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# Pentecostal pastorhood as calling and career: migration, religion, and masculinity between Kenya and the United Kingdom

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This article explores the intertwining of migration and religion in the lives of migrant men who were born in Kenya and have become Pentecostal pastors in London. Drawing on the spiritual careers of several pastors, I suggest that pastorhood be understood as a gendered means of social mobility. As pastors, these men attain a status that is socially and culturally intelligible in London and Kenya. At the same time, given that status is contingent upon recognition, the article also examines how pastorhood helps them navigate the challenges and inconsistencies of their lived experiences, such as a competitive religious marketplace and hostility in London, and the high expectations of those in Kenya. Rather than viewing religion as compensatory, I argue that Pentecostalism offers a 'site of action', to use Ruth Marshall's phrase, in which they can (re)make themselves as 'new' men and (re)position themselves vis-à-vis the multiple social worlds they inhabit.

Most Kenyan-born pastors in London were 'called' to serve God after migrating to the United Kingdom in the 1990s. Now in their forties, they are part of a generation of men who came of age at a time when Kenya faced political, social, and economic uncertainty, which jeopardized their aspirations. In the context of Africa, migration and religion, both separately and together, have been understood to provide new means for self-making and for imagining and securing the future (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006; Cole 2010; Piot 2010). This article explores the intertwining of migration and religion in the lives of migrant men who have become Pentecostal pastors in London. In doing so, I suggest that pastorhood be understood as a gendered means of social mobility, as calling and career. More specifically, I argue that, as Pentecostal pastors, these men circumvent structural discrimination in London and gerontocratic power structures in Kenya, while attaining a status that resonates with historically grounded ideas of (male) status in Kenya. Thus, their position as pastors affords them a status that is socially and culturally intelligible in both contexts, not to mention more widely, and which might otherwise have eluded them. However, the intelligibility of pastorhood is contingent on the recognition of others. A second and related argument is that the coherence of these

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men's identity across space requires ongoing cultivation and impression management. Pentecostal pastors in London face a competitive religious marketplace where (subtle) rivalries between Kenyan-initiated churches can make it hard to retain members and, thus, to have their callings reaffirmed. At the same time, as racialized migrant minorities, they struggle to maintain their status in their encounters in wider British society, while also having to navigate the expectations of those in Kenya.

I situate these arguments at the intersection of two bodies of literature engaged with gender, those of migration and of Pentecostalism, both of which increasingly pay attention to notions of masculinity and the experiences and perspectives of men. In theorizing the intersection of gender, migration, and power, Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar (2001) highlight the importance of considering how gender identities get reproduced and/or transformed across space. Doing so allows us to understand the ways in which migrants' social locations shape their identities and lives and in turn how they navigate the multiple social worlds they inhabit. Looking at the experiences of men from various African countries living in Europe, migration has unsettled their traditional positions of social privilege and power and undermined their status and recognition, if not denying them altogether. JoAnn McGregor (2007) discusses how Zimbabwean men working as carers in London feel humiliated and emasculated by this 'feminine' work. Nauja Kleist (2010) examines Somali men's struggle to negotiate 'respectable masculinity' vis-à-vis the Danish welfare system, which they experience as undermining their patriarchal authority. Meanwhile, Dominic Pasura (2008) describes Pentecostal and Catholic churches as key sites in which Zimbabwean men in Britain assume positions of leadership, which they do not enjoy in their wider lives. These experiences resonate with discussions about a 'crisis of masculinity' in the wider literature on migration, men, and masculinity (Charsley 2005; Charsley & Wray 2015).

Studies of Pentecostalism and masculinity are also concerned with men's struggles to realize their aspirations and be valorized. If Pentecostal thought encourages men to understand their challenges and difficulties as deriving from their own failings and weaknesses, then it also offers potential answers. A growing body of research examines how Pentecostalism 're-socialises the young man, drawing him away from a world of violence and promiscuity into a family-centred life' (Maxwell 2006: 201; see also Chitando 2007; Soothill 2007). In their work among Zambian and Tanzanian men, respectively, Adriaan van Klinken (2012) and Martin Lindhardt (2015) highlight how getting saved is more about a change in moral lifestyle than in religious belief, which helps men cultivate self-control and take 'responsibility' in pursuit of spiritual development and (a modicum of) material success. However, as Lindhardt (2015) also discusses, getting saved can create new gendered challenges: for example, Pentecostal men may face criticism that, by converting, they have become feminized.

The article also engages with work on Pentecostal pastorhood, which has not explicitly considered the gendered dimensions of pastorhood, just as research on African Pentecostalism and masculinity has not explicitly looked at pastors. Research in Africa and its diasporas shows how Pentecostalism facilitates the social mobility, including physical mobility, and enhances the social stature of those who are pastors, though it does not guarantee their financial security (Burgess 2009; Englund 2003; Lauterbach 2009; 2010; Nieswand 2010). In the context of migration, part of African pastors' stature derives from helping congregants navigate a new setting, reflecting the wider literature on religion and migration (Adogame 2009; Hagan & Ebaugh 2003; Währisch-Obblau 2009). Karen Lauterbach's research on Ghanaian men who have become Pentecostal pastors

is most relevant here (Lauterbach 2010; 2015; 2017). She describes how pastorhood helps these men address a crisis of social becoming in ways that align with local and historical notions of power and status among the Asante. Like Lauterbach, I focus on pastors of smaller, independent churches; however, in my case, this kind of church predominates in London, where born-again Christianity is a minority faith, unlike in Ghana. This focus contrasts with that of much research in the African diaspora, which looks at megachurches (e.g. Cartledge & Davies 2013) or branches of large transnational churches, such as the Nigerian-based Redeemed Christian Church of God (e.g. Burgess 2009; Knibbe 2009). I extend Lauterbach's discussion by considering pastorhood as an alternative means of social mobility in the context of migration. While pastorhood, I suggest, allows these men in London to attain the status they aspire to, it also generates new challenges and contradictions in their lived experiences in London and Kenya.

