Performing Intimacy with God: Spiritual Experiences in Vietnamese Diasporic Pentecostal Networks

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In many parts of the world, Pentecostalism is becoming the fastest growing religious movement. Not least as a result of migration, people from Asia, Africa and Latin America carry religious ideas and practices across borders. In Germany too, particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Vietnamese migrants, former contract workers in the socialist part of Germany, and 'boat people' whose flight from Vietnam led them to West Germany, founded Pentecostal churches, connecting host and home country via transportable religious practices. Pentecostalism is on the one hand embracing newcomers from various ethnic, national and language backgrounds, while on the other hand creating new boundaries, in particular by rejecting 'traditional' beliefs such as soul calling and spirit possession. The revitalization of such familiar religious practices is quite popular in contemporary Vietnam, but imagined as the Other in Vietnamese Pentecostalism.

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out among Vietnamese migrants in Berlin, who converted to charismatic Pentecostal Christianity after arriving in Germany. By focusing on these churches in Berlin, it explores the allure of charismatic Pentecostal Christianity for people living in the diaspora. The article argues that emotions as cultural practices represent a substantial part of religious rituals in Vietnamese Pentecostal charismatic networks. As this religion is characterized by intense spiritual experiences such as speaking in tongues and falling into trance, the essay explores the techniques used to identify the presence of God through emotions, and investigate when and how emotions are invoked and performed. By referring to anthropologists who have argued that emotions are cultural artefacts, and thus cannot be analysed in isolation from the cultural contexts in which they are experienced, it will investigate how, in the context of migration, emotions are transformed, transmitted and performed in different ways.[1] As experiences of fear, loss, sorrow and loneliness affect the lives of Vietnamese people in the diaspora, it will analyse how religious experts and practitioners deal with individual and collective sensitivities. Moreover, as emotions are also embedded in power relations, it focuses on charismatic leadership, on control of spiritual powers and on the loss of religious authority.[2] Finally, as this article

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[1] C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London, 1973), p. 81; M.Z. Rosaldo, 'Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling', in R.A. Shweder and R.A. LeVine (eds), *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 137–58; C. Lutz and G. White, 'The Anthropology of Emotions', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15 (1986), pp. 405–36. Referring to Riis and Woodhead, I use the term 'emotion' with different nuances: '"passions" conveys the power of emotions, "feeling" their embodied aspect, "sentiments" the way they relate to character and education, while "affect" suggests their passive and reactive dimension'. O. Riis and L. Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion* (Oxford, 2010), p. 20.

[2] L. Abu-Lughod and C. Lutz (eds), *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990).

deals with the history of migration from Vietnam to Germany, it will investigate how experiences of flight are commemorated and how, in this context, too, emotions are evoked and performed via media use.

When studying Christianity in Africa, Asia and Europe, anthropologists have taken not only an ethnographic, but also an historical approach.[3] As anthropologist Joel Robbins has pointed out, 'Pentecostalism's roots lie in the Protestant tradition that grew out of the eighteenth-century, Anglo-American revival movement known as the Great Awakening'.[4] In the past few decades, these scholars have also begun to focus not only on the history of Christianity in the societies they study, but also on the relationship between religion, postcolonialism, globalization and mobility. A historical perspective on transnational ties and global networks in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is necessary in order better to understand people's everyday lives, so anthropologists are engaged in a lively dialogue with historians working on missions and missionary societies in the nineteenth century and their impact on global history.[5] Further, anthropologists have noted that the elements of Pentecostalism are immensely portable, able to enter many cultural contexts.[6] The present article contributes to this ongoing exchange between the disciplines, providing in particular a contribution towards the construction of an historically informed anthropology of Christianity. It also highlights the significance of postcolonialism and postsocialism for new religious movements, including the rapidly growing global Pentecostal charismatic networks, and their impact on migration, past and present. In particular, new mobilities contribute to the travelling of people, objects and spirits.

I: The Rise of Global Pentecostalism—Vietnam and Germany

In the last decades, particularly amid new migration flows and global economic orders, religion has drawn the attention of scholars and politicians alike.[7] Part of the emergence of new religious movements is the global explosion of charismatic Pentecostal

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[3] J. Comaroff and J.L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. I (Chicago, 1991); P. van der Veer and H. Lehmann (eds), *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton, 1999); T. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993).

[4] J. Robbins, 'The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity' in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33 (2004), pp. 117–143, here p. 120.

[5] G. Hüwelmeier, 'Global Sisterhood: Transnational Perspectives on Gender and Religion', in A. Braude and H. Herzog (eds), *Gendering Religion and Politics: Untangling Modernities* (New York, 2009), pp. 173–93; G. Hüwelmeier, '"Our future will be in India": Travelling Nuns Between Europe and South Asia', in E. Gallo (ed.), *Migration and Religion in Europe: Comparative Perspectives on South Asian Experiences* (Farnham, 2014), pp. 45–57. S. Conrad and R. Habermas, 'Mission und kulturelle Globalisierung', in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 36, 2 (2010); U. van der Heyden and A. Feldtkeller (eds), *Missionsgeschichte als Geschichte der Globalisierung von Wissen* (Stuttgart 2012).

[6] J. Robbins, 'Globalization'.

[7] My article is based on results of the research project 'Transnational Networks, New Migration and Religion' funded by the German Research Foundation (ref. no. HU 1019/1–2 and 1–3). Ethnographic fieldwork among Vietnamese migrants in reunited Germany and returnees in Vietnam was carried out intermittently between 2005 and 2010. I conducted participant observation in several churches, and in a number of house fellowships in Berlin and other German cities as well as in Hanoi. Encounters and interviews took place in living rooms, in former industrial places and bazaars, in church meetings and prayer camps.

