

### Belonging and friction - how tradition is negotiated within two Pentecostal congregations in post-colonial Windhoek, Namibia

Siegert, Hannah

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Siegert, H. (2020). Belonging and friction - how tradition is negotiated within two Pentecostal congregations in post-colonial Windhoek, Namibia. *EthnoScripts: Zeitschrift für aktuelle ethnologische Studien*, 22(1), 69-84. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-8-15675>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-SA Lizenz (Namensnennung-Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-SA Licence (Attribution-ShareAlike). For more information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

## Encountering post-colonial realities in Namibia

Volume 22 Issue 1 | 2020

Hannah Siegert

Belonging and friction – how tradition is negotiated within two  
Pentecostal congregations in post-colonial Windhoek, Namibia

Ethnoscripts 2020 22 (1): 69-84

eISSN 2199-7942

### Abstract

Religion has the potential to preserve collective memory and can therefore establish belonging. In colonial and imperial settings, religion was often used as a legitimation of inequalities and therefore as tool of oppression. At the same time, religion, and especially Pentecostal belief systems, can be employed as politicized and de-colonizing efforts in struggles of liberation and empowerment. In Windhoek, a distinction is drawn between the so called “traditional” mainline churches, which are pre-dominantly Protestant and the Pentecostal ones. Main markers of distinctions are worship practices. It can lead to a sense of belonging, but on the other hand to frictions with members of mainline congregations. Within this discourse the meaning of “tradition” is negotiated by members of Pentecostal congregations. In this paper, the different meanings, and consequences of the use of the word “tradition” in the context of pentecostal believe systems in Windhoek will be shown.

### Publisher:

Universität Hamburg  
Institut für Ethnologie  
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1 (West)  
D-20146 Hamburg  
Tel.: 040 42838 4182  
E-Mail: lfE@uni-hamburg.de  
<http://www.ethnologie.uni-hamburg.de>

eISSN: 2199-7942



Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter einer Creative Commons Licence 4.0  
International: Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen.

## Belonging and friction – how tradition is negotiated within two Pentecostal congregations in post-colonial Windhoek, Namibia

Hannah Siegert

### Introduction

*“[...] because without Christ you are nothing. He took all our sins [...] for you to be set free, for you to be saved, for you to be restored [...]” (Interview extract: Hidaya, Pentecostal Pastor, Windhoek).*

After the sermon at the Pentecostal Protestant Church Windhoek (PPC)<sup>1</sup> all participants came to the front, where we formed a circle, kneeled down and put our foreheads on the floor to surrender to the Spirit<sup>2</sup>. After a short while, personal prayers could be requested by the congregation. We prayed to God to make the streets safer, we prayed for equality, for politicians to consider people’s needs and, of course, we prayed for rain. People who needed special comfort and strength stepped into the middle. Others came to them, laid their hands on them, touched or hugged them while praying. Everybody who stood in the middle was handed the microphone so they could voice their troubles and share them with the congregation. A young woman came to me, took my hands, and held them tightly. We stood closely to each other, almost face to face, holding each other’s hands, sometimes touching each other’s shoulders.

1 Pentecost Protestant Church (PPC) is situated in Hochland Park, which is considered an upper-class resident area in Windhoek (Kader 2016). The church building can hold 500 people and 350 can sit outside. The church leader, Ps. Johnny Kitching, claimed that the Spirit prepared him, and the Lord showed him how “nations of hungry people will flock together”. During this sermon, a strong emphasis was put on “nation and community”, as well as “the healing of the community”. Ps. Johnny Kitching talks there about “the healing of Namibia, financially, mentally, and physically in miracles.” <http://www.ppchurch.iway.na/about-us.php?PHPSESSID=c045be5f1388cf1f41c733aeedaf066e>; accessed 04 October 2020.

2 In Christianity, the Trinity is perceived to be God, the Holy Father, Jesus Christ, his son who came to Earth, who saved believers from sin and gave the opportunity to defeat death and rise to heaven, and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came down on the Pentecost to the Apostles and made them speak in different languages, so that they may carry the story of Jesus Christ into the world. At Pentecostal congregations in Windhoek, the Holy Spirit plays an important role and is sometimes referred to simply as “Spirit”.

She cried silently, mumbling prayers that her family should be saved by receiving and accepting the Spirit. She was shaking as she swayed her body front to back with her eyes closed. Many women in the middle of the circle repeatedly said the same things, as though they were in a state of trance. In the end, one of them collapsed. The woman's eyes turned to the back of her head; her movements were contorted and convulsive. Her state was interpreted as a visit of the Spirit. The congregation immediately surrounded her, holding each other's hands, and prayed for her. Subsequently, we stood there, arm in arm, rhythmically swaying and chanting together. The room was filled with relieved crying and laughter.