In making these arguments, I do not mean to imply that we should view the pastors' motivations as opportunistic or instrumental; rather, I am interested in how pastorhood, when viewed in relation to migration and masculinity, offers a site to understand the complexity of desires, demands, and expectations that are part of religious experience, but which can escape anthropological attention because of a tendency to bracket the 'religious' off from the 'social', 'economic', and 'political'. In her work on Nigerian Pentecostalism, Ruth Marshall comments that we cannot invoke a crisis of material conditions for which religion is the answer because the explanation would necessitate a functionalist understanding of religion (2009: 18). She argues that 'religious change is not merely the sign or the effect of change in other domains of human practice, but rather constitutes, in and of itself, a mode of historical and political transformation' (2009: 34); accordingly, religion is 'a site of action, invested in and appropriated by believers' (2009: 22). In other words, becoming and being pastors should not be seen as a compensatory action or status that offsets hardships these men have endured or makes up for their seemingly low social status. Such an interpretation relies on a cognitive separation of religion from the rest of their lives, which are implicitly understood in such a reading as secular. Instead, and in line with the centrality of God to their lives, I am suggesting that Pentecostal pastorhood affords them a space of endeavour and possibility to transform their lives, affirm themselves and, ultimately, pursue their destiny as God's children.

I begin by outlining the intertwining of physical and social mobility among families in Kenya, before moving on to describe how Christianity articulates with their entwinement historically. I then consider men's lives in London, especially early on, highlighting the gap between their expectations and their lived experiences of social marginalization and racialization, followed by a look at Pentecostalism's gendered appeal. The remainder of the article focuses on the spiritual trajectories of three Pentecostal pastors, their journeys to London and into pastorhood, while considering their ongoing efforts to (re)position themselves vis-à-vis the numerous social worlds they inhabit.

This paper draws on fieldwork in London beginning in 2009 and in Nairobi and Kiambu County, Kenya, in 2010. While my research initially focused on transnational reconfigurations of relatedness, including the role Pentecostalism plays in generating and managing such changes, my research has, since 2014, focused on Kenyan-initiated Pentecostal churches in London and the myriad ways in which faith infuses the lives of migrant Kenyans there. Fieldwork entailed attending weekly services, fellowship meetings, and conferences; participating in church activities; ongoing conversations

with pastors and congregants; and spending time outside of church with pastors, congregants, and their families. I have known the pastors whose stories I relate here since I first began fieldwork in London, which has afforded me a privileged perspective on their spiritual careers. At the same time, the analysis also draws on research with additional pastors in London and Nairobi.

### **Mobility and social becoming in Kenya and beyond**

The entwinement of physical and social mobility and, thus, social becoming in Kenya has a long history. While livelihoods and mobility were linked prior to colonization, the British colonial administration's need for labour power demanded ever more mobility (Berman & Lonsdale 1992). Men circulated between their work in settled towns and their families in the 'African reserves'. From the 1950s onward, many embarked on rural-urban migration to meet their families' needs and fulfil their aspirations. Yet the late 1980s and 1990s, a period marked by increasing political, economic, and social uncertainty, challenged this strategy of accumulation and self and familial betterment. Whether from middle- or working-class backgrounds, men coming of age at the time were eager to reach social maturity, to marry, establish households, and start families. Yet they faced rising school fees and limited employment opportunities, which prevented them from embarking on or completing their secondary education and/or securing sustainable livelihoods. Much of the work that was available was informal and low paid, such as selling goods (e.g. second-hand clothes and food) or services (e.g. barbering or driving taxis), which would not enable them to fulfil gendered expectations of providing for large families (Frederiksen 2002). In other words, the situation thwarted their aspirations for social becoming (Frederiksen 2002; Prince 2006).

With traditional paths to social maturity increasingly inaccessible, these men began to look beyond Kenya to secure their futures. Going abroad has long been alluring, linked as it is to social status. During the colonial era and through the 1970s, those who travelled to the United Kingdom often did so to pursue their studies. Many of those students returned to Kenya, becoming part of the struggle for independence and, later, members of the government and business elite (Okoth 2003). During the 1990s, Kenyans in their late teens and twenties began migrating to London in the hope of finding stable livelihoods and realizing their aspirations.<sup>1</sup>

### **Christianity, status, and mobility**

Just as colonialism contributed to the intertwining of physical and social mobility, so too did Christianity. Catholic, Anglican, and Presbyterian missionaries, among others, established missions during the colonial era, their presence representing a world beyond Kenya. Identifying education as a key means of conversion, missionaries founded numerous schools (Anderson 1970), and formal education began to (re)shape people's aspirations for the future. Historian Kenda Mutongi quotes one mother as saying, 'You sent your son to the new school because you wanted him to make enough money, to be seen as someone with *maendeleo* [civilization] and speak English like an Englishman' (2007: 106). Education reinforced the linkages between physical and social mobility, as those who received educations migrated into urban areas to find the kinds of jobs for which they had been educated.

