church annexes in Usine and Oko-Akare arrived. Since the pastor in Ikpinle was busy with someone else, while they waited for him, they sat in the living room to watch the film with me.

This film narrates the story of a young pastor from Cotonou, who is sent to evangelise the village of *Yatin*, known for its intense *vodun* life and the activity of its witches. The village authorities, the king and *vodun* priests, in conjunction with the witches, launch a series of attacks against the pastor and his wife, after seeing that they had started to deliver people and divert them from the ritual life of the town. However, the pastor and his wife faced these attacks with prayer and victoriously overcame them with Jesus’ protection. All the harm caused by their opponents was automatically redirected to harm them instead. In the end, the entire village converts to Christianity after being convinced of the power of Jesus. As we watched the film, the pastors laughed heartily as they commented on the scenes where “occult forces” were shown, identifying these as “Satanic” and pertaining to the “spiritual” realm. All those things happening in the film were, they said, to be found in people’s real lives. In one of the main scenes, the pastor protagonist is captured by the village *feticheurs* (sorcerers) and taken to the king’s court to be judged. After judgement, the king decided to sacrifice the pastor and offer his flesh to the local *vodun* during its annual ceremony. Before performing the sacrifice, a group of women initiated to the local *vodun* performed a traditional dance to the beat of drums. At that moment, one of the pastors said,

You see? This music and the dance could be used to worship God, instead of the *fetish*. That is part of our culture. If you see their outfits, everything is very pretty. This is not what we reject, what we reject is the sacrifices, what lies behind them. That is demonic. That is not from God. You see? Instead of worshipping God, they are worshipping an idol, which is nothing else but a statue. That is what ignorance does. The Gospel has brought us light and a different understanding of things. These people do not realise that by worshipping an idol they are bringing misfortune to themselves, because it is a malediction.

He continued explaining to me that it is important to separate what is “ritual” (*le cultuel*) from what is “cultural” (*le culturel*), something that people in Benin, including non-Pentecostals, often debate about. He said, “the cultural is the dances and the outfits. That is our culture! Not the sacrifices. People say that sacrifices are our culture, but that is ignorance. Sacrifices can be eliminated, that is part of the ritual (*cultuel*).” We continued watching the film and, at some point, they showed the image of the *vodun* statue with teeth and an evil face. Both pastors started laughing and, again, one of them said, “seriously, people are funny. The other day in the village [Oko-Akare] I saw that people made a statue of the local *vodun* with a watch on its wrist, and placed it on the side of the road … as if the *fetish* could really see the time!” he continued laughing and added, “people do not reason”.

This anecdote raises several important points. First, there is the perceived need to separate cultural forms from their ritual content. Second, there is the pastor’s emphasis on people’s ignorance and lack of reasoning, and the proposed solution of the Gospel, which brings “light” and a different way of reasoning. Thirdly, there is the way the film contrasts the village life of *vodun* against the Christian pastor from the city. All these things reflect and speak about the way in which people in Benin, in particular Pentecostals think about and navigate between aspects of what they consider “modernity” and “tradition” in their social worlds. In this final chapter, therefore, I would like to go back to some of the issues presented in the introduction of this thesis, first, concerning Pentecostal engagement with “ruptures” and “continuities”, and their relation to the perceived necessity of making a “radical break with the past”. Kinship, as one of the areas that presents strong elements of “tradition”, constitutes an interesting

arena in which these tensions can be explored. In the second part of this concluding chapter, I refer back to some aspects - also presented in the introduction - in relation to the context and socio-economic background of Pentecostals living the south-east of Benin. I evaluate these elements in relation to the commonly-held argument - influenced by some aspects of the Weberian Protestant ethic - that attributes changes in Pentecostals' kinship relations to a desire to liberate themselves from the economic pressures of their extended kin, and their desire to increase their upward mobility in a neoliberal world (cf. Meyer 1998, 1999; Maxwell, 1998). I suggest that the analysis of Pentecostalism in this semi-rural environment reveals that it is geographical mobility - either in the form of internal or international migration - rather than the pursuit of capital accumulation that plays a crucial role in influencing people's religious affiliation to Pentecostalism, and in allowing them to define themselves as Africans in a constantly changing world.

