



Empowered to Submit

Pentecostal Women in Nairobi

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Abstract

Neo-Pentecostalism is characterized as offering freedoms and empowerment for women, a limited role in navigating patriarchy, or strengthening patriarchal control. In Nairobi, Kenya, neo-Pentecostalism is concerned with a morality built around an idealized model of the nuclear family in which a wife is subservient to her husband. It might appear that women's ministries empower female members to challenge structures of control, but such challenges are resisted and women are expected only to survive within existing structures. Single-women are expected to live amongst the prejudices of society and dissuaded from any attempt to alter the societal structures that leave them marginalized.

Keywords: African Christianity, Pentecostal, gender, women, single, patriarchy

Introduction

This article is based upon research with particular neo-Pentecostal congregations in Nairobi, but represents conclusions that can be more widely applied. It is our contention that resilient social expectations of women, as expressed in sermons and lay discourse, are that they should enjoy a subservient role; these forms of preaching maintain patriarchal

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structures and challenges to these structures are strongly attacked. We go on to consider examples of women who do not have a specific male to whom they submit and the means by which different groups support but do not encourage single women and, in fact, censure those who attempt to challenge the patriarchal structures in Kenyan society. Ministries that cater to single women are found in Nairobi, and they often promote a narrative of joy and empowerment that is similar to narratives for married women. Once again, it is our contention that these messages intend to sustain oppressive patriarchal structures as they are currently constituted and that challenges to these structures are vigorously resisted. Finally, we explore the importance of ministries that provide opportunities for women to display and perform submission which can, in fact, aid in protecting them within the present societal conditions but also maintain these conditions.

In conceptualizing Pentecostalism and its global significance, a range of authors have been fascinated by the exponential growth in the number of adherents, along with ideas or “certain attitudes and habits” that constitute moves to modernity in the developing world (Berger: 11). In the study of this “tearing of the [previous] social fabric,” particular interest has been directed towards women (Martin 2002: 23). Scholars such as Ogbu Kalu and Marie Griffith have drawn attention to the important role of using feminine spirituality as metaphors of power, transformation, and encouragement. Kalu, for example, points to the capacity of Pentecostalism to reimagine the feminine spirituality of the Pneuma. He argues that feminine spirituality is radicalized in the Bible with images of God as the mother of Israel, the awesome power of God mediated in predominantly feminine imagery (148). According to him, God’s salvation was first broached and activated by Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, and Mary Magdalene. These women had the courage to say yes to the Holy Spirit, and became co-workers with God; their apparent weakness turned into a powerful, prophetic recovery of both church and community. Griffith further shows how women appropriate rich biblical metaphors and use them to reconstruct their own understanding of Christian womanhood.

What is notable is that many of the studies concerned with women and Pentecostalism pay the greatest attention to the manner in which “personal transformation and empowerment” are undertaken within families (Freeman: 3). David Martin and Rekopantswe Mate are essentially in agreement that the objective of “Western feminists . . . to release women from the weight of family responsibilities, including the linked trio of cooking, children and church” is not realized within Pentecostal families (Martin 2002: 23). However, while Martin is rather positive about this situation, feeling that the nuclear family is the best unit within which to access the fruits of capitalist modernity, Mate sees “patriarchal control” (549) and the destructive misery of unequal rights and attendant abuses. Both authors, therefore, write of evangelical women as engaged in “voluntary submission to divine authority” but disagree as to whether this represents their “true liberation” (Griffith: 199).

In this paper we discuss Kenyan neo-Pentecostalism as being dominated by the submission of women to domestic service and as highly resistant to challenges to established gender norms. We take Mate’s description, adapted from Kandiyoti (1988), of patriarchy “as a structure of gains and losses in an individual’s life (regardless of sex) vis-a-vis relations with others which change with age, marital status and wealth” (565). We describe the manner in which Pentecostal women in Nairobi are encouraged to access gains and mitigate losses

through men, but contend that these gains are secondary, limited, and must not challenge male dominance. The nuclear family provides a vehicle through which these processes are most comfortably managed. There is an increasingly rich vein of work discussing women and Pentecostalism, including in Africa. Jane Soothill, for example, has provided a challenging consideration of the means by which women negotiate power through men, especially their husbands, in Ghana. We feel that the literature to date has been limited in the consideration of Pentecostal women who are not within a nuclear family structure or have no designated male to whom they submit. This study considers these circumstances through specific examples of leaders and members of particular congregations in Nairobi, Kenya.