Christianity, attracting millions of people all around the globe. Similar to Hindu nationalism and transnational Islam, charismatic Pentecostalism has thrived because globalization provides fluid networks across borders that help transport religious practices and messages from local to global audiences. Yet religion and religious practitioners do not merely react to global processes, they also generate global interconnectedness.[8]

As scholars working on Pentecostal charismatic Christianity have pointed out, enthusiastic worship may be observed all over the world.[9] Pentecostalism attracts millions of people, not least as believers receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, falling into trance, healing and prophesying. Even the Catholic Church was influenced by the charismatic movement at the end of the 1960s.[10] According to Barret and Johnson, about 523 million adherents of Pentecostalism live outside the West and about nine million people convert every year.[11] While some scholars question these statistics, most of them agree that Pentecostal charismatic Christianity is the fastest growing religious movement worldwide.[12] The movement may overtake Catholicism 'to become the predominant global form of Christianity in the twenty-first century'.[13] The mass appeal of the current Pentecostal charismatic churches is partly due to their call to make a 'complete break with the past'.[14] However, as 'the past' in the Vietnamese migration context is an entanglement of 'traditional' religious practices, moral values and obligations towards those left behind, newly established prayer groups and house fellowships in the diaspora have to deal with ongoing debts towards ancestors and spirits.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the religious sphere in the diaspora is the emergence of Pentecostal churches founded by migrants, such as in England, the Netherlands and Germany.[15] In other words, a number of migrants do not join churches considered as branches of mega churches founded in their countries of origin, but build new

[8] G. Hüwelmeier and K. Krause, 'Introduction', in G. Hüwelmeier and K. Krause (eds), *Traveling Spirits: Migrants, Markets, and Mobilities* (New York, 2010), pp. 1–17, here p. 1.

[9] S. Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000); Robbins, 'Globalization'; R. Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago, 2009); B. Meyer, 'Pentecostalism and Globalization', in A. Anderson *et al.* (eds), *Studying Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods* (Berkeley, 2010), pp. 113–33; Hüwelmeier and Krause, 'Introduction'.

[10] T. J. Csordas, *Sacred Self* (Berkeley, 1994).

[11] D.B. Barrett and T.M. Johnson, 'Global statistics', in S.M. Burgess and E.M. van der Maas (eds), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, 2002), pp. 283–303, here p. 284, quoted in Robbins, 'Globalization'.

[12] D. Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford, 2002), P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford, 2002).

[13] J. Casanova, 'Religion, the New Millennium, and Globalization', *Sociology of Religion*, 62, 4 (2001), pp. 415–41.

[14] B. Meyer, '"Make a Complete Break with the Past": Time and Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse', in R. Werbner (ed.), *Memory and the Postcolony* (London, 1998).

[15] D. Garbin, 'Symbolic Geographies of the Sacred: Diasporic Territorialization and Charismatic Power in a Transnational Congolese Prophetic Church', in Hüwelmeier and Krause, *Traveling Spirits*, pp. 145–65. R. van Dijk, 'The Moral Life of the Gift in Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches in the Diaspora', in W.M.J. van Binsbergen and P.L. Geschiere (eds), *Commodification, Things, Agency, and Identities: The Social Life of Things Revisited* (Münster, 2005), pp. 201–25. B. Nieswand, 'Ghanaian Migrants in Germany and the Social Construction of Diaspora', *African Diaspora*, 1, 1 (2008), pp. 28–52; G. Hüwelmeier, 'Socialist Cosmopolitanism Meets Global Pentecostalism: Charismatic Christianity Among Vietnamese Migrants in Germany', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34, 3 (2011), pp. 436–53; K. Krause, 'Cosmopolitan Charismatics? Transnational Ways of Belonging and Cosmopolitan Moments in the Religious Practice of New Mission Churches', *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 34, 3 (2011), pp. 419–35.

religious networks in the country of destination after their arrival. Vietnamese Pentecostal churches in Germany are a very recent phenomenon. Yet they share some features with Pentecostal churches in general, such as healing services, speaking in tongues and falling into trances. The main issue is a dualistic world view: a constant fight between divine and evil forces; spiritual warfare against 'traditional' religion, such as spirit medium-ship, ancestor veneration and fortune telling; and the struggle against 'other' religions, such as Catholicism and Buddhism. All these religions and traditions are thriving forces in contemporary Vietnam.[16] Rejecting other beliefs, therefore, is an important issue in Vietnamese Pentecostal charismatic Christianity.[17] In Sunday sermons as well as in private prayer meetings, pastors, apostles and evangelists endlessly talk about Satan, demons and other spiritual entities that have to be chased out of the body, mind and soul.

Charismatic Pentecostal churches founded by migrants in Germany are increasing in numbers. According to a recent study, in the region of the river Rhine in the western part of Germany, for example, between the cities of Aachen, Cologne and the Ruhr region, there are 258 Pentecostal charismatic migrant churches, out of which 172 are of African origin or newly founded churches by African migrants in Germany, and forty-three churches are of Asian origin.[18] The success of these churches is mainly based on spontaneous healings, on stories about praying for sick relatives in the home country who then recovered, and on narratives about people who became rich.

II: Uncertainties and Anxieties in the Migration Context

Between the late 1970s and the early 1990s tens of thousands of Vietnamese migrated to Germany. By 1990, there were 45,779 Vietnamese living in West Germany (FRG) and around 60,000 Vietnamese living in East Germany (GDR).[19] After reunification, an estimated 40,000 of those in the GDR returned to Vietnam. Later in the 1990s, a fair number returned as non-documented migrants, while thousands of Vietnamese living in Russia, the Czech Republic and other Eastern European countries moved to Germany. In 2013, more than 80,000 Vietnamese were living in Germany, the country's largest Asian ethnic group.[20] The city of Berlin alone was home to 13,622 Vietnamese in June 2012, according to official statistics.[21]

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[16] K. Endres, *Performing the Divine: Mediums, Markets and Modernity in Urban Vietnam* (Copenhagen, 2011); J.A. Hoskins, 'What are Vietnam's Indigenous Religions?', Newsletter of the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 64 (2011), pp. 3–7.

[17] G. Hüwelmeier, 'Creating and Refining Boundaries: Church Splitting among Pentecostal Vietnamese Migrants in Berlin', *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Sciences*, 47, 2 (2013), pp. 220–30.

