

CROSSING BOUNDARIES: PENTECOSTAL ASIA – AFRICA NETWORKS AND CONNECTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF BOTSWANA

Fidelis Nkomazana

ABSTRACT

This article examines the extent to which Pentecostalism has become a religion without borders. This is supported by the migratory or transnational nature and practice of the Southern African religions in general. The article however focuses on the networks, connections and relationships that develop between Pentecostals in Asia and Africa in the context of Botswana or generally outside their national boundaries. To do this I provide some case studies from my anthropological field research on the establishment and growth of two churches, the Korean Church in Botswana, with roots of origin in South Korea, and the Kingdom City Church in Botswana, with connections and historical origins traceable to Malaysia. The article also examines the networks that have resulted from the formation and growth of these churches. The result and conclusion of the discussion is that Pentecostalism has become a religion without borders or frontiers. It has spread and established networks and connections beyond its borders, as is typical in the case of Botswana, Malaysia and South Korea.

Introduction

The article deals with the transporting of Pentecostalism between continents, regions and national borders of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In his book entitled, “Global Pentecostal Networks and the Problems of Culture: The Church of Pentecost in Ghana and Abroad”, Girish Daswani (2012) observed that Pentecostalism has become a force to be reckoned with continentally, regionally and nationally. He goes on to mention that Thomas Csordas (2007) calls this a “transposable message of salvation” and “portable practices” that include prayer, speaking in tongues and prophecy. These forms of Pentecostalism are said to travel rapidly through processes of missionization, migration, mobility and mediation. Joel Robins (2004: 117-119) has also pointed out that Pentecostalism has successfully adapted itself to new cultural and language settings through processes of multiplication and indigenization. In the process it has made itself relevant to the local worldviews and has also addressed itself to important indigenous values..

In this article, however, I take you to Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana, where we examine two churches with relationships with South Korea and Malaysia. First, is the Korean Presbyterian congregation, whose members are predominantly Korean, some of whom are Pentecostals. It is the presence of these Korean Pentecostals that has interested me to examine the activities of this church. Secondly, I discuss the ministry of the Kingdom City Church and its networking experiences. Building on the fieldwork that I have carried out in these congregations, I will highlight the networks that exist between Botswana and Asia in general and Malaysia and Korea, specifically. These networks and connections are maintained and strengthened in various

ways and do contribute and impact on the society as well as on the development of Pentecostalism. The development of these networks leads to national and transnational Pentecostal operations taking place. The growth of these churches and their connections have also strengthened local/national and transnational networks and connections that the two congregations and their Pentecostal members have and act within. As has already been implied, I will more specifically discuss how in the process of crossing frontiers, Pentecostalism, as represented by these two congregations has established networks and connections in both the local and international contexts as well as changing the character of the church as it crosses new territories. Power structures and relations will also be considered.

The study is therefore a departure from the tendency that global growth is an American dominated phenomenon. This paper recognizes that the Africa-Asia connection is becoming an important new centre for the spread of Pentecostalism to other parts of the world. This paper also points to the importance of national, regional, cultural and contextual development of Pentecostalism. Africa and Asia in general and Botswana, Korea and Malaysia, specifically are becoming important centres of Pentecostalism. These new networks and connections are therefore important historical developments, which will go a long way in shaping the future of the Pentecostal movement (Brouwer, Gifford & Rose, 1996).

Transnational Nature of Religion

Before I go on to discuss the migratory nature of Pentecostalism in the context of Botswana, Malaysia and South Korea, it is necessary to provide some background to the general character of religion in the context of Africa. Lovemore Togarasei (1998), in his article “Cursed be the Past: Tradition and Modernity among Modern Pentecostals in Zimbabwe”, has pointed out that “many of these fellowships have the terms ‘ministries and/or international’ as part of their names to indicate their intention to spread across national borders. He points out that they seem to have borrowed a leaf from American Pentecostal movement like the Jimmy Swaggart Ministries or those of other tele-evangelists. The second point I want to make is that there is a striking similarity between the migratory tendencies of the Pentecostals and the African indigenous religions in Southern Africa. The *sangomas*²⁶⁸, for instance, frequently engaged in transnational religious practices, for purposes of healing the sick, physically and spiritually and mentoring the apprentice. In December 1994, the prominent *sangomas* from the Southern African region held a huge religious gathering at the village of Mookane, which is about 140 kilometres north of Gaborone. The occasion attracted many immigrants from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland for various reasons. The meeting lasted for days and was characterized by healing

²⁶⁸ The name given to the traditional healers of many Southern African peoples, such as the Zulus, the Ndebele and the Swati. It is a spiritual calling, as opposed to a chosen profession. An apprentice *sangoma*, studies with a mentor for several years and must learn how to connect with her ancestors, prepare herbal medicine, interpret dreams, diagnose illness through divination with bones and how to heal both physical and spiritual illness. Through rituals, purification, dreaming, dancing to ancient drum rhythm and traditional songs, the initiate becomes bound to her ancestors, who have chosen her for this work.

practices such as exorcism, deliverance, divination, dancing and purification. The *sangomas* of Swati, Zulu and Ndebele origin, were highly influential and greatly impacted the religious landscape of Botswana and the experiences of hundreds other people from the region. Their migratory tendencies and identities were generally repeated across the national frontiers.²⁶⁹ Similarly, the priests of the Mwali cult among the Kalanga of the north eastern part of Botswana, with roots of origin in Zimbabwe, seasonally migrated across the borders of Botswana and Zimbabwe for religious purposes. These movements did not only create permanent religious imprints but also left religious identities in terms of practices, dress styles and thus taking religion across the borders. The cultural and language similarities between these borders facilitated the frequency and intensity of such encounters. To some extent the process was further aided by the English language as a lingua franca, in places where African languages did not promote such religious encounters.²⁷⁰

The above mentioned religious activities in both Mookane in the Central District and Mapoka and Ramakgwebane in the North East District are very good examples of the transnational and trans-regional religious migration of religion in Southern Africa. The crossing of borders by Pentecostalism and other religious groups as demonstrated below is not a new thing in southern Africa.

The Korean Presbyterian Church

Koreans in Botswana form a very small population of about 200 people. Of this number, one hundred and fifty four live in the capital Gaborone. Some have established businesses as construction engineers, while others are employed in the Daewoo and Hyundai Heavy industries largely employed South Koreans. They have their own school for elementary and high school children called the Botswana Hangul School), where their children go for schooling.²⁷¹

The Korean Church was established in 1991 in Tlokweng, a suburb of the capital city Gaborone. In terms of doctrine and practice, the church is not strictly Pentecostal, but has in its membership Pentecostals, who were influenced by the Korean culture and language to join the church that holds a Christian tradition that is not Pentecostal. The church has come up with outreach programs that have made encounters with the indigenous religions of Botswana possible. The Pentecostals within this church have successfully played an important role in supporting the church's outreach programmes to the local communities. This is something positive, since Pentecostals, have in the past been blamed for rejecting or demonizing other Christian traditions (Westerlund, 2009: 2). Finding themselves beyond the frontiers of their culture, language and other identities, they seem to have been compelled by circumstances and found it realistic to

²⁶⁹ Nkomazana, Mookane Fieldwork Research, 23-26 December 1994

²⁷⁰ Mr Gunda, Research Assistant & UB Student, attended the Mazenge dances at Mapoka and Ramakgwebana, December, 2012

²⁷¹ Pastor Hyon Mo Kim, The Korean Presbyterian Church, Tlokweng, 14 – 15 July 2015

connect with their country men and women for fellowship and mission work. Consequently, the evangelistic outreaches of the Korean church gave birth to local/rural churches in villages of Hebron, Takatokwane and Mabuane with a membership of 70, 30 and 40 respectively. Subsequently, the church worked hard to introduce cultural transformation in order to bring the Batswana members of the church into a different their doctrinal world view and form a new community. This took the form of rejecting traditional medicine, ancestor veneration and the economic system based on cattle industry, which took the attention of men at the expense of Sunday church service. The Korean Church finds this to be unacceptable and a sign of lack of Christian commitment. Their dissatisfaction also included regular attendance of funerals on Sundays. The fact that the members of these rural churches are poor and thus failing to pay tithes and offerings was interpreted as failure to understand the principle of tithing. Pastor Hyon Mo Kim, observed that differences in the Korean and Batswana culture and language was a major factor contributing to what he saw as lack of commitment to church work on the part of Batswana. He also mentioned that both the Korean Presbyterians and Pentecostals have difficulties with the church culture of the indigenous Christians. He complained that they lacked strict discipline, which is the hallmark of Presbyterian doctrine. In this regard he pointed out that this strict doctrine of the church is demonstrated through Bible studies, discipleship and prayer, which they see as the source of Christian life. Pastor Kim also pointed out that their faith as a church is based on keeping the Lord's Day holy, but was frustrated by the fact that the majority of local church members were women, while men preferred going to the cattle-posts and attending funerals, and not keeping Sunday holy. He further complained that the Botswana village churches were failing to give tithes and offerings as compared to their counterparts in Korea, where poor people give their tithes and offerings to the Lord. He observed that their principle and vision of establishing self-supporting, self-propagating and governing churches in Botswana will take a long time to be achieved.²⁷²

