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Only (Dis-)Connect: Pentecostal Global Networking as Revelation and Concealment

Simon Coleman

Department for the Study of Religion, Jackman Humanities Building, University of Toronto, ON M5R 2M8, Canada; E-Mail: simon.coleman@utoronto.ca; Tel.: +1-416-978-4788; Fax: +1-416-978-1610

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Abstract: Contemporary forms of Pentecostalism, such as that of the Faith Movement, are often represented as inherently global, constituting a religion ‘made to travel’ and to missionize across the world. I argue that while much attention has been paid to proselytization as a catalyst in encouraging transnational activities among such Christians, more analysis is needed of how Pentecostalists represent each other in the construction of global imaginaries. The imagined and enacted networks that result assert connections between like-minded believers but also valorize the power of distance in the creation of landscapes of religious agency whose power is illustrated through such tropes as ‘number’, ‘mobility’, ‘presence’ and ‘conquest’. I juxtapose two Prosperity-oriented movements, that of the Swedish Word of Life and the Nigerian Redeemed Christian Church of God, to indicate further how Christians who appear to be conjoined via common forms of worship appear, from another perspective, to be inhabiting and moving across disjunct global landscapes and cartographies as they engage in very different forms of mobility.

Keywords: prosperity; health and wealth; pentecostalism; networks; Word of Life; Redeemed Christian Church of God; Sweden; Nigeria

1. Introduction

If the twentieth century was a time when globalization gained an increasingly prominent profile as a societal process and then as an analytical concept, it was also an era when Pentecostalism made its presence felt around the world. Global developments had been anticipated by forms of empire, colonialism and the industrial revolution, but the world-wide spread of spirit-filled forms of Christianity

from small-town Kansas and the slums of Los Angeles was rather less expected.¹ Pentecostal influence over the past century has both defied predictions of secularization and continued to grow into a world-wide phenomenon. Although the spread of this form of Christianity is clearly connected with both urban and industrial expansion (e.g., [2,3]), it cannot be dismissed as ‘mere’ mystification of underlying economic shifts [4–6]. Joel Robbins [7] argues that Pentecostalism now represents not only the most dynamic and fastest-growing sector of Protestant Christianity around the world, but also “one of the great success-stories of the current era of cultural globalization” [8]. Probably at least half a billion Pentecostal and charismatic believers exist around the world today, constituting between a quarter and a third of all the world’s Christians. Pentecostalism has not only gone global; it has also increasingly gone mainstream.

Academic responses to the globalization of Pentecostalism have become more apparent since the 1990s (e.g., [9–12]). Taking a demographic perspective, Philip Jenkins [13] sees it as contributing to a shift in the orientation and influence of Christendom towards the global South. If so, there are recurring elements in Pentecostal practice that seem to cross national and cultural boundaries with relative ease. Harvey Cox [14] perceives its basic patterns as residing not in any formal theological system but rather in “high amperage music, voluble praise, body movement, personal testimonies, sometimes ‘prayers in the spirit’, a sermon full of anecdotes... a period of intense prayers for healing”. He adds: “Almost instantly pentecostalism became Russian in Russia, Chilean in Chile, African in Africa.... It was a religion made to travel, and it seemed to lose nothing in the translation” ([14], p. 101). Other commentators agree on the sheer mobility of this form of Christianity but prefer to emphasize its frequent discontinuities with local contexts. In an influential piece, José Casanova characterizes it as “an uprooted local culture engaged in spiritual warfare with its own roots” [15]. This sense of articulation—but also strategic discontinuity—with already existing values is developed further by Robbins ([8], pp. 126–27), who stresses how Pentecostal and charismatic movements accept the reality of local cosmologies only to attack them, thus retaining indigenous categories but reversing their moral charge.

In this paper I explore themes related to discontinuity in ways that draw on but are also distinct from those suggested by Casanova or Robbins. I wish to highlight disconnections not merely with local culture, but also and more particularly *within* globalizing Pentecostal networks. Perhaps it seems counter-intuitive to talk of networks and disconnections within the same breath, but I hope that my reasoning will become clear. It is often acknowledged that Pentecostal practices tend to involve reference to and orientation towards non-Christian others assumed to be in need of mission and salvation; generally less often discussed (though see e.g., [16]) but still important is the rhetorical and visual invoking of Christians who are ‘like us’, fellow born-again who are separated by geographical distance and nationality but appear to subscribe to the same beliefs and forms of worship. Indeed, we might think of such images of ideological and ritual soulmates as being regularly brought “into presence” [17] not merely via mission and conference-going but also through photographs or films in

¹ The scholar of African religion, David Maxwell ([1], p. 18ff), is one of a number of scholars who have emphasized that Pentecostalism was transnational from its very beginnings. Debates over how ‘American’ the origins of the movement were are themselves symptomatic of the emphasis in this paper on the links between social and cultural capital and the ability to define the character of Pentecostal identity.

worship services, websites, social media, verbal narratives, and prayers. Robbins ([7], pp. 56–57) has referred recently to ways in which Pentecostal sociality is marked by “a high degree of mutual ritual performance” and the creation of an intersubjective sense of coordination of action. Indeed, he argues that such action has the potential to forge bonds of trust across boundaries of cultural or linguistic understanding ([7], p. 62).² However, I am more interested here in exploring the nature of the disjunctions that may exist between the frequent use of *images* of ritual and ideological association and the relative lack of actual encounters among ordinary believers. In this sense, representational continuity goes along with a kind of social discontinuity and lack of detailed mutual knowledge. My approach is meant to highlight what we might see as the flip side of making Pentecostal connections, the ways in which it involves both conscious as well as inadvertent forms of selectivity in the creation of a globally oriented (religious) culture, even when dealing with its own supporters. Thus we should be able to see how representations of global connectivity often involve metonymic, albeit often literally glancing, links between groups of Pentecostals whose imaginings and experiences of ‘the world’ reveal significance discontinuities as well as continuities.