Over time, Christianity became a vector and idiom through which intergenerational differences were expressed. For example, the confluence of religion and education challenged the *mbari*(sub-clan)-based authority of Kikuyu elders, which was

traditionally rooted in their mastery of their own landed households. According to John Lonsdale (1996), conflicts began to arise during the 1920s and 1930s between male Kikuyu-speaking elders and younger men like Johnstone (Jomo) Kenyatta over what were considered legitimate sources of authority: authority grounded in local, landed, and oral reputation versus authority afforded by the wider reach of print communication. In 1928, Kenyatta founded *Muigwithania* (Kikuyu for the reconciler), the journal of the Kikuyu Central Association (a young Christian party), which gave him a platform from which to speak. Lonsdale suggests that, during this time, to assume a position of authority among Kikuyus, Kenyatta had to overcome his image as a 'prodigal son'; his moral failings lay in his being 'a reader, his Christian disobedience as a politician, and his insolence as a literate opposition member' (1996: 24). The specific historical moment facilitated Kenyatta's successful transition from prodigal son to defender of Kikuyus: to protect their collective interests in the face of British colonial incursions, Kikuyus needed the literate among them who could understand the bureaucratic mechanisms and practices of the colonial government, such as keeping minutes of meetings (Lonsdale 1996: 36). In seizing this power, Kenyatta helped to reconfigure the system of generational authority, using Christianity to legitimize challenges to social obligation.

Since the colonial era, Christianity has offered a means of travelling abroad. Mainline mission churches have long histories of sending Africans to the United Kingdom and elsewhere for theological and other training (Harper 2006; Killingray 1994). The 1980s and early 1990s saw Pentecostal churches surge in popularity (Gifford 2009), and it is through Pentecostal networks that both a slightly older generation of men (those born in the 1960s) travelled abroad, as well as a few of my interlocutors. The difference between these two generations, however, was that the older men left with the intention of returning, like the brother-in-law of one interlocutor who trained in Sweden in the 1980s, at the invitation of Swedish evangelical Christians, before returning to Nairobi to found a church. However, in the face of growing uncertainty in Kenya in the 1990s, this kind of circular migration gave way as the decade progressed. Although religion did not play an instrumental role in the migration of most Kenyans I met in London, it has been, as we will see, central to their lives post-migration.

### Arrival in London

In migrating to the United Kingdom, some Kenyan men continued their studies, but expensive fees meant that many had to set aside their education. Others migrated to work with the aim of earning enough money to return eventually to Kenya. Yet the available jobs were low-wage ones in the cleaning, caring, security, and hospitality sectors, reflecting London's segregated labour market, particularly in relation to migrants (Wills *et al.* 2010). Though they initially saw the available jobs in a positive light, they realized that their low wages made it difficult to support themselves, much less meet their obligations to those in Kenya (Fesenmyer 2016). Along with demoralizing experiences of racialization, they found such employment incommensurate with their expectations; ironically, such jobs also threatened to consign them to a fate they believed they had left behind in Kenya.

Because getting out of Kenya was considered the achievement, these men had not given much thought to how long they would stay. The reality of low-wage work, coupled with high living costs, meant that surviving, much less thriving, would be difficult. Compounding this economic precarity was uncertainty regarding their legal

status. They had entered the country on student, visitor, and temporary work visas. Yet their arrival coincided with increasingly restrictive immigration laws intended to limit routes to regularizing their status in the United Kingdom and to obtaining permanent residency. The reality of their daily struggles in London contrasted sharply with the lives those in Kenya imagined they led, awash in opportunity and possibility.

### **Pentecostalism and its gendered appeal**

Though born into the mainline Christian denominations of their parents, Kenyans in London largely attend Pentecostal churches. When I first began doing fieldwork in London in 2009, there were thirty-one Kenyan-initiated churches in the United Kingdom, with over half located in London. Kenyan-born pastors lead these largely independent neo-Pentecostal churches, along with one or more junior pastors responsible for such areas as youth, music, media, and street outreach.<sup>2</sup> The congregations range in size from 20 to 250 members, with most at the lower end of the spectrum. Young families predominate, though most congregations include older members; believers from other East and Southern African countries and, occasionally, from Britain and elsewhere also attend services. Services are conducted entirely in English, as are the praise and worship sessions. In addition to Sunday services, churches often hold fellowship meetings, choir practice, youth groups, and bible study during the week. Being part of a Pentecostal church can thus absorb members' time outside of work.

Much of the attraction to Pentecostalism can be found in how it offers believers the means to make sense of their struggles. It encourages an understanding of religion as a personal relationship with God, a special, intimate bond between each believer and a caring, forgiving God; such a relationship takes on added significance in the context of migration, where believers often contend with myriad challenges as they try to build lives in a new setting. Meanwhile, the 'prosperity gospel' promises material wealth and physical well-being to those who accept Jesus Christ as their personal saviour. Adherents are bolstered by the belief that, if they lead good Christian lives, their futures will be secure. Unlike the extravagant lifestyles often associated with the gospel, however, its promise for those in London is understood in more modest terms: physical health, a 'good' marriage and family, material comfort, and continuing spiritual growth. Coupled with this spiritual appeal are the religiously inflected seminars and trainings that churches offer to facilitate members' future success in employment, entrepreneurship, marriage, and parenting.

Pentecostals' belief that they are God's children helps them to re-narrativize their lives such that they come to see themselves as having the power to change their own circumstances and the wider context(s) in which they live. In proposing a new way of being in the world, Pentecostalism provides an alternative means of social becoming that takes gendered forms. In the literature on Pentecostalism and gender, the theme of empowerment and liberation, of not being the victim of circumstances or others' actions, is prevalent in women's testimonies (Cole 2012; Mate 2002). In contrast, men's testimonies emphasize how becoming born-again helps them to develop a clear focus in life and cultivate self-control (Lindhardt 2015; van Klinken 2012). Central to Pentecostal notions of masculinity is the image of men as husbands and fathers. With the family as the basic building block of a community, men are encouraged to take seriously their role as the heads of their families and to provide their children with a morally stringent upbringing (see Maier & Coleman 2011). Kenyan Pentecostal men contrast this ideal



image with their perceptions of men in the United Kingdom. They are highly critical of fathers who are morally lax and, even more so, of absentee fathers who deprive their children of male role models. Notably, their testimonies convey pasts reminiscent of the (perceived) lives of their ('Godless') British counterparts, ones filled with drinking, smoking, fighting, and the fathering of children outside marriage.