The other Korean Pentecostal missionary, Pastor Won Jun Enoch Lee, of the Reaching the Unreached International Mission Organization in Botswana closely works with the Korean Presbyterian Church in Botswana. He has also established partnerships with the local Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission in Botswana²⁷³, Bible Life Ministries and the Chinese Christian community. The purpose of the Reaching the Unreached International Mission Organization in Botswana, which is interdenominational in its approach to mission, is to promote evangelize the poor and unreached communities with the Gospel of Christ, healing the sick, setting the captives free, preaching the good news and empowering people to rise to the challenges of their circumstances. It does this by strengthening most unreached people globally, establishing indigenous churches and equipping local pastors to reach out to their people. Pastor Lee and his organization hold the view that the local pastors are better placed because they speak the language of the people and understand their culture. Pastor Lee has worked closely with the

²⁷² Pastor Hyon Mo Kim, The Korean Presbyterian Church, Tlokweng, 14 – 15 July 2015

²⁷³ AFM is one of Africa's earliest Pentecostal movements, and also one of the biggest Pentecostal churches in Botswana.

local Pentecostal churches and established networks through workshops, in order to understand their history, culture and religious background, which is important evangelistic strategy. Pastor Lee continues to establish networks and relations in Botswana for greater evangelistic results.²⁷⁴

Kingdom City Church

The second case study focuses on a church established in Botswana in 2013 by Pastor Matthew Gaotsenelelwe, namely the Kingdom City Church. Pastor Gaotsenelelwe, is a Motswana young man, who in August 2008 was sent by the government of Botswana to study IT at the Sunway University in Malaysia. During his university studies he came into contact with this Pentecostal church, which he claims changed his outlook to life, his attitude and faith in God.²⁷⁵ In fact, his experience with this church, through the prophetic utterances from the leadership of the church convinced him to start a church on returning to Botswana under the name Kingdom City Church to signify the intention to establish strong networks with the global church as stated in their website that: “We are one church in six cities -Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Perth, Australia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Singapore, Gaborone, Botswana and Manila, Philippines”. Joel Robbins (2004:117-143) has referred to such developments as globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. Birgit Meyer (2011) discussing the relationship between globalization and Pentecostalism also observes that globalization among other things introduces the vocabulary of diversity, multiple identities and postmodernity. She further points out that Pentecostal churches and movements have historically presented themselves as “global” and “international, hence, she says, globalization stands central in the study of Pentecostalism. She also observes that in studying globalization and Pentecostalism, it becomes evident that these churches “are organized as global mega-churches addressing masses of believers, make prolific use of media technologies to spread the message and endorse the prosperity gospel” (Meyer, 2010:13).

Similarly, Kingdom City Church presents itself as a global movement bringing into its global network six nations, Botswana, Australia, Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore, where the global church frequently sends missionaries across the borders of these countries for mission work. In these networking strategies, Pentecostalism is presented as a globalizing project with emphasis on outreach, expansion and influence. In this setup Kingdom City Church, Botswana Chapter continues to establish links with its partners in Asia through what is known as spiritual mapping and intercessory prayer and other strategies. Born again Christians in different countries join in the spirit and use prayer as weapons of spiritual warfare, invoking the power of the Holy Spirit to transform the world. In the context of networking Africa and Asia, therefore, the target is to spread and unite Pentecostalism across the globe, with particular emphasis on the

²⁷⁴ Nkomazana, Workshop Participation, Botswana – Korea Ministerial Relations organized by Pastor Won Jun Enoch Lee, Big Five Hotel, Mogoditshane, 2011.

²⁷⁵ Pastor Matthew Gaotsenelelwe, Kingdom City Church Hub, Extension 2, plot 828, Gaborone, 20-21 July 2015; Info.gaborone@kingdomcity.com; WWW.kingdomcity.com/gaborone/

six cities making the major centres of Pentecostalism in that part of the world. Much emphasis is on thinking big – thinking expansion, thinking growth and thinking crossing national borders with the message of the Gospel. As part of this strategy, to grow and influence society through various links and networks, Pentecostals in general dream of filling the public space with Pentecostal signs, stickers on cars, verses on buses and sign boards with Bible references to make Pentecostal Christianity virtually present everywhere. The Kingdom City Church global website describes the church mandate as follows:

We believe our name are our mandate – to bring God’s ‘kingdom’ – aka His reality, to our ‘cities’. Our heart and our vision is summed up in one sentence “connecting, equipping and empowering people to bring the reality of God to their world.” Each word in our vision statement is intentional and full.²⁷⁶

Buttressing this mandate, the website presents Mark Varughese and his wife Jemima Varughese as the global senior leaders of the international body, saying:

They have a big heart for people of diverse backgrounds and enjoy celebrating that diversity, but are most passionate about seeing the cities of our world impacted by God’s reality through the local church. Blessed with an amazing team in all six cities, they are committed to ‘connecting, equipping and empowering people to bring the reality of God to their world’.²⁷⁷

To emphasize their intention to conquer the world through strategic networking, the Global Kingdom City Church has an international leadership structure and global team as follows: Jess Bergin [Administration], Ron Woodbine [Communications], Mark Varughese [Senior Leader], Mervin Jayaseela [Equipping], Andre Dique [General Manager], Jemima Varughese [Senior Leader], Luke Quinlivan [Systems] and John Pearse [Film].

This project of making Pentecostalism the future form of Christianity, through strategic networks and “reaching out into the world” through modern media facilities, global infrastructure and various forms of mass organization is endorsed by many Pentecostals (Meyer, 2010:119). Through the Botswana – Asia networks global outreach programmes are developed to circulate Pentecostal messages through websites, international crusades and prayer meetings. The foremost desired goal is to spread the Gospel in all the nations of the world to ensure that Pentecostalism becomes a transnational project. The challenge of this kind of strategy, vision and goal of globalizing and networking Pentecostalism in that way is that it will endanger the idea of inculturation, contextualization and vernacularisation of the local Pentecostal churches. The tendency to connect with broader, global networks in which English is the main language of the project, will only weaken other important projects such as the translation of the Bible into local

²⁷⁶ www.Kingdomcity.com

²⁷⁷ www.Kingdomcity.com

languages at the expense of transnational networks (Meyer, 2010:20). These three phenomena are key elements in propagating the Christian faith. Inculturation here as in Biblical studies is “the practice of adapting the interpretation and proclamation of the Bible to different cultural contexts” (Tate, 2012). Hunter (1990) understands contextualization as in liberal theology as “the theology which is constructed with maximal concern for its relevance to the cultural context in which it occurs”. He states that the term was defined by Shoki Coe (1973) as preferable to the term “indigenization”. The third term is “vernacularisation” which according to Farlex (2016), means “to translate into everyday language spoken by a people”. These concepts are very important in the process of transporting Pentecostalism across borders. Their goal should not be lost during the process of transporting Pentecostalism across borders.

Confrontation with other religions as a challenge

One of the biggest challenges for Pentecostalism as it crosses frontiers is how to relate with other religions. Can it cohabit with and adapt to other religions? Pentecostals in Botswana and Asia openly reject the idea of accommodating other religions. They have found learning from them or co-operating with them a major challenge. In Botswana much of interfaith work that involves Pentecostals and other denominations as well as other religions occurs in ecumenical contexts through the Evangelical Fellowship of Botswana (EFB), the Botswana Council of Churches and the Organization of African Independent Churches. These organizations have carried out joint projects for networking and interfaith dialogue. The Pentecostal churches, through EFB, work with a variety of interfaith organizations to promote better understanding of different faith traditions and to co-operate on areas of common interest (Togarasei, et. al, 2011:2-21). It is through ecumenical organizations that the Korean Church and the Kingdom City Church can effectively cross their frontiers and penetrate the cultural traditions of the Batswana.

As observed above, Pentecostals have generally found it impossible for dialogue to take place between them and the adherents of the African Traditional Religions (ATRs). ATRs, on the other hand, are inclusive and accommodating and still influencing many people’s thinking as are present in many places in Botswana. Their elements are even found within Pentecostal churches. This being the case, the need to dialogue with adherents of ATRs becomes imperative. Pentecostals, however, regard those who do not profess belief in Christ as heathens. Their understanding is that those who follow ATRs do not know God, and that they are steeped in the worship of idols. Kalu (2008) observes that many of the Pentecostals seem to have always never imagined their fellowship in unity with the AICs, for instance. They would say “how do we explain the diatribe in Pentecostal rhetoric and practices that variously demonizes the AICs as ‘white garment Churches’ or ‘mademoni’ people covenanted to familiar spirits”. Foremost in their minds is a strong conviction that ATRs are thoroughly evil. This attitude can also be attributed to the evangelical revival of the 19th century in Europe, which imbued into the minds of the missionaries an unprecedented missionary zeal that moulded them into Christian soldiers whose primary objective was to proclaim the saving acts of Christ. Paganism was considered the

devil on the cross, which was to be defeated and destroyed once and for all times (Moffat, 1842; Mackenzie, 1871). Alec R. Vidler, for instance, described the main motive of missions as follows:

The main motive of missions in the nineteenth century was the evangelical one, common to Protestants and Roman Catholics, of rescuing as many of the heathens as possible from the everlasting damnation which otherwise awaited them. The grand object was to save as many souls as possible for eternal life in the next world. The simple view that everything in non-Christian religions and cultures was evil dominated the missionary outlook for a long time, though individuals were of course more humane than their creeds (Vidler, 1961:152).

As a result of their attitude, the early Pentecostals wanted to transplant all they could of Pentecostalism. In their mission work to the indigenous populations, both the Korean Church and the Kingdom City Church have found that, while ancestors form a very important part of the religious thought of most Africans, they are opposed to any form of relations with the spirits of ancestors. Ancestor veneration is completely unacceptable to these Pentecostal churches. Due to the tenacity and the resilience of the traditional ritual and spiritual life they have found the elimination of their practices a theme of their mission work as it were the theme of the early missionaries (Moffat, 1842 etc). Pentecostal churches totally reject divination and *bongaka* (traditional medicine) as practices associated with the worship of *badimo* (ancestors) (Nkomazana, 2009:152-154; Nkomazana, 2000:49-50; Akiiki & Kealotswe, 1995:9-10).

The ecumenical bodies of ATRs, the Dingaka Tsa Setso Association and the Dingaka Association²⁷⁸ are generally marginalized or excluded in most forums that bring together other ecumenical bodies such as the BCC, EFB and OAICs. This is also true for other non-Christian bodies such as the Botswana Muslim Association and the Hindu Association. In addition to the tendency to exclude these umbrella bodies from most forums, there is little recognition given to their qualified experts and leaders. The EFB and its individual member churches are generally against the idea of inviting leaders of ATR groups along with leaders of other religious groups to forums and discussions handling national issues such as prayers for rain and independence. Most often religious pluralism cuts across ethnic and family lines. There are people belonging to different faiths in the same family, village and town. They meet at family meetings, birthday parties, marriage celebrations, funerals and village meetings. They work side by side in the same offices, schools and factories. A situation for dialogue imposes itself on these people who find themselves in such situations.

Historically, Pentecostals in Botswana have up to the present avoided to deliberately preach messages or disseminate evangelistic information that would provoke people of other religions such as Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. They have advocated for friendship evangelism which

²⁷⁸ These are associations for traditional doctors in Botswana.

stresses the necessity of respecting people of other faiths. However, the tendency by the Botswana Meat Commission to have all meat slaughtered and processed at the abattoir halal sparked off a heated debate between Christians and Muslims and nearly led to mass protest (Mmegi, 7 November 2008). The Pentecostals conducted national prayers against this development, advising that the government should respect the religious feelings of the majority of the populace who were anti-hallal slaughtering, while they made efforts to accommodate the minority Muslim population. Debating the issue, GABZ FM (7 February, 2014: 16:15) pointed out that Christians were not happy with hallal products in retail shops. The discussion highlighted that the Christian population was worried by the advent of hallal products in retail shops and that they were forced to consume food sacrificed to idols. Christians were concerned by the fact that the government seemed to be reluctant in controlling the situation, while on the other hand Muslims saw no problem with Christians eating hallal products. The EFB chairperson, Pastor Matlhaope, argued that hallal could harm the Christian religion. This is one of the reasons why the interactions between Pentecostals and other religions in Botswana has not been very successful (Haron, 2006:200-217; Nkomazana & Lanner, 2007:279-295, 322-339).

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