In order to develop these themes I explore two instances of notable Pentecostal expansion that emerged most strongly in the 1980s and which are still active today. One is the Word of Life (*Livets Ord*)³ foundation, located in Uppsala, Sweden, but also something of a global ‘franchiser’ of allied congregations and Bible Schools. The other is the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), a Nigerian denomination that has become hugely prominent within its country of origin as well as through parishes that it has established around the world over the past two decades.⁴ One reason for juxtaposing these cases is the practical one that I have conducted fieldwork on both, but their inclusion can be justified on more coherent intellectual grounds. Both are generally regarded by commentators as well as members as global in orientation, but also as propagating forms of the Health and Wealth Gospel, a highly successful if often controversial variant of ‘neo-Pentecostalism’ that has emphasized the idea that possession of faith leads to physical and material prosperity. As Robbins notes, the Faith Movement (another name for such Christians) has had “striking success in parts of Europe, Africa, and Latin America” ([7], p. 122). Csordas [4], indeed, sees the Prosperity Gospel as providing a good example of a “transposable message”—one whose appeal can find its footing across diverse linguistic and cultural settings.

Word of Life and RCCG leaders attend some of the same conferences. Their followers occasionally buy books and CDs produced by the same preachers, or watch the same Christian satellite channels. Arguably, both organizations combine consciousness of a certain kind of peripherality in relation to other parts of the globe—the Word of Life as located far up in the secular North, and the RCCG as emerging from the economically and politically chaotic South—with ambitions to gain world-wide profiles as missionary forces. Yet, in line with my focus on the selectivities and discontinuities implied

² Of course, ritual performance, even when it includes a sermon, can under some circumstances contain a relatively impoverished amount of propositional meaning [18], thus providing one means to avoid overt verbal disagreements and conflicts.

³ I shall use ‘Word of Life’ rather than the Swedish term in this essay; both are in common use.

⁴ While the RCCG explicitly forms a denomination in its own right, the Word of Life’s association with its ‘franchised’ ministries is looser. Both organizations retain complex links with American Prosperity ministries: while influence from American preachers is evident, both are also forging an independent identity.

in making connections, what intrigues me in this paper are the gaps as well as the proximities between these two contributors to apparently the same, globally-oriented, neo-Pentecostal movement. Their proximities are largely created through demonstrably sharing certain idioms of worship and constructing landscapes of mission in broadly parallel ways; their distances by occupying radically different positions in relation to the complex political economy underlying transnational activity in the Faith Movement.

My approach takes us back to what I see as some of the ambiguities that surround practices of networking. Robbins ([8], p. 125) characterizes Pentecostal and charismatic modes of organization as inherently network-oriented, with far-flung populations held together by media production, conferences and travel, while also pointing to Gerlach and Hine's ([19]; see also [20]) original depiction of global Pentecostalism as reticulate and segmentary. Both the lack of a single, centralized authority and the creation of a "web-like structure of personal connections" (Robbins [8], p. 125) resonate with (and are a product of) Pentecostalism's distrust of static organizational structures. These features support Sebastian Schüler's claim [21] that transnationalism is inherently located in the Pentecostal imaginary, embedded in everyday religious practices including the use of virtual networks and the representation of global communities. Schüler draws on a combination of Henri Lefebvre and Homi Bhabha to argue that Pentecostals create a "third space" for the construction of identity, helping dense "rooms of action" to emerge from participation in Christian conferences, missionary operations, prayer chains, and so on ([21], p. 53). Thus Pentecostals may come to see themselves as "imagined migrants" across global or transnational landscapes.

On the other hand, in a methodological reflection on the globalization of religion and network analysis, Manuel Vásquez [22] points out that not all flows are created equal, and draws on Anna Tsing's [23] notion of "awkward engagement" to discuss restrictions in access to religious and other resources. The globe is "multiply gated" ([22], p. 167; see also [24]) through mobility regimes that permit only certain kinds of movement across borders, effectively blocking off some chains of connection and enabling others. Religious networks embody moral but also economic and political geographies, displaying differentials of power and forms of exclusion as well as inclusion. The kinds of globalization that they constitute must therefore be theorized in terms of social closure as well as openness ([22], pp. 169–72, 179; [25]). Vásquez's arguments resonate well with those of Doreen Massey [26] in her discussion of the "power-geometry" inherent in the differential ways in which social (ethnic, gendered, cultural, *etc.*) groups are placed in relation to the supposed flows of space-time compression. Such suggestions point to some of the forms of discontinuity that I wish to explore in this paper, as we reflect on disconnections that are created or at least experienced by believers in relation to local, secular culture but also with regard to other parts of the Pentecostal global landscape. In the following sections, therefore, I illustrate the ways in which the Word of Life and the RCCG form their respective religious imaginaries through both literal movements and representations of global connectivity, before exploring how or whether such imaginaries intersect or even acknowledge each other.

2. The Word of Life

When I published a small volume in the early 1990s on the controversy surrounding the emergence of the Word of Life in Uppsala [27], I happened to use the word "network" (*nätverk*) to describe the

collection of people—academics, journalists, concerned family members—who sometimes came together to protest about the activities of the ministry. My feelings were decidedly mixed when, soon after the volume’s publication, I was told that the head pastor of the Word of Life, Ulf Ekman, was quoting my use of the term when he used it to defend the actions of his ministry against what he presented as a united and powerful array—indeed a network—of opponents.

I probably should have predicted what would happen. Images of networks of various sorts had frequently cropped up as part of the critical storm that buffeted the group almost as soon as it was formed in the early 1980s. Most often, the Word of Life was depicted as contributing to a “hidden” (*dold*) and hyper-conservative constellation of para-church and politically-oriented groups, spread around the world and particularly North America. Some of these reports reminded me of the regular scare-stories that cropped up in the Swedish press about Soviet spy submarines being spotted in Baltic waters as they occasionally rose to the surface from murky depths. Both submarines and religious zealots conveyed a powerful sense of the presence of underlying foreign threats, secretly surrounding and then penetrating national boundaries. In the case of the Word of Life, society-wide, critical discourses about networks implied that there was much more to the ministry’s activities than met the eye: such critique combined allegations of concealment with the assertion that almost contagious connections existed among numerous threats to Swedish governance. One well-publicized book by a pastor in the relatively liberal Mission Covenant Church noted for instance that “with the para-church network...we see a strategy for the de-democratization of Swedish Christianity” [28].

One of the things that we discern in these debates is the emergence of a negative moral charge around the very notion of networking, indeed a moral panic not only about the impact of aggressive mission in a country renowned for its secularity, but also in relation to wider debates in Swedish society during the 1980s and 1990s over whether economic, political, and cultural processes of globalization were challenging older models of a stable society. The Word of Life was often taken to represent a threatening form of religion but also a negative embodiment of globality itself, associated with conservative politics and Americanized free-market ideologies as opposed to a long-standing if disintegrating Social Democratic ethos [11]. According to such a view, the ministry’s shape-shifting as expressed in the slippery form of a network seemed alien to the stolid and supposedly transparent institutions of Swedish society, including the long-established ‘classical’ Pentecostal Movement, which had survived controversial beginnings in the early years of the century to become a well-respected part of ecclesiastical and broader civic society. In response to such a national and local climate, Pastor Ekman’s deployment of my own use of the term “network” arguably performed a double discursive function, not only revealing the supposedly hidden cabal of enemies arrayed against him (and thus turning the sin of a lack of transparency back on to his critics), but also invoking the analytical tools of academic discourse to defend charismatic rhetoric.