The woman recovered after a while but kept lying motionless on the floor. When the prayer-meeting was dismissed, I was told by the young woman who was my praying partner that Jesus loves me.

Pentecostalism constitutes about a quarter of the world's two billion Christians and numbers are still growing. It stresses an intimate and joyous relationship with God and focuses on healing, prophecy, and God's direct intervention in the material well-being of his people (Kalu 2008: xiv). People are attracted by Pentecostalism because of its message and by its hermeneutics of trust and certainty. Religion has the potential to preserve collective memory and can therefore establish belonging within displaced communities (Schmidt 2008). Besides, in colonial and imperial settings, religion was often used as a legitimation of inequalities and therefore as tool of oppression (Mbambo 2000). At the same time, religion, and particularly Pentecostal belief systems, can be employed as politicized and de-colonizing efforts in struggles of liberation and empowerment (Kalu 2011). Religious symbols and their reference system can be interpreted and used to emphasise creative resistance (Schmidt 2008). This can mean a creation of a utopian and eschatological sphere in which enslavement or colonial dialectics are suspended. Such an employment of religious practice can be essential for the construction of a collective identity (Schmidt 2008: 167). It is one way in which people may unite within a "community of feelings" (Hervieu-Leger 2000). Nevertheless in neo-/post-colonial settings, Christian-inspired beliefs, such as Pentecostalism, must locate between the tense poles of "inculturation and liberation" (Martey 1993). This can be a part of a difficult, complex and multi-layered search for colonially stolen or occupied identities and belongings (Martey 1993, Oduyoye 1995, Schmidt 2008, Pui-lan 2014).

This article's opening sequence of a prayer meeting at the Protestant Pentecostal Church in Windhoek illustrates my encounter with Pentecostalism as a supportive network performed by collective weeping and rather intimate bodily performances. Identifying as a member of a Pentecostal congregation in present-day neo-/post-colonial Windhoek holds promising opportunities as well as potential challenges especially in familial contexts. Being a Pentecostal believer tends to involve a strong identification with the congregation.

Relatives who identify themselves as members of a so called “traditional” or mainline congregation may reject the religious affiliation of those who are part of Pentecostalism. Pentecostal congregation interviewees are still experiencing being compared with or dismissed by members of mainline churches. This tension originates in the relatively strong distinction, which is drawn in Windhoek between pre-dominantly Protestant mainline congregations and Pentecostal congregations.

Mainline congregations can constitute a neo-/post-colonial reality in Windhoek, due to their missionary and colonial background (Mbambo 2000, Kathindi 2019). Special attention is given in this context to the complex use and meaning of the term “tradition”. Members of both Protestant and Pentecostal congregations use this label to elevate their own practice and performances and to downgrade those of their respective counterpart. The mainline congregations use the term to portray their ways of worship and practice as more conforming and longer established as Pentecostal ones. In their view, this also justifies their better institutionalization in the political landscape of Windhoek. Pentecostal congregations use the word “tradition” to emphasize their potential and fluidity to integrate “traditional elements”<sup>3</sup> in their worship practices. Nevertheless, the ambivalence between paying respect to “traditional elements” and revitalizing them, as a perceived need to modernize practices labelled “pre-colonial and paganist”, is also a field of debate in Pentecostal congregations.

In this article, I will first introduce my sample, then retrace the historical and ideological journey of Pentecostalism in the South of Africa. I will pay special attention to decolonizing efforts to colonial Christian-European missionary engagement (Kalu 2008). These de-colonizing powers are enforced by statements of an interviewee re-claiming the liberation history of Namibia within a Pentecostal message. This re-claiming of religious worship and practices within a liberation narrative is then taken to relational and personal levels of members of the two Pentecostal congregations studied. Thus, I will show a sense of belonging is established and what friction it can cause. Finally, I will reference the motivations of believers to withstand this friction.

### The Setting: Ethnographic sample and methodology in Windhoek

My findings are based on observations and interviews undertaken in August 2019 during a research excursion of the University of Hamburg within the two congregations: Model Prayer Ministries (MMP) in Rocky Crest<sup>4</sup> and Emmanuel Church (EC) in Pioneer’s Park. MMP was the only congregation

3 “Traditional elements” weren’t clearly specified by the people interviewed. I assume that these vary, depending on the contexts and background of members of the congregation as well as the congregation’s lead.