Gender norms in Africa have undergone significant changes over the last two centuries. Women, especially in urban areas, are expected to be in the home and to conform to expectations, as David Martin suggests, to “defend hearth and table against the depredations of the street” (2005: 146). Women are required to be, and be seen to be, under the control of and submissive to men. This work discusses the constructions of Pentecostal femininity found among Pentecostals in Nairobi where the dominant conception of domestic service and submission to a male head of household can be seen and heard in the pronouncements by Pentecostal leaders and ordinary Pentecostal women in mixed congregations and organizations specifically convened for women. The National Interdenominational Women Prayer Network (NIWPN), for example, which consists of 150 women leaders from various Christian denominations, mobilized to pray and make intercession for the nation and, in particular, the *family* unit.

This article is built on research conducted in 2008-2009 by both of its authors. Our concern is to gather extensive data and knowledge of varied voices of lay congregants to conceptualize their worldviews and agency in complex, contemporary Kenyan society. Methodologically, we utilize participant observation in churches: services (including sermon material, presentation, performance, and spatial construction); semi-structured interviews with leaders and congregants; extensive informal discussions in churches, homes, and during everyday activities with Pentecostal adherents and those from other or no faiths; triangulation with media (including social media); oral reporting of current events; and contemporary literature on African Pentecostalism. The nature of our research necessitates spending extensive periods of time – months, even years – with particular churches. Thus, the information discussed here comes from particular congregations that we know extremely well. Conclusions also incorporate specific research, knowledge of the literature, as well as the lifelong experience as a Kenyan Christian for one author, and 20 years of living and working with Kenyan Christians for the other.

Within the literature on Pentecostalism and gender, excellent recent work is to be found regarding homosexuality, gender normative behavior, and oppression (see for example Van Klinken; Valoise). This construction of norms and exclusion of others is valuable for our present work and consideration of what it means to be a Pentecostal woman in Nairobi, indeed what it is to be a Kenyan woman. Damaris Parsitau and Philomena Mwaura have written extensively on the extent to which Pentecostal women leaders can and cannot challenge social norms and step outside of the bounds that are generally placed on women, marriages and families (Parsitau and Mwaura 2010, 2012; Parsitau 2011, 2012). Our focus here is lay congregants, and in particular single women and the extreme limits placed upon

them – as well as the consequences if they attempt to challenge social and religious norms (which are increasingly indivisible in Kenya). It is also notable that much of this research was conducted during a period of political upheaval, civil unrest, and widespread violence in Kenya following the disputed general election of 2007. First, we argue that work on Africa can be overly consumed with the machinations of political elites and the voices and experiences of ordinary citizens can be lost in exoticized and dramatic accounts. Second, rather than seeing great change in gender relations and roles, this period provides a compelling case study of the extent to which deep social norms are extremely resilient amidst other changes. In fact, amidst uncertainty many people cling with increased force to existing social conditions – be this imagined nostalgia or otherwise.

Good Wives

The vast majority of Pentecostal churches in Nairobi include a women's ministry, and some have emerged with particular prominence. Also, a limited number of city churches aim to include an exclusively female membership. The former include, for example, "Ladies of Excellence" at the Maximum Miracle Centre in Nairobi's Central Business District (CBD). In the latter category is, for example, "Ladies Homecare Spiritual Fellowship," located to the west of central Nairobi, in a middle class estate that borders a large slum. Such ministries feature significant content in terms of affirmation and messages of encouragement. Heavily repeated terms used in these ministries include "transformation," "excellence," "empowerment," "anointing," "blessed," "healed," "raised," "filled with the Holy Spirit," "set free," "set apart," and "released." Meetings, conferences, and seminars feature titles such as "Models of Destiny," "Women of Excellence," "Women without Limits," "Women of Fire," "Spirit-filled Women," "Daughters of God," and "Daughters of Faith" (Parsitau 2008–10). Biblical women heroines, such as Deborah, Naomi, Dorcas, Ruth, Mary, Elizabeth, and Mary Magdalene are often mentioned. Jael (Judges 5:31), for example, is described as having redeemed Israel from the hands of the Canaanites by killing the army Commandant Sisera and bringing peace to Israel without "training" (Rev. Lucy Muiru at Ladies of Excellence conference, August 8, 2008).

Jael is, however, a wife who achieved beyond that which was expected of her. Similarly, Abigail, wife of Nabal (Samuel 25:32-35) is referred to as having "salvaged" her family and as a "good example of a woman married to men [sic] who are not born again" (Rev. Lucy Muiru at Ladies of Excellence conference, August 8, 2008). When her husband refused assistance to King David, Abigail is described as having taken food to the King and his soldiers and as having "begged for forgiveness." Thus, sermons may explore the means by which women can overcome challenges, but such issues are essentially family related and concerned with getting by in circumstances as they are currently structured in Kenyan society. They are built around issues such as how to handle husbands, children, house-holds, finances, and wife inheritance. It is in this manner that the Reverend Kathy Kiuna states that she has a passion for women and wants them "to believe in themselves, to fulfil their destinies."² Once again though, such "destinies" are to be wives in second place to a

² From an advertisement in "The History of Jubilee Christian Church: Celebrating 11 years of God's Faithfulness: To God be the Glory," *Saturday Nation* (January 30, 2010).

husband who “is the head of the home.” Overall, Kiuna states that her aim is to assist women in making “a man . . . comfortable in his place [because then] he will let you be comfortable in yours” (cited in Irungu). Even at the rich and powerful Mavuno Church, when discussing “the strength of a woman,” married women role models, including Dr. Gladys Mwiti, a leading clinical psychiatrist, have stated that viewers (of a television special) and congregants should thank “God for making me a woman,” and that even with her Ph.D. she was “still a submissive wife.” At best:

Women should use their beauty, relationships and words to get what they want. Women have the following attributes: beauty, words, relationship skills, intuition, femininity. Women should use these assets to get to the boardroom. Women are both beautiful and mysterious. Use your beauty for business (Mwiti, Citizen TV, June 20, 2010).

What is not expected or tolerated among Pentecostals in Nairobi are challenges to their model of a strong nuclear family in which females in their ascribed roles as wives carry out domestic, household tasks. For example, during a Bible study session in 2008 in Kibera, an informal settlement, the wife of a congregant was prayed for because she was said to be suffering from “Satanic oppression, disturbed sleep, nightmares and speaking in strange tongues.” The woman herself was not present; in her stead her husband knelt and the presiding pastor placed his hands upon him and attendees prayed. The pastor asked those present to consider whether “maybe one of us did something to make the devil think he could come in.” When the woman in question was possessed, she would shout abuse at her husband, refuse to do chores, or stop in the middle of doing them. This meant that sometimes the house was not cleaned and sometimes she would refuse to cook. When this happened, her husband, who would be “tired from working,” would have to buy food from a hotel (kiosk) to feed the children.

One of the authors of this study accompanied the pastor, husband, and a church elder to the family home (room) of the Kibera wife. The woman was making jerky head movements, looking dazed and moving restlessly. In contrast to the pastor’s statement that she was suffering satanic oppression, she was calling upon God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Those present sang and prayed, while she continued her restless movements, repeatedly walking to the door saying, “they will chase me, lock the door.” After a while, she became calmer, sat down and after a little more praying and singing the pastor began to interview her. The woman said that she had gone to another church to pray because her child had been troubled by leg pains. She also described a dream in which she had somewhere to go and found the church where she had prayed for her child. In another dream, she was locked out of the church building and was threatened with attack by the Mungiki gang, but God protected her (on Mungiki, see Anderson; Katumanga). She said she would not go to the church that Sunday because “God is there at home, and that is enough.”

The pastor again prayed for the wife to submit to the husband as the head of the household. However, he said that he did not feel the need to cast out any demons that day, but instead wanted to make a slow, gentle diagnosis to understand fully what was happening. He said that he did not believe that the wife was fully possessed because she could remember what had happened to her; she was “clever” and was talking about things she had

“heard” and were “obvious” as opposed to “spiritual.” Her refusal to go to the church and fear of the Mungiki gang could also be interpreted as concerns regarding the pastor. The church represented for her a place where the pastor could bring community censure to bear upon her. The pastor in question was also a Kikuyu, as were members of the Mungiki, but the woman was a Luo from Western Kenya, suggesting the utilization of another form of resistance or an attempt to portray community censure that might be applied to her in ethnic terms and, therefore, attempt to weaken it before it was enacted. Her refusal to attend this particular church at that time was also indicative of fear. Mungiki for her represented terror and fear of the gang due to inter-ethnic tensions that emerged after the 2007/8 post-election crisis; she had no confidence in her church because her personal security and safety were not guaranteed by the church.

Her fear highlights a number of issues. While the woman claimed to be talking to the Holy Spirit, her possession was similar to that attributed to demons or lesser spirits, and lesser spirits tend to directly communicate displeasure with particular issues. Demons and lesser spirits have been widely discussed as being involved in expressions of anger with social exclusion and relations of power and status, in particular with capitalistic and gender relations (Ong). This possession involved refusal, failure, or inability to cook, clean, and carry out other household tasks and, therefore, suggests a significant challenge to societal expectations of a woman in a domestic setting. This challenge could not be countenanced, and was rebuffed by statements questioning the authenticity of this woman’s actions. In the end, the husband took his young wife upcountry a month later. This was done partly as the pastor felt that it was a church she had visited that had led to her possession. At the same time, going upcountry would give her a break from the lonely grind of household management in Kibera (Swart: 26). She would continue with household activities, but would find additional help and support from the female members of her extended family. At the same time, family members would subject her to further pressure to submit to her husband and rescind her challenge. Thus, this woman’s possession produced some positive results for her, in terms of a period of rest and support. However, she could only bargain with the structures that she was unhappy with to obtain limited results for herself. Overall, the effects of her challenge were strongly and successfully resisted (see Kandiyoti 1988, 1998). Pentecostal women are told to conform to an idealized model of the nuclear family in which a wife is submissive to and serves her husband. Ministries also exist for women who do not have a husband, but they are, nevertheless, expected to submit to and adapt themselves to existing conditions without challenging the structures that marginalized them in the first place.

Single Women

Arguably, Nairobi’s most prominent women’s church is the Single Ladies Interdenominational Ministry (SLIM), which was founded by Elizabeth Wahome in 2004. Rev. Wahome claims that she received a vision from God to start SLIM to give “lonely single women some fellowship after realizing that most Christian churches did not address their needs” (Parsitau 2008–10). Women in this ministry are categorized according to the nature of their “singleness” and their lives are likened to the experiences of biblical female figures and heroines. Separated and divorced women, for example, are represented by Hagar,

the maidservant of Sarah, Abraham's wife (Genesis 21:13-14), who was rejected with her son Ishmael, suffered hunger and thirst, and was rescued by God. Wahome draws many parallels between Hagar's story and that of separated and divorced women who are usually left with the responsibility for feeding and raising their children.

Single mothers are often stigmatized and branded by churches as "husband-snatchers" and "home-wreckers" (Parsitau 2008–10). In Kenya, there is strong social stigma attached to single women, especially single mothers, who are frowned upon by society and often branded as women of loose morals who fend for their children by preying on married men. This is a particular challenge given that Kenya has one of the highest percentages of single mothers in Africa, according to a 2012 Pan African Study (Clark and Hamplová). The study reports that six out of 10 Kenyan women are likely to become single mothers by the time they reach 45. It is contended that an increasing number of women are drawn into single parenthood as more men abandon their traditional roles as providers for their children (Kiberenge). Despite, or in light of, this situation, single women and mothers in particular are viewed with fear and suspicion. However, in SLIM these women are not stigmatized; instead they are referred to in the light of the newness of Christ and the ending of pain as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:1.

At SLIM, all categories of single women are encouraged to rise above "victimhood" and value themselves as children of God. At home and in the church the women are encouraged to work as the bride of Christ, to be active in evangelism and ministry (interview with Wahome, May 2009; cf. Kalu: 231). Wahome states that her ministry's sole aim is to challenge single women to rise from living a down-trodden life, and Pentecostal women within and without this group are described as "women without limits," "Women of Excellence," "Models of Destiny," "Daughters of Faith," "Daughters of Zion," "Women of Honour and Integrity," and "Women of Worth" (Parsitau 2008–10). In one sermon during a ladies' conference, Rev. Wahome told attendees to "see and value themselves the way God sees and values them" (*Single Ladies' Moments*). This is reiterated in SLIM's motto, which states, "In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the lord has planted for his own glory" (Isaiah 61:3; *Single Ladies' Moments*).

Women are offered support in overcoming their challenges and achieving their glorious destinies through, for example, being invited to share their experiences, and they are prayed for and given encouragement. Successful women, single and married, are invited to speak to other women at conferences and seminars. SLIM has also developed various programs such as Sister Keepers Ministry that encourage women to watch over each other as keepers. These are usually networks of prayer support groups in which women listen to each other's problems and pray together. The ministry also has weekly meetings such as Bible study, committee meetings, and prayer groups, all of which provide space to talk about problems and challenges. Whether gathered for their annual conferences or joined in sister keeper fellowships, cell group meetings, or Bible study groups, women share their stories of sufferings and restoration through confessional testimonies (Griffith: 115). The meetings allow them to disclose their inner life among generally supportive women. Meetings can be powerfully therapeutic, as women narrate their sufferings and pain at the hands of abusive spouses, the loneliness they feel when deserted by a spouse, or the struggles and pain they experience as they fend for their children. The effect on the participants seems immense.

Throughout the meetings, women sob, cry aloud, embrace one another, lay hands on each other, experience a release, and some fall on the floor “slain in the spirit.” Meetings are described as giving women some sense of miracle and mystery as they come to feel healed, inwardly transformed, and outwardly set free through the power of the Holy Spirit.

On a number of occasions and using mass media, Rev. Wahome challenged the government to not only address issues affecting single women but also to include women’s concerns in developing the nation’s agenda and formulation of policy. She claims women are oppressed with no one to fight for them and no one to listen to their cries, both in churches and in government. Wahome further decries high levels of gender based violence and insecurity among women, but especially among poor and vulnerable women in the country’s informal settlements. She calls for legal aid for single women, especially widows whose relatives disinherit them when their husbands die. In one SLIM meeting, women were given time to ask questions regarding their legal rights, particularly in respect to property and children’s rights, and were given advice by women lawyers invited as guest speakers.

Rev. Wahome criticizes Christian churches and calls on them to open up space for women as leaders, deacons, preachers, and directors of projects. She recognizes that single women are capable leaders and that the church must formulate leadership programs to impart leadership skills to women. Rev. Judy Mbugua also criticizes Christian churches and calls on them to open up space for women as leaders, deacons, preachers, and directors of projects, but she could not be ordained in her own home church, Nairobi Pentecostal (NPC), which would not give her any leadership roles. She was, however, ordained as a full minister in 1991 by Bishop Arthur Kitonga of the Redeemed Gospel Churches of Kenya (RGC), and remains affiliated with NPC. Nevertheless, the women’s roles that Wahome and Mbugua call for do not appear to challenge existing boundaries established in Kenya’s gender codes.

Rev. Wahome perceives herself as a mother to the women to whom she speaks, the majority of whom refer to her by this title. Spinsters find their affirmation in Matthew 1:21-23, as Wahome draws parallels between this group and the Virgin Mary, who was faithful when an angel appeared and announced that she would be pregnant with child. Nevertheless, Wahome exhorts women in this category to concern themselves with serving God while *waiting for a husband*. In this meeting, she challenged NGOs to come to the aid of women and provide them with financial resources, easy access to credit facilities, and safe space to do business that is free of harassment so that women can *support their families* – not so they can prosper as individuals. Single women are supported, but are still a threat to the model of the strong, Christian, nuclear family because they do not submit to a particular male. Women’s ministries exist to address this situation and appear to offer adherents powerful, motivational messages that might appear to suggest a challenge to the dominant, patriarchal structures of Kenyan society. However, it is our contention that they, in fact, assist women only to survive within the patriarchal social structure and work toward the provision of husbands; thereby, they actually maintain and even strengthen societal constructions and the oppression of women. This can be especially seen in light of women’s economic empowerment activities and support. In an effort to assist women living in Nairobi’s poorest areas, SLIM has opened a bureau that advertises jobs and encourages employers to seek workers through from its membership. SLIM’s message to employers

reads, “Attention employers, are you looking for honest born-again workers? For secretaries, accountants, housekeepers, and baby sitters, contact the SLIM bureau.”

The SLIM Skills Centre, an initiative of Rev. Wahome, provides a variety of skills to single women and has recently opened to young girls and boys. However, the skills taught conform to those that may be characterized as feminine activities: baking and confectionery, tailoring, catering, detergent and shampoo making, and animal husbandry. Women are expected to become empowered, but only within existing feminine spheres, and are supported by each other – rather than challenging the lack of support provided by men. SLIM adheres to the models described by Rekopantswe Mate and David Martin, but with the notable difference that these women operate without men. In the descriptions by Mate and Martin, women operate economically outside of the home but submit to husbands. What they do not address are the circumstances for single women, whether they have children or have at any point been married. Wahome offers support for women deprived of a man, but makes no attempt to address the structural inequalities of gender norms in Kenyan society.

