Negotiating Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism: Global Entanglements, Identity Politics and the Future of Pentecostal Studies

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Abstract

Pentecostal studies seems to be caught in a deadlock with regard to its subject matter of research. Most definitions of Pentecostalism appear

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either too broad or too narrow compared with the inclusive sense in which "Pentecostalism" is used in academia. Scholars admit that Pentecostal is a "fuzzy category", but still, they opt for a combination of essentialist definitions, rarely investigating whether their empirical data could open up fresh perspectives on how to conceptualize the subject matter of Pentecostal studies. Others postulate a "Pentecostalization" of Christianity and/or tend to dissolve Pentecostal studies into the study of Evangelicalism and/or Catholicism for other reasons. Still others prefer to speak of Pentecostalisms in the plural or seem to have given up on finding a consensus. The introduction to this special issue proposes an alternative approach. Drawing on Michael Bergunder's work, it suggests to conceptualize Pentecostalism as a name that keeps together various equivalential chains. As the articles collected in this special issues show, this means to investigate the meaning "Pentecostalism" assumes in specific research contexts as product of local identity politics and analyse its entanglement in a global discourse about "Pentecostalism".

In 1982, the *World Christian Encyclopedia*'s "general religious adherents" overview for the Philippines listed only "Catholic Pentecostals" (Barrett, 1982: 562). "Pentecostal" was no category in itself; denominations, today classified by scholarship as "Classical Pentecostal", like the Assemblies of God or Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), ran under the rubric "Evangelical" (ibid.: 562). The second edition listed "Pentecostal/charismatics" apart from "Evangelical" as a "trans-megablock", comprising 26 per cent of the country's total population (Barrett, Kurian and Johnson, 2001: 594). Other statistics counted more than one-third of the total population as adherents to "Pentecostalism" or the "Pentecostal/charismatic" movement (Pew, 2007: 4; Johnson, 2014: 286–87). Fieldwork between 2009 and 2016, however, showed that on the ground nobody wanted to be labelled "Pentecostal". This has to be understood in relation to how Pentecostals and Charismatics have been portrayed by academics and the mass media: in the postcolonial Philippine context, "Pentecostal" stands for hysteric low-class spirituality, closely associated with fanaticism or old-fashioned denominationalism, resulting from a "colonial mindset" which "still looks up" to US missionary agents. "Charismatic" in turn, is a name reserved for the Catholic renewal movement (Maltese, 2017: 608), which dwarfs all the other groups, even as it is subsumed in global scholarship under the category "Pentecostal/Charismatics" (Anderson, 2004: 132). Thus, it is avoided by non-Catholics who prefer to identify as being

part of a relevant force that challenges Catholic's claim to determine how "Philippine religiosity" should look like (Maltese, 2019). Accordingly, the most frequent name for self-identification is "Evangelical". Does this state of affairs mark the beginning of the end of Pentecostalism in the Philippines? Should future investigations drop "Pentecostal" as analytical category and refer to the groups hitherto studied under the name Pentecostal as part of either Catholicism or Evangelicalism? It seems that these questions are not limited to the Philippine context, (Blanes, 2017; Coleman, 2017; MacCarthy, 2017; Strong, 2017; Frahm-Arp, 2019; Le, 2018) and the absence of an emerging scholarly consensus on how to define Pentecostalism exacerbates the problem.

Pentecostal Studies and Its Present Deadlock

Definitions of Pentecostalism (for an overview, see Anderson et al., 2010) appear as either too narrow, such as the normative and essentialist approaches reviewed by André Droogers, or too broad and theoretically vague, such as Allan Anderson's taxonomic approach that makes reference to Wittgenstein's "family resemblances" without clarifying what particularities are to be assessed as similarities and which ones do not matter (Bergunder, 2010: 53). The lack of reflection on the assumptions underlying such an assessment of family resemblances as well as the difficulty to criticize such an assessment of the base of sources, has been critiqued for not adequately reflecting the role of the researchers (ibid.: 66–8). The same argument applies to Joel Robbins' network approach (ibid.: 54).