4 Kadar (2016): <https://labor.beuth-hochschule.de/geovis/abschlussarbeiten/eric-kadar/>, accessed 30 September 2020.

where I had the opportunity to conduct a formal interview with the founder of the church, the Bishop. Born in Nigeria, he leads the ministry together with his wife. I attended one deliverance service and a Sunday meeting. Anisa, an 18-year-old woman at the time, was my main interview partner in this congregation. MMP, as is rather common for Pentecostal congregations, boasts a vast social media presence<sup>5</sup>, as well as several ministries and counselling services for members. MMP also offers financial support in case of sickness or funerals. According to the Bishop and Anisa, a main aspect of the congregation is its focus on and respect of so called “traditional elements”. Within the second congregation, EC, I attended two Sunday services, a prayer meeting and a “Blessing Bus Tour”, which is an outreach to less privileged areas in Windhoek. Emmanuel Church describes itself on its homepage as an “inclusive, missionary church” whose congregation is built like a “big multicultural multi-generational family that exists for the glory of God”<sup>6</sup>. EC, too, has a huge online presence and even livestreams various of its services. I met several members of the congregations:

- Suna: born in the South of Namibia, in her 20s, studies medicine.
- Jara: born in D.R.C, also in her 20s. She takes a break from her studies at UNAM and works in tourism.
- Anayo: born in Zambia, Media Student at UNAM and artist.
- Hidaya: born in South Africa, a Pastor in her 50s, works as an accountant. She does not see herself as official member of the congregation since she has her own chapel in her backyard in which she occasionally holds wedding ceremonies.

### Historical background of Pentecostalism in the South of Africa

“African Pentecostalism” has changed in every decade and befuddles easy labelling through its diversity (Kalu 2008). The development of African theology must be regarded within the larger context of the struggle to define African cultural identity and autonomy (Pui-lan 2014). Oduyoye (1995) argues that within Pentecostalism, one does not necessarily have to give up one’s cultural identity to become Christian, which she calls “crossroads Christianity”. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha’s (1994) approach, Oduyoye simultaneously holds a critical stance: according to her, it is clearly difficult to generalize cultural elements. Myths of homogenous national or cultural identity tend to be created to benefit those who are in the majority or who are in power. In this section, I will examine Pentecostalism in Africa, the ideological and historical journey of Pentecostalism in mainly Southern African countries drawing on Kalu’s (2008, 2011) work. I will then investigate whether the efforts of

5 Model Prayer Ministries (2020) <https://www.facebook.com/gracecitympmi/>, accessed 02 October 2020

6 Emmanuel Church Windhoek (2020): <http://www.emmanuelwhk.com/about/mandate-vision-and-values/>, accessed 30 September.2020.

Windhoek's Pentecostal churches' to differentiate themselves from mainline churches holds de-colonizing elements.

In 1792 early African American evangelization in Africa started in West Africa with charismatic spirituality that carried the spirit of antistructure and resistance to colonial Christianity (Kalu 2008: viii). Ezekiel Guti, Mensah Otabil and Barrister Emeka Nwankpa inspired Pentecostal cultural policy that recognized the powers of the formerly oppressed and crafted a theology of salvation that honed cleansing and witchcraft eradication strategies of the "ancient days" (ibid.: ix). Pentecostal policy of Guti, Otabil and Nwankpa was "a quest for identity through charismatic spirituality and constituted the historical rise of Pentecostalism in West Africa" (Kalu 2011: 212). Since independence from colonial regimes, progressive church leaders and theologians in African countries have campaigned for the abolition of the colonial trappings of Christianity (Martey 1993, Pui-Lan 2014). The world wars scattered missionary infrastructure and raised a new perspective on African religious initiatives. Political and social forces were also mobilized as Europeans consolidated their holds on African lands and economic resources and exploited and abused the African labour force. The African response, according to Kalu, included nascent political mobilisation and radical religious movements predominantly bearing the marks of charismatic spirituality (Kalu 2008: x). Kalu argues that in the post-independence period, a "charismatic wind" blew through the African continent that first hit the youth and women, and later oversaw the resistance of the mainline churches and various strands connected across national boundaries. External Pentecostals and evangelical forces swamped Africa. International initiatives provided contacts and built confidence, visibility and high public profiles for individual Pastors and their ministries. Leaders became the "big men of the big God" and performed like movie stars and virtuoso healers (ibid.: xii). This networking created "a global Pentecostal culture" (ibid.: 228). According to Kalu, "African Pentecostalism" may be criticized because of the movement's capitulation to the materialism and individualism of American cultural values. Charismatic ministries can be threatened by malpractice. Kalu (2011) argues that the rise of Pentecostalism in African countries did not start from the Azusa Street movement and therefore attention should be paid to the case of Southern Africa. Supposedly, Pentecostalism started in the second half of the 19th century with the separation of the Baptist and Methodist Movement (Gierse-Arsten 2005). Charles Fox Parham, a Methodist Priest, and William Joseph Seymour are considered the founding fathers of the typical Pentecostal-movement (Hollenweger 1997). Because Seymour was rejected by a bible school, due to racist segregation, he founded the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission which was established as starting point of the spreading of Pentecostalism (Anderson 1987). One way of how Pentecostalism arrived in African countries was within Pentecostal African American missionary engagement.

Anderson (1987) states that the expansion of evangelization-campaigns to Africa started in the 1950s, with American “healers” travelling to Africa and the additional acceleration of decolonizing and modernizing agencies (Gierse-Arsten 2005: 17). Within African American missionary engagement, national strains were fused with charismatics, identity, social justice, and Black Nationalism (Kalu 2011). This can be also illustrated by the role of Nicholas Bhengu (1909-86) in South Africa. He was influenced by the nationalist ideology of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and became a central actor of Pentecostalism in southern Africa (Kalu 2011: 223). Nicholas Bhengu’s ministry – analogous to spiritual movements of the nineteenth century – addressed a combination of personal renewal and social justice. It “turned prayer, land deliverance, and intercessions into political praxis” (Kalu 2011: 223). Anderson and Pillay (1997: 227) consider the rapid expansion of Pentecostal Churches in South Africa as a result of their ability to address core problems of South Africa: ill-health, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, sorcery, and spirit possession. The popularity of Pentecostal churches is strongly promoted by the belief in miracles and healing (Bate 1999). Considering living circumstances in South African townships, the need or quest for healing has also an economic dimension of inequality (Bate 1999). Bate highlights that the need for healing for the South African community can be related to societal-economic challenges characterized by crime and violence (ibid., Gierse-Arsten 2005: 25).

Pentecostalism can have liberating and inclusive elements (Kalu 2008: 2011). The historical and ideological framework of Pentecostalism in mainly Southern Africa presented above elicits the question if these de-colonizing elements can also be observed in Pentecostal congregations in current Windhoek. This will be discussed in the following section, which draws on statements by a member of the Association of Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches in Namibia (ACPCN), the main political organization for Pentecostal congregations in Namibia. Examining closely the relational sphere within the two Windhoek-based congregations, I will further investigate potential de-colonizing efforts in Pentecostal practice.

### Pentecostalism in Windhoek: Politics and decolonization?

One of my informants from the Association of Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches of Namibia (shortly put: ACPCN) enthusiastically outlined to me the growth of Pentecostal churches in Namibia. Currently, 220 churches are organized within the ACPCN, and my informant was convinced that this was an ongoing trend. “The churches have grown”, the Pastor explained: “[...] religion is no longer that hidden kind of thing [...] now it has become a little bit open” – clearly, to the pastor, “people are moving towards Pentecostalism” (all quotes direct from Pastor [ACPCN]). The Pastor’s efforts and beliefs are



an example for “political engagement within religiously motivated beliefs” (Kalu 2011: 223). He is a leading member of ACPCN which currently (2019) works on a proposal for the Namibian government to establish a council of Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches. In the Pastor’s views, this is an effort to elevate Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches to the level of the traditional, mainline churches. These churches already have a council in the government. The council is supposed to control Pentecostal churches and prevent “malpractice” and “church-mushrooming” for the creation of legitimacy, to upgrade the social standing and reputation of Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches (Interview: Pastor [ACPCN]). Members of the council identify their legacy in early resistance against German colonization in Namibia:

*“[...] our first Pentecostal Pastor was Hendrik Witbooi. [...] The one whose bible was taken to Germany and was returned to Namibia now. Those years he had visions and consulted God for his plans of war against the occupiers of that time, so we take that as starting point of Pentecostalism in Namibia [...] although he was not labelled as such. But today you can see by the way he consulted God and prayed with his people for victories that was the introduction of Pentecostalism basically in Namibia. Because the other religions existed, of course, but this was a new thing that he observed. You know in general Pentecostalism is not a new religion. Basically, it comes right through the scriptures from the Bible” (Pastor [ACPCN]).*

Nicanor Panduleni Kathindi published an article in “The Namibian” (19 July 2019), a popular daily newspaper in Windhoek, which stated:

*“Christianity fostered a kind of enslaved morality that suppressed the desires contained in the human will. Christianity and colonialism are often closely associated, because Catholicism and Protestantism were the religions of European colonial powers and acted in many ways as the ‘religious arm’” (Kathindi 2019).*

The article further states that an image of God requiring death and suffering of Jesus to cause reconciliation with humankind is immoral. Ethics in the bible should be criticized, because – especially in the Old Testament – it portrays a God who commits genocides. This makes the statement of the Pastor (ACPCN) even more challenging when he labels Hendrik Witbooi, a major freedom fighter and symbol of resistance against colonial powers, as a Pentecostal Priest, “because of the things he preached and how he lived, which contained other morals than the ones of the colonial forces” (Pastor [ACPCN]). This leads to my first finding that Pentecostal beliefs in Windhoek can be interpreted as a de-colonizing strain of religious practices. Kathindi (2019) associates Christian religious practices with a devotion and enslave-

ment. For the Pastor, Pentecostalism can have de-colonizing elements. For him, Pentecostalism signifies a liberation from colonial oppression. Pentecostalism to him boasts a renewed eschatological and empowering meaning to it. Unlike Protestant or Catholic practices, Pentecostalism adopts new morals, which stand for liberation nationalist effort and unity, rather than for devotion and enslavement (Pastor [ACPCN]).