[18] C. Währisch-Oblau, 'Die Spezifik pentekostal-charismatischer Migrationsgemeinden in Deutschland und ihr Verhältnis zu etablierten Kirchen', in M. Bergunder and J. Haustein (eds), *Migration und Identität: Pfingstlich-charismatische Migrationsgemeinden in Deutschland* (Frankfurt/Main, 2006), pp. 10–40, here p. 13.

[19] O. Beuchling, *Vom Bootsflüchtling zum Bundesbürger* (Münster, 2003). p. 21. G. Hüwelmeier, 'Moving East: Transnational Ties of Vietnamese Pentecostals', in Hüwelmeier and Krause, *Traveling Spirits*, pp. 133–45.

[20] In 2008, the Statistisches Bundesamt Wiesbaden put the number at 83,333, but this figure does not include the many Vietnamese who have been naturalized or who remain undocumented. According to the Statistisches Bundesamt Wiesbaden, the number of Vietnamese living in Germany (non-German citizens) was 83,830 on 31 Dec. 2011. www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/AuslaendBevoelkerung2010200117004.pdf?__blob=publicationFile (accessed May 2014).

[21] www.berlin.de/lb/intmig/statistik/demografie/einwohner_staatsangehoerigkeit.html (accessed May 2014).

Despite the years that have passed since reunification, the Vietnamese in Germany are still a fractured population. Those Vietnamese who began arriving in the FRG in 1978 were political refugees mostly from the country's South who had fled Communist Vietnam by sea—hence the term *boat people*.[22] In the FRG they were granted asylum and later received permanent residency permits. They had access to language courses and government assistance in finding jobs, while family reunification policies enabled relatives in Vietnam to join them. By contrast, the tens of thousands of mostly North Vietnamese in the GDR had come as contract workers on the basis of a treaty signed by East Germany and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1980. Workers were permitted to stay only for the duration of their contracts, most of which were limited to four or five years, and family members could not accompany them. More significantly, official policy did not encourage social integration: contract workers received little language instruction and were housed in separate residences under the supervision of 'group leaders' who provided interpretation and assistance in day-to-day affairs.

These distinct histories still divide Vietnamese in Germany today along cultural and political lines, and continue to provide fodder for animosity between former boat people and former contract workers, who use these names to this day to delineate their respective identities. More relevant for present purposes, however, is the fact that the division between East and West has a religious component as well. A number of Vietnamese who settled in the FRG practised Buddhism, Catholicism and, to a lesser extent, Protestantism and Evangelicalism. Conversely, contract workers in the GDR did not practise religion to any significant degree. Ancestor veneration was not permitted in workers' apartments, and public religious monuments such as Buddhist pagodas did not exist. Much as in Vietnam at that time, religion was not supposed to play an important role in the socialist 'brotherland'. Today, however, religious practices are part of the everyday lives of many Vietnamese both at home and in the diaspora. Former Vietnamese contract workers from East Germany who stayed in Germany after reunification, and who converted to Pentecostalism in the host country, pray for good health, a happy family and success in business.

Believers also face problems specific to the migration context, for example regarding their legal status. Moreover, in the diaspora, they experience differences with regard to the performance of religious practices, in particular in the way men and women express and deal with emotions. As a general rule, it is only in exceptional cases that Vietnamese would express positive emotions in a public setting. For example, emotions such as love have to be hidden and should only be performed within the nuclear family, if at all. In Vietnamese Pentecostal churches in Germany, however, there is space to express one's positive emotions. A man in his fifties told me that he could not stop crying, tears running down his face, when he felt the love of Jesus in his heart. A former Catholic, he had converted in a Vietnamese Pentecostal church in Germany. When Jesus called him and when he felt the deep love of the Lord, he sincerely repented of his sins, and simultaneously felt guilty towards those whom he had cheated when he was young.

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[22] At the 1979 Indochina Conference in Geneva, the FRG announced that it would grant asylum to 10,000 Southeast Asian refugees. That same year, 20,000 Vietnamese arrived in Germany shores. In 1984, the number reached 38,000: M. Baumann, *Migration-Religion-Integration* (Marburg 2000), p. 31.

Due to great social and economic uncertainty in the diaspora, Pentecostal networks offer a space where regular practitioners and newcomers can gather with other people sharing similar problems, such as lacking necessary legal documents. Feelings of fear, of being rejected as an asylum seeker, of being discovered as an illegal migrant, of being unable to marry the person they love because of problems with 'documents'—these are just some of the sensitivities that are negotiated in the church space. Hence, the majority of church members pray for the extension of residence status, others for the acquisition of marriage documents.

During religious gatherings, several of the attendees witnessed to the miraculous help of God after they had prayed asking Jesus for support. Some publicly reported that they received the extension of their residence status or could marry their Vietnamese or German partner, as they had obtained the missing documents. However, according to some of them, the Holy Spirit is not always at work. Therefore, one has always to beware of evil spirits. Stories circulate about the separation of couples even in Pentecostal settings and divorce or family breakdown occurs due to alcohol abuse or a husband's gambling addiction. These problems, coupled with feelings of despair, loss and solitude in the diaspora, are attributed to the presence of demons. *Ma qui* (demons) can easily destroy the home of people, particularly in cases where not all family members have yet been 'born again'. In order to cast out demons, techniques of the body in the sense outlined by Marcel Mauss are performed in every religious gathering: singing, shouting and crying are the most visible and audible expressions of feelings.[23]

III: Music as a Medium of Purification of Space and Body

During my fieldwork in 2007, every Sunday about fifty Vietnamese met in the eastern part of Berlin to celebrate a religious service in the rooms they rented from a free evangelical church. The group of religious practitioners was a branch of the Holy Spirit Church, founded by Vietnamese boat people in 1980, with its headquarters in the western part of Germany at that time.[24] After the fall of the Berlin Wall, a number of former Vietnamese contract workers who had lived and worked in the socialist GDR joined the church as well.