The main objective of this thesis has been to explore the way in which the Pentecostal command of making "a radical break with the past" and with "tradition" shapes and redefines people's *relationships* with the members of their kin group in a patrilineal society. I have tried to look beyond the common focus on the formation of individualist subjectivities, in order to explore the Pentecostal influence in shaping social configurations. In order to do so, I have grounded the analysis of people's discursive formations within their social contexts and social practices. The ethnographic material presented reveals that, although discursively some ruptures concerning people's connection to their "blood ties" are formulated as radical, in practice they do not always manifest as such. People in Benin still depend on and continue to cultivate their social relationships with members of their kin groups in very fundamental ways.

I have argued that the way in which Pentecostalism shapes people's relationships with their kinship is through a selective re-appropriation of certain cultural norms and values, in which ruptures are accommodated along cultural continuities. This is achieved through a two-fold process of "realignment" similar to that described by Engelke (2010a:179-184). This means that "breaking with the past" involves, on the one hand, a realignment with another but different, Christian "past" or "tradition". On the other, it requires an engagement with certain aspects of the local culture and sociality, which set the terms in which the break is made (*ibid.*). Through this process of "double realignment", cultural continuities also acquire new meanings, as they engage with

and/or are realigned with certain Christian norms and values. This process resonates with the anecdote narrated above, in which the pastor advocated for the separation of “cultural forms” from their “ritual contents”.

I made my case through an ethnographic exploration of some key aspects of Pentecostal religious practice. Destabilising an emphasis on individualism, I suggested that the Pentecostal pursuit of an intimate and personal relationship with Jesus contributes to shaping among its converts a “relational subjectivity”. This subjectivity, in turn, influences the way Born Again relate to other people, including converts and non-converts alike. For this purpose, a focus on Pentecostal ritual life has allowed me to demonstrate that people’s relationship with Jesus is first made possible and then is cultivated in relation to others. Moreover, the intensity of Pentecostals’ ritual life allows its adherents to constitute tight communities (cf. Robbins 2010b), which sometimes involve kinship ties, sometimes not, but there is always an expectation that at some point members of their kin will convert too (see Chapter 3). Similarly, a focus on Pentecostal ritual life in relation to other “traditional” ritual practices, such as *oriṣa* worship, has also revealed certain continuities in the way people relate to the divine. For example, people’s relationship to Jesus, as with the *oriṣa*, is intense, personal and embodied. Although the logic of the relationship with the divine is similar, the character of the divinity and the meaning of the relationship are different. This is an example of how Pentecostalism resonates with African sensibilities concerning the spiritual world (cf. Robbins 2004).

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this process of double realignment can be found in the way Pentecostals’ relationship with ancestors is transformed. Chapter 3 has presented the way in which, through a radical rejection of ancestral and post-mortem ceremonies, Pentecostals perform a ritual separation from their “spiritual” kin ties. This ritual rupture is supported by the process of “renewing the mind” which consists of a personal realignment with - or assimilation of - a Christian doctrine (see also Chapter 1). Through this realignment, Pentecostals learn to see themselves as now belonging to a Christian lineage: they become descendants of Abraham and children of God. As such, they expect to be resurrected and lifted from earth to heaven in a moment of rapture at the “End of Times”, as narrated in the Book of Revelation. However, through the analysis of ritual and social practices during funerals we have also witnessed a continuous engagement with local forms of sociality. Pentecostals continue to engage

with their non-convert relatives by observing some of the norms of reciprocity and solidarity during funerals. In this case, ancestors are displaced and an alternative is substituted. Through this, people access a more direct source of blessings, this time coming from God, and disconnect themselves from the spiritual influence of their relatives who might want to hold them back. However, their relationships with their living relatives are maintained and, indeed, given priority over those relationships with the dead. This is a clear example of Pentecostals practice of separating the ritual content from the cultural practice, while giving the latter a new and different meaning. In this case, we see that sometimes the radical discursive ruptures allow people to set the terms of what then becomes a new form of relating.