*Pentecostal flexibility: Openness to change and create new forms of practice and worship*

*“[...] In the past, in the traditional churches, the Pastor would pray, and the Pastor would teach the word of God. But with Pentecostalism comes the power of the Holy Spirit. So, people are seeking this power, miracles, quick solutions to their problems and that is one of the aspects that connects people” (Pastor [ACPCN]).*

This statement can be directly connected to the above mentioned motivations within South African Pentecostalism and Africa-American missionary engagement: Liberation from the oppressor by the consultation of God, physical and mental healing, as well as the healing of communities, and direct rewards for worship (Bate 1999). The Pastor (ACPCN) explains the protruding popularity of Pentecostal congregations in Windhoek with their difference to Protestant congregations. According to him, there is a trend towards greater openness to new forms of worship and practice and faster solutions to perceived challenges. “Traditional” churches are assumed to be more static and opposed to change (Interview: Anayo [EC]). In this line of thought, mainline congregations can be interpreted as a more devout form of practice, a practice equipped with a different sense of suffering.

Pentecostalism, on the contrary, changes the eschatological dimension of religious practice away from suffering and emphasis the present moment. Believers feel empowered to a direct impact of their religious practice in their life. They may have a more active role – they are not forced to submit to and accept God’s given destiny since the Spirit can intervene.

In the next section, the statements of the Pastor (ACPCN) will be juxtaposed with a personal, relational level in Pentecostal congregations in Windhoek.

*Belonging and friction: Blurred boundaries of family and Pentecostal community*

I attended the City Bus Tour from Emmanuel Church, which takes the church members to different stations in Windhoek. They drive to congregations they

stand in connection with, hospitals and streets of informal businesses, settlements, shebeens or places known for sex work – to pray either with or for them. Some streets of Katutura and Hakahana were described as the “satanic world, where the ones live that have fallen from grace” (Anayo [EC]). This emphasizes a strict contrast in evil and good Pentecostal belief practices in Windhoek, as also mentioned by Gierse-Arsten (2005).

While driving to the different stations of the tour, we prayed, some spoke in tongues<sup>7</sup> and sang for the people in the streets who were following their daily routine. This was done without asking for permission and partly elicited opposition: some of the people were not amused by the prayers and rejected being classified as “fallen from grace” and “living on the dark side”. They expressed their disagreement using offensive gestures. We visited congregations called “Hakahana Christian Ministries” in Hakahana, as the name suggests and “Torch” in Chinatown. Hakahana Christian Ministries showed us their large soup kitchen and supportive projects for the marginalized community. Torch offers English courses and legal assistance and functions as sort of community centre for Chinese migrants and their families. The Bus Tour displayed Emmanuel Church’s network with other congregations throughout Windhoek. On this Blessing Bus Tour, I met one of my key interviewees, Anayo (EC). In the following, I present his reflections on this outreach: Anayo (EC) explained that, to him, these bus tours were about “reaching out to the lost and forgotten. The ones who think they got too far away and feel like they can-not come back home.” Pentecostal practice meant to him a refuge, addressed to “[...] mostly outsiders when they feel they need to find a place, where they can feel like a part of a family. Most people are homeless.” Anayo (EC) described the congregation as home and as a space where worries and pains can be communicated, where counselling and engagement in several ministries is offered.

For Anayo, Suna as well as Jara (all members of EC), going to church was a sign of belonging, home, refuge and being involved in a community which shares the same values – like a second or chosen home which “unites in diversity and welcomes everybody” (Suna 2019).

*“[...] In Emmanuel we are trying to encourage a culture, where everybody is the same. Whenever they are white, black, yellow, purple. Whatever it is, that we are all the same. And to be part of the church means, you have to be involved in diversity. And that is the culture we are trying to encourage [...]” (interview Suna [EC]).*

All the interviewees considered their religious affiliation as related to their family lives. For Anisa (MMP), church is clearly “a family thing”. Anayo and

7 “Speaking in tongues” is a Pentecostal expression, which means that the Spirit speaks through you, mostly in unrecognizable and unknown languages.

Jara mentioned that a joint baptism may be a ritualized familial phenomenon. Likewise, Anayo told me that his familial background had motivated him to join the Pentecost when he was 19. This was “a family decision” – a “very symbolic” decision indeed. The church community was considered a good influence by his mother. Simultaneously, Anayo stressed his personal motivation to stay in the church:

*“[...] It’s a place where I can communicate to God [...] and socialize and talk about the creator of heaven and earth and how he has a purpose for you”.*

Being in the church meant to Anayo the comfort of shared values and belief systems.