Becoming born-again entails, in Birgit Meyer's (1998) terms, 'breaking from [such] pasts'. The testimony of Pastor Tom shared during a service helpfully illustrates this 'break'.<sup>3</sup> The story of his 'dark' past began with his self-description as a 'drug addict, womanizer, and jailbird'. He was 'beaten several times, so badly you couldn't recognize me . . . Then I found God. God loves and accepts me regardless of my past'. He described how he went 'from grass to grace', a journey illustrated with before-and-after photos which showed him first with long dreadlocks and dishevelled clothes and then as a smartly besuited man with a shaved head in various loving poses with his wife.

The ideal of men as heads of their families resonates with traditional ideals of masculinity in Kenya. The ability to contribute to the wider community, to be 'an upright member of society', traditionally hinged on starting a family and managing one's own household (Kershaw 1973: 47; Lonsdale 2003). In relation to Kikuyus, Lonsdale writes that mastery of one's 'own home' could be considered the sternest test of one's 'self-mastering moral agency (*wiathi*)' (1996: 19). However, as much as Pentecostal Kenyans continue to uphold these values, they take serious moral exception to the historical practice of polygyny and more contemporary practices of men having multiple relationships simultaneously (Silberschmidt 2005). For Pentecostals, the ideal marriage is a partnership based on gender complementarity, which, as I describe later, is important to a successful pastoral career. Pentecostal thought likens a married couple to a single person where the man is the head and the woman is the neck or the rest of the body supporting him (Mate 2002). Couples are encouraged to work together as a team to raise their families and fulfil their promise as God's children.

At the same time, these marital partnerships are not thought to undermine men's masculinity. Respecting one's wife, along with being faithful and monogamous, is portrayed as requiring great strength and determination, rather than as evidence of weakness, subservience, or emasculation. Marriage classes, for example, encourage couples to have active sex lives, which allows men to channel their sexual desires into their marriages. In this way, they reconcile two competing discourses on ('African') masculinity: they are both 'real' men with strong sexual appetites *and* responsible men with self-control (Spronk 2014: 512-13). Similarly, men's ability to listen and be attentive to their wives is a skill to be honed through diligent, sincere effort. In the words of one pastor,

It is the responsibility of men to learn how to treat their wives until they are radiant . . . If your wife is always excessively tired she will not radiate that brilliance which a man desires from a wife. This calls for a man to break any cultural limitations that prohibits him from placing his finger on [and helping with] the chores.<sup>4</sup>

While other religious traditions propound many of the same values, the key difference is that Pentecostal men actively cultivate themselves to be 'new' men.<sup>5</sup> During weekly fellowship meetings and at periodic retreats, and in their daily lives, men grapple with the challenges and setbacks they confront in their ongoing efforts to do so.

As Pentecostals, these men distinguish themselves from their British counterparts and from traditional gender ideals, which they deem 'backward' and 'cultural'. At the



same time, they embrace selected traditions, which helps to ensure their recognizability to non-Pentecostal Kenyans and ‘celebrates [and maintains] their culture’ in the face of increasing hostility toward migrants in Britain. And they adopt what might be understood as middle-class British values regarding being a ‘good’ spouse and father. In doing so, they seek to reposition themselves as morally superior vis-à-vis the United Kingdom and Kenya, rather than accepting their status as racialized ethnic minorities from a geopolitically weak country.

### **Calling and career: pastorhood as spiritual entrepreneurship**

Though one is called to become a pastor, being a pastor must be worked at diligently, and there are various paths of progression, not unlike those for non-religious careers. In what follows, I explore pastorhood as a form of spiritual entrepreneurship that combines aspects of calling and career (Lauterbach 2015; 2017; van Dijk 1992). In his work on religious leadership among Pentecostal-charismatic leaders in Zambia, Thomas Kirsch highlights a tension in Max Weber’s definition of charisma: ‘a special quality of an individual’s personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities’ (Weber 1968: 48, cited in Kirsch 2014: 48; see also Lauterbach 2017: 99). Charisma is at once about the personal characteristics of a person *and* about the recognition of that person as a ‘leader’ by others, thus drawing attention to the relational and contingent nature of pastorhood. Such an understanding of Pentecostal pastorhood is consistent with both scholarly and experiential understandings of being Pentecostal as an ongoing project which is always at risk of being compromised.

At the same time, pastors must be ‘bold’.<sup>6</sup> As a male lay leader explained to me, ‘Pastors are rebels. They break away from what’s there . . . They need to stand their ground’. Pentecostal pastors do not need formal theological training, though many I know have credentials, ranging from diplomas to Master’s degrees (see Lauterbach 2017: 103–10; Nieswand 2010). With no standardized path to promotion, nor a central authority to confer their position upon them, Pentecostal pastorhood is seemingly accessible. What is needed, however, is a ‘call’ to serve God, which might happen through a vision or a dream, through God talking to them or sending a sign. A calling must be substantiated by the ongoing recognition of others, but this reliance on recognition also contributes to the instability of pastors’ status.

With the mention of career and entrepreneurship, it is necessary to comment on the relationship between pastorhood and livelihood. Though most pastors would like to dedicate themselves to their congregations full-time, it is not easy to do so because they are not salaried employees like their mainline counterparts. Initially at least, those called to serve God do so as ‘tent’ pastors, relying on income generated through outside employment.<sup>7</sup> Many strive to run their own businesses, though only a few have (thus far) succeeded in doing so. Another source of ‘income’ is the money and gifts congregants give pastors: for example, after they have been healed or as a gesture when someone in the pastor’s household becomes ill or dies. Pastors also rely on their wives’ incomes from nursing, teaching, administrative, and caring work.

Given the centrality of the family to Pentecostal ideals, it is worth noting the role of marriage in pastoral careers. The prosperity gospel holds marriage to be a blessing and, as such, it is important that pastors are themselves blessed with ‘good’ marriages if congregants are to believe these men have the power to effect blessings in their lives. At the same time, pastors’ effectiveness as role models rests in part on their relatability.

By sharing their own experiences of marital tensions regarding parenting, finances, or household duties, they express empathy for men, while also offering guidance on how to overcome such difficulties. Moreover, wives play crucial roles in supporting their pastor husbands, serving as 'test' audiences for their services, organizing women-only conferences, and advising women congregants.

I want now to give some idea of the spiritual careers of three men and their journeys to becoming Pentecostal pastors in London. Like most Pentecostal pastors I met, these men were 'called' while in their thirties. Married to Kenyan-born women, they are from various parts of central Kenya. Unlike many migrant African pastors in Europe, they are not from middle-class, professional families (Burgess 2009; Nieswand 2010). Their socio-demographic similarities notwithstanding, the sketches I provide are situated along several axes of difference. They include a man who got saved as an adult and whose pastorhood was 'thrust' upon him, compared with two men who accepted Jesus as teenagers and whose callings mark less of a 'break from the past' than a continuity. While each man leads his own church, their churches range from large and thriving to struggling.

### *Pastor Stephen*

I met Pastor Stephen in summer 2009. When he heard I was a doctoral student at Oxford University, he immediately invited me to speak at a career event for young people at his church. His forthrightness, I would quickly learn, was central to his entrepreneurial approach to pastorhood and to his ability to grow his church to be among the largest in London. Raised in a Kiambu village, Pastor Stephen migrated to London in the mid-1990s. Having left school early in Kenya, he found shift work as a security guard like many of his male peers in London. Though born into Catholicism and leading what he has described as a 'Godless life', he joined a Kenyan-initiated Pentecostal church in the early 2000s and, almost immediately, became an usher, a lay position of leadership.

When the church's senior pastor learned he would not be able to renew his visa to stay in the United Kingdom, the church unexpectedly found itself without a leader. Pastor Stephen initially resisted God's call to step in: 'I wanted to just continue going to church as Brother Stephen'. By that time, he had established a security business and was enjoying being his own boss. But he recounted how a visiting woman pastor started referring to him as 'Bishop'. Both he and his wife did not know how to respond, but she insisted, saying that God had told her Pastor Stephen was 'her (spiritual) father'.<sup>8</sup> Pastor Stephen prayed on the situation, asking for God's guidance, and eventually relented. During this time of flux, the church's congregation had shrunk, so Pastor Stephen faced the daunting task of growing it. The church's eventual acquisition of a building was taken as evidence of God's blessing over Pastor Stephen and the church (Fesenmyer forthcoming). Never one to be satisfied with past successes, Pastor Stephen has an ambitious vision for the church that includes acquiring a larger space and starting a homeless shelter and a school.

### *Pastor Edward*

The second born of four children, Pastor Edward was raised an Anglican in a Kiambu village. During a revival meeting in the early 1990s, a teenage Edward accepted Jesus. Though local Pentecostals encouraged him to attend their services, God told him to remain in the Anglican church and do something for his peers, who, like him, felt dismissed by their elders. His story of becoming born-again thus has more to do with a

desire to deepen his relationship with God than a desire to break with a sinful past, as in Pastor Stephen's case. Like Kenyatta's story, in which religion facilitated his acquisition of status, Pastor Edward's testimony gestures towards the continually changing relations between elder and junior men and the ways in which religion is implicated in and expressive of generational dynamics.

In 1995, Pastor Edward migrated to London to study medicine, but found he could not afford the fees beyond the first year. In describing his calling, he detailed the 'freedoms' confronting his peers: having no one to answer to, drinking, and dating. He saw a 'spiritual gap' in their lives and felt 'called to step into the void'; those who knew of his experience as an Anglican youth leader substantiated his calling. In the early 2000s, he and his wife launched a church in East London to what seemed like great enthusiasm, but subsequent services were sparsely attended. Pastor Edward remarked to me, 'I had a calling, but how you do it and how God wants you to do it are two different things'. After moving to a suburban area, they re-established the church there. With about fifty members, it is a 'community' church focused on spiritual and pastoral issues, and Pastor Edward, who has the 'heart of a shepherd', is focused on his members' well-being. Besides embarking on further theological studies, he (re)trained as a counsellor after being made redundant from his social service job; his doing so allows him to serve God and his congregation more fully, while providing a new livelihood. Pastor Edward does not have the entrepreneurial zeal to expand his church as Pastor Stephen continues to do, nor, as we will see, does he travel widely to preach like Pastor William does.

### *Pastor William*

Pastor William was called to 'spread the good news' as a teenager more than twenty years ago. Growing up in a large polygamous family in central Kenya, he described the period before getting saved as a 'dark time', during which his mother brewed spirits in their homestead. Unlike Pastor Stephen, Pastor William's 'break from the past' entailed distancing himself from his parents and extended family, rather than giving up his own vices. With the help of a missionary family he met in Kenya, he, like men of earlier generations, migrated to the United Kingdom in the late 1990s to study theology.

Once in London, he embarked on his pastoral career under the guidance of a senior pastor at a West African-initiated Pentecostal church. This kind of apprenticeship is not uncommon among pastors, affording them the opportunity to learn on the job, while garnering recognition via their relationship with an established pastor (Lauterbach 2017).<sup>9</sup> Alongside his developing spiritual career, he, too, worked in security like Pastor Stephen, but eventually devoted himself to preaching in the United States, Kenya, and elsewhere in Europe with the (financial) support of his wife Edith, who worked as a carer. Over the years I have known the pastor and his family, they have consistently – and somewhat unusually in my fieldwork – engaged me in conversations about my religious beliefs. This explicit concern with my spiritual well-being, I have come to understand, reflects Pastor William's evangelistic zeal.

A few years ago, Pastor William and his wife were called to 'stand their ground' and start a church. Alongside this call, Pastor William continued serving God through evangelizing. Since the founding of their church, however, membership has shrunk, prompting the couple to question their calling. Pastor Edith said during one service, 'I wanted to let go of my role as pastor and return to being Sister Edith. Being a pastor is hard, staying true to your calling and not faltering when everything seems to be going against you'. While Pastor William's dedication to God is lengthier than that of the other

pastors, it has not (yet) translated into a larger congregation, like Pastor Edward's, or a permanent place of worship, as in Pastor Stephen's case.

### **Maintaining status: rivalry in the spiritual marketplace**

'Spiritual careers' afford pastors recognition and entail opportunities for personal growth, but they also include tests of faith that can cause them to question their calling and undermine their status. One arena in which such opportunities and tests play out is in relation to congregation size. Not unlike businesses, churches are expected to grow because it is a sign of their success in spreading the Word of God and 'saving souls'. But how they grow can be a subject of scrutiny.

While it is common for pastors to invite well-known pastors and bishops from Kenya and other non-Kenyan (typically white British) religious leaders to minister to their congregations, this practice also extends to inviting other local pastors. Doing so reflects well on a pastor because it demonstrates his (transnational) connections and, through these 'strategies of extraversion', he can consolidate his leadership position (Bayart 2000: 262; cf. Englund 2003: 95). However, such occasions carry the risk that their members may decide to join the church of a visiting pastor. Since no pastor wants to be known for 'poaching', the movement of members between churches is a delicate subject. Pastor Simon, a pastor of a small congregation, shared with me an instance when a woman from another church approached him:

It was tricky. I had led an overnight vigil at her church, and she asked me, 'Where is your church? I want to follow you'. I had to be straight with her pastor and tell him what happened. That's the only way to handle it. Poaching happens, but it isn't supposed to.

In such cases, how then do pastors explain the movement of believers between Pentecostal churches?

Pentecostals believe that everyone has a 'unique gift' which is important to cultivate in serving God, and pastors are no exception. Some are good at healing, others at addressing family issues, and still others at prayer. Pastor Stephen explained it to me in terms of the five-fold ministry outlined in the Epistle to the Ephesians: God needs apostles to govern, evangelists to gather, pastors to guard, teachers to ground, and prophets to guide. Thinking of the pastors whose stories I just related, Pastor Stephen, with his far-reaching vision for the church, can be likened to an apostle, while Pastor William is an evangelist called to spread the Word of God and Pastor Edward is a shepherd guarding his flock. Pastors rationalize why members leave their churches with reference to their rival's 'unique gifts' and, by implication, a member's spiritual needs, while emphasizing that belief in God matters more than which church someone attends.

However, when faced with challenges, pastors often acknowledge tests of their calling. For example, Pastor Edward saw his first effort to launch a church falter when few people turned up for its services, while Pastor William has watched his congregation shrink. As I have discussed elsewhere (Fesenmyer forthcoming), Pastor Stephen faced daunting obligations that stem from being responsible for a building. The pastors maintain that these 'tests' have reinforced their belief that 'God's time is the best time', meaning that their churches will grow and flourish when God is ready to open a pathway for them to do so. In other words, their experiences have renewed their faith in God. Each draws on a processual understanding of being Pentecostal to legitimate and neutralize these sorts of challenges and setbacks.

At the same time, growth of the kind I have been talking about arises from what Kenyan Pentecostals refer to as 'church migration': that is, those who are already saved and attending one Pentecostal church 'migrate' to another one. In contrast, 'church growth' refers to the growth that arises when people accept Jesus, thus expanding the ranks of the 'saved'. Since most churches where I conducted fieldwork rarely had new converts, 'church migration' is the norm, not the exception.<sup>10</sup> In an effort to keep 'poaching' in check, how a church grows becomes a subject of subtle criticism. The pastors in question may deflect such criticism: for example, by shifting attention to those who move. Since moving between churches is a well-known phenomenon, if not also the personal experience of many, intimations suffice to make the point that the reason reflects a given believer's spiritual seeking, rather than the pastor's (spiritual) shortcomings. The migration of members, whatever the reason, nonetheless highlights the contingent nature of recognition and, thus, the instability of a pastor's status.

### **Displaying status vis-à-vis British and Kenyan societies**

If pastors struggle for status and recognition amongst themselves and vis-à-vis their congregants and prospective members, they also do so vis-à-vis British and Kenyan societies. Erving Goffman's (1990 [1959]) notion of impression management is helpful for considering pastors' navigation of expectations – of pastors, (African) migrants, and (black) men – and the challenges arising from (the convergence of) these expectations in Britain and Kenya. Impression management refers to how people seek to convey an 'appropriate' impression based on what they perceive to be 'correct' for a given setting; this might entail over- or under-stating their social status in relation to others in unclear situations, as well as competing for status superiority or deceiving others (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 203–30).