The service started with singing by church members, accompanied by a music band that, although the church space was quite small, worked with a public address system. The choir singers, second generation Vietnamese girls, used a microphone to get the participants of the service into the 'right' mood. Beforehand the windows were closed, so that neighbours would not be disturbed by the loud voices and the band's music. At the very beginning, church followers sang in a hesitant way, while the lyrics in Vietnamese were shown on the wall via an overhead projector. Fuelled by the preacher and the singers, the congregation strengthened their singing within minutes. Some of them slowly raised their hands, closed their eyes and moved their bodies to the sound of music. Others were carried along by the increasing volume of the music and started jumping up and down in front of the chairs. A number of believers hopped

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[23] M. Mauss, 'Techniques of the Body', *Economy and Society*, 2, 1 (1973), pp. 70–88, here p. 73.

[24] I have changed the names of churches and people. The Holy Spirit Church in Germany is a free evangelical church; in Vietnam, where it founded branches at the end of the 1990s, it operates underground.

back and forth in the crowded space. In their own interpretation they were filled by the power of the Holy Spirit, which manifested itself through constantly loud shouting of 'Hallelujah'. Pastors commanded demons and evil spirits to leave the church room. At some point during this early part of the gathering, the spiritual leaders assured those present that the Holy Spirit had arrived and was 'now here, among us'. As some of the believers explained to me later, the louder you sing, the faster the evil spirits will disappear from the church.

Opening rituals in Vietnamese Pentecostal church services last about half an hour, as worshippers repeat the same songs over and over again, with increasing volume. Later the faithful testify to the power of the Holy Spirit, by reporting miraculous healing effects that it has or should have in body and soul. A few church followers are moved to tears, others collapse from a gentle touch by the pastor and are moved deftly to the side by assistants waiting to fulfil their duties. Once, in a service I visited, a few worshippers fell into a trance. One person remained motionless while being possessed by the Holy Spirit, others spoke in tongues, and one person laughed quite loudly. This laughter was interpreted by the pastor as an expression of happiness, as the Holy Spirit had filled this person. Some mumbled and uttered words that others could not understand. According to what believers narrated, the Holy Spirit came upon them. However, the Holy Spirit was not always at work, in some cases the body quickly moved back and forth while lying on the ground or went into convulsions. It was then presumed that demons were present and had taken possession of the person. Only the church leaders were supposed to be able to identify whether this was due to demons or to the Holy Spirit. If the spiritual entity was identified as *ma qui* (demon), it had to be expelled from the body immediately. While participating in a healing ritual, I once saw a woman vomiting (allegedly spewing the demons out of her body), while the pastor and his male and female assistants were praying at her side, shouting as loud as they could 'Devil, leave the body!' After the ritual was over, the woman explained to the audience that she felt relieved from physical and emotional pain.

As this sequence illustrates, the purification of the space as well as the purification of the body are essential parts of the ritual. Practices of the expulsion of demons are performed with the help of the sound of music and singing. The imagination of impure spaces, due to demonic presence, and their subsequent purification can be interpreted as rituals of spatial purification, as important 'techniques for the production of locality'.[25] The purification of the body and its dramatic performance of vomiting of demons in the ritual setting can be best understood by referring to the work of Mary Douglas, who highlighted practices of the pure and the impure as universal ordering mechanisms of societies.[26] In this case, the purification of the female body was part of a healing ritual, as the woman, who had felt sick for several weeks, claimed to have been possessed by evil spirits.

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[25] A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996), p. 182; M. Oosterbaan, 'Purity and the Devil: Community, Media, and the Body. Pentecostal Adherents in a Favela in Rio de Janeiro', in B. Meyer (ed.), *Aesthetic Formations. Media, Religion, and the Senses* (New York, 2009), pp. 53–71, here p. 62.

[26] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (2nd edn., New York, 2002; 1st edn, 1966).

Imagining the influence of spiritual forces on the wellbeing of people is quite common in Vietnam as well as in the diaspora.[27] Although the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has rejected all forms of so-called superstitions such as spirit possession, divination and other forms of 'traditional' religious practices for many years, one can observe a revival of religious practices everywhere in contemporary Vietnam.[28] In all these practices, the body and emotions play a prominent role. The search for happiness in the family, health issues, the desire for the children to obtain good high school diplomas, a marriage partner for the daughter or the desire to be successful in business activities motivate people to participate in all kinds of religious rituals. It should also be mentioned here that the 'health and wealth gospel' of Pentecostal churches, promising prosperity, success and good health, harmonizes to some degree with Vietnam's economic liberalization and a rapidly developing market economy, generating consumer desires as well as the desire for money.

IV: 'Traditional' Religious Practices in the Diaspora

Ancestor veneration is the most important religious practice both in Vietnam and in the diaspora.[29] If people do not respond to the demands of the ancestors, if they do not feed them on a regular basis or if they do not burn incense, the spirits of the dead may afflict the living. The rejection of the veneration of ancestors is one of the most striking strains in the process of conversion to Pentecostal charismatic Christianity among Vietnamese who have been 'born again'. Destroying the ancestor altar at home is what church members expect from newcomers. There is emotional pressure to do so, and also supervision and checking that the break with former religious practices is maintained. However, control and authority over church issues do not always go in the 'right' direction. This is what Mrs Ha, a schismatic, reported during a conversation we had, in which she talked about her feelings, ambivalences and sensitivities while recalling difficult times in her life.

Before Mrs Ha converted to Pentecostal charismatic Christianity in Berlin, 'traditional' religious practices were quite important in her life. When she was still living in Vietnam, she visited Buddhist temples and pagodas. In 2000, after Mrs Ha moved to Germany to follow her husband, a former contract worker in the GDR, she erected an ancestor altar in her private home in the eastern part of Berlin, like many other Vietnamese. Yet, after conversion to Pentecostalism, she destroyed the altar, against the will of her husband. Her action led to marriage problems on a daily basis, she cried for many hours, praying to Jesus and asking him to help her, as she had to cope with a lot of difficulties. The new church was expecting that she would visit the Buddhist pagoda in Berlin to remove the image of her deceased son, and burn the picture afterwards. In

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[27] G. Hüwelmeier, 'Spirits in the Market Place: Transnational Networks of Vietnamese Migrants in Berlin', in M.P. Smith and J. Eade (eds), *Transnational Ties: Cities, Identities, and Migrations* (CUCR book series vol. 9, New Brunswick and New Jersey, 2008); Hüwelmeier, *Socialist Cosmopolitanism;* Hüwelmeier, 'Creating and Refining Boundaries'; G. Hüwelmeier, 'Bazaar Pagodas—Transnational Religion, Postsocialist Marketplaces and Vietnamese Migrant Women in Berlin', in *Religion and Gender*, 3, 1 (2013), pp. 76–89.

[28] P. Taylor (ed.), *Modernity and Re-Enchantment in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam* (Singapore, 2007).

[29] K. Jellema, 'Returning Home: Ancestor Veneration and the Nationalism of Doi Moi Vietnam', in Taylor, *Modernity and Re-Enchantment*, pp. 57–90.

this case, the 'complete break with the past' would result in Buddhist nuns no longer praying for her beloved son. As her husband did not agree with what she was doing, their relationship was heavily strained. Mrs Ha, however, followed the advice of her pastor that, in Pentecostal charismatic Christianity, the performance of former religious practices is not allowed.

I came to know Mrs Ha while participating in the services of the Holy Spirit Church as part of my ethnographic fieldwork. One Sunday in 2007, during the sermon in a rented church room in Lichtenberg, an area in the eastern part of Berlin, Mrs Ha, sitting on a chair, suddenly fell down. While she was in trance, the female leader of the church branch instructed her male assistants to remove Mrs Ha from the community hall. While the two men pulled Mrs Ha across the floor, the leader continued preaching. Some church members were watching what was happening through the glass door but nobody intervened, nobody tried to help Mrs Ha. The church members seemed to be devoid of sympathy. Once Mrs Ha realized what the male assistants were doing, she tried to defend herself, screaming and striking out widely. However, the two men followed the preacher's instructions and took Mrs Ha to a side room and locked the door.

Meanwhile Mrs Thuy continued preaching and most of the congregation did not seem to be annoyed by this incident. Nevertheless, after some minutes the preaching style changed and Mrs Thuy spoke about Satan and demons, while simultaneously referring to relevant passages in the Bible. She informed her listeners that evil forces were also active in the community. Moreover, she told the worshippers, Mrs Ha had contact with the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Berlin. In addition, she also reported that she had some information about Mrs Ha's participation in spirit possession cults in Vietnam. As Mrs Thuy was the leader of the church branch—and thus claimed authority—she maintained that only she knew well that it was not the Holy Spirit that had entered the body of Mrs Ha, but a demon. The dualistic worldview of Pentecostal believers and the imagined struggle between good and evil, the notion of 'spiritual warfare', is a concept shared by all Pentecostal churches.[30] As this ethnographic case study illustrates, Vietnamese Pentecostalists easily build on popular imaginations of spiritual entities such as *ma qui*. These beliefs and the relevant anxieties about afflictions by evil spirits are transmitted from one cultural context to the other and should therefore be labelled as 'portable practices'.[31] Pastors constantly remind the church members not to become vassals of the devil. Like Pentecostal churches in Africa and Latin America, Vietnamese charismatic churches 'share a projected notion of Christian modernity, which acknowledges the reality of all those evil doings, especially demons and other so-called superstitions, which a good Christian is supposed to "leave behind"'.[32]

However, in Mrs Ha's case it seemed unclear what constituted a good Christian. Obedience towards the church leader and respect of his authority is one of the duties of a Pentecostal believer. Pastor Tung, the founder of the church, travelled to Berlin the following Sunday, exhorting Mrs Ha to obey the female church leader of the Berlin

[30] Meyer, 'Make a Complete Break'.

[31] T.J. Csordas, 'Introduction: Modalities of Transnational Transcendence', *Anthropological Theory*, 7, 3 (2007), pp. 259–72.

[32] B. Meyer, 'Impossible Representations: Pentecostalism, Vision, and Video Technology in Ghana', in B. Meyer and A. Moors (eds), *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington, 2006), pp. 290–313, here p. 298.

branch. There was a dispute between her, the pastor and the female church leader about her presence in the church. The pastor and the female preacher wanted Mrs Ha to subordinate herself to the authority of the church, and publicly recognize the leadership. However, she refused, declaring that she was obedient only to God and to the Holy Spirit, but not to those people doubting that the Holy Spirit had entered her body several times. As religious leaders are not officially appointed in Pentecostal churches, and as the Holy Spirit is 'considered to be independent in selecting his worldly manifestations',[33] the pastor lost his charismatic authority among part of the congregation.

This example illustrates the beginning of processes of exclusion and finally church splitting that result from the drawing of boundaries and conflicting definitions of the charismatic gifts and charismatic authority of the preacher. Exclusion from belonging and the fear of not belonging caused the production and performance of dramatic gestures and grand emotions.[34] Twelve women left the Holy Spirit Church, as they doubted that the Holy Spirit was still in that church. Doubt in the religious context is one of the most important factors causing emotional pressure or strain experienced by believers in times of crisis. However, the women did not doubt that the Holy Spirit was among them. They decided to meet in the private home of one of the church members while they were in the process of building a new church. The following Sunday I experienced the most extraordinary meeting I had ever attended. All the women were collectively crying, shouting, sobbing, asking Jesus for forgiveness for leaving the church. Simultaneously they stated in loud prayers that they were not guilty, but were just following the Holy Spirit. Finally, the strongest emotional distress concerned exclusion: the loss of their friends and co-congregants, who remained in the Holy Spirit Church.

The pastor, too, had had visions about the upcoming split. Before the split occurred, he gave a sermon based on St John's Gospel, chapter 15, and the metaphor of the vine and the branches. It was obvious that he was referring to those who wanted to leave the church. He quoted the Bible:

> I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.. .. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.[35]

Those listening to the sermon appeared to feel threatened by the way in which the pastor was preaching. Emotions which threatened exclusion as well as the fear of being excluded on the part of the believers formed an integral part of his sermon. The pastor was shouting, his voice became very loud, and his preaching looked like an attempt at intimidation. However, in the end, he failed to convince all the church members to stay. On the contrary, some of them felt that the way the pastor tried to put pressure on them, demanding respect and obedience, justified their decision. The pastor had lost his charismatic authority.

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[33] T.G. Kirsch, 'Performance and the Negotiation of Charismatic Authority in an African Indigenous Church of Zambia', *Paideuma,* 48 (2002), p. 57–76, here p. 57.

[34] Hüwelmeier, 'Creating and Refining Boundaries'.

[35] John 15.1-2, 5–7, New International Version.

According to Max Weber, a characteristic feature of charismatic authority is the emotional commitment between the bearers of charisma and those who believe in charismatic authority.[36] Charismatic authority is strictly personal and emotional, based on the followers' affectual belief in the extraordinary qualities of the pastor.[37] However, in cases of conflict and mistrust, the emotional bonds are severed and therefore the relationship is broken: the faithful no longer believe in the pastor's charismatic authority, and the pastor can no longer claim recognition.

V: Embodied Practices—Performing Religion

Most of the religious gatherings in Vietnamese Pentecostal churches are marked by the evident and audible relationship between performing religious practices, emotions and the body. Not only publicly performed prayers and songs, but also the presentation of the believers' life stories in front of the group, the narration of a sinful life and the experience of conversion are central issues in Pentecostal charismatic Christianity. This is particularly relevant in the context of conversion narratives as fundamental parts of religious practices in Pentecostal churches. Emotional experiences in believers' lives, such as flight and migration, are validated and commented on by pastors. Painful emotions such as leaving one's home country, leaving behind ageing parents and one's children, are commemorated in a specific way and are finally reinterpreted in a religious context, a point to which I shall return.

The public presentation of one's own life history, one's feelings, public prayer, public confession of sins after personal introspection, and public testimony of the agency of the Holy Spirit in one's body and emotions are part of what has been called 'learning religion' in recent scholarship.[38] In evangelical and Pentecostal churches, whose members rely on the authority of the Bible, great importance is accorded to personal dialogue or personal encounter with God. The results of this dialogue, such as testimonies, have to be performed publicly. Prayers, visions, dreams and trance are embodied practices, closely connected with the encounter with spiritual entities, either with the Holy Spirit or with other spirits that are demonized by the church leadership. Yet what I have elsewhere called 'embodied emotions' with regard to 'particular friendship' among Catholic nuns, and what Saba Mahmood has pointed out with reference to female Mosques in Cairo, is a matter of 'skills and aptitudes acquired through training, practice and apprenticeship'.[39] Special skills and gestures, such as the movement of the body, dietary customs, expression of emotions, experience of pain and cultural values in general, are inscribed on the body.[40] Referring to 'technologies of the self', Talal Asad has analysed the concept of *disciplina*, to be understood as the physical, intellectual

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[36] M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen, 1972), p. 141.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] T.M. Luhrmann, 'Metakinesis: How God Becomes Intimate in Contemporary U.S. Christianity', *American Anthropologist*, 106, 3 (2004), pp. 518–28; D. Berliner and R. Sarro (eds), *Learning Religion: Anthropological Approaches* (New York and Oxford, 2007).

[39] G. Hüwelmeier, *Närrinnen Gottes* (Münster, 2004), p. 185. S. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton and Oxford, 2005). S. Mahmood, 'Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Salat', *American Ethnologist,* 28, 4 (2001), pp. 827–53, here p. 844.

[40] Csordas, *Sacred Self*.

and moral cultivation of a person in the religious context of medieval monasteries.[41] These practices or ritual technologies became highly relevant, for example, in copying religious texts, in meditation, in listening to the sermons of the abbot as well as in the performance of the liturgy, and are thus part of learning religion.

In Pentecostal charismatic churches converts 'must come to believe emotionally' that new concepts and words are true.[42] By emphasizing the body, for example by focusing on singing, clapping hands, raising hands, and closing eyes while listening to music, Pentecostal pastors use 'those experiences to create remarkably intimate relationships with God'.[43] In Vietnamese Pentecostal migrant churches this relationship is partly characterized by hearing the 'voice of God' or by 'having visions'. The pastor of the Holy Spirit Church told me that in a vision God had instructed him to conduct missionary work in former socialist countries.[44] In our conversation he confirmed that it had taken him a long period of time to carefully listen to the voice of the Lord.

These experiences, both of physical expression and of personal guidance, illustrate that the church is not just a place for performing religious services, but a place of teaching, praying, touching and listening, as well as giving instructions to young people and to married couples. During a prayer camp in another Vietnamese Pentecostal church in Germany, when the pastor was talking about love in a sermon—between husband and wife, parents and children and between God and the believer—he encouraged a male church member to stand up and to say loudly to his wife 'I love you'. The audience started laughing, as a Vietnamese man would never say these words in the public, this would be considered embarrassing and inappropriate. However, the Vietnamese pastor did not stop preaching about love and he did not stop encouraging the man to follow his prompt. When, after a quite long time, the person concerned gave in, the audience clapped enthusiastically.

Part of staging religion is internal self-inspection. In addition to the internal audit and the emotional relationship with God, an essential part of church services concerns the individual and collective performance of religion. The public presentation of, for example, marital problems or traumatic experiences, such as sexual abuse, is accompanied by unexpected emotional outbursts on the side of the believer on the one hand, and on the side of the religious group listening to the narrative on the other. Evangelical women meeting in mass gathering in rented hotel ballrooms in the US, for example, have been observed placing thousands of tissues left and right of the table rows.[45] Hundreds of women started crying while listening to the sad stories of their 'sisters'. The ballroom was transformed into a religious space where Christian believers were emotionally touched by the narratives of the protagonists on stage.

Religious emotions are publicly staged in Vietnamese Pentecostal Sunday services and house churches in Berlin. During the church service, the pastor calls the believers to come forward to talk about their diseases, or to express concerns and worries

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[41] M. Foucault 'Technologies of the Self', in L.H. Martin *et al.* (eds), *Technologies of the Self* (Amherst, 1984), pp. 16–50. T. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, p. 140.

[42] Luhrmann, 'Metakinesis', p. 519.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] Hüwelmeier, 'Moving East'.

[45] R.M. Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (London, Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1997).

aloud. The congregation hears about the daily difficulties of women, men and young people, who talk loudly about their inner life. Women, for example, talk about severe health problems, mothers mourn their drug-taking children, young people report the imprisonment of their fathers, men complain about their gambling addiction, quite common among male Vietnamese in Germany as well as in Vietnam. Some talk about the difficulty of obtaining marriage documents in Vietnam, others complain about losing their jobs. Church members also debate the problems of their relatives in Vietnam: diseases of parents, or the funeral of a parent that they are unable to attend as they cannot afford to travel. Other difficulties of life are part of the emotional burden in the diaspora, such as residence status mentioned above.

In the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, in churches attended by people who had formerly lived in Germany and by new believers, those present do not speak about marriage documents and ageing parents, but, for example, about their experiences in Germany. As a number of them converted in Germany, they praise their immigration to Germany, mostly as asylum seekers. Some of the returned migrants had become 'rich' there and were now able to build a house and to buy a motorbike. Furthermore, as some Pentecostal churches in Vietnam are underground churches, and thus, like the Vietnamese branches of the Holy Spirit Church, cannot gather in public, part of the talks and sermons in the services concerns the difficulties with local authorities and how to deal with such issues. Church leaders use media technologies such as camera phones to demonstrate how groups of thugs threaten family members and beat church followers.[46]

VI: New Media in Church Services

In charismatic Pentecostal churches, media and practices of mediation play an important role in spreading the gospel.[47] Religious practitioners, particularly those who have migrated, are connected via new media to those who stay behind, to family members as well as to branches of their churches in the country of origin. Thus, performing intimacy with God in Pentecostal churches is directly linked to the use of new media.

Listening to audio cassettes and DVDs with sermons, watching TV shows with famous preachers from Africa and Latin America, or being healed by touching the TV screen are all parts of religious practices associated with emotions and physical sensations. Those members of the Holy Spirit Church in Germany who are supposed to be rich have DVD players at home and view DVDs with mass gatherings of their churches. Some of the followers also buy DVDs with mass healings and gatherings from mega churches in Africa. Affected by the huge crowds on the screen, some of them pray loudly in the house churches, others proudly talk about the expansion of their religion to other countries, while sitting in their small living rooms. Listening just to the sound of some of the songs performed in another language on the TV screen evokes emotions of belonging and being part of a global Christian world.

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[46] Some of the new churches register with the local authorities, but many other churches are underground, as they do not want their members to be controlled by the authorities.

[47] Meyer and Moors, *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*.

Leaders of house churches also use cell phones to practise healing services on the phone. They attentively listen to emotionally charged memories and everyday stories, while praying over marital problems or migraine attacks. Religious practitioners have reported that the words and prayers transmitted through the phone had positive effects on their wellbeing, on body and soul. They became calm, less anxious and had positive visions about the future. Believers in Germany also pray for sick relatives in Vietnam. In every service, individual and collective prayers for curing health problems of kin in Vietnam are part of the healing session. Some of the believers phone Hanoi regularly to convert parents, sisters and other relatives. Some use MP3 players and listen to sermons even in their workplace. One Vietnamese believer I know in Berlin uses this kind of new media while selling flowers at a metro station. Only when customers enter the shop does she interrupt her religious duties. Another flower shop owner actively proselytizes in his shop, distributing DVDs of religious gatherings and leaflets announcing the next prayer camp. Thus media technologies are part of everyday religious life at home and even in the work place.

The use of media contributes to the rapid spread of Pentecostal Christianity, and mobility is one of its characteristic properties. Mobility includes mission trips by religious teachers, such as travelling pastors, prophets, apostles and laity, all of them carrying religious messages across cultural and geographic boundaries. But it is not only the Holy Spirit and other spiritual entities, such as ancestral spirits and the souls of the dead, that move back and forth between continents.[48] In charismatic Pentecostal Christianity, the 'gifts of the Holy Spirit', such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing are digitally recorded and transported as evidence of the effect of the Holy Spirit on people in various countries.

Only in recent years has the use of new media—TV, radio, cameras and DVDs— relating to religious practices become the subject of anthropological research.[49] Since religions claim to convey the transcendental, spiritual and supernatural, making these elements accessible to the faithful, religion should therefore be analysed as a practice of mediation.[50] Moreover, the approach of religion as a practice of mediation is very useful in exploring religious networks across borders and the process of the invocation of emotions through media practices. A sermon on the demise of the *Titanic* can illustrate how charismatic leaders refer to media and practices of mediation.

Pastor Tung, the founder of the Holy Spirit Church, preaches constantly about the loss of the homeland Vietnam, imagining the union of all Vietnamese in a future 'Christian' Vietnam. In his distinctly loud and sometimes threatening style of preaching, the pastor used the disaster of the *Titanic* as a metaphor for the imminent end of the world,[51] but also to offer an idea of salvation and resurrection by referring to the experiences of the Vietnamese boat people, who fled their home country at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s and many of whom drowned in the South China

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[48] Hüwelmeier and Krause, 'Introduction'.

[49] C. Hirschkind, 'Cassette Ethics: Public, Piety and Popular Media in Egypt', in Meyer and Moors, *Religion, Media and the Public Sphere*, pp. 29–51. G. Hüwelmeier, 'New Media and Traveling Spirits: Pentecostals in the Vietnamese Diaspora and the Disaster of the *Titanic*', in H. Behrend, A. Dreschke and Martin Zillinger (eds), *Trance-Mediums and New Media* (New York, 2014), pp. 100–15.

[50] Meyer and Moors, *Religion,* p. 7.

[51] For a detailed analysis, see G. Hüwelmeier, 'New Media and Traveling Spirits'.

Sea. On the one hand, he linked the tragic journey of the *Titanic* with the anticipated judgment of God during the end of days, as portrayed in the *Book of Apocalypse*; on the other hand, he used it to evoke memories and emotions surrounding war, flight and displacement—a crucial part of the religious message.

The rhetoric of the image gave his preaching a powerful message: Repent and follow God or drown in the sea! The disaster of the *Titanic*, shown on a huge screen in a prayer camp in Germany, was 'vietnamized' and interpreted as God's plan. As the pastor explained in his sermon, God wanted his followers, who were rescued by his power, and who found Jesus only in the diaspora, to return to Vietnam and bring the gospel to all Vietnamese. God told him personally, he said, to proselytize in the former GDR, Poland, Russia and other East European countries.[52] And it was a proof of the agency of the Holy Spirit, he continued, that the 'fruits' of his work, mostly former contract workers from postsocialist countries, were attending the prayer camp.

In the pastor's view, only intensive prayer to God on the boat led to salvation. He reported his personal experience that all the people on the boat were very scared, nobody knowing whether they would survive. They had all heard stories about people on the boats being attacked by pirates, about women being raped before their husbands' eyes. They had even heard rumours about people being eaten by other people on boats when there was no more food, no water. In his emotional desperation, Pastor Tung had promised that if he were saved, he would serve God and proclaim his word around the world. Finally, he reported, God had answered his prayers and all the passengers were rescued. For several months he had lived in a refugee camp in Southeast Asia, where he had already begun proselytizing. A year later, in 1980, after he had arrived in Germany together with thousands of other boat people, he had started proselytizing in the host country. Initially he had worked in the Ruhr area, because he and his family were living there. He had created small prayer groups all over the FRG, visiting them regularly. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, he had had a vision: God told him to evangelize the East. He developed contacts with other Vietnamese in former East Germany, Poland, Russia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, and eventually started going back to Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries occasionally to spread the gospel among Vietnamese in the Asian diaspora.

While displaying a picture of the sinking Titanic on a huge screen, the pastor evoked feelings of anxiety and threat. On the one hand, his message gave rise to personal anxiety: those who do not believe in God will die like the passengers on the ship. On the other hand, he presented an apocalypse that carried a strong political message: himself exiled, a Christian believer, not allowed to enter his home country by local authorities, would bring the gospel to Vietnam via God's messengers, the many Vietnamese migrants converted in the diaspora. This critique of the current political situation in his home country referred to the fact that within Vietnam church members are not allowed to perform religious practices in the public sphere. However, there is also a promise to be found in this religious message: those who operate in underground churches in Vietnam, living in fear of surveillance and of paid gangs of thugs, will be among the saved in a new time.

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[52] Hüwelmeier, 'Moving East'.

VII: Conclusion

As bodies and emotions are socially situated, this contribution has explored how religious devotion is transformed in the migration context. In the diaspora, the collective memory of past experiences of flight and migration is a crucial issue in mass gatherings and church services of Vietnamese charismatic Pentecostal networks. Pentecostal Christians' devotion to the Bible implies 'dramatization, bringing the word to life, certainly in preaching but also in one's life'.[53] As this article has illustrated, the words of the Bible are not just dramatized, but dramatically visualized. In the context of preaching and by referring in particular to feelings such as fear, threat, hope and rescue, Vietnamese pastors constantly remind church followers not to forget the history of their country and the reasons why they had to leave their homeland. Church media teams, displaying photos, maps, videos and movies, contribute to the evocation of memories and emotions via new media technologies.

Charismatic Pentecostal Christianity attracts millions of people all over the world. However, it is not the word alone that brings converts into this religious movement, but also extraordinary experiences such as intensive prayer, speaking in tongues or falling in trance. By learning and adopting practices such as loud singing, closing one's eyes, raising hands, dancing and other techniques, followers create intimacy with God and signal God's voice or God's presence in their bodies as his response, a process that has been described as *metakinesis*.[54] Most of the bodily techniques are transmitted via new media technologies, as believers watch and learn from DVDs how to move their bodies in the right way, how to pray, and how to manifest the presence of God.

By performing and publicly staging emotions such as love and happiness, religious believers are encouraged to make a break with 'traditions', in particular with former moral values and family duties. Being separated from families and kin in Vietnam and largely excluded from the society of the host country, former contract workers and asylum seekers find a new home and a new family in the church. Emotional distress is performed on the stage and counterbalanced by simultaneously belonging to a small house fellowship, to many branches in Germany and East European countries, to underground churches in Vietnam and to a global charismatic Christianity. Diasporic Pentecostal Vietnamese in Berlin, like other migrant groups, transport their transnational emotional regimes,[55] rework them in the respective host societies, and bring back modified and diversified forms of religious sentiments and embodied practices to their country of origin, and, as they become missionaries, to various places in the world.

Abstract

This article seeks to contribute to the dialogue between the history and anthropology of Christianity by addressing the emotional practices of Vietnamese Pentecostals in present-day Berlin. Particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Vietnamese migrants, former contract workers in the former GDR, and 'boat people' whose flight from Vietnam led them to West Germany, founded Pentecostal churches and connected their old and new homes via transportable religious practices. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork carried out

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[53] Coleman, *Globalisation*, p. 118.
[54] Luhrmann, 'Metakinesis', p. 519.
[55] Riis and Woodhead, *Religious Emotion*, p. 50.

among Vietnamese migrants in Berlin who converted to charismatic Pentecostal Christianity after arriving in Germany, this article explores the allure of charismatic Pentecostal Christianity for people living in the diaspora, arguing that emotions as cultural practices represent a substantial part of religious rituals in Vietnamese Pentecostal charismatic networks. In the context of migration, emotions are transformed, transmitted, and performed in different ways, and at the same time, the migration experience generates specific emotions that are dealt with in religious practices.

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