Yet, while Word of Life members, in common with other Pentecostals and charismatics, have often produced elaborate depictions of the intertwined, hidden and diabolical forces undermining their work, they are also highly prone to invest reticulate connections with a more positive moral charge, to openly praise participation in them as essential to the work of reaching *out* to the unsaved and *across* to fellow believers. From the early days of the group, it seemed almost a fashion amongst enthusiastic young students to talk of how their vision was to “*starta eget*”, in other words to go to another part of the country or the world and to “found one’s own” congregation while retaining connections to the

mother-foundation in Uppsala—often using names with the tell-tale formula “Word of...”. Not all supporters have been able to start new congregations, of course.⁵ But this is not to say that a sense of the self as occupying the center of a ramifying network of contacts cannot be cultivated and broadcast through numerous means. For instance, the following quote—from a much more recent period—is taken from a lengthy discussion on a Word of Life blog, prompted by an original contribution by Ekman about the correct ways for a Christian to use money. A businessman who is also a Word of Life adherent notes:⁶

I decided a number of years ago to say a short prayer for every bill that I receive, and for everybody who is part of the trail that brings the bill to me, and then in turn for the people who receive the money. It’s a lot of people...people employed by the paper factory, office staff, postal staff, bankers and so on...unknown to me, but God knows them all.

Notice the assumptions evident here: ego becomes the centre of a prayer network (almost a *de facto* chain) that takes its direction from an everyday business context, creating a spiritual snowball effect—at least in the believer’s imagination—where those who receive money in the secular sphere receive much more than they bargained for in spiritual realms. Note also how the practice moves swiftly from known to more anonymous zones of contact. The ‘sociality’ here becomes more and more diffuse, even as a sense of reaching out into distant social realms is valorized. The benefits for the businessman operate at two levels: his transactions become blessed but in giving to others he also constitutes his commitment as a spiritual entrepreneur⁷, and as we see this is a commitment that may be ‘benignly’ concealed in relation to non-believers but is being shared narratively with a sympathetic audience of Word of Lifers. Such actions echo quite closely the extensive use of media by members of the group, where for instance CDs and personal websites provide a distanced sense of reaching out into an unlimited space of mission without necessarily involving direct contact with a potentially aggressive audience, such as the many skeptics likely to be encountered in Sweden. This combination of the material and the verbal forms part of a Word of Life habitus of reaching out into the world, including a ‘gifting’ of the self to others (whether they are aware of it or not) as a realization of the Spirit-filled power of the self [29].

Such examples of spiritual entrepreneurialism carried out within Sweden resonate with action that occurs at a vastly different scale and yet belongs to the same phenomenological landscape. For instance, it is notable that since the fall of the Soviet regime in 1989 the Word of Life has created a sphere of missionary influence that has taken particular prominence in former Eastern Bloc countries. In this sense Word of Life activity plays powerfully into what can be presented as a spiritually loaded conjoining of two socialist, atheist landscapes, incorporating not only what is left of the Social Democratic state in Sweden in an age of increasing neo-liberalism, but also the remains of the post-Soviet landscape in countries adjacent to Sweden’s borders. Pre-1989 the Soviet bloc was presented by preachers as a land of atheism, prone to blocking mobility of missions as well as markets

⁵ The Word of Life is very much the largest of the Swedish Prosperity-oriented congregations, with around two and half thousand members of its congregation.

⁶ Blog date 26 September, 2009. My translation.

⁷ Entrepreneurialism here refers both to the sense of actively reaching out to others with missionizing intent and to the combination of spiritual and business-oriented imagery—a combination common among Faith supporters.

and governed through static, top-down, redistributive economic policies. While pre-1989 missionaries focused on secretly smuggling Bibles through the Iron Curtain, subsequently the former Soviet Union has become a landscape openly inscribed by spiritual agency, or at least by representations of it. For instance, a Word of Life publication from October 1990 contained a piece entitled “East Germany Today: Marx is Dead—Jesus Lives” and quotes a young German pastor who claims that “The Berlin Wall fell because of goal-oriented and effective prayer in the Holy Spirit” ([30], pp. 30–31)—a depiction of combined political and spiritual rupture where the results of prayer have a specific material referent. In the same year, Ekman and the leader of his East European mission, Carl-Gustaf Severin, walked around Red Square itself, “binding the spirits” (in Pentecostal parlance) over the city, an action that was followed by the investment of millions of Kronor in following years in Bible Centers in Russia, the Ukraine, Albania, and so on.

Two decades later, mission in Eastern Europe remains a vital part of the Word of Life global imaginary, and forms an important part of the group’s self-representation. The current Word of Life website [31] includes an expandable map with the title “Explore the Word of Life’s World-wide Missionary Work.”⁸ Sweden occupies the top-right (north-west) corner, while the rest of Europe as well as parts of Asia and North Africa are depicted. The key to symbols divides relevant activity into centers, Bible schools, congregations, pastors’ training, media work, and humanitarian operations. Flashing text provides impressive statistics about the group’s mission, noting for instance that it supports 45 full-time missionaries in the field, and enables many people to graduate from its pastors’ course in Moscow. However, what is perhaps most notable are the regions and nations highlighted: Sweden, the Baltic, Central Europe, Russia, Ukraine, Aserbaijan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, Albania, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, India, China and Vietnam. So while expansion of Word of Life influence within Sweden may have largely ceased by now, the post-Soviet landscape among others allows penetration of a previously ‘diabolical’ space of ‘immobility’ by mission and gifts, by movements of people in and people out—constituting a space through which the entrepreneurial self can be constituted in the imagination.