Challenges by single women to these circumstances are strongly resisted. On April 13, 2008, for example, during a Sunday morning service in a Kibera informal settlement, a female member of the congregation was “slain in the Spirit.” She called out, wept, and writhed on the ground. Some benches were moved so that she did not hurt herself and her legs were covered with a cloth to avoid her exposing herself. However, she received little attention. Silence is particularly powerful: “Unlike the activity of speech, which does not require more than a single actor, silence demands collaboration and the tacit communal understandings that such collaboration presupposes” (Sheriff: 114). When praise and worship finished, she remained on the floor and was told to be quiet. After a while she sat back up on a bench, looking somewhat dazed. When the incident was discussed with the church’s pastor, he stated that what happened must have occurred because of the presence of the Holy Spirit and not demons because “demons are violent.” He seemed impatient, and the woman’s behavior was largely ignored by everybody who was present. There was no celebration of what might have been considered a powerful demonstration of the presence of the Holy Spirit or as a joyful and exciting example for others.

The woman in the example above was a relatively successful and confident woman; she did not live within the control of her father or a husband. She was always an enthusiastic congregant, dancing and singing with gusto. Her exuberant dancing and singing (and ululating and praying, particularly during an upcountry crusade) seemed to be tolerated, or even encouraged when she was with the female congregants. While she remained with the women of the church, it seemed that she was not considered a threat to male dominance by intruding into their designated spaces within the church. However, her being slain in the Spirit was a step too far; it was not in keeping with the order of the service. In a church where congregants are regularly slain in the Spirit, this normally occurs when a pastor touches the head of the believer, the process is requested and controlled, or “happens within a format of body posture and timing” (De Witte: 183). In this setting, the woman was stepping out of line; her actions were truly unexpected and not in keeping with situational normality.

This event represented a threat to the church hierarchy and its structures of order and control. The woman did not physically intrude upon designated male areas of the church, although she did come close to the stage and her apparently uncontrolled movements meant that the threat of intrusion was present. Rather than being happy that the Holy Spirit was present, everybody, including the head pastor, seemed somewhat embarrassed. The woman's behavior was not sanctioned and the lack of apparent control in terms of time (during the service), space (within the church), and power (as a woman) were very threatening. Pentecostals demonstrate a hierarchy with regards to gifts of the spirit. In Biblical terms, such gifts, referred to in Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11, and 1 Corinthians 12:1-14, include prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, mercy, evangelizing, pastoring, knowledge, faith healing, miraculous powers, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Being slain in the Spirit is not specifically referred to, although it can be seen as a manifestation of the Spirit and a combination of tongues and miraculous powers. Exegesis of these biblical texts regarding spiritual gifts would argue that different gifts are conferred on different people for different purposes within the church, and there is no hierarchy to such gifts (see, for example, Walvoord; Edgar). Nevertheless, it can be argued that there is a tradition of hierarchy in African culture and religion (see Aquina: 206). The dramatic demonstration of the presence of the Spirit described above would be seen as important and powerful and, therefore, more threatening than less overt gifts such as teaching or mercy. Lesser gifts would also be in keeping with gender expectations, with women being expected to engage in caring or household roles.

This woman's general behavior could be tolerated as representing that of a good Christian *woman* who was not overly threatening and still knew her place, but her being slain in the Spirit stepped outside of the boundaries of acceptable female behavior. Resistance to women's gender roles was also demonstrated in the case of another woman who planted and tended a flower garden by the main entrance to the church she attended. The flowers portrayed an image of femininity, but her activity would be questionable, rather than submissive, in a public place. In Kenya, gardening is generally a male activity. Therefore, this woman's work not only stepped outside the boundaries of gender roles for women but also intruded upon male activities. There were rumors that the woman was receiving a salary from the head pastor and that they had sexual relations. In defiance of the rumors, she continued to tend the garden. One night, a machete was used to destroy the garden. It is presumed that this action represented the wishes of more than a lone individual because, first, it followed the use of rumor and, second, a night guard sat directly opposite the flowerbed, suggesting collusion or at least acquiescence. This demonstrates that women who challenge patriarchal norms are subject to censure and are even at risk of violence. Pentecostalism plays an important role in society, but its role is protecting women within threatening structures, rather than challenging structures that marginalize them, particularly in regard to women's ways of being, doing, and dressing. Submitting to a male protects some Pentecostal women, but it cannot protect Pentecostal woman who have no male to whom they submit.

Protection

Women in Nairobi are placed into an ambiguous position, as they are required to leave their homes to engage in economic activities. Even though it is essential, movement outside the home contradicts use of Biblical tracts such as 1 Timothy 5:14, which would have them, “take care of their homes, so as to give [their] enemies no chance of speaking evil of [them]” (Mate: 557). If they are not at home and not clearly submissive to the male head of household and his regulation, they are frequently seen as potentially being engaged in unregulated sexual activity. Video halls or bars are considered to be “male spaces . . . associated with . . . having pre-marital or extra-marital sex,” visited by men “alone, or with male friends and colleagues but rarely [with] their wives or serious girlfriends.” Women in such spaces are assumed to be “deviants who transgress ascribed feminine sexual mores and practices [and] are sexually available to men for a price” (Borne: 7).

Churches can offer an alternative to the home as a social space that can allow for avoidance of questions over motivation and behavior. Nevertheless, women in church are still outside of the home and remain open to question – especially as churches are not unambiguously virtuous spaces. Stories of sexual infidelity by pastors are widespread in Kenya (see Kariuki). Parents fear that children will use time away from the home to have sex, and individuals are rumored to utilize churches to find partners. This means that women remain exposed to rumor and allegations even while in church and, as discussed above, single women are especially at risk as they do not have a male to submit to even when at home. Within and without their churches, single and married women can only partially defend themselves from accusation and attack by behaving in a demure, submissive manner.

Women in a range of churches state that regulation and submission is important if one is a single lady, and that it is good to know that if she were to sin, she would be disciplined. One woman said that discipline was carried out on Christians in general if they sinned. However, her most significant desire as a woman was to be bound to and controlled by the church. She invited censure even before any sin happened and, thereby, stated that as a woman she was expected to be submissive and that this was particularly necessary as she was not under the control of a father or husband. In such churches, we may also consider spiritual performances in terms of “technical action,” and as disciplines “[that] must be taught and learnt, and are therefore . . . dependent on a range of social institutions and material conditions” for their meaning. Utilizing concepts of “semiosis,” we may understand such performance in terms of “meaning making through language, body language, visual images or any other way of signifying” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough: 229). We may see bodily techniques and speech acts not just as shallow, culturally determined symbols of individual spirituality. If assessed within their particular power context, they provide the practical means for “achieving social and psychological objectives” (Asad: 257). Actions are performed by certain individuals in particular ways that reflect expectations of power.

In mixed churches, large bodily actions and loud utterances tend to be made by male congregants. Male church members may pray loudly, pace up and down, kneel, face the wall, raise their hands, or bounce on their toes. Female church members are more likely to stand still, with eyes closed, hands either by their sides or clasped, or at most, with arms raised. Pentecostals state that exuberant performance (singing, dancing, and praying) are signs of

true spirituality. Thus, an individual who does not perform exuberantly is considered less spiritual, and thereby less valued, and less powerful. However, this is also a means by which a woman may place herself within a partially protective space to defend herself from accusations of inappropriate behavior.

Particular churches that offer assistance for women to perform this submission in an especially exaggerated manner have evolved. The Ministry of Repentance and Holiness (MRH), founded by self-proclaimed Prophet David Owour, for example, is an end-time millennial church that gives prominence to rituals on purity, holiness, sin, sex, female bodies, and dress codes. This ministry is very popular with women who find Prophet Owour's message of repentance, holiness, and moral probity attractive. In this ministry, women in fact occupy a seemingly visible public role. Many are ordained pastors who lead and head a number of altars or churches. They also sing in church, lead worship services in churches and crusades, as well as providing ushering services during large repentance and holiness crusades and rallies. Prophet Owuor preaches about holiness, purity, turning away from sexual sin, immorality, and other such puritanical principles. However, one of its distinguishing characteristics is how women followers have embraced a particular dress code, characterized by long flowing and loose dresses ostensibly to embody holiness as taught by their prophet. Some of these bodily tenets include the forbidding of wearing sleeveless tops, hemlines at or above the knee; slit skirts that expose knees, open shoes, bare legs, and uncovered heads. Church gatherings, crusades, and meetings become not just sites for the formation of a sort of shared sisterhood and identity making but also, and more importantly, sites of holiness and gendered assembly. Here women are bound together by a common faith and dress code but are also bound in submission to church authority, teachings, and rituals. The complexities of women's practical and spiritual church work and its articulation with liberating and constraining doctrines is an interesting dimension of this particular ministry. Women's majority status is coupled with demonstrative worship practices that place women's bodies at the heart of religious life. Beneath the veneer of spiritual empowerment of female followers of the church are complexities and tensions and constraints manifested by a subtle control of women's bodies, sexuality, and relationships.