In a British context, ironically, immigration provides an arena in which these pastors can gain recognition. In immigration and asylum cases, it is common to invite witnesses to attest to a person's character, and pastors are ideal choices to do so. In acting as brokers bridging the worlds of Kenyan Pentecostals and British immigration authorities, pastors present themselves as men of stature and authority on a par with British-born Christian leaders. They assert their (undocumented) congregants to be in Mattia Fumanti's terms (2010) 'virtuous citizens' on the basis of their being 'good' Christians. In doing so, they extend their recognizable Christian-ness and status as pastors to their co-nationals. Their testimony as men of God takes on added significance at a time marked by worries about fraudulent immigration claims.

However, such affirming instances are relatively rare compared to pastors' everyday experiences. Part of what contributes to the instability of their status vis-à-vis British society, I would suggest, is that their status is not literally visible. Since most pastors are not ordained, they do not, for example, wear clerical collars, the clearest marker of being a Christian leader. Additionally, because many pastors are employed in other capacities – they are also teachers, administrators, and security guards, for example – their multi-faceted public personas can give rise to situations of what Erving Goffman (1990 [1959]) refers to as status inconsistency: that is, they are employed in relatively low-status, if not also low-wage and, in some cases, emasculating, occupations while also occupying a socially valued status as pastors. For example, Pastor William described an incident that occurred while he was working as a security guard. A young boy from a nearby council estate whom he had gotten to know called him an 'asylum seeker' and told him to go 'home'. Though only a child, his comments reflect the kinds of

hostile sentiments that the pastor has encountered elsewhere. Moreover, because Pastor William was raised to respect his (male) elders, he experienced the encounter as an affront to his position as an older man relative to the boy. His status as a pastor does not insulate him from anti-migrant abuse or translate into every setting in which he finds himself. Pastors like William must navigate contexts in which their status is not readily visible and thus not recognized.

If migrant pastors' experiences of status inconsistency arise locally, they also emerge in the Kenyan context. There, however, the precarity of pastors' status rests on their (in)ability to perform pastorhood in ways that satisfy local social expectations of pastors, as well as of migrants and men. The pressure migrants feel to display their successes during visits to Kenya is well documented: they seek to live up to expectations, even to show off, and, in doing so, fuel idealizing imaginings of life abroad as superior to life 'back home' (Carling 2008; Nieswand 2011). In practice, in Kenya, they fulfil such expectations by dressing in fashionable clothes, giving gifts to a wide circle of family and friends, and fielding various requests for assistance. Men arguably feel the latter expectations more profoundly because of the cultural expectation that they should provide for their families; this expectation, coupled with their physical presence in Kenya, allows their relatives to exert gendered pressure in the hope they will comply (see Coe 2011; Fesenmyer 2016). When migrant men are also Pentecostal pastors, expectations are even higher. The belief that, as born-again Christians, they have a 'right to the blessings of health and wealth won by Christ' means that pastors, who mediate between the spiritual and material worlds, should enjoy God's gifts in abundance (Gifford 1998: 39). Taken together, imaginings of migrants, of pastors, and of men mean that expectations of these pastors are very high, as are the risks to their status.

Concerns about impression management emerge, for example, regarding the question of where a pastor and his family should stay during visits to Kenya. The issue of accommodation taps into not only expectations of migrants and of pastors, but also gendered customary practices. In common with other migrant men of their generation, they did not have their own houses when they left Kenya. Though a few have purchased plots of land, none currently own houses there. Even if it was feasible to stay with their parents, custom dictates that they should not do so (Evans-Pritchard 1950; Spronk 2012: 194-5). If, at adolescence, boys are expected to move out of their parents' house, then a pastor and his family should certainly not stay there. Evangelizing pastors like William navigate these gendered expectations by travelling alone to Kenya at the invitation of other pastors. But when travelling with their families, pastors must arrange alternative accommodation. They might stay in a hotel, but that, too, can be fraught since it should be a 'nice' (i.e. respectable) hotel. Because hotels in Nairobi are intended for (foreign) visitors to the capital, they tend to be expensive. Ideally, they would stay with (expatriate) better-off friends or acquaintances. When Pastor Simon and his family visit Kenya, they rely on their international Pentecostal networks and stay with American missionary friends in an upscale estate in Nairobi. In most cases, however, pastors, like other male migrants, delay travelling until they can save enough money to cover the added expense of accommodation and to satisfy expectations that they are successful men.

These instances of navigation and negotiation in the name of impression management illustrate the delicacy of performing simultaneously their status as pastors, as migrants, and as men, whether in London or in Kenya. While pastoring is a calling, it is not necessarily a lucrative livelihood strategy. Yet, because it is perceived as such,



particularly in Kenya, pastors must balance these potentially incommensurable aspects of their lives. In London, the situation is different in that they are not presumed to be wealthy men of any stature. Rather, as Pastor William's experience illustrates, they are more likely to be received with hostility or simply indifference. Thus, they face high expectations in Kenya which they often struggle to fulfil, whereas in London they experience contradictions arising, at once, from being pastors, a generally well-regarded position, and African migrants, who (may) face racism and xenophobia.

## Conclusion

To conclude, I have situated pastors' spiritual career trajectories within the wider migration projects of their (male) generation. Faced with a gendered crisis of social becoming in Kenya, they migrated to London, only to find their predicament exacerbated by low-wage employment and legal precarity. They (re)turned to faith, though not to the mainline Christian churches of their upbringings; rather, they embraced Pentecostalism with its forgiving God and empowering values, discourses, and practices. In being 'called' to serve God, these pastors acquired a position that is held in high esteem in Kenya and socially valued in the United Kingdom. The description of Pentecostal pastors as 'rebels' can thus be read multiply as a generational break from their parents and elders and from the authority of mainline churches, as well as a reframing of their seeming social marginalization.