Such work does not represent all of the official networking carried out by the group—it does not for instance refer to the extensive contacts it maintains with like-minded American ministries through mutual visits by pastors—but it still gives a powerful sense of what global missionary activity means in the Word of Life context.⁹ Its most obvious gap is the fact that it does not indicate the group’s emphasis on Israel—a place that permeates many Word of Life narrative, ritual and cartographic representations, both in public discourse and more private conversations with believers. Ekman who set up a Bible School in Jerusalem in 2004, publishes a regular electronic newsletter called “Israel Report” that is sent out to subscribers around the world, and has organized tours of the country that have taken thousands of people there since 1987. The Christian Zionist focus on Israel clearly

⁸ “Utforska Livets Ords världsvida missionsarbete.”

⁹ The Word of Life engagement with global missionary activity is more complex than can be dealt with here, but is clearly uneven in its emphases. While people from around the world come to be trained at the group’s Bible School, and Ulf Ekman himself has traveled extensively, mission work has generally focused more on Europe and Asia than on other regions. As Sweden itself has become more of a host to migrants in recent years, the group has responded by, for instance, hosting activities on Saturday mornings for people new to Sweden. Thus ‘Africa’ is part of a global Word of Life imaginary but does not occupy a particularly privileged place there.

expresses the group's construction of an image of the globe experiencing the End Times, but also provides one clue to the Eastern Europe-centered focus of its mission. An ambitious scheme called Operation Jabotinsky¹⁰ has enabled up to 20,000 Jews to return to Israel since its inception in 1993. Such *aliyah*, or return of the Jews to their homeland, is said to form one of the necessary conditions for Jesus' return (along, for instance, with the granting of the opportunity for all peoples around the world to hear the Gospel message).

Maps may even be imagined in visions and revelations, and made the subject of sermons. In one example that I have written about elsewhere [32], Ekman tells his congregation of how he saw a map of Sweden 'in the spirit', which in his vision became akin to a firework spreading in all directions. On another occasion (see [32]), he invoked a missionary division of labor more akin to a network when he predicted that "the Lord's glory" would come from all the cardinal directions, including the North (Sweden), (South) South Africa, East (South Korea) and West (the USA). This is a global landscape constituted by what I shall call 'number' (e.g., evidence of those requiring to be saved), 'mobility' (of pastors in particular), 'presence' (of Word of Life-related institutions as well as individual missionaries) and 'conquest' (of large areas of territory by networks of proselytization and prayer). The imagery of a globe being missionized, in effect enveloped by evangelizing action and surveillance, provides an example of the kind of mapping that international evangelical and Pentecostal movements have used to wage what is sometimes seen as territorial spiritual war against unseen as well as obvious enemies [33]. Word of Life mapping thus encapsulates various forms of Pentecostal aesthetic at once: the presentation of both generic, global space and particular areas where a moral geography has particular resonance (e.g., the formerly diabolical Soviet Bloc); high levels of territorial ambition, achieved through reticulate, inherently expansive trajectories of missionary action; and the possibility of all-encompassing *spatial* coverage being complemented by constant *temporal* vigilance, for instance through the kinds of prayer chains mentioned above by Schüler that allow someone, somewhere, always to be praying for the mission to succeed.

These idioms of global connection and influence also depict a world that is made up of a network of countries that can, from one perspective, be seen as mutually equivalent (with the exception of the Holy Land), each with their own 'calling' to missionize the world. Swedes might be needed to evangelize in Mexico, but that does not mean that Mexican Pentecostals do not have the perfect right to evangelize in Sweden, for instance. In theory, a particular kind of balanced reciprocity is implicit in this Faith landscape, with each country able to provide both evangelists (reaching out to other parts of the world) and local populations in need of being missionized. At the same time, some countries are inherently more likely to send than to receive, and *vice versa*. Sweden occupies an intriguing position in this regard: both deeply secular by reputation (said to be in dire need of proselytization) and hugely prosperous (able to provide considerable resources to reach out internationally and not just at home).

Such invocations of mobility and ambition, more marked in the early days of the group but still evident, are frequently understood as containing an indictment of already existing Protestant denominations in Sweden, and of the classical Pentecostal movement in particular. Moreover, the ideal image of the neo-Pentecostal subject, the aggressive fisher for souls as well as material prosperity, is

¹⁰ Named after the Zionist activist Vladimir Jabotinsky, who died in 1940.

sometimes pitched against what are presented as Swedish characteristics of excessive modesty and acceptance of the need to limit personal ambition for the greater societal good. We can therefore see a confluence between the Word of Life remaking of an ideal Swedish habitus and its imagery of a globalizing network, an unbounded and permanently expansive conquest of space that is unapologetic in its intention. We do not need to subscribe to crude functionalist models of relative deprivation and compensation to see how such actions construct spiritual capital for a movement located in but also uneasy with a national context perceived to be both deeply secularized and geographically peripheral to the rest of Europe—“little Sweden” as it is sometimes referred to by members who normally go on to juxtapose the country’s small population with its potential for large influence.

Vitaly for the argument of this paper, we see from the above how representations of converting unbelievers can be complemented in significant ways by global imaginaries of *fellow*-believers, whether the latter are Word of Life members or not. People I have spoken to marvel at the fact that “*samma ande*”, “the same spirit”, pervades the crowds that attend Word of Life international conferences they have been to, hosted in Uppsala, but also those hosted elsewhere and attended by Ulf Ekman and other leaders on the global faith circuit. The Word of Life itself is constituted as a congregation but also by other activities oriented towards the formation of diffused networks out of believers who stay only for a relatively short time in Uppsala. These include Swedish- and English-speaking Bible Schools, a university modeled on that of Oral Roberts University in the United States, and numerous mission teams, especially for younger people. A sense of forming part of a spiritually-charged global landscape is incorporated into services through hanging national flags round the hall, offering official language translation services for foreign visitors, but also by showing photographs or films of missionary activity and prayer services from other parts of the world during worship services.

Visits to Israel can also help form a fresh stage for representations of global networking among like-minded peers. The following, for instance, is taken from a Word of Life member who describes a visit to the Holy Land led by Ulf Ekman 2011 [34]:

Imagine taking the journey together with over 630 other people! People from 27 countries with different languages, cultures and background—but still able to unite in prayer, love and engagement for Israel...The Word of Life’s trips to Israel are attracting more and more international guests! This year large groups came from Russia, India, Brazil, Switzerland and Singapore. There were also groups from Fiji, America, England, Armenia and countries such as Mexico, Nigeria, New Zealand and Indonesia. But by far the biggest group this year came from Sweden with at least 180 Swedes! It’s fantastic to see how the Word of Life’s Israel journeys attract so many travellers from so many countries!

In itself, such language seems fairly standard for Pentecostals but we should not pass over how the message has specific implications for Word of Life members. Apart from providing an implicit exhortation to them to take part in next year’s journey, it is also carving out a significant sphere of imagined influence for both the ministry and the country it represents. Sweden forms an international admixture with both the Holy Land itself and with the other locations represented on the visit—but it is the most significant of the countries on display, aside from Israel. Note also how the categories of representation for fellow believers are rather similar to those used for non-believers on the missionary map: ‘number’, ‘mobility’, and all-encompassing ‘presence’ are all there.

So far, then, I have talked of how Word of Life networking constructs dual global landscapes of believers and unbelievers, with agency asserted over both in representations created for worship services but also for publications, electronic media, and so on. A final dimension needs to be added, and it is one that is interesting for its ideological ambiguity and its *lack* of representation in Word of Life circles. I refer here to people who are neither non-believers nor members of distant networks of fellow Pentecostals, but who still show interest in the group. Particularly when the new ministry emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, many Christians from other denominations visited its services on a regular or occasional basis. Some were simply curious. Others found it helpful to combine such membership with occasionally dipping into Word of Life services and literature. At the time, the press and other Christians were representing the organization as a ‘total’ institution akin to the public image of the Moonies, and somewhat ironically the group’s own representations of the need for total commitment and high spiritual ambition resonated with critics’ attempts to paint it as a brainwashing sect. Yet, the situation on the ground has always been more complicated. To be sure, the Word of Life has developed a central cadre of people who lead prayer groups dotted around Uppsala, thus complementing larger worship-services with more local and intense forms of association, but it still attracts a large penumbra of people who do no more than sample its wares whenever they want. In my experience, the latter are frequently attracted by *discourses* of global encompassment and total engagement, but do not wish fully to participate in what fulfilling such ambitions would actually require of them, including either going on or supporting extensive mission. Nor does the Word of Life itself monitor such semi-detached engagement. So there has emerged a kind of complicity between core and penumbra, which has permitted semi-detached supporters to create their own balance between regular membership in a more conventional congregation and occasionally tasting what the Word of Life has to offer.¹¹ We see how in this case a degree of social and spiritual networking has emerged, but it is not one that occupies a readily acknowledged part of the landscape of agency openly created by the group. While global connections are overtly and frequently claimed with Christians who nonetheless remain physically distant, here social relations are much more direct and local but not generally allowed to come into significant representation. We shall return later on to such themes of proximity and distance, but it is time now to explore our second case.

3. The Redeemed Christian Church of God

The history of the RCCG, like that of the Word of Life, provides a striking microcosm of the globalization of Pentecostalism in recent decades. The denomination was founded as far back as 1952 in southern Nigeria along broadly ‘Aladura’ lines. The term Aladura—literally “the Praying People” in Yoruba—refers to a movement originally founded in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, which drew on Anglican and Methodist roots and emphasized healing, prophesy, and a holiness-oriented separation from the world. After its creation, a full three decades were to pass until the RCCG entered a phase of impressive and swift expansion [35], at about the same time as the Word of Life was emerging thousands of miles to the north. The sea-change began in 1981 when a young

¹¹ In fact, as a fieldworker, I actually found my own religious preferences, personality and behavior far more closely scrutinized in my dealings with the more socially ‘dense’ Pentecostal church, where internal networks of kinship, friendship, locality were more developed.

university lecturer in Mathematics, Enoch Adejare Adeboye, took over the leadership of the Church. Adeboye introduced prosperity teachings as well as new ‘model parishes’, strategically relaxing the pietistic framework of older RCCG congregations in order to attract more middle-class members from academia, politics, the military and business. English often replaced Yoruba as the language of services as one way of transcending parochial tribal identifications, the wearing of jewellery was allowed in order to signal a less strict attitude to bodily display, and in due course electronic communication was encouraged.

The results were certainly dramatic. Asonzeh Ukah [36] argues that, nowadays, no denomination better illustrates the dynamics of transnational Pentecostalism and the phenomenon of religious rebranding than the RCCG. It has now become the most popular Nigerian Pentecostal church, with thousands of branches in around 100 countries, and thus in effect has been involved in creating denominational networks across the globe for the past two decades or so. Today, some 40 or more countries in Europe alone have RCCG churches, part of a global membership estimated at over a million [37]. The *Newsweek* “Top 50 Global Power Elite” List for 2008-9 contained just two people of African origin: Barack Obama and Pastor Adeboye.

The RCCG’s ideological and organizational shifts into global diffusion have had important cartographic and spatial as well as spiritual referents. Movement towards relative world accommodation has accompanied an expansion of geographical horizons and seeming encompassment of the globe through mission combined with migration. Central to these developments has been the policy not only of modernizing ritual and everyday practices, but also of saturating city spaces within and beyond Nigeria with RCCG congregations. Such buildings, ideally owned and not merely rented, become material expressions of the remarkable aspiration of ensuring that no person on earth will be situated more than five minutes travel time away from an RCCG assembly. This ambitious geography of the spirit draws on theological images of proclamation, mission, and so on, but is also articulated through a spatial vocabulary that the RCCG shares with many other evangelizing Christian movements, including the Word of Life, whereby the world is perceived in terms of both cities and nations to be “taken” for Jesus or in the Spirit. Apart from providing key anchor points in the landscape of mission these spatial emphases also bring to the fore a common Pentecostal (and indeed characteristically ‘Prosperity’) trope of scale—indexing the influence of the self in relation to architecture but also in relation to flows of capital and of the publics represented as reachable in urban contexts.

RCCG policies have specific implications and meanings in the context of Nigeria. They resonate with ways in which Pentecostalism in the country is often rooted in idealized imaginaries of the city and demonizations of the rural, but also perhaps with the long history of associations between towns and political authority in Yorubaland. The original strategy of opening out to a wider world (within and beyond the country) also gained much of its impetus because it was initiated during a period of deep corruption and violent military rule in the country. The key point—as both Ukah and John Peel point out [35,38]—is that in the RCCG’s new denominational dispensation, images of the state and the nation represent areas of potential appropriation and redemption, and are thus made a consistent theme in worship and prayer. These ideals took literal form in the 1980s, which saw the construction and consolidation by the RCCG of a “Redemption Camp” on a 10-square km site on the busy Lagos-Ibadan expressway. Peel notes that the Camp has almost grown into a small town with its own (often

expensive) houses, shops, energy supplies, educational facilities, and lodgings for such dignitaries as visiting pastors but also state governors and federal ministers. It now has a vast, kilometer-long auditorium capable of accommodating half a million or more people. The Camp competes with other such premises run by religious groups (Christian and Muslim) dotted along the Lagos-Ibadan highway. It is both a prayer and an administrative center and, in effect, a paradigm for the running of a successful city or state, strategically located adjacent to but not within Lagos itself.

Such realization of ordered if arguably also exclusive living is combined with particular understandings of revelation and concealment in relation to spiritual and other matters. Clearly, all denominations and other organizations in Nigeria must address the assumptions frequently made within and beyond the country that public institutions are corrupt and self-interested, and thus liable to be exposed to censure. In this regard, it is important to point out that the RCCG as a public institution has generally not been hit by the scandals attached to many other churches or corporations. Managing visibility takes on other significant forms, as well. RCCG members operate in a context of competition with Muslims who make up roughly equal numbers in the country as a whole, and thus the physical occupation of urban space sends a message of prominent presence in a religious landscape where mosques are also prevalent. Indeed, nowadays, the RCCG is probably the largest private landholder in Nigeria. The Christianization of the country also contends with the continued existence of what are seen as more traditional, elements of religion, invoked in the powerful imagery of many Christian-oriented films produced in Nigeria but also in the claim made by some RCCG members that Redemption Camp is literally built over the top of—and thus burying—what was a pagan site.

One way of interpreting these developments is to say that, for many of its supporters, the RCCG represents a particular form of Nigerian modernity, alluringly aspirational for those excluded from wealth, and culturally acceptable for those who are already middle class. If so, this is a form of modernity that retains traces of its historical roots. For Peel, the RCCG's success draws on "a view of spiritual causation that comes down from indigenous belief through the Aladura churches" [38]. He argues further [39] that the born-again message of the denomination has been able to draw on a Yoruba notion of *olaju*, enlightenment, carrying the connotation that: "Progress depends on opening oneself to the wider world, forward movement on spatial enlargement". Also salient here is James Doubleday's [40] discussion of how his Yoruba Pentecostal informants in London articulate a sense of urban space as open, porous, constructed through social interconnection, with the "space-ness" or "capacity" of places seen as reminiscent of the Yoruba metaphorical market-place, a context where through action (and transaction) a person might display—and make—their "bigness".

This complex picture of cultural influences is reinforced when we consider a key dimension of RCCG expansion and associated networking: its promotion of an extensive landscape of mission and migration in diaspora. Just as the Church began its new phase of expansion in the 1980s by creating certain features that facilitated internal mobility within Nigeria, so "such features also helped propel external mobility and migration, and consequently the multiplication of parishes in different parts of the world" ([35], p. 318). Thus a relatively unknown religious organization containing 39 parishes in 1980 proliferated into 6265 parishes by 2002, with close to a thousand of these located outside of the country. New waves of migration and mission combined as Nigerians began to search for education, jobs, futures in other parts of the world, including Europe and North America. For those with greater cultural capital, the pursuing of education abroad or a career in a transnational corporation could be

combined with starting up a congregation. Ukah [41] puts the point well when he describes such expansion as in effect inserting itself into multi-faceted flows already being created by mobile networks of Nigerian migrants. Referring to the movements of capital as well as of pastors round Europe and elsewhere, he notes “Both forms of mobilities reinforced themselves, creating a sense of explosion, of uncontrolled proliferation and ‘runaway expansion’. Mobilities are thus the engines of transformation of the RCCG” ([41], p. 325). The implications of Ukah’s analysis are expressed in the following words of an informant based in London, speaking in a 2009 interview to me and my co-researcher, Katrin Maier: “God gives that privilege that churches become influences all around, you know, in their community, in the town, in the estates, in the country. So there are seasons in their times. (...) And now it’s probably Redeemed’s time, at the moment it’s everywhere. You’ve got America, they have got hundreds of churches, you’ve got England, anyway, they’re in the season obviously.”

We might also view the current expansion of the RCCG through the lens of what Childs and Falola [42] term “The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World”. In line with Paul Gilroy’s work on the Black Atlantic, they see this African diaspora as one where return migration as well as networks of trade and political activities (reinforced by extended families and fictive kinship) have long allowed for trans-Atlantic migration in both directions. Present patterns of migration cannot be viewed in isolation: they link not only with contemporary Pentecostal strategies and the demographic fallout from Nigerian failing statehood but also with longer-standing Aladura and Yoruba understandings of power, urban authority and linkages across space.

Intertwined themes of modernity, networking, and the search for recognition in urban contexts are prominent in the fieldwork that I and Katrin Maier have been carrying out on RCCG members in London over the past five years. Some of our work has been carried out in Jesus House, the largest RCCG congregation in the UK and a beacon for the denomination’s activities in Europe as a whole. In 2011, the head of Jesus House, Pastor Agu, was actually chosen as “Britain’s most inspirational black person” by a poll organized through Metro Newspaper and the Mayor of London [43]. The location of Jesus House is not especially visible, in an ugly area of shopping malls, roads and warehouses in the Brent Cross area of North-West London. It is a squat, square building constructed in a warehouse style with mirror-like panels, surrounded by gates. Yet, the inside of the building speaks less of separation from the external world and more of much higher ambitions, expressed in both cartographic and temporal form. On entering, the visitor is presented directly with a plaque displaying a map of London, and then a foyer and front desk flanked by a large map of the world and three clocks, telling the times in London, Beijing and New York respectively. The foyer also contains a ‘Press Wall,’ displaying a number of newspaper articles about RCCG activities in London and beyond, including some by secular journalists. Near a book stall is also a three-dimensional model of a building that the congregation hopes to construct one day when they have the resources, and which according to our informants is planned to contain a hall for 10,000 people as well as a café and a gym. Currently Jesus House holds at least three services on Sundays, as its building is not nearly big enough for its congregation. People come from far away to worship there, including towns at or beyond London’s borders, such as St. Albans and Milton Keynes. One member of Jesus House whom Katrin Maier and I interviewed regularly traveled halfway across London to attend the church, despite the fact that there was an RCCG congregation at the end of his road, precisely because he cherished the expansionist

ambition of an organization that, much more than most other RCCG congregations, had already realized the ambition of making its mark in the city.¹²

In these brief characterizations of the activities of the RCCG and Jesus House we see how an outward orientation takes on a number of forms. London, and ultimately the world, constitute mission fields that take on significant representation within church space. Inscribed into the very building is a sense of terrain to be covered, a spatial imaginary of Christian agency and potentiality, and one that is sometimes also reinforced by images of landscape as well as RCCG activities around the world that are presented during or just after Church services. Furthermore, Jesus House openly seeks mainstream legitimacy for RCCG activities in the UK. One of its proudest moments seems to have been when it hosted a visit from Prince Charles on the occasion of his 59th birthday in 2007, but in addition the Church engages in such activities as cooperation with neighborhood police, prayer groups run by other denominations, and the offering of Christmas dinners to less well-off local inhabitants who happen to live in the Brent area. It also manages the interwoven forms of mobility involved in mission and migration, for instance paying the salaries of over 20 RCCG pastors in Asia and Eastern Europe, and playing an important role in securing travel documents for pastors in Nigeria planning to come over to Europe as missionaries. Administrators at Jesus House help to organize the bi-annual ‘Festival of Life’ conference that brings together tens of thousands of supporters from the UK and beyond to worship at the Excel arena in central London, and which provides a European echo of the regular, huge in-gatherings that take place at Redemption Camp outside Lagos.

Thus, using London as a lens into a wider diaspora, I am telling a story of RCCG expansion into post-colonial landscapes as well as into other parts of Europe. And yet, for this picture to be complete it requires another, vital, component—and one where such spatial enlargement encounters and is challenged by significant social closure. Ukah notes that the transnational religious empire of the RCCG has so far been largely unable to proselytize nationals within local contexts, not just in Europe but even in West African countries such as the Benin Republic and Ghana. As he puts it, the RCCG is “a global church without a global appeal” ([36], p. 126). This point should perhaps not be over-emphasized. For instance, RCCG churches are beginning to attract some other migrants and locals in southern and eastern Europe. However, there might be numerous reasons for the organization’s relative parochiality. Racism cannot of course be discounted, and nor can simple mistrust of Nigerian migrants, given the reputation of the country abroad, though other Nigerian Churches in the UK, such as Christ Embassy, have been more successful in attracting a cosmopolitan membership from around the world. Ukah [36] notes that the faith gospel itself may not be popular in certain European contexts, but adds that this factor does not explain why the Church has not won significant numbers of converts from other West African societies. In the latter, there may therefore be worries over apparent religious empire-building projects coming from Nigeria. In the context of this paper, however, the most intriguing factor that he raises deals specifically with the ways in which networks of congregations have been created by the RCCG through direct transplants of methods and sometimes also personnel from Nigeria. Such congregations tend to recruit mostly from other

¹² There is also some evidence that a congregation as large as Jesus House attracts less committed members, with semi-detached engagements, as at the Word of Life. However, such engagements are very unlikely to involve white Christians looking for ways to complement their attachment to more established congregations.

Nigerians, of whom there are already many based in the UK. Networks of friendship and family relationships expand into congregation ties in the diaspora, enabling their existence but in effect constraining their capacity to reach out into wider social realms. Ukah's point certainly fits with Katrin Maier's and my observations of the backgrounds of RCCG members, who were generally born again in Nigeria before coming to the UK. More interestingly, it seems to present something of a problem of representation and identity among RCCG activists, at least among those we have interviewed at Jesus House. Should believers simply accept that God's plans for the denomination seem currently to be focussed on fellow West Africans in the diaspora, or should greater efforts be made to reach out into other, less ethnically confined realms? The rhetoric of a prosperity-oriented, aspirational ideology such as that publicly espoused at Jesus House tends to avoid invoking 'structural' reasons for lack of achievement of economic goals. The Holy Spirit is also assumed to be color-blind. In the analytical terms set out by this paper, the dilemmas faced by believers are significant because they conflate the distinction between missionizing the unconverted and the converted. RCCG networks of association, especially in the diaspora, and are currently far more effective in engaging people with a particular Christian, ethnic background than they are in fulfilling their ostensible mission to convert the world. At the same time, they are able very successfully to represent themselves as straddling the globe through the establishment of congregations in a truly transnational landscape. So what we are describing here is a very *particular* kind of globality, and one that is clearly 'gated' through circumstances currently beyond the RCCG's control.

4. Worlds Collide or Worlds Apart?

My juxtaposition of the activities of the Word of Life and the RCCG since the 1980s provides evidence of the parallel orientations and tropes that have driven these two Prosperity movements forward. Their histories and geographical origins are hugely disparate, but in both cases we see Christians whose individual and collective identities are constructed in great part through rhetorics of outward expansion, and where both scale and spatiality take on powerful connotations through indexing the presence of spiritual agency. For instance, the Word of Life emphasis on spiritual entrepreneurialism expressed in the desire to *starta eget* has its counterpart in the Yoruba notion of *olaju*: the two should not be seen as equivalent to each other, but the point is that both orientations happen to resonate well with broader Prosperity emphases on the significance of material expressions of spiritual agency, not merely in order to convert others but also as a means of constituting the active, progressing self. A sense of engaging in global expansion can be expressed through personal networking but also through observing and being surrounded by representations of expansion that take in cities, countries and the world as a whole. Such representations are frequently formed out of tropes that emphasize number, mobility, presence and conquest—measurable, spatially indexed expressions of global expansion, and ones that can apply both to souls needing to be saved and to the representation of other, already like-minded Christians around the globe.¹³

¹³ Ironically, in both cases the expressed ambition of these groups leaves them vulnerable to critique from moral entrepreneurs worried about expansion of Pentecostal activities in supposedly secular, Northern European contexts. However, while the revulsion expressed towards the Word of Life in Sweden was nationwide and spread across both secular and religious contexts (see Coleman [11]), concerns over the RCCG have been much more localized and smaller

If coming under Pentecostal conviction under such circumstances is also to surround oneself with orientations towards transnational landscapes of potentiality, such landscapes are formed through the marking of some identities and the ignoring of others. Word of Life strategies of expansion are fueled in part by a desire to combat the twin threats of both socialism and secularism, at home and abroad. Under such circumstances, the terrain made up of the former Soviet bloc provides a powerful mission field against which to pitch the actions and networks of the group. In these terms, Operation Jabotinsky does dual ‘spatio-spiritual’ work by bringing Jews from Eastern Europe to the geographical center of the neo-Pentecostal cartography of salvation, the Holy Land itself. Such activities and associated representations of agency clearly have much more symbolic resonance than the implicit acceptance that some of those who support the group conduct much of the rest of their spiritual lives in denominations that maintain very different visions of the scale and scope of the Christian life.

RCCG expansion has been articulated by developing its own array of powerful threats: Islam (though more conciliatory moves are also sometimes made), ‘traditional’ religion, and the manifestations of corruption that infect both the running of the state and the reputation of Nigeria as a modern nation. Migration into the diaspora becomes an expression of post-colonial agency even as it responds to problems in Nigeria, creating a form of networking that is both reverse mission and career move. Such ideals of expansion fit more easily into the denomination’s vision of worldwide redemption than the acceptance that much of the global RCCG landscape is made up of the *already* redeemed and the ethnically Nigerian because few others will join. In both groups, then, we see forms of revelation and relative concealment co-existing in the formation of globalizing networks.

What I am describing has many similarities with the activities of Pentecostals in general. However, the Prosperity message distinguishes itself not only through the extent of its emphasis on the importance of material resources but also in the sheer scope of its ambition. Its message is not merely transposable but routinely spread via transnationally-oriented sermons, media images, and publications. It is a religion made *to* travel but also a religion made *through* travel. Conferences form key ritual events, combining worship with ostentatious networking. They therefore embody the social productivity manifested through shared ritual forms that Robbins [7] sees as characteristic of Pentecostal-Charismatic movements. Certainly, they provide an important forum in which Ekman and Adeboye may actually appear together in the same time-space of Prosperity global networking.

To take a recent example of how such encounters are represented, I want to look at a conference “Shaping the Future of the Spirit—Empowered Movement Around the Globe”, held over three days in April 2010 and co-ordinated by “Empowered 21”. The latter is an umbrella organization, supported by Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, designed to bring broadly conservative charismatic ministries together [44].¹⁴ In the very title of the 2010 conference we already see some familiar tropes: temporality linked with agency; a future that is to be actively shaped; and such shaping being carved out through movement that is world-encompassing. In conference literature, the ordinary participant is urged to “be a part of history”, indicating one of the ways in which Pentecostal rhetoric and practices

scale. Such muted reaction is partly a result of the group’s avoidance of scandals that have afflicted other Nigerian churches, but also a consequence of the fact that its profile in British social and cultural circles remains relatively low.

¹⁴ The site urges: “Be a part of history when you join us at Empowered21”. The Congress took place from April 8–10, 2010 in Tulsa, Oklahoma at the Oral Roberts University Mabee Center.

can be self-legitimizing: going to a conference to discuss empowered movement *becomes* almost by definition a form of empowered mobility. The conference was made up largely of sessions devoted to broad spiritual ideals, led by different preachers from around North America. The closing session is the most interesting for our purposes, however, as it featured preachers from other parts of the world. The program noted:

The Congress will close with an INTERNATIONAL IMPARTATION SERVICE led by Empowered ministries from every continent. Speakers will include E.A. Adeboye representing Africa, Claudio Friedzon representing South America, Ulf Ekman representing Europe, Niko Njotorahardjo representing Asia, Margaret Court representing Australia, Arthur Blessitt representing Antarctica and Tommy Barnett representing North America. At the conclusion of the evening the entire Congress Ministry Team will unite in commissioning participants for 21st century world evangelization.

Several things are going on here. Notice how the conference is closing by expanding its horizons from a single continent to many. Each corner of the globe is represented by preachers who embody cartographic as well as spiritual reference points. ‘Presence’ from all parts of the world is combined with ‘mobility’ in the persons of world-renowned preachers. In coming together, such preachers can also be seen as functional equivalents of each other, peers striding across a common global stage; and they can also re-present themselves in this way to audiences at home: for instance Ekman’s and Adeboye’s movements are regularly reported to their supporters through websites and other media.

Such representations are ‘world-making’ in the sense that they are creating a global landscape that resonates well with spatial imagery maintained by organizations such as the Word of Life and the RCCG. They present occasions of literal as well as spiritual contact between leaders of the faith. Yet, we might also see Ekman and Adeboye as the overt points of contact between two worlds that are in reality both more self-contained and much further apart than such imagery might suggest. I have not conducted systematic surveys of supporters from both camps, but in the course of fieldwork I have in recent years asked ordinary believers whether and how they were aware of the other ministry. Generally, I have been struck by the *lack* of either contact or awareness exhibited in replies given to me so far. The most extensive response I have received has come from an interview conducted by me and Katrin Maier in 2009 with a well-educated young RCCG supporter whom I shall call Aaron, who had moved to London from Lagos as an adult and was holding down a responsible job. He was also quite a wide reader of Prosperity literature, whether produced by Nigerians or preachers from other parts of the world. Aaron’s characterization of his connection with Word of Life discourse is revealing in the forms of both proximity and distance it expresses. His awareness of the Swedish group was confined to his knowledge of Ulf Ekman—“a well-known pastor”—whom he had heard preach at the charismatic Kensington Temple in London. He described Ekman thus:

He [talked of how he] impacted not with just the community that [the Word of Life] were established in as a church, but [of] a whole nation when he was at his height of his...being ... the pastor and teacher in Sweden....And so they had influence in the country, they had influence in Sweden...and it became a really big church....And I reckon that we will have that in England as well....[The] Christian God gives that privilege that churches become influences all around, you know, in their community, in the town, in the estates in the country. So there are seasons in their times.

I could not help noting that Aaron used the past tense when referring to Ekman, partly no doubt because he was recounting a sermon from years back but possibly also implying that the “height” of Ekman’s renown had passed. Certainly, he did not indicate any further attempt to follow Ekman after hearing the sermon, for instance through Christian TV channels. On the other hand, his recall of Ekman’s sermon was notable because it illustrated an exemplary *model* for the RCCG in the UK: a “big” church, and one that could be measured through its impact on the nation. If the reference to “seasons” seems familiar it is because I quoted from Aaron earlier when he used the same phrase to describe what he now sees as the RCCG’s moment of expansion. Furthermore, although I did not ask him at the time, I think it very likely that his use of the phrase was meant to echo the famous passage from Ecclesiastes 3, verse 1, which notes that “For everything there is a season” (ESV). So what we see in such a response is a characterization of the Word of Life that is both generic and easily oriented towards RCCG lenses and ambitions, and indeed one that is framed through both Ekman’s and Aaron’s narratives as well as biblical text. The Swedish congregation is indexed through its size and impact on community, town and nation, but also invoked as a result of its perceived effectiveness as a model for *other* Christians in other nations to follow.

I have not yet encountered any similar characterization or notable recognition of the RCCG from the Word of Life side, despite the fact that the RCCG does have a small presