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Sarah's Sinfulness

Egalitarianism, Denied Difference, and Gender in Pentecostal Christianity

by Annelin Eriksen

Early anthropological studies of Pentecostalism and gender, dominated by Latin American and Caribbean ethnography, focused to a large extent on women's conversion and how Pentecostal ideology has limited masculine oppressive behavior and provided women with social community, faith healing, domestic counseling, and so forth. These studies of Pentecostalism have thus been dominated by a focus on women on the one hand and on social community and social change on the other. The primary question asked in these studies has been, does Pentecostalism bring about an increased degree of equality? With the development of the anthropology of Christianity, the focus has shifted to a more thoroughgoing understanding of Christianity as a culture. In this paper I argue that this shift can also stimulate a shift in the way we study equality and gender in Pentecostalism. Instead of looking at men and women's roles, we need to look at the specific idea of egalitarianism that this form of Christianity brings about and how this shapes the way in which gendered difference is articulated. I present a case from Vanuatu, South West Pacific, arguing that we need to look at gendered values, and I suggest a focus on what I call "the charismatic space."

Linda Woodhead (2007) has argued that the study of gender in religion always includes the study of relations of power. In anthropological and sociological studies of Pentecostalism and gender, this power perspective has indeed been the dominant one, and the focus has been primarily on men's and women's negotiations of power and leadership. A specific focus on equality/inequality has led us to privilege a perspective on power in studies of gender in Pentecostalism. In this paper I challenge these traditional perspectives and urge for a move away from the focus on men and women's "power struggle" to an analysis of value and gender.

In the 1980s and 1990s analyses of the rise of Pentecostalism in Latin America were dominated by classical sociological perspectives on gender and power. Two main questions were asked: why are women so numerically dominant in these churches, and why do men still hold on to leadership positions (Bowen 1996; Brusco 1986, 2010; Burdick 1990; Chestnut 1997; Hallum 2003; Ramirez 1999; Sjørup 2002; Stoll 1990)? Two contrasting viewpoints emerge. First, Pentecostalism reproduces and reinforces paternalism, although in new and different ways (see Bowen 1996; Flora 1975; Willems 1967). Second, and contrary to the first, Pentecostalism is a strategic

women's movement (Brusco 1986, 2010), a feminist effort at "domesticating men" (Stoll 1990:319). As Brusco (1986) pointed out in her study of Colombian Pentecostalism, Pentecostal social practice and norms inverted the masculine role, making men more accommodating to domestic ideals as opposed to the traditional "machismo." Others again pointed out that the Pentecostal social practice enabled women to voice their domestic problems (Burdick 1990), or that Pentecostal churches teach women middle-class behavior, making it easier for them to achieve social mobility (Sjørup 2002), or that the Pentecostal focus on health and healing makes these churches more attractive to women because women are the main domestic caretakers (Chestnut 1997).

What characterizes these analyses of gender in Pentecostalism in Latin America (mainly from the 1990s) is a very explicit focus on what men and women do in church—their roles, positions, and status. Gender relations are often analyzed as power relations defined as access to leadership and public roles. The basic enigma has been why women are so numerically dominant but so absent in representational offices.

In recent years, the focus on women and Pentecostalism has been complemented by an emerging literature on masculinities and Pentecostalism (Eves 2010; Gooren 2010; Van Klinken 2011, 2012). In many ways these studies follow the same analytical paths as the "women and Pentecostalism" studies, looking at access to male leadership, but also changing notions of gender identity. Van Klinken's (2012) recent anal-

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ysis of Zambian men's conversion stories, for instance, support in many ways Brusco's (1986) analysis of Colombian Pentecostalism: in Zambia, born-again men become "responsible" men, men who engage in family matters and stop drinking, smoking, and having affairs.

Earlier studies from the 1990s concerned with "women's issues" and more recent studies of masculinities and "men's issues" have thus primarily been concerned with gender identities and access to leadership and public roles. In this paper I want to develop another kind of gender and power analysis, moving the focus away from the gender of the persons who convert and their individual agency, roles, and status and toward the way Christianity, and in this case Pentecostal Christianity, itself is gendered. I will show how Pentecostalism, in spite of its fundamental egalitarian ethos, is structured on gendered, binary differences. Not only does this difference shape the social practice of men and women, but, as I will show, it is fundamental for the moral evaluation of femininity and masculinity. In this paper I will emphasize gender as a dynamic of binary differentiation that is constitutive of Christianity as a cultural system in Vanuatu. Others have also argued that one of the essential features of cultural change in the aftermath of Christian conversion is exactly the focus on binaries (see Schieffelin 2014; Vilaça 2014). In this paper I look in particular at how the specific binaries of gender constitute a Christian cultural order in the Melanesian context of Vanuatu.