Pentecostal performance thus represents restriction and bounding of women's behavior within patriarchal expectations and control. Women who perform gifts of the spirit or demonstrate initiative are subject to significant community censure through being ignored, described as inauthentic and suspicious and temporarily exiled, or their work being destroyed through violent acts. Space for action that deviates from expectations of situational normality and gender normative behavior does exist. However, as we have seen, this generally takes place in ministries and services solely for women. In mixed services, women face the danger of accusations of inappropriate, challenging behavior. In such churches and society, women must defend themselves. Thus, Pentecostalism plays an important role in women's attempts to protect themselves but does not challenge and, in fact, maintains the hierarchical structure of gender. Furthermore, while we can see male control over females in these actions, behaviors, and performances, it is of particular importance here to note the extent to which women submit themselves to male control. In certain spaces and moments women are able to express themselves with exuberance and attendant release, although even these actions must be restrained and conducted according to particular rules so as not to

challenge broader societal mores. These restrained activities represent survival mechanisms because, in general, female submission is required to avoid censure and violence, especially for single women.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have examined how different categories of Pentecostal women struggle to navigate and bargain with patriarchy in a complex and contested social and cultural context and milieu. We have shown how married women essentially submit to their husbands despite, or perhaps in keeping with, a certain rhetoric of empowerment that is found in sermons and teachings in mixed ministries as well as in those exclusively for women. The latter, in particular, help women survive in a heavily patriarchal society, but do not challenge the structural issues that predominate in Kenyan society. In order to consider the importance of this situation, we might argue that women in Kenya operate as “sub-oppressors” and that “the very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped” (Freire: 27) so that they act in ways demanded by males who hold positions of power within patriarchal hierarchies. In this manner Pentecostal women can also be seen as enforcing the wishes of men, and this would at the least represent a challenge to those who portray Pentecostalism as offering a new equality of opportunity to its adherents.

Wider processes of cultural hegemony can be seen as Kenyan Pentecostals attempt to address “contemporary urban challenges . . . [giving] meaning to human life, while simultaneously equipping . . . [themselves] to be resourceful in meeting diverse challenges” (Chitando: 30). This is not to suggest that they are successful in addressing the challenges in their lives by changing their circumstances. Instead, the mechanisms employed allow some limited protection from rumor, judgment, and exclusion – rather than opening up new modes of existence in which these attacks are avoided, or those who hold such attitudes have their opinions and understandings remade. It is in this manner that the homiletic role of neo-Pentecostalism in the lives of single women can best be understood in Nairobi. As the title of this paper states, women are expected to submit, and where a clear male figure cannot be identified, then submission to Jesus provides empowerment, in an extremely limited sense.

Essentially, it seems to us that Kenyan Pentecostalism is a complex mix of empowering and disempowering for women. For example, ministries for women promote a sort of feel good motivation rhetoric, but fail to bolster or support challenges that women might make in taking a stand against a heavily patriarchal culture. The nature of this culture, we also wish to emphasize, can be viewed in the light of a dominant Christian conception of gender roles and social structure. Understandings of homes, families, and individual gender roles have undergone significant changes in Kenya and across Africa, in part due to transformation in modes of production but also in response to conceptions of Christianity. As mentioned above, a variety of authors have engaged in disputes as to whether predominant understandings of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christianity with regards to women are positive or negative. There is little dispute as to whether they have produced changes and are significant in terms of gender conceptualization. Kenya as a nation is generally considered to be at least 85% Christian and this powerful cultural and socioeconomic force is primarily

Pentecostal and Evangelical in its nature (Deacon and Lynch). Understanding gender relations in Kenya, which are immensely important for understanding the nature and modes of production in the country, is therefore greatly assisted by discussion of the religious concepts that are applied to both women and men. It is our contention that women's attitudes toward and understandings of themselves are vital.

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