If pastorhood is divinely bestowed, it is also socially produced. Pastors cultivate selected values and practices and shun others, encouraging their male members to do the same. More specifically, I have shown how their practices of boundary-drawing include condemning some traditional practices and particular British gendered practices. They resemble neither their polygynous forebears nor their feckless British peers. Meanwhile, their self-identification as family men and providers resonates across space, contributing to their ongoing recognizability. Moreover, in showing that pastors also face tests, I have described ways in which they are similar to male lay members of their congregations. Pastors serve as role models for a new kind of man – expressive, responsible, and attentive – one who is set apart from, but also recognizable in and by, British and Kenyan societies, similar yet different, and superior. Through the stories and experiences of these men who have become pastors, religion emerges as a 'site of action', to use Ruth Marshall's phrase, for migrant Kenyan men more generally as they navigate multiple social worlds.

When viewed in relation to the wider population of migrant men in the United Kingdom, many of whom are not Christian, Pentecostal pastorhood emerges as an unexpected means of status acquisition. Rather than understanding their callings in instrumental terms and, thus, their status as pastors in compensatory ones, however, I have argued that the religious change these men have undergone since migrating constitutes a 'mode of transformation', which affords them a valorized self-understanding and enables them to (re)position themselves socially and morally (Marshall 2009: 34). Nonetheless, I have also shown the limits of their calling as pastors and born-again identities to insulate them from everyday indignities and difficulties in London, where Christianity has been in decline for the last three decades (Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life 2015: 15). Such status inconsistencies arise there in ways they presumably do not in predominantly Christian Ghana where Lauterbach's pastors live and preach, thus necessitating ongoing impression management for their British-based counterparts.



While exploring pastorhood as a path to social becoming in the context of migration, I have also revealed the complexity of these men's new status. Thinking in terms of how gendered subject positions are reproduced and/or transformed through transnational migration, their predicament adds complexity to Boris Nieswand's notion of the 'status paradox': that is, the interaction between opportunity structures for the transnational transfer of resources and the challenge of converting material and symbolic resources earned in one socio-spatial context into social status in another (2011: 124-5). In line with Nieswand's definition, which emphasizes the context dependency of wealth, these pastors experience a status paradox between London and Kenya, but their predicament is also more complicated. Pastorhood, I have suggested, amplifies the (material) expectations of those in Kenya such that pastors may experience a status paradox there as well – they are not wealthy enough. Meanwhile, in London, the intersection of their multiple subject positions generates its own paradoxes. Thus, we see how migration and religion, separately and together, shape the lives of Pentecostal pastors locally, in Kenya, and transnationally.

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Of various ethnic backgrounds, including Kikuyu, Luo, Kamba, and Luhya, they moved from working- and middle-class estates and informal settlements in Nairobi. Many also migrated from Kiambu County, a historically Kikuyu-speaking area adjacent to Nairobi.

<sup>2</sup> In contrast to Nigeria, for example, Kenya does not have well-known churches with extensive transnational networks. In the words of Pastor William, whose pastoral career is discussed later, none of the churches in Kenya are 'brands'. This has two implications: pastors do not generally go abroad with their churches, and almost all the Kenyan-initiated churches in London are independent.

<sup>3</sup> All names are pseudonyms; in a few selected instances, other potentially identifying details, which do not have analytical relevance, have been altered to ensure anonymity.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.misterseed.com/familyrebuild/familyrebuild2008.html> (accessed 3 October 2013; no longer posted).

<sup>5</sup> Notably, this kind of (gendered) self-cultivation is evident in other religious traditions, particularly Islam (e.g. Janson 2009).

<sup>6</sup> In working with a Ghanaian Pentecostal pastor in Germany, Boris Nieswand also encountered the term 'bold', which his interlocutor used to describe the disposition pastors needed if they were to grow their churches. There, as in London, a pastor's 'boldness' is an 'indicator of the divine immanent in his activities' (2010: 50).

<sup>7</sup> The term comes from the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, who supported himself through making tents (Acts 18), but also refers to pastors in Kenya who preach in tents, while gathering the resources to obtain a more permanent structure.

<sup>8</sup> The reference to a 'spiritual father' invokes the kind of spiritual hierarchies which are central to how Pentecostals, including pastors and more senior figures, relate to one another.

<sup>9</sup> The pastor was Nigerian, not Kenyan; at that time, there were no senior Kenyan pastors in London under whom he could train, had he wanted to do so.

<sup>10</sup> 'Church migration' occurs not only between Kenyan-initiated churches, but also includes movement from these churches to other African-initiated churches and to a Nairobi-based mainline church with a branch in London.

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## **Le pastorat pentecôtiste comme vocation et comme carrière : migration, religion et masculinité entre le Kenya et le Royaume-Uni**

### *Résumé*

Le présent article explore l'imbrication entre migration et religion dans la vie d'hommes migrants, nés au Kenya et devenus pasteurs pentecôtistes à Londres. À partir de la carrière spirituelle de plusieurs pasteurs, l'auteure suggère que l'on peut appréhender le pastorat comme un moyen genré de mobilité sociale. En tant que pasteurs, ces hommes parviennent à un statut intelligible socialement et culturellement, à Londres comme au Kenya. Dans le même temps, parce que le statut dépend de la reconnaissance, l'article examine aussi la façon dont le pastorat aide à négocier les difficultés et les incohérences du vécu de ces hommes, par exemple la concurrence sur le marché de la religion et l'hostilité qu'ils rencontrent à Londres ou les grandes attentes de leurs proches au Kenya. Au lieu d'envisager la religion comme une compensation, l'auteure avance que le pentecôtisme offre un « site d'action », pour reprendre les mots de Ruth Marshall, dans lequel ces hommes peuvent se (re)construire comme des hommes « nouveaux » et se (re)positionner par rapport aux multiples mondes sociaux qu'ils habitent.

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