In my analysis I take comparative literature from Africa and my own region, Melanesia, into consideration as I try to understand ethnography collected in 2010 during fieldwork in Port Vila, the capital city of Vanuatu, in the South West Pacific. Here I met Sarah,¹ a woman in her midtwenties, who has been expelled from church for inappropriate sexual behavior but who was also a very powerful Pentecostal healer. Although an outcast, she was also a symbol of the effectiveness of strong belief and the power of the Holy Spirit in healing. In order to understand this ambivalence, or doubleness, in the relationship between her and the congregation, I need to develop perspectives on gender that go beyond what I call the "sociological perspective" and analysis of roles, status, and power. We need to understand more than what women and men appropriately can do in church; we need to understand the underlying cultural and gendered grammar. We need to understand the gender of key Christian values. More precisely, we need to understand why certain activities are more appropriate for women and others for men. What kinds of gendered values are underlying these social and cultural patterns? For instance, when we observe that healing is important for women (e.g., as domestic caretakers) or that women are more loyal converts than men (and therefore outnumber them), we need to connect this analytically to gendered values. The analysis that came from studies of Pentecostalism and

1. To make her unidentifiable, I have changed her name and describe her and the circumstances in general terms.

gender in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s gave us important knowledge of the effect of Pentecostalism and its theology on the lives of men and women. In the same way the emerging literature on masculinities and Pentecostalism gives us important insights into how men renegotiate their male identities and new ways of understanding their leadership roles. However, we also need different kinds of questions, questions that reveal the engendering of cultural orders in terms of feminine and masculine values. This paper thus contributes to the anthropology of Christianity by analyzing Christian values (Dumont 1986; Robbins 2004a) and specifically how these values are gendered (Eriksen 2008a). In this paper I do this by looking more closely at the significance of gender for one of the defining features of the culture of Pentecostalism: charisma. Before presenting the ethnography in full, however, I will take a detour through some comparative African literature on Pentecostalism to open the perspective on what I call "the charismatic space." By "the charismatic space" I refer to the space in which the Spirit reveals itself for the believers. It is the way gendered values structure this charismatic space that interests me.

Crossing Borders

Pentecostalism has been defined as "the form of Christianity in which believers receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and have ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing and prophesying" (Robbins 2004b:117), sometimes internationally attuned (Meyer 2004), sometimes more concerned with church independence. In this paper I talk about a great variety of churches, from small Pentecostal-like congregations displaying only certain characteristics of Pentecostalism to what one might call more "mainstream" Pentecostal churches of the international kind. The most important feature of all of these churches, however, is the strong emphasis on the charismatic: speaking in tongues, the gifts of prophesying, healing, and encountering evil forces.

What then seems to be the characteristic feature of this charisma of healing and prophesying? As Luedke and West (2006) have pointed out, transgression of borders is essential for religious healing generally, both in a literal sense (healers crossing the nation-state borders, borders between the local and the urban, the national and the global, etc.) but also in a more symbolic sense of crossing borders between the material and the invisible world. Much of the literature from Africa on Pentecostalism has emphasized the importance of this latter border, of the openness of Pentecostalism not only to the spiritual but also to the occult. Meyer (1999) has shown in her analyses of Ewe Christians in Ghana that early missionaries drew on the Devil in order to make a boundary between what was Christian and what was "heathen." The Devil, denoting the ancestral spirits and gods, was denied by the missionaries as a real power in the world, thus creating an absolute border. The Pentecostal churches that became

popular in the 1980s in Ghana challenged this border and began to take the Devil seriously. The charismatic space in these Pentecostal churches thus challenged these absolute borders between the material and the invisible forces, between the good and the bad, between the old spirits and the new Spirit. This porousness of the border between the occult and Christianity has been described as “ontological ambivalence” (Smith 2001). On the one hand, there is an outspoken “war” against the occult forces in the Pentecostal churches, but on the other hand, these forces are thereby becoming more emphasized and more powerfully present. Lindhardt (2009) has pointed to what he calls the “ambivalence of power”: the spiritual power is essential in healing but can also display dark sides in the more traditional, occult forms of healing. Newell (2007) outlines similar perspectives in an analysis of “Pentecostal witchcraft,” showing that in the effort to transcend witchcraft, Pentecostals in many cases become encompassed by the witchcraft discourse, taking on the appearance of witchcraft itself (see also Rio 2011:69 for Melanesia).

In Papua New Guinea we have ethnographic descriptions of the way Pentecostal theology has encouraged “war” against ancestral spirits and burning of ancestral houses in an effort toward “breaking with the past” (Jorgensen 2005). But, as Engelke (2010) has pointed out regarding the African context, this break with the past is often ambivalent; the break is always also realignment with the past. Furthermore the break has the effect of making the past more visible; the ancestral spirits increase their presence in the very effort to break with them. Spiritual warfare against the old spirits inevitably empowers the very same spirits by making them “war enemies” worthy of attack.

The charismatic space described in the literature on Pentecostalism thus seems to be characterized by a fundamental effort to challenge borders. Furthermore, the opening of these borders also seems to create a more ambivalent charismatic space, a paradoxical presence of that which one seeks to overcome. The charismatic space produces ambivalence toward the past, toward the occult, and toward gendered order. In this paper I want to open this ambivalence of the charismatic space to analytical scrutiny. What is the significance of the ambivalence and how can a focus on the binary dynamic of gendered values give us insights into how this ambivalence works? I will argue that the tension between masculine and feminine values comes to the surface in the charismatic space.

Masculine Encounters and Feminine Mediations

Let me now home in on the ethnographic context of this paper in order to specifically focus on gendered values in the South Pacific nation of Vanuatu. Christianity was gradually introduced in the Vanuatu archipelago during the 1800s, but in some areas mission stations were established as late as in the early 1900s. Anglican, Presbyterian, and Catholic forms of Christianity have dominated, and the Seventh Day Ad-

ventist mission has also had a certain influence. However, during the last two decades, a new wave of Pentecostal Christianity has spread through the country. Vanuatu has become the scene of a rapidly expanding number of Pentecostal churches.

During my most recent fieldwork in Port Vila in 2009–2010, I worked on a survey of new Pentecostal congregations in the urban area on behalf of the Vanuatu Cultural Center.² I thus visited all the congregations in Port Vila, talking to the founders and pastors of the churches. The great majority of these churches are independent, so-called break away congregations from larger, international Pentecostal churches that were established in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Assembly of God, Potter’s House, United Pentecostal Church, Revival Fellowship, and others. These smaller congregations often have memberships of only a hundred, some maybe two or three hundred, and they rarely have proper church buildings, often holding services in a backyard, tent, or temporary building with just a roof of corrugated iron and open walls. I always asked the pastors to tell me the story of how their church was established. Below is an example of one such story given to me by Pastor Torboe, the founder of an independent Pentecostal church, the Grace Church.³

Pastor Torboe tells me one late afternoon in May 2010 about his first encounter with the Holy Spirit, about two decades ago. He recounts a vision he has had and how he came to understand this.

I heard the voice of God speaking clearly. . . . “My servant, you see the living trees sinking on that island over there; that represents the people in Vanuatu and elsewhere, are dying in their sins. They are heading towards hell. And you see young pine trees with old ones; they represent the young and old people in . . . [Vanuatu] . . . and elsewhere. The clouds above are forming to produce rain. This represents the imminent mighty outpouring of My Spirit. The flaming sword represents My life-changing Word. My Spirit will be poured down upon multitudes of young and old people as My Word is preached and taught in simplicity and clarity. The impact of the outpouring of My Spirit will see multitudes of people, in particular, young people, turning to me, to be saved and filled with My Spirit.”

The vision ended, but it left a mind-boggling spiritual impact, and bearing upon my entire life. I shared the vision with those present at that prayer meeting. . . . Filled with

2. The Vanuatu Research Policy requires researchers to do voluntary work for the Cultural Center in return for being given research permission in Vanuatu.

3. Pastor Torboe is a well-known public figure in Port Vila and one of the best-known charismatic pastors. I had several talks with him during my fieldwork in 2010, and he was well aware of my research. His testimony (see n. 4) has also been widely distributed. The content of the ethnography revealed here is thus not of a kind that requires anonymous status of the pastor. I have not changed the names of any of the pastors mentioned in this article, as they are well known, and the stories they told are also known.

an unbelievable burden in my heart for the lost souls, I was undoubtedly determined to do everything possible to reach the lost with God's Word, and His healing power.⁴

Pastor Torboe heard God speak directly to him, addressing him on an urgent issue, giving him a life-saving mission—to save the people in Vanuatu. This was the typical kind of story that the founding pastors of Pentecostal (independent) congregations gave me: they had either heard the voice of God speaking directly to them or encountered the Holy Spirit in a dream or in the form of a burning bush. Some of them had encountered an angel who had been a messenger from God (see also Eriksen 2012). They had all encountered the Godly in a direct way. They had been chosen, selected to bring the message forward.

Pastor Torboe was very eloquent in his descriptions of his encounters and experiences with the Holy Spirit. When I asked him to tell me the story of his conversion, he gave me a written, 10-page narrative about what he called “his walk with God.” Pastor Torboe describes his first conversion experience when he as a young boy and attended what he called a boring Presbyterian church service that seemed to go on much longer than expected: “I then decided to open my eyes and see what that Pastor Bangtor was on [about]. In total amazement, I saw the Cross right in front. The Lord Jesus Christ was hanging on that Cross. I saw His blood running down His sides. . . . God audibly called me and pointed me to the Lord Jesus Christ, hanging on the Cross and said, ‘Phil, this is for you.’”⁵

Again, he is being directly addressed; it is a personal vision for him only. Similarly, Pastor Jude Neru, founder of the Living Water Ministry, established in early 2000, told me that he had encountered the Holy Spirit in a miraculous way when, after a full day of fasting, he had heard the voice of God telling him to build a new church that would be the biggest and greatest Vanuatu had ever seen.⁶ These stories all reveal the importance of the individual encounter with God.

The importance of the individual in Christianity generally (Dumont 1986) and in Pentecostalism in particular (Robbins 2004a) has been underlined both in anthropology and beyond. It is in particular through the concept of belief as an inner state and in the concept of salvation that the individual becomes the key figure. As one of Robbins's (2002) interlocutors phrased it, “My wife cannot break off part of her belief and give it to me.” Belief is a private and inner state. The relationship with God, the foundation of belief and salvation, is also based on a one-to-one relationship in which the in-

dividual is given primary status. What I observed in my ethnography, however, is that this Christian individualism is, in an interesting way that I will explain below, male. As the conversion story of Pastor Torboe reveals, there is a certain idea that an encounter with God implies an elevation of the individual; a person has been chosen, selected by God, for a specific mission. When comparing the way these “founding fathers” of the many new churches in Port Vila talked about their encounter with God and their visions to the way many of the female healers and prophetesses talked about their visions, I realized that the charismatic space, the space in which the presence of the Holy is sensed and understood, is indeed gendered. There seems to be a feminine and a masculine way of relating to the godly.

Although I mainly interviewed male pastors and church founders, I talked informally to more Pentecostal women than men during my time in the field, and women very rarely presented themselves as having been chosen by God.⁷ I have elsewhere (Eriksen 2012) outlined how the prophetesses and healers in a specific church called the Bible Church in Port Vila let the Spirit work through them, as if they were mediators for the Spirit. They, to a much lesser degree than the pastors and founding fathers, encounter the Spirit as much as they are filled and penetrated by the Spirit. They channel the Spirit.

In an interchurch prayer group for women who are specifically receptive to the Holy Spirit, I observed that the women always hold hands, shouting encouraging words and phrases to each other, in order to be filled with the Spirit. This group meets on a weekly basis in the city center of Port Vila and consists of women from most of the Pentecostal-like churches in the area. They come together in order to heal not only sickness and misfortune on an individual basis but to heal the nation as a whole (see also Eriksen 2008b). When the Spirit is sensed in the room, some of the women will enter into an almost unconscious state, shouting and crying. They explained to me that the Spirit works *through* them; they are vehicles for the Spirit. Sometimes they will lay hands on a map of Vanuatu in order for the Spirit to heal, through them, the whole nation.

When looking at healing practices and stories of encounters with the Holy Spirit in Vanuatu, it becomes obvious that there are distinctly gendered ways in which this is done. There are on the one hand male encounters with the Spirit and on the other hand female mediations of the Spirit. This feminine and masculine way of relating to the Holy Spirit, in which the former elevates the individual and the latter does almost the opposite, downplaying the role of the individual, is to some extent paralleled in descriptions of gender and Pentecostalism

7. I know of one exception to this general observation. A well-known woman, outspoken in media and holding high offices, has founded a church. As I argue elsewhere, among women belonging to what one might call the emerging urban elite, we can observe a changing notion of femininity (A. Eriksen, unpublished manuscript).

4. This report was not prepared for me. Pastor Torboe was already working on the story of his life and encounters with God as a testimony to the power of God, as he phrased it. He called his report “A Striking Story of the Conversion of Philip Lepiko Torboe and His Walk with God.”

5. See n. 4.

6. The church report form 2010 reveals a number of similar stories told by “founding fathers.”

from elsewhere. Van Klinken's (2012) analysis of Zambian born-again masculinities, for instance, underline that Zambian men become more conscious of their "self" and the necessity to show "self-control" and "self-discipline" as a result of becoming born again. This is not dissimilar to masculine encounters with the Spirit in Vanuatu. Furthermore, Gooren (2010:107) has analyzed women's conversion narratives from Latin America, arguing that women are more likely to describe their conversion as a matter of letting go of control.

These gendered experiences of conversion are in many ways echoed in the Vanuatu ethnography, but they take a specific and local form. Women are described as having "soft hearts" and are thus more "open." Women become "possessed" by the Spirit, and without necessarily searching consciously or willfully. To some extent one might say that they more easily let go of their individuality, opening their hearts to the Spirit. The value of "letting go," of "opening up" on the one hand and the value of the one-to-one encounter on the other are fundamental to the Pentecostal Christian value system in Vanuatu, but they are differently gendered and have different significance. The one-to-one encounter creates the charismatic church leaders. These leaders become trustworthy and interesting because they reflect the ability and the value of the individual relationship with God. The more feminine values of letting go, of "opening up" and creating relational connections, are also central but less significant in terms of creating leadership. The ability to represent and handle the significance of the individual encounter is the ultimate value in the creation of institutional leadership in these churches (see Eriksen 2012). However, the charismatic space, in which these encounters with the Spirit take place, might open the door for articulations of ambivalence and challenges to this gendered Christian ethos. In other words, the masculinity of the individuality/self-assertion and the femininity of letting go/lack of individuality are challenged. In arguing this I claim that when studying gendered Christian values, one needs to not only outline how gendered values create a certain cultural order but also how these values are confronted in different social contexts. In other words, if Christianity itself entails the possibility of a binary gendered order, this order might be the subject of challenges in different social contexts where these values are taken up. Before moving to the ethnography that will allow for this argument, I will try to outline more clearly what I mean by a gendered Christian order.

The Gender of Christianity

As theologians and literary scholars, specifically the feminist version, have pointed out (Keller 2003; Økland 2008), biblical narratives in their most basic sense are gendered. Kristeva (1982), for example, in her essay on abjection, outlines what she calls biblical abomination, referring to the system of taboos and prohibitions as explained in the Old Testament. She analyzes the prohibitions of certain foods as outlined in Le-

viticus 12 and shows how these rules create the female as something outside of the Holy (Kristeva 1982:99). The separation of the sexes is fundamental to Christianity, according to Kristeva (1982).

At any rate, that evocation of defiled maternity, in Leviticus 12, inscribes the logic of dietary abominations within that of a limit, a boundary, a border between the sexes, a separation between feminine and masculine as foundation for the organization that is "clean and proper," "individual," and, one thing leading to another, signifiable, legislable, subject to law and morality. (100)

In other words, separating the feminine and the masculine and creating a hierarchically organized division between them is fundamental for Christian morality as it is outlined in the Old Testament. This hierarchy between the feminine and the masculine was produced by the connection between masculinity and Christian monotheism. The feminine, on the other hand, was associated with the "archaic Mother Goddess who actually haunted the imagination of a nation at war with the surrounding polytheism" (Kristeva 1982:100). All taboos, from the boils signaling leprosy (Leviticus 13, 14), the prescribed rules of avoidance of the newborn girl (Leviticus 12), the circumcision of the boy (Leviticus 12), and the taboos on blood and female substance in the Temple, reveal the way the religious order was based on a gendered order in which the feminine is outside of the holy. For a woman to be holy, femininity (especially female sexuality) needed to be neutralized. Mary's immaculate conception of Jesus is perhaps the best-known biblical example. According to Kristeva, in the New Testament, this explicit, gendered order wherein the "abjection" figures centrally has become a matter of subjective interiorization. The "abject" is that which one cannot tolerate within oneself; the feminine is a threat from within the self and within the body. In other words, where the Old Testament described an external landscape of taboos and prohibitions, which is fundamentally organized on the binary female-male axis, the New Testament turns this into a subjective order, inside the body.

Similarly, Walker Bynum (1992) has described how the Christian moral order has been imagined by medieval scholars and artists as a matter of bodily transformation. In medieval Europe the body of Christ was portrayed as both female and male, which, according to Walker Bynum, was a general medieval perspective of the body. It was androgynous. Gendered order was of no less significance, of course, but the ambivalence of the gendered body was more outspoken. Femininity revealed liminality and inferiority, as when Francis of Assisi took on female qualities to signify poverty and weakness, becoming a "mother" and being addressed as "Lady Poverty" (Walker Bynum 1992:35). The gendered order revealed itself through the aesthetics of self-transformation: from male to female (to signify weakness and humbleness) or from female to male (to signify holiness). The process of conversion was also portrayed in medieval Europe as a transformation from

a female status to a male one. As Walker Bynum (1992) writes about Francis of Assisi, “From the liminality of weakness, nudity, and womanliness comes the leader and model who changed the religious life of the thirteenth century” (35). In death he is described as a leader and a *father* of his friars (1992:35). The transformation from mother to father, from being weak to leader, is a gendered transformation that reveals the gendered order of medieval Christianity.

Feminist scholars of Christianity have given us insights into how gender functions as a language for expressing the holy in different forms of Christianity. The biblical texts, as well as interpretations of the texts (e.g., in medieval art), reveal how the language of femininity and masculinity becomes a language for transformations from profane to sacred, or from mundane and weak to exceptional and holy. Often, if these portraits are based on the New Testament and images of Jesus, they take the form of a bodily transformation revealing an “inner” transformation.

Although it is difficult to make the general claim that Christianity in all its traditions and interpretations is fundamentally based on gendered binaries, it is fair to say that there is a potential for such an understanding and that it has been clearly pointed out in both theological and literary writings. The important point to make for this argument, however, is that the gendered binaries outlined above are echoed in the version of Christianity that is taking form in local churches in Vanuatu. There is a clear tendency to make the difference between the feminine and the masculine a fundamental difference. In Port Vila, the difference between the capacity to become the “individual,” or the chosen leader (Eriksen 2012), on the one hand, and the lack of this ability to “individualize” is based on a fundamental binary and hierarchical contrast between the feminine and the masculine.

So far I have argued that there is a potential in Christianity for making fundamental distinctions based on gender and for revealing moral transformations (from good to bad, from holy to unholy, or vice versa) as a gendered transformation. I have also argued that, in Vanuatu, Christian individualism more easily takes a male form than a female form. With this as a background, I will present Sarah’s story, a story of bodily transformation revealing her efforts to achieve holiness. This effort, however, challenged the established gendered order. As my outline will show, it is specifically in the charismatic space of the Pentecostal congregations that the established images of Christian order are challenged.

Sarah’s Miracles

I first heard about Sarah from the prophetesses in one of the Pentecostal churches in Port Vila. I was following the work of healers from different churches during my fieldwork in 2009–2010. Many of the healers mentioned Sarah, a truly gifted healer who was no longer part of this specific Pentecostal church. For a long period I only heard stories about this woman. Meeting her seemed to be difficult, although I

asked whether they could invite her to some of the meetings. Gradually the women told me that Sarah rarely came to church anymore, that she was not allowed. I was also told that she stayed mostly in her home. One of the women told me that Sarah was in a “prison” in her own home; she was being punished for immoral behavior. The women were vague about the cause of Sarah’s fall from grace but mentioned that she had disobeyed the rules of marriage. She had been involved in sexual relations with a married man. Finally, however, I managed to visit Sarah in her home on the outskirts of the Port Vila city center. When I talked to Sarah, she had a small son of about two years and was living with the child’s father.

Sarah had moved to the capital as a young woman of about 18–19 years. It is a common pattern for families in town to call for a girl from the village to come and help out in the urban household. She looked after the children and did laundry and cooking for relatives living on the outskirts of the urban center. When Sarah arrived in town, she joined an independent Pentecostal charismatic church because this was the congregation the family she lived with belonged to. After some time in town, she had discovered that she was pregnant. Sarah did not go into much detail about what had happened. She just stated that the husband in the household where she worked was the father. The wife had subsequently left the household, leaving the husband, the pregnant house girl (Sarah), and four children. At this point the church had decided to expel Sarah along with the father of her unborn child for immoral behavior. I was told that most people in the church knew that Sarah had not wanted to live with the child’s father and that the pregnancy most certainly had been the result of a forced sexual relation.

Although expelled from church and marked as an immoral person, there was a sense of uneasiness about Sarah’s situation. Before meeting Sarah, for instance, I had heard numerous stories about her and what people talked about as “the miracles.” Sarah herself did not elaborate on these miracles, but one of the other healers, Sarah’s aunt, told me about a specific event that took place not long after the child was born.

Sarah arrived early one morning to have tea with us. We sat around the table, but Sarah acted strangely. She showed us her palms, revealing sores and blood. Her forehead had similar sores. She had woken up this way that morning, she had explained, blood in the palms of her hands and on her forehead.

Her aunt said, “She had the same marks as Jesus.”

Later on, when the child might have been some months old, she visited the same relatives and put the baby to sleep in the back yard of the house while she herself joined the others for tea. After a while a female relative picked up the baby, unfolding the blanket in which he was wrapped, revealing money (a 5,000 VT note [about US\$50]) on the baby’s chest. A parallel incident had taken place a couple of weeks

later, when Sarah was breast-feeding the child and once again found money on the child's chest.

Sarah's story is very different from most of the other stories I heard and observations I made while taking part in the activities in different Pentecostal churches and visiting members in their homes. Sarah's story reveals how the charismatic space can open for ambivalence and challenge the established, gendered order. If the transformation from immoral to moral, from weak to strong, from unworthy to worthy, easily can take a gendered form (following Kristeva 1982), and if the established gendered order in the Bible Church allows men to achieve this transformation to a greater extent than women (moving from non-individualized to "the chosen one"), then Sarah's miracles present challenges on several levels. First, Sarah reveals herself as Jesus. Her stigmata signal her identification with Jesus and his suffering. Just as Jesus suffered and was denied by his own, so Sarah has also suffered and become an outcast from the church. Taking this form, taking on the personality of Jesus, so to speak, turns Sarah into something other than the prophetess and healer she had been known as before. Sarah as Jesus is not (only) a "mediation" but an "individualization"; she becomes a chosen one. She takes on male qualities. The bodily transformation is also one that challenges the Christian gendered order. She is transformed not from a mother to a father (like Francis of Assisi) but from a suffering mother to a suffering man. On the one hand, she becomes a man—Jesus—underlining the way gender structures a moral transformation from unmoral to moral, from female to male. On the other hand she reveals the female qualities of Jesus. Jesus suffers for humanity just as mothers suffer for their children. There is a doubleness to Sarah's miracle; on the one hand she becomes a man, taking on an individualized, masculine form. On the other hand, she transposes female qualities onto the image of Jesus, revealing Jesus as also feminine. The doubleness is also underlined by the blood. Blood, as outlined by Kristeva (1982), is a taboo, but it is the ultimate sacrifice as well. Sarah's blood signals both her suffering and her fall from grace, but also her sacrifice.

Sarah's second and third miracles (the money on her child's chest) reveal something else: Sarah is not only like Jesus; she might also be similar to the Virgin Mary. Just like the Virgin Mary, her pregnancy was not her own decision, and just like the Virgin Mary, she has given birth to a blessed child.

The miracles show us Sarah's effort at transforming herself from immoral to moral, from outcast to holy, in line with the gendered principles of moral transformation in the local Pentecostal ethos. However, these miracles also show us that she has problems achieving this, because, as a woman and as a mother, she cannot easily take on the individualized form of the "holy man." By not only becoming Jesus but also the Virgin Mary, she shows us how the transformation from mother to man is ambivalent; she is the Virgin Mary and Jesus at one and the same time. Mayblin (2014) has also pointed to the importance of "gender bending" in Christianity. Her analysis confirms my own conclusions about the gen-

der ambivalence produced in the charismatic space. The saints Mayblin describes as being of clearly undetermined gender might also be seen as an expression of the ambivalence articulated through the charismatic. Sarah needed the charismatic space to articulate a desired transformation from outcast to holy. In doing this she challenged the strong emphasis on gender binaries in what I have here called the Christian cultural order taking form in Vanuatu, where men have taken on individuating capacities.

In the charismatic space, the space wherein the spiritual reveals itself to the believer—in this case in the form of stigmata on Sarah's body and money on her child's chest—ambivalence is articulated (through the imagery of Jesus and the Virgin Mary). Where does this ambivalence actually come from? What is this ambivalence an expression of?

Denied Difference in Pentecostalism

On the one hand, Pentecostalism is perhaps the most elaborate form of an individualist and egalitarian religion; the focus is on the personal relationship with God (Robbins 2004a), on personal returns in the prosperity gospel (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003), and on individual gifts more than hierarchical structures of positions and status (Cox 1995). On the other hand, as I have outlined, there is a difference in the way the feminine and the masculine are expressed in the charismatic space in the context of Vanuatu. Although it is the individual (whether man or woman) who is the core value of the Pentecostal theology, the relevance of gender is always there too. In the case of the Bible Church for instance, although the congregational members also underline the importance of the personal relationship with God and belief as a matter of individual effort and trust, there is always something that escapes this logic; there is an underlying difference between male encounters and female mediations that seems to make men more prone to have personal relationships with God, and men seem to make the most of this relationship.

There is an explicit focus on individual egalitarianism: everyone is equal in the presence of God, and everyone can have a personal relationship with God. Yet there seems to be a gendered hierarchy in the way this is achieved and performed, not only in the context of Vanuatu, but, as the literature I referred to in the introduction reveals, all over the world where Pentecostalism gains a foothold. This ambivalence between outspoken egalitarianism and submerged gender hierarchy is expressed, I will claim, in the charismatic space. The charismatic space seems to enable an articulation of the ambivalence toward gendered difference, which is on the one hand a defining feature of Christianity but on the other submerged or denied in Pentecostalism. There is in every church session, in every healing session, an obvious difference between the way men and women experience and express charisma. In the charismatic space ambivalence between egalitarianism and difference can be articulated. In

other words, in spite of the dominant focus on egalitarianism in Pentecostal theology, the charismatic space opens for an articulation of the ambivalence between gender difference and equality. This returns me again to Mayblin (2014) and an alternative comparison between the two ethnographies: Mayblin's ethnography shows that the articulations of gender ambivalence seem to be also an everyday matter (and not solely a matter for "the charismatic space"). I suggest that this might be understood as a result of the difference between Catholicism and Pentecostalism. If Pentecostalism is structured on a denied difference (including gender difference), Catholicism is not equally so. Catholicism, with its clearly established and outspoken hierarchy, does not deny difference in the same way. When difference is articulated, it can also be contested (and articulated as "gender bending" in everyday contexts), and not only within the charismatic space. It is interesting, however, that both in Pentecostalism and in Catholicism, although to clearly different degrees, contestations of gender difference through gender ambivalence are essential.

In Pentecostalism, however, it is the charismatic space that opens for these contestations. The anthropology of Pentecostal Christianity is rich in ethnographic descriptions of the gendered qualities of religious imaginaries that show these kinds of contestations. These have, however, not always been unpacked in these terms. Badstuebner's (2003) vivid descriptions of witchcraft confessions in a Pentecostal South African church, for instance, thoroughly reveal the way in which the feminine is played out in South African Christianity. Here, a group of women traveling with a pastor on a revival tour admit to having been witches, drinking blood, transforming themselves into bloodsucking snakes, and attracting men by taking on the appearance of beautiful white women. In the rich ethnography provided by Badstuebner, the contrast between dangerous female sexuality, blood references and occult forces, and the need to transform oneself into a new person ridding oneself of these female and dark sides—becoming "born again"—is evident. On the one hand, these women portray femininity as dangerous, but on the other hand, as Badstuebner points out, these women also reveal the power of the feminine, reversing the logic of a perpetrating sexuality. Instead of the statistically common phenomena of men raping women, these occult scenarios display women raping and assaulting men. Again, it is within the space of the charismatic that the Christian gendered order is expressed and challenged.

Similarly, the gendered logic of Gogodala women's possession by the Holy Spirit in Papua New Guinea, described by Dundon (2007), reveals an interestingly similar ambivalence. The female prophets or warrior women, who seem to work collectively in healing and praying activities (like the prophetesses in the Bible Church in Port Vila), are able to channel the Holy Spirit and heal sickness, but they are also open to "lying spirits" that, instead of turning them into efficient healers, make them "turn their attention toward themselves" (Dundon 2007:38). The lying spirits turn women into socially irresponsible persons who are sexually provoc-

ative, childlike, and "mad." There is thus a danger for women in opening themselves to the Holy Spirit. They might be deceived. While these women seek the Holy Spirit's help in order to heal sickness (especially HIV and AIDS caused by immoral sexual behaviors) and counter the forces that threaten society, they are prone to becoming the performers of these immoral acts themselves if they are deceived by the lying spirits.

Conclusions: Egalitarianism, Denied Difference, and Gender

As this ethnography shows, gender is fundamental for the articulation of difference in Christianity generally and in Pentecostalism in particular. This difference is, however, in the case of Pentecostalism, problematic. It is not a difference that can easily be identified or articulated. The ethnography shows, however, that in the charismatic space, the ambivalence between the outspoken egalitarian ethos and an underlying gendered difference is opened up. In the charismatic space the paradoxes of the egalitarian structure of Pentecostalism are displayed and even contested. It is here that the denied difference can be articulated. As I have shown for the case of Vanuatu, an understanding of the logic of this denied difference requires an understanding of gendered values. Returning to Sarah, I think her story shows us the need to look beyond modified masculinities and women's access to leadership positions. An analysis that looks at the way men reform their masculinities in the conversion process might reveal processes in which drinking habits and aggressive sexual behavior are modified and negotiated in church, but it might not reveal the fundamental structures preventing women from becoming not only socially but also morally equal to men within an egalitarian religious ethos (as Pentecostalism in Port Vila). The case outlined here shows how feminine values are encompassed by masculine values. In the charismatic space this becomes apparent. However, I think it is vital to point out that Sarah did not succeed in transforming herself from immoral to moral, from outcast to "holy." Although the charismatic space gave her a language for the articulation of a fundamental sexual difference, it did not bring about any change. Sarah could not be accepted back into the congregation.

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