But being a member of a Pentecostal congregation can trigger conflicts or frictions with the original family or home, as both Suna (EC) and Anisa (MMP) mentioned. According to Suna, the main cause is the division between so called “traditional”, mainline churches, which generally means Protestant and the Pentecostal congregations. In Suna’s view, her family is somewhat judgmental towards Pentecostalism and its practices. Suna’s and Anisa’s families take a critical stance towards Pentecostal forms of worship – indeed they are among those who refer to Pentecostal practice as “Oshiwela”.

*Suna: “[...] it’s known as “Oshiwela” and it’s seen as a bad thing. Down in the South people tend to be a little more receptive, than up in the North. So, we don’t get shunt out of our family. [...] So generally, and personally it depends what your background is. For me personally there is a little bit of friction, because of disagreement how the traditional church does it and how the Pentecostal church does it. So, when you declare yourself as being Pentecost you are put under a certain category. Sometimes it’s not positive, sometimes they see you as you have gone mad. That is just the general view of how people will see you.”*

Suna came from a Protestant background and was the first in her family to join the Pentecost. Later, other members of her family also joined Pentecostal churches. This change of religious affiliation was characterized by Suna as the daring undertaking of being “born again” and overcoming their “traditional backgrounds”. Joining a Pentecost church in her family required a challenging “coming out” among immediate family and relatives.

In conclusion, being a member of a Pentecostal congregation can cause a sense of belonging and community with shared values and morals, as the statements illustrated. People can unite and take refuge in a congregation as a chosen home. Being baptized can be interpreted as a family ritual, like Anayo (EC) did, when he mentioned that he got baptized out of respect for his parents. However, Pentecostal membership can also lead to frictions, even

within a family, particularly when members belong to a “traditional” mainline church. In those cases, as described by Suna, the members might be concerned about the Pentecostal way of worship and prayers.

*Respect for tradition and the perceived need to revitalize/modernize practices*

Anisa pointed out to me that “Africa is big on religion”, and that MMP, is influenced by “cultural elements”<sup>8</sup> and tries to also “pay respect to the tradition”. According to her, MMP works against witchcraft but is indeed often and falsely called “Oshiwela” by people who are not members of the Pentecost movement. She continued that the mainline churches hold many prejudices against the Pentecost churches, because they equate it with “Oshiwela” – which can cause friction, as also above mentioned by Suna. In Anisa’s opinion, the so-called mainline church has a considerable influence on Oshiwambo<sup>9</sup> speaking people which “goes back to the colonial influence of German and Finnish people and then to people from South Africa”. A “European way of life was adopted”, Anisa argued. Anisa said that criticism comes from the Pentecostal form of worship and praying, which is most intensively experienced within the deliverance services. The Bishop of MMP also stated that Deliverance-Services are an important branch of his church, as of Pentecostal Churches in general.

For the Bishop of MMP it was very important to distance himself and his congregation from ritual practices from Nigeria, which he experienced as ineffective. By not obeying the religious and labelled “traditional” rules of his family, according to him “his father and him broke a curse” and found a new source of power within Pentecostal practice. For him, this practice is more powerful and has more direct outcome than some of the Nigerian practices he mentioned. The Bishop stated that people in Nigeria still believed in “dead religion” and that the Pentecostal belief simply showed more results.

*Bishop: “[...] Paganism won’t do, we realized that when we recall on those techniques, we call on those in the 70ies, 80ies. You find out that most of our parents still belief in dead religion.”*

*Hannah: “Dead religion?”*

*Bishop: “Dead religion. [...] we come into Christianity, we call the name of the Lord, the name of Jesus Christ and we see reactions, we see positive reactions, we get positive answers. [...] No, no, no, our Pentecostal here is far away from tradition. They take*

8 “Cultural elements” weren’t specified by Anisa. I assume that they vary, depending on the contexts and background of members of the congregation as well as the congregation’s lead.

9 Oshiwambo is the largest language group of Namibia.

*tradition as something that doesn't want change. But change is important.*

*[...] The Pentecostal is not saying that tradition is bad, like our church here we believe in the tripartite laws of marriage. In this church you cannot marry without fulfilling the tradition."*

Pentecostalism, according to the Bishop and the Pastor, tries to distance itself from tradition, but does not condemn it. In their opinion, Pentecostal Churches can easily adapt change and react flexibly to the believers' needs.

*Pastor [ACPCN]: "Yes, there is these days what we call the African spiritualism, where people say that this is not our religion from first, it was brought in by like what you said, by the colonials. [...] But that is not associated with Pentecostalism. Because these religions are purely, I would even say that they are not based in Jesus, they are based sometimes on ancestors. You know they speak about their roots; they are not about Jesus. [...] There is a kind of spiritualism, let say African spiritualism, where people seeking an identity, because of the long-time of colonial rule. So, they sort of go into religion or they mix religion and some traditional ways of...but we have not observed it so much in Namibia, although it is sort of popping up. We see people coming up and we see people kind of claiming that we need to have our own religion and that unfortunately is not based on the bible, not based on Jesus [...]."*

This quote emphasizes the complex meaning of tradition. It can be interpreted as not only pre-colonial. The bible is not necessarily seen as a colonial remain, but understood as an even deeper truth, which is even stronger than ancestral beliefs. Like mentioned above, what becomes apparent is the challenge of Christian inspired beliefs in a post- or neo-colonial setting in African countries to position themselves between the tense poles of "inculturation and liberation" and the controversial search for colonially stolen or occupied identities and belongings (Martey 1993, Schmidt 2008). In conclusion, it can be stated that the differentiation of "traditional", mainline, and Pentecostal congregations manifests itself on an institutionalized level. The Bishop stated that mainline churches receive financial support and have a better representation in the government; similarly, the Pastor lamented his lack of institutional acknowledgment for the ACPCN. Furthermore, on a relational level, being a member of a Pentecostal congregation can offer shared experiences, but also distinction in its values and new forms of relations, forms of worship and practice. On the other hand, it can lead to friction with the intermediate kinship family. Being a member of a Pentecostal congregation can be a marker of belonging, but also of distinction. The main point of criticism

against Pentecostalism, voiced mainly by members of mainline churches, is the inclusion of strong bodily performances, speaking in tongues and Spirit possession in Pentecostal worship. To Pentecostal believers however, these are empowering aspects of different approaches to religion and God, within another force to the Spirit. Members of Pentecostal congregations in Windhoek perceive its way of prayer and worship as more fluid and open to change and direct rewards from God.

## Discussion

After describing two spheres of the distinction between mainline and Pentecostal congregations, I want to return to a question raised at the beginning, inspired by Kalu (2011), whether the Pentecostal understanding of God and its belief in the powers of Spirit can have de-colonizing forces.

*Pastor (ACPCN): "You know in general Pentecostalism is not a new religion. Basically, it comes right through the scriptures from the Bible."*

*Suna: "The Pentecostal movement started in the days of the apostles. If you read Ex Chapter one. The Pentecost are known as the Pentecost because they believe in the Holy Spirit and the Power of the Holy Spirit and Pentecost basically mean, the out-pour of the holy spirit. And because of that, I believe it is so successful."*

As these quotes show that the beginnings, and origins of Christian denominations weren't directly associated to the arrival of missionary or colonial German enterprises in Windhoek, neither to encounters within Pentecostal and charismatic African American missionary work in other states of Southern Africa. Suna, the Pastor, as well as Anayo took their belief further than the arrival of the Bible under German colonial rule since they relate their form of worship and practice to a greater truth and existence.

Pentecostalism in Windhoek is not explicitly seen or named a de-colonizing force by my interviewees. Nevertheless, the connection to colonialism is made, when informants like Suna and Anisa mention so called "traditional" mainline churches. Pentecostal congregations still face daily comparison, judgement, and denial of a representative position in politics. Nevertheless, a de-colonizing response and interpretation of religion within Pentecostal worship and practices, connected to shared values within a sense of community, can be identified (Anayo, Anisa, Suna, Jara). This is most obvious in the statements of the Pastor, when he mentions that Hendrik Witbooi was the first Pentecostal Priest, which can be also read in the re-appropriation of history (compare Gorenflo, this volume). The Pastor (ACPCN) had a different approach to worship and practice than the mainline churches. This entails a

different relationship between humans and God, also mentioned by Anayo, especially in terms of interpreting the powers of the Spirit as closer to its believers. This leads to a different experience in the eschatological dimension of belief. Incorporating values into daily lives and not exclusively in a church context stretches the effective force of Pentecostalism and extends its impact on its believers (Anisa). This is also taken to a relational and interpersonal level in the congregation itself, by worship practices being more fluid, inclusive, as well as liberating stricter forms of prayers and other connotations of the relation to God (Anayo, Bishop).

## Conclusion

*Hannah: “Why do you say Pentecost is not a religion? What is it then?”*

*Anayo (EC): “It’s a relationship.”*

The Pentecostalism I found in Windhoek is a political and relational force which attracts mainly young people. By means of it, a sense of belonging can be established. Pentecostal worship and practices are experienced by my informants as new, more liberating, and more open to change, as well as promoting a novel, promising relationship with God. Importantly, people use the narrative and appropriation of history that Hendrik Witbooi read as first Pentecostal Priest fighting for liberation against colonial oppression. At the same time, friction between family members can be experienced when some members belong to a mainline congregation and others belong to a Pentecostal church. Believers do not frame their belief as explicitly de-colonizing, but as opposing and comparable alternative to “traditional” churches, especially concerning its form of worship. Anisa described Pentecostal believers as more strict in terms of incorporating values and moral ideas into their daily lives and not simply “going to church” like the members of the mainline congregations. Suna thinks that these moral concepts should be also aspired in political or more representative contexts.

This is attempted by the Pastor of ACPCN. Mainline congregation members call their churches “traditional” to emphasise their influence and history as an established institution (Anisa, Suna). “Tradition” is used to downgrade Pentecostal forms of worship as less established and institutionalized in this context. The term tradition is hereby selectively employed. According to my interviewees, Pentecostalism integrates “elements of tradition” into the lives of its believers and is thus seen as a more powerful practice to accomplish one’s hopes and wishes. This can be described with the concept of “Crossroad-Christianity” from Oduyoye (1995), which establishes that one does not necessarily have to decide which elements of tradition should be dismissed in order to be Christian. Not everything that is considered “tradition” is in-



corporated into Pentecostal practices. As the Bishop states, Pentecostalism worships even exceed former “traditional” ones as a more powerful and effective tool. Pentecostalism is seen as modern approach opposed to “traditional” worship forms. Additionally, it is seen as a new set of relations, as “revolutionary kind of love”, setting new moral standards and a better way of life by its believers. Pentecostal congregations give their members a sense of belonging and refuge and they unite people in a “community of feelings” (Hervieu-Leger 2000) through perceived shared values and moral ideas.

## References

- Anderson, Allan and Pillay, Gerald, J. (1997) The segregated spirit: The Pentecostals. In: Elphink, Richard and Rodney Davenport (eds.) Christianity in South Africa. Oxford: James Currey: pp. 227-241.
- Anderson, Robert Mapes (1987) Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. In: Eliade, Mircea (ed.) The encyclopedia of religion. New York and London: Collier Macmillan Publishers: Vol. 11: pp. 229-235.
- Bate, Stuart C. (1999) Does religious healing work? *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 55 (4): pp. 259-278.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1994) *The location of culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Emmanuel Church Windhoek (2020) <http://www.emmanuelwhk.com/>, last accessed 30 September 2020.
- Gierse-Arsten, Sonja (2005) Christ crushes HIV-crisis: Umgang namibischer Pfingstkirchen mit der HIV/AIDS-Epidemie. *Kölner ethnologische Beiträge* [herausgegeben von Michael J. Casimir]. Köln: 17.
- Hervieu-Leger, Daniele (2000) *Religion as a chain of memory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hollenweger, Walter J. (1997) *Charismatisch-pfingstliches Christentum. Herkunft, Situation, Ökumenische Grenzen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Kadar, Eric (2016) *Windhoek. Eine räumliche Analyse und die Konzeption der zweiten Auflage des Business Atlas of Windhoek*. Berlin: Beuth Hochschule für Technik Berlin. <https://labor.beuth-hochschule.de/geovis/abschlussarbeiten/eric-kadar/>, last accessed 30 September 2020.

- Kalu, Ogbu U. (2008) *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kalu, Ogbu U. (2011) *Black Joseph: Early African American Charismatic missions and Pentecostal-Charismatic engagements with the African motherland*. In: Yong, Amos and Estrelida Y. Alexander (eds.) *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in history and culture*. New York and London: New York University Press: pp. 209-232.
- Kathindi, Nicanor Panduleni (2019) *Rambler is right*. *The Namibian*: 19 July 2019. <https://www.namibian.com.na/190940/archive-read/Rambler-is-Right>, last accessed: 22 June 2020.
- Martey, Emmanuel (1993) *African theology: Inculturation and liberation*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis.
- Mbambo, Samuel K. (2000) *Religious change in Namibia*. *Journal of Religion and Theology in Namibia*: 2 (1): pp. 110-121.
- Model Prayer Ministries (2020) <https://www.facebook.com/gracecitympmi/>, late accessed 02 October 2020.
- Oduyoye, Mercy Amba (1995) *Christianity and African culture*. *International Review of Mission* 84: pp. 80-81.
- Pentecostal Protestant Church (2020) <http://www.ppchurch.iway.na/about-us.php?PHPSESSID=c045be5f1388cf1f41c733aedaf066e>, last accessed 04 October 2020.
- Pui-lan, Kwok (2004) *Mercy Amba Oduyoye and African women's theology*. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*: 20 (1): pp. 7-22. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002487?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002487?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents).
- Schmidt, Bettina E. (2008) *Einführung in die Religionsethnologie: Ideen und Konzepte*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag.

---

Hannah Siegert graduated from Ruprecht-Karls-University Heidelberg with a BA in Cultural Anthropology and South Asian Studies. Since 2019 she is a Master student at the University of Hamburg. Her academic interests are: Identity and belonging, medical anthropology, mental health, (ritual-) healing, gender and sexualities, and the study of religion, mainly belief systems inspired by Christianity.