This last point leads us to the issues presented in Chapter 4 concerning people's relationships with their living relatives. In this chapter, I paid attention to the phenomenon of social ruptures in people's relationships to their kin groups. Life stories revealed that social ruptures were often embedded in the patrilineal dynamics of male competition and jealousies channelled through witchcraft. By becoming Born Again, people find protection and deliverance, which enables them to distance themselves from harmful behaviour caused by their jealous relatives or by the authoritarianism of the elders in their patrilineages. However, Pentecostalism also offers new "ethical criteria" (Lambek 2010) on the basis of which converts can relate anew and restore their once severed broken relationships. In this case, I have focused on the analysis of forgiveness. By looking at forgiveness as an ethical act we have seen that, being more than just a narrative as suggested by Piot (2010:64-65), it has practical social implications in people's lives. This is also an example of how ruptures are accommodated along the lines established by cultural continuities. In this case, it is the importance of the patrilineage that is the key continuity. In cases involving witchcraft, forgiveness, as a form of deliverance, transforms the logic that articulates people's relationships with their relatives; however, the relationships or obligations of support towards them are not necessarily severed.

Chapter 5 and 6 explored what happens in the domain of the immediate family, which has been emphasised as the area to which Pentecostals give priority in preference to the extended kinship group (Laurent 2003; Meyer 1998:186; Marshall-Fratani 1998:283; Mate 2002; Maxwell 2005; van Dijk 2002a). In Chapter 5 I presented some of the contradictions expressed by Beninese people in relation to marital models, which are

changing from polygyny to monogamy. These dilemmas and contradictions arise from social and economic changes happening in the last few decades, and as part of the Beninese government's efforts to build a modern nation. In this context, Pentecostalism provides a specific set of moral guidelines that aim to build a model of monogamous marriage: one that conforms to the Christian moral command to live according to scripture. In order to do so, Pentecostals accompany and teach converts from the moment when young people select their partners right through to the experience of marriage within which spouses articulate their conjugal relations. For this purpose, Pentecostals draw on what can be considered as "traditional" values, such as virginity on marriage, payment of bridewealth and feminine submission to male authority. These values are considered compatible with Christian moral ideals (Chapter 5 and 6); however, in the process of realigning "traditional" values with Christian ones, the former also acquire new meanings.

Lest all this sounds too neat, however, it must be noted that this process of realigning traditional values with Christian values is not always smoothly achieved. Moral dilemmas such as those presented in Chapter 6 reveal that changing values can at times become a challenge to people's personal faith. In an effort to build monogamous marriages, Pentecostals give primary importance to building a bond of love between partners. However, the prominent Beninese value of fertility and reproduction of the lineage becomes a threat to the Christian model when a couple cannot conceive children. We have seen that the way in which a person deals with these dilemmas depends on a wealth of factors. These include the position the person occupies in the social system, the intertwined dynamics of gender and generation, and personal choice. These dilemmas also open the possibility to effect cultural change, especially when a person who initially fails to live up to the new values then resolves to reinsert herself into the new moral system through "ethical work on the self" (cf. Zigon 2009).

All in all, the material presented here reveals that Pentecostal churches in Benin, as in other parts of Africa, deal in very practical ways with the problems and tensions arising at the heart of kinship and family relationships. An analysis of the ruptures and continuities set in motion from the moment of conversion, along with some dilemmas that arise from these, reveal the importance that the patrilineage and the value of reproduction still have for Pentecostals, and people in general, in Benin. From this perspective I suggest that, even though Pentecostal ruptures in relation to kinship appear

to be in principle socially corrosive, when they are seen in conjunction with continuities they reveal themselves as important factors that enable the re-actualisation of certain aspects of cultural forms or institutions (in this case the patrilineage in Beninese society).

Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to the study of Pentecostal Christianity by suggesting that it is important to study people's relationships, both in the way in which Pentecostalism contributes to shaping them and in the way these relationships are constitutive of the process of shaping a moral Christian self. Similarly, this thesis reinforces the claim already made by some scholars: that it is important to take into account the analysis of discontinuities along with continuities, both in discourse and practice, by grounding one's analysis in the specific social contexts where these take place (cf. Engelke 2010a; Chua 2012).

### *The “Pentecostal Ethic” and Global Christianity in a Neoliberal World*

How does this form of Christianity and its influence in restructuring kinship relations connect to the current neoliberal order? And can Weberian ideas about the Protestant ethic be of any use in exploring this? The rapid growth of Pentecostalism in Africa and many parts of the world has been linked to the so-called post-Cold War era, characterised by processes of market liberalisation, structural adjustment programmes and the retreat of state intervention in the economy and in service-provision (cf. Comaroff 2012:45; Piot 2010). The de-territorialisation and shift in relations between capital, labour and consumption has brought the further exclusion of many African economies, which hence depend increasingly on the informal economy (Comaroff 2012:51). Pentecostalism in Africa has received great attention in relation to these matters, given its tendency to promote entrepreneurial values and activities and to moralise material economic achievements (Freeman 2012:21). These features have been seen as preparing people for the economic demands of the neoliberal order (Maxwell 1998:354), by promoting alternative ways to access the wealth of the world economy, when traditional means have failed, in a way that resonates with a Weberian Protestant ethic (Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins 2008:1149-1150).

It is in relation to this debate that a common argument regarding Pentecostal influence in restructuring family and kinship relations has been formulated. As mentioned before,

Pentecostalism tends to appeal - the argument goes - to upwardly mobile people who find in this faith ways to liberate themselves from the economic demands of their poorer kin. In doing so, Pentecostalism encourages certain forms of individualistic ethics and capital accumulation (Meyer 1998:186, 1999; Maxwell 1998:354). For example, the strict morality that Pentecostalism demands from converts has a positive impact on cutting down unnecessary expenditure in alcohol or tobacco consumption or in traditional ceremonies, in order to invest it to the benefit of their immediate families (Maxwell 2005:27; Freeman 2012:15-16).

In a recent study, Freeman (2012) further explores the relation of Pentecostalism to the Weberian Protestant ethic. Despite key differences between the type of Christianity and context Weber studied and the current economic dynamics and contexts where Pentecostalism is taking root around the world (2012:17-20), she reminds us of a key point that Weber made: in order for capitalism to thrive and be taken up by people “there had to be a shift in their values and subjectivity in order to motivate new behaviours and to make the new economic system seem moral, and Protestantism unintentionally did this” (2012:20). She suggests that Pentecostalism’s role in this regard is to stimulate behaviour that leads to success, promote upward mobility, hard work and savings, and limit certain kinds of consumption so as to enable investment and accumulation (2012:20-21). How relevant is such an argument to the ethnographic context of south-east Benin, and what socio-economic factors might play a role in people’s attraction to Pentecostalism here? In the remaining section, I present some aspects of this socio-economic context, including converts’ geographical mobility, economic and social aspirations, ethnicity, the use of modern media and changing rhythm of life linked to economic activities. I conclude by suggesting an alternative explanation for the role of Pentecostalism in the lives of its adherents in the current neoliberal world.