Currently, Pentecostal Studies seem to be caught in a deadlock with regard to its subject matter of research. Some scholars even seem to have given up on finding a consensus. In their newest reference work, Cecil Robeck and Amos Yong content themselves with stating: "That the term Pentecostal [is] used to describe movements that do not always see eye to eye on all aspects of their history, theology, or praxis does not in itself disqualify them from the core realities that make them Pentecostal" (Robeck and Yong, 2014: 2–3), even though such "core realities" are never identified. Likewise, scholars usually admit that Pentecostal is a "fuzzy category" because the groups subsumed under this name are heterogeneous, hybrid and often short-lived. But still, they proceed to opt for merging existing approaches into an essentialist definition, rarely investigating whether their empirical data could open up fresh perspectives on how to conceptualize the subject matter of Pentecostal Studies

(Frahm-Arp, 2019; Robeck and Yong, 2014). Thus, scholarship often fails to draw theoretical (or even methodological) consequences from field-work or archival research with regard to the problem of identifying and naming Pentecostals, even as such discussions might help to point to pos-sible blind spots in the current knowledge production on Pentecostalism. The most recent volume dedicated to an in-depth examination and dis-cussion of the problem of names and definitions is a volume edited by the Glopent Research Network on Pentecostalism (Anderson et al., 2010), which by now dates back more than a decade to three workshops held in Birmingham, Amsterdam and Heidelberg from 2006 to 2008 (ibid., 2010: 9).

The articles published in this special issue take up the theoreti-cal challenges posed by the lack of consent on the subject matter of Pentecostal Studies albeit with a different approach. Rather than seek-ing to define Pentecostalism globally along essentialist features, which are either too broad or too narrow compared to the inclusive sense in which "Pentecostalism" is used in academia, the authors argue that the meaning "Pentecostalism" assumes in specific research contexts should be a constitutive part of the analysis. In this way, the analysis brings into view all of the fluidity and contradictions of the local and global phe-nomena addressed by scholars as "Pentecostal". Thus, rather than looking for abstract common features or for teleological necessities, they empha-size contingency and global entanglements. From this perspective, the meaning of "Pentecostalism" results from contingent negotiations owing themselves to local constellations and contestations in (identity) politics. Contingency, however (contrary to radical constructivist approaches), does not mean detachment from social practices or from global dis-courses, because the negotiations to be studied do not occur in isolated discursive universes, as the talk of "Pentecostalisms" often presupposes. Rather, negotiations are viewed as being entangled with global discourses; as resulting from how global debates about Pentecostalism, conducted by scholars, church leaders and mass media, are received on a local level and are referenced in order to mark differences from some groups and postulate similarities to others. From this perspective, an investigation of how "Pentecostalism" is used by the groups in a concrete context is all but exterior to the study of Pentecostalism (Maltese, 2017: 608, 611–14; 2019).

Methodologically, this translates into a critical reconstruction of the demarcations that are drawn by people who refer to "Pentecostalism" and a reconstruction of its relationship to global knowledge production

on Pentecostalism, such as narratives and definitions proposed by academia and media (Maltese, 2019). This allows, first, holding on to Pentecostalism as a subject matter of research without ignoring, homogenizing or glossing over the fluidity and heterogeneity of the groups studied. It also offers an alternative to approaches that privilege some groups over others, by regarding them implicitly or explicitly as prototypical for global Pentecostalism. As already hinted at, such prototypical taxonomic conceptualizations are frequently framed along Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblances" (e.g. Anderson, 2010) and yet remain theoretically and methodologically vague or evasive with regard to why specific features are taken into account and on what grounds similarities are declared (Bergunder, 2014: 249). A similar critique applies to the special status granted to North American evangelical denominations in the frequent talk of "Classical Pentecostalism" (Anderson, 2013: 50) that tacitly views certain denominations as a prototype of Pentecostalism. Second, conceptualizing "Pentecostalism" as the product of local negotiations that are entangled with global discourses allows for making sense of groups who seem to oscillate between Pentecostal and Evangelical, or are represented in both ways by scholarship, church leaders or media reports (Maltese, 2017: 613). This offers an alternative to approaches that postulate the "Pentecostalization" of Christianity or tend to dissolve Pentecostal studies into the study of Evangelicalism and/or Catholicism for other reasons (which in the case of the former only shifts the problem to the impossibility of defining global Evangelicalism). Third, it allows to see if and how local developments and actors in turn affect global debates, claiming the right to participate in the discourse about what Pentecostal means and whose interests are served by predominant understandings (Bergunder, 2010: 57; Maltese, 2019).

Why the Unexplained Matters

The studies collected in this special issue do all, in one way or another, draw from Michael Bergunder, who suggests to define Pentecostalism along "formal criteria", rather than along "traditions", "roots" or "essences" (Bergunder, 2010: 55). Combining theories of hegemony informed by post structuralism (Ernesto Laclau) with approaches from cultural and postcolonial studies (Gayatry Spivak), Bergunder conceptualized Pentecostalism as a particular "discourse about religion and culture" (Bergunder, 2009: 247) whose limits are permanently contested, albeit partially fixed around certain nodal points (Bergunder, 2010: 54). Such

an approach does not view believers and researchers who contest the boundaries as a disturbance, but as a point of departure for theorizing. This perspective allows a critical look at the hegemony cemented and the exclusions produced by the conflicting claims about who should be counted as Pentecostal or not (Maltese, 2017: 50).

Bergunder adapted his approach to the wider field of religious studies, which, he argued, "cannot agree on a common definition of its subject matter" either (Bergunder, 2014: 246). In an article titled "What is Religion?", he complemented Laclau's poststructuralist hegemony theory with concepts from Judith Butler and combined it with insights from global history studies, suggesting to conceptualize religion as an empty signifier that holds together different discursive articulations. Bergunder agrees with the mainstream of scholars that realist and nominalist, substantialist and functionalist definitions of religion are either too broad or too narrow to describe what religious studies is actually concerned with. Yet he argued that such an assessment of inadequacy is only possible if there are "two different kinds of 'religion': explained and unexplained", which he called Religion 1 and Religion 2 respectively (ibid.: 252). Thus, Religion 1 is found in the mentioned definitions of religion, while Religion 2 stands for a widely accepted understanding of religion that although unexplained or hard to grasp in definitory terms, is plausible enough to invalidate the mentioned definitions (Religion 1). This also applies to sophisticated definitions that combine various approaches, such as Benson Saler's widely received polythetic conceptualization, which rest on the assumption that certain groups are to be viewed as "prototypical" for "religion" (ibid.: 249–50) and which resembles Anderson's approach. Therefore, Bergunder concluded, "unexplained religion" could be viewed as the consensual subject matter of religion studies, provided there was a conceptual framework that allowed one to study Religion 2 in a theoretically transparent way without falling back into essentialist approaches (which would be Religion 1).

According to Bergunder, this would be possible, if scholars took the current predominant meaning of "religion" in a concrete context as point of departure and analysed how it was contested or affirmed by scholars and non-scholars alike. Rather than presupposing an unbroken continuity or a stable relationship between term and object, this perspective would work out the discontinuities in the use of "religion" through time and space. Such a perspective has nothing to do with radical constructivism or relativism as a recurrent critique goes. The post-structuralist epistemology lying behind it does not lend itself to arbitrariness, as if

scholars could randomly choose how to define religion. If the meaning of "religion" is contested and consequently transformed, it occurs in interaction with what that very name used to mean and which can be historicized as a sedimented discursive practice (Bergunder, 2014: 266–8). Thus, one can study the conditions of both the performances of sedimentation and its transformation (cf. Bergunder, 2010: 51, 66). Moreover, this epistemology does not deny any extra linguistic reality or materiality of objects; it only contests that the latter can be constituted as a subject matter of analysis independently from the discursive conditions in which they emerge as objects (ibid.: 51, 53–4). From this vantage point, religion could be understood as a name for a "chain of equivalence", produced by various local antagonistic identity claims, which in this chain, came to refer to one another and owe themselves to global entangled politics of representation and negotiations.

Pentecostalism: History of a Name and Global Entanglements

How does this translate into a conducive approach that gets us beyond the impasse of Pentecostal Studies with regard to the conceptualization of its subject matter? Given that definitions of Pentecostalism have been critiqued as either too narrow or too broad, it seems productive to distinguish between "explained" and "unexplained Pentecostalism". The former (Pentecostalism 1) is found in explicit definitions such as those discussed above. The latter (Pentecostalism 2) is what all the said definitions implicitly presuppose and yet are unable to fully grasp. Pentecostalism 2 is also what makes it possible to critique current definition as inadequate and what has led scholars to study Pentecostalism in the broader context of Evangelicalism or renewal movements. From this point of view, the subject matter of research in Pentecostal Studies would be Pentecostalism 2. Accordingly, the task of the researcher is to study the global history of the name "Pentecostalism" through an investigation of the competing identity claims, which have been set as references to "Pentecostalism" and served as a demarcation from what is both excluded by the former and related to other discourses (e.g. politics, science, superstition etc.). This means to study what Bergunder, following Laclau, called "equivalential chains" produced by antagonistic articulations that draw from "sedimented practices" and thus, either cement or challenge hegemonies (Bergunder, 2014: 262–8).

Put differently, chains of equivalences are produced by antagonistic people who defend and contest established ideas, practices and orders as

well as the orders and exclusions generated by the latter, relating nega-
tively or positively to the name "Pentecostalism". As such they represent
the elements that fix the meaning of "Pentecostalism" in a specific con-
text. Yet these fixations are always precarious: they could be subverted
any time, albeit never arbitrarily because any subversion has to refer to
the sedimented practices of how "Pentecostalism" is used in said context
(otherwise it would be unintelligible). To recapitulate, if definitions of
Pentecostalism are inadequate, this is because they are driven by a search
for conceptual logics underlying the use of "Pentecostalism" or, following
a conceptual history approach, try to systematize different meanings of
"Pentecostalism" in a hierarchical way (Bergunder, 2014: 258).

By contrast, this approach opts for a change of perspective that favours
discontinuity and contingency and conceptualizes Pentecostalism as a
name, which temporarily fixes the fluidity of equivalential chains. Such
a temporal fixation is precarious because it itself happens as contingent
practice and as such is always threatened by the possibility of subversion,
once other claims become part of said chain of equivalence. This allows,
on the one hand, for studying Pentecostalism 2 as a historical object of
research, and yet refraining from essentializing it. On the other hand, it
enables to grasp how Pentecostalism is still contested and negotiated by
people, including scholars, who add competing elements to the "chains
of equivalence" altered in specific contexts. Moreover, it allows for ques-
tioning the effects of power on discourses of truth, which research itself
cannot escape.

Rather than looking for an origin of Pentecostalism in order to gener-
ate essentials, whether it be "roots" or "core realities", we argue that it is
analytically more productive, firstly, to investigate the currently predom-
inant use of "Pentecostalism" and, secondly, the antagonisms that have
led and lead to the formation and establishing of the equivalential chains
that the name "Pentecostal" fixes. Methodologically, a historical study of
the history of the name has to follow a genealogical approach, which in
the Foucauldian sense (Bergunder, 2014: 269–70) reconstructs the equiv-
alential chains. Such a genealogical reconstruction asks where, when,
how, vis-à-vis whom and in demarcation to whom "Pentecostalism" is
used in a particular context along with the question whose interests are
served by the various articulations related to Pentecostalism (Maltese,
2017: 613). Put differently, Pentecostalism has no universal identity in
terms of core essences or roots, rather it is the product of name politics.
It is the study of such name politics that constitutes Pentecostal Studies.

The Future of Pentecostal Studies

Outside of Heidelberg, scholars of Pentecostalism have hardly acknowledged Bergunder's work (Bachmann, 2017; Haustein, 2011; Maltese, 2017; Quaas, 2011; Suarsana, 2013). If his work is referenced at all, it merely serves to support the idea of Pentecostalism's "changing and fluid nature" (Frahm-Arp, 2019: 100) without discussing the approach. This is surprising, given that Bergunder's work has provoked a remarkable debate in the broader context of religious studies (Hermann, 2015; Neubert, 2016; Trein, 2016). Taken together, the following articles represent a novel contribution in the sense that authors follow a consistent methodical approach that refrains from merely presenting the various case studies from Africa, Latin America, South Asia and Central Asia (the so-called Middle East) as atomized Pentecostalisms (in the plural). Rather, the authors combine ethnographic data from fieldwork with Bergunder's call for a thoroughgoing contextualization of the name Pentecostal within the setting of local negotiations and global entanglements (which so far has only been done by Maltese, 2017; and to a certain extent by Haustein, 2011: 188–247). All articles take the question of how Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism are introduced in the respective academic debates and on the ground as their point of departure. Thus, they show that it is analytically inadequate to define or identify Pentecostalism apart from or prior to studying local antagonisms and negotiations which draw on an unexplained Pentecostalism (Pentecostalism 2) just as researchers do. Likewise, they show that it is inadequate for Pentecostal Studies to focus on groups that use this name as a self-designation. This includes not only a constitutive shift from focusing on churches dubbed "classical Pentecostal" or from taking them as a (implicit) reference point. It may also include to study groups that, according to most studies, seem to have nothing to do with Pentecostals, like the Salvation Army, if the local context requires it. Starting from this vantage point, the articles collected here demonstrate the possibility of a comprehensive analytical project on global Pentecostalism that refrains from essentializing its subject matter. Furthermore, they represent an approach that takes into serious consideration that researchers cannot claim a position outside of the discourse, which is why any articulation or scholarly investigation has to reflect that it "is also always an activity of power" (Butler, 1995: 138).

Anna Kirchner's study focuses on Arab "Evangelicals" in Israel. Her study of antagonistic relations and equivalential chains argues that the local understanding of "Evangelicalism" came about with the establishing

of the Convention of Evangelical Churches in Israel (CECI). As a legal body, CECI was significant enough to be officially recognized by the state as a religious community. Furthermore, it served the various CECI groups to represent themselves as part of a worldwide movement, namely global Evangelicalism, and possibly tap the resources of umbrella organizations such as the World Alliance of Evangelicals (WEA). At the same time, Kirchner shows that such an understanding of Evangelical is constitutively entangled with the ambivalent embrace of the term "Charismatic" and with the pejoratively loaded, albeit rarely used term "Pentecostal". The latter represents what is outside of this identity discourse and thus serves to convert the stark differences among the CECI-groups into equivalences: vis-à-vis such an imagined "Pentecostal" outside, the various churches and organizations share a common identity, even though most churches do not differ with regard to a positive embrace of worship practices dubbed "charismatic". This distancing from the name "Pentecostal" and the identification with the nationalistically connoted name "Evangelical" does also apply to groups like the Assemblies of God, which academic studies often present as the poster child of Pentecostalism. Given the contingency of this Evangelical identity – an identity that does not rest on common theological or liturgical core-essences, but on antagonistic local constellations – this identity politics does not go without ambiguities. Thus, Kirchner shows the tensions between the CECI and the WEA whose Zionist political attitude virtually discriminates Arab Christians and explains the latter's hesitation with regard to the name Evangelical.

Johanna Weirich directs our attention to South India and to one organization most typically regarded as Evangelical by academics – the Salvation Army (SA). Focussing on SA's struggle to define its identity vis-à-vis other groups, she argues that local SA leaders dealt with challenges that were structurally similar to those tackled by international SA leaders. However, while for the former "Evangelicalism" was the main referent, for the latter it was "Pentecostalism". This owed itself to the local context, in which the main-competitors were churches dubbed by SA leaders as "Pentecostal". Reconstructing the different elements that were linked together in equivalential chains arrested by the two designators, Weirich shows the entanglement of global and local discourses and argues that the characteristics and roles attributed to "Evangelicals" and "Pentecostals" were strikingly similar. Yet, contrary to many studies, tongues or exorcism were irrelevant for defining "Pentecostalism". Thus she concludes that one should not study "Pentecostalism" and

"Evangelicalism" as concepts but as names, "strategically employed to define identity in relation to a particular contexts" (see page XXX).

Judith Bachmann's article on southwestern Nigeria takes as departure point recent suggestions to study Pentecostalism as "born again" Christianity. Her fieldwork confirms that "Pentecostal" is almost insignificant on the ground. Presenting a name history of "born again" that traces the transformations this designator underwent, she argues that "born again" stands for a demarcation of "real" or "committed" Christians from "corrupted" ones and especially from the source of this "corruption" identified with traditional practices, especially healing practices. As such, it is claimed by many Nigerian Christians regardless of their church background. Her analysis of the conditions for the possibility of the current "born again" discourse shows that it gained popularity in reaction to governmental politics of the 1970s, which aimed at uniting the nation by evoking tradition as common ground and was subsequently contested and ultimately demonized by both Christians and Muslims alike. In the 1990s politicians capitalized on it to mobilize voters. Thus, Bachmann concludes, that Pentecostal Studies can benefit from situating demarcation practices in the "wider field of religious identity politics spanning multiple denominations", if the researchers work out antagonisms and equivalential chains. This would "make visible what local issues, practices, and ideologies are relevant for the identity politics of the so-called Pentecostal movement" (page XXX) and how referencing "born again" serves to contest the political agendas lying behind specific forms of representation.

The article by Nora Kurzewitz deals with Costa Rica. Reconstructing the equivalential chains fixed by the name "Evangélicos", she argues that Evangelicalism here was (re-)invented in the process of bloc-building against the Catholic Church when different churches founded the Evangelical Action Committee in the 1950s, which would later become the Evangelical Alliance of Costa Rica. Thus, she concludes, what the churches that scholars and believers subsume under "Evangelical" have in common, is "the contingent fact, that they happened to be in need of defending their rights vis-à-vis traditional Catholicism" (page XXX). Tracing the transformation "Evangelical" underwent since the 1900s, she discusses the entanglement of some Alliance churches with revival groups that emerged in the 1970s appropriating a global discourse on renewal and change and later came to be institutionalized as Charismatic Renewal organizations. Her focus on socio-political relations and counter-hegemonic formations allows her to shed fresh light on the

question why these entanglements are virtually unknown in the Catholic and non-Catholic historiographies and how this relates to Pentecostalism 2. It also explains recent tactical alliances between Evangelicals and Catholics, in the light of newer debates on legislative liberalization concerning issues of sexual morality which suspends the theological differences central to the narratives found in scholarly publications and on the ground.

Finally, Esther Berg and Katja Rakow offer a response. Drawing from field research on Singapore, the authors discuss the papers and point to critical issues. All articles are based on a panel that took place at the 10th GloPent Conference held in 2018 in Amsterdam. Thus we hope that this special issue will raise new questions and further the discussion on the theme of the conference: "The Future of Pentecostal Studies".

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