In contrast to the urban context, and to Pentecostal churches that promote the Prosperity Gospel on which many studies on Pentecostalism have focused, Pobe and Ikpinle are situated in a semi-rural environment, and the churches I focused on did not present a strong emphasis on the Prosperity Gospel. The relative proximity of these towns to the major cities of Lagos and Cotonou means that they have easy access to some aspects of “modernity” in the city but, at the same time, many aspects of rural life still structure people’s everyday lives. Pobe and Ikpinle are situated on the main road, and their

economic activity allows them to have access to services such as electricity and running water. However, most of the surrounding villages such as Oko-Akare and Usine, which are only a few kilometres away, do not have ready access to these facilities. People in Pobe and Ikpinle often proudly say that they prefer to live in the tranquillity of their towns rather than in the bustle of the cities. However, at the same time, they often complain of the lack of paved roads and other signs of “modernity”, and ironically explain this by saying that they still live in “the bush” (*la brousse*). In a context like this, social aspirations among the Pentecostal population manifest differently than they might for their counterparts in the cities.

If there is a common feature in the sociological profile of Pentecostals in Pobe and Ikpinle, it is a certain kind of uprootedness. As mentioned before, most of the Pentecostals living in this area are considered to be “foreigners”. This means that their places of origin are located in other parts of Benin or in towns in the surrounding area. Some of them are second-generation migrants, whereas others settled in these towns more recently. Some arrived in Pobe or Ikpinle after being assigned to work as teachers in local schools, or as workers in the palm-oil research centre and plantation, the cement factory in Onigbolo, or as bureaucrats for the local government. Those whose origins are in Pobe normally converted while living away from their hometown - mainly in Nigeria or Cotonou - and only later re-settled in their place of origin. The majority of converts engage in commercial activities or services pertaining to the so-called informal sector. Many of them engage in small-scale agricultural activities that complement their income in the informal sector. However, most of them do not have access to ancestral land. They need to rent the land on which they cultivate and pay for workers to help them in their agricultural activities.

Pastors from the rather well established churches such as the AoG in Ikpinle and Foursquare Church in Pobe were very wary of emphasising a notion of prosperity that translated into material wealth as the Prosperity Gospel does. The reason the AoG pastor in Ikpinle gave for this was that an emphasis on material achievements diverted people’s attention from the main focus of their faith, which is salvation and Jesus. Therefore, for many converts in these churches, the prosperity provided by God’s blessings is understood in relatively low-key and humble terms. It includes some or all of the following: a regular source of income, having children, the capacity to give their

children an education, and (for students) the ability to pass their examinations and proceed to university.

Aspirations for upward mobility among Pentecostals in the AoG and the Foursquare Church are expressed mainly in the form of building social relationships that will enable them to reach some degree of social recognition and respect, and educational achievement. Students often pray for protection in order to pass their exams and are encouraged to be diligent students. For example, we have seen how an economically upwardly mobile man such as papa Elodie made a great effort to support his kin. Men become respectable by showing their support and solidarity towards others by fostering nephews or the children of distant relatives, attending funerals or lending money when they are asked for it. The one area where these Pentecostal churches differ from other churches in helping people to partly achieve their social aspirations is that of education. In a society where the majority of the adult population is illiterate, the Pentecostal emphasis on “renewing the mind” or changing the way of thinking also becomes a kind of “informal” education. Sometimes teaching includes practical matters such as the importance of hygiene, managing money, and even basic literacy skills that otherwise are not available without schooling and which are seen as part of being a good Christian.

The aspirations mentioned above do not differ very much from those of the rest of the population. However, Pentecostals differ from their counterparts who belong to other religions, in the way they deal with obstacles presented when trying to achieve their goals of social recognition or educational achievement. Non-Pentecostal people often recur to *gris-gris* and protective amulets to avoid harm caused by jealous relatives or rivals, or they perform ancestral ceremonies and sacrifices when *Ifá* determines that the cause of their failure is their ancestors’ wrath. In contrast, what allows Pentecostals to distance themselves from the harm caused by people like relatives are prayers for deliverance and for Jesus’ protection. It is these that offer the advantage of liberating believers from the fear that renders them powerless and that makes them feel as though they are being held back.

In relation to the above, no matter how far or close a person is from her hometown, the same spiritual forces of witchcraft can equally affect her. Whereas Pentecostal deliverance can be performed anywhere, traditional means of dealing with witchcraft have particular requirements, such as sacrificing a specific type and number of animals

in specific places, such as ancestral shrines, which very often can only be performed in the place of origin. During my stay in Benin, I witnessed an *Ifá* divination consultation concerning a matter of witchcraft afflicting a woman from Pobe, but who lived as a migrant in Gabon. For the previous year, she had presented many of the symptoms attributed to witchcraft and her business had not been doing very well. Therefore, she had to travel back to Pobe in order to consult a local *babaláwo* and perform the sacrifices needed to solve her problem. For many people, this is not always possible given the cost of travel involved and, as seen in the example of papa Honoré's brother, people often recur to Pentecostal deliverance prayers, even if they are not converts, because performing animal sacrifices is becoming increasingly expensive.

There is another important element to consider, which is ethnicity. Contexts of migration are characterised by their ethnic diversity and, in relation to this, Pentecostalism plays a very important role in blurring ethnic boundaries and differences by bringing people together. In a pluri-ethnic context such as south-east Benin, the Pentecostal tendency to create a dual world of believers and non-believers, some guided by God and others by Satan (cf. Robbins 2004b:128-129) simplifies, to some extent, cultural diversity. This simplification allows converts to address common problems faced in relation to kinship and family through a single and common front. In African contexts, where ethnic rivalries and differences are still very strong, Pentecostalism tends to bring unity. In addition to this, it allows for inter-ethnic marriages, where otherwise kinship regulations or ethnic enmity would not have allowed for it. For example, the AoG pastor and his wife said that if it had not been for God, they would have never got married given that she is Mina from Togo, of a different country and ethnicity from his, which is Gun.

There is another aspect that is linked to the above, which is the use of modern media and their role in spreading this form of Christianity around the world. This element has been addressed on the literature on Pentecostalism and its relation to globalisation (cf. Meyer and Moors 2006; Meyer 2004a; Comaroff 2010:21). As explored in Chapter 1 Pentecostal sensational forms are also historically situated (Meyer 2010b) and they are part of the repertoire of people's worship in different parts of the world. Pentecostals share the same kinds of music and films; they watch DVDs with the same preachers and read books written by evangelists from Korea, the US and/or Brazil. The transnationalisation of these sensational forms allows for the generation of similar

sensorial experiences, which contribute to creating a sense that Pentecostals in Benin, as in other parts of the world, speak the same religious language. They feel connected by sharing something in common, which is the experience of being children of God, despite local and cultural differences. For example, the AoG pastor often said that the human heart is the same everywhere and that the Gospel appeals equally to people around the world because it addresses matters of the heart. Similarly, many people in Benin often said that the *gris-gris* of the “white” is the gun; or that Satan in Africa works through witchcraft and evil spirits, whereas in the West, Satan works through drug-addictions or suicide. They said that evil is the same everywhere, it is a common enemy, even if it takes different forms in different places. Many Pentecostals in Africa feel that they have an important role to play in the re-evangelisation of the nations. In one occasion, a pastor told me that nowadays in Europe many people had lost their faith despite the fact that Europeans had first brought Christianity to Africa. He thought that now it was time for Africa to bring Christianity back to Europe.

Another important factor to consider in relation to the increasing popularity of Pentecostalism in contexts such as Latin America, Asia or Africa, is the changing rhythm of life linked to economic activities and the decline of agriculture as the major economic activity. This phenomenon has been reported in other places in the world where “tradition” seems to be going into decline (cf. Chua 2012:58-79). In south-east Benin, religious life still presents a strong presence of traditional religious ceremonies, many of which are linked to the agricultural calendar (cf. Juhé-Beaulaton 2002:284-287). However, nowadays people rely less and less on farming as their exclusive or main economic activity. This, for many, constitutes an impediment preventing them from continuing to practise traditional religion, because they cannot keep up with the ceremonial timing of some of these rituals. For example, during my fieldwork many people - including practitioners of traditional religion - often debated how they could “modernise tradition”. During the period of *Orò* worship, many towns close their access routes, and sometimes even the main road, for several days. Therefore, people often discuss the need to find the best possible way to perform these ceremonies without interfering with the economic activities of the rest of the population. This is another example of how Pentecostalism provides the advantage of maintaining people’s religious sensibilities without depending on the performance of localised or specifically time-defined ceremonies and rituals.

Having considered these elements in relation to the material presented in this thesis, I agree with Freeman when she suggests that a “Pentecostal ethic” is provoking a shift in values and subjectivity that resonates with some of the dynamics of the current neoliberal world (cf. 20-22). However, I would be careful not to over-emphasise the claim that Pentecostalism supports and legitimates, or is “integrally connected” to, the spread of capitalism in its neoliberal form (Freeman 2012:22; Comaroff 2012:43). Although Pentecostal values at times resemble those of the neoliberal socio-economic order, I am wary of suggesting a direct correlation. It is true that their historical convergence allows them to have a common point of dialogue and/or engagement in areas such as gender, ideas of love and hard work. However, as seen in Chapter 5, there are also stark differences between them. Taking as an example the issue of gender, we have seen that Pentecostal values regarding gender roles are not the same as those held by international NGOs that proclaim women’s rights and gender equality as part of a neoliberal agenda on “development”. Similarly, ideas of love between partners taught and encouraged by Pentecostal churches are not necessarily the same as ideas of “romantic” love associated with capitalist forms of consumption (cf. Wardlow and Hirsch 2006; Thomas and Cole 2009). Therefore, Pentecostal values need to be understood in their own right, as part of a broader Christian project of “salvation”. Instead, I am more inclined to see Pentecostalism as a moral mediator of changes in values linked to broader social and economic transformations. In a world of rapid socio-economic changes that at times seem to be chaotic and of increasing demands of geographical mobility, Pentecostalism provides its members with a strict and very specific set of moral guidelines that allow them to navigate different worlds. This set of moral guidelines, to some extent is realigned to the demands of the current world in the same way that in others, it is realigned to elements of the local “tradition”.

Moreover, I would be careful not to over-emphasise the role of Pentecostalism in encouraging capital accumulation (cf. Maxwell 1998; Freeman 2010:21). Although, as we have seen, Pentecostalism discourages people’s participation in traditional ceremonies that demand lavish expenditure, this does not mean that redistribution of economic resources no longer happens. In fact, Pentecostals in south-east Benin continue to engage in economic contributions to their relatives, which are part of building a certain social recognition. Similarly, these churches have their own gift-giving demands and, given that they sustain themselves through the economic contributions of their members, they often ask them to provide a significant portion of

their economic resources in the form of tithes and other charitable donations (cf. Freeman 2012:14-15). These forms of Pentecostal gift-giving and economic exchange in relation to the neoliberal system have started to receive more attention in other parts of Africa (cf. Haynes 2012).

One issue that deserves more attention than was possible in the present study is the kinds of quasi-kinship ties that Pentecostal churches tend to build. Academic literature has already emphasised - particularly in contexts of international migration - that Pentecostal churches present the advantage of building tightly knit communities of support that resemble quasi-kinship ties among their members, which maintain certain aspects of African sociality (cf. Van Dijk 2002a, 2002b). However, as I witnessed in a local context, these quasi-kinship ties also have their own dynamics and demands that are not free from contradictions, conflicts, dilemmas and their own elements of competition. This would merit further study.

In a rapidly changing world that increasingly demands personal mobility, we can see Pentecostal Christianity as a cultural phenomenon that, in its capacity to realign itself with different cultural norms and values, opens a space for the re-actualisation of local forms of sociality, for example, the patrilineage in Benin. In the case of Africa, this feature is important, as it allows its converts to continue building a sense of "Africanness" by maintaining specific elements of their culture and forms of sociality, despite demands of geographical mobility and the uprootedness that derives from it. Similarly, it allows them to build a sense of connection to the wider world by building a common platform of dialogue through their Christian practices and beliefs, from which they can participate as equals and not just as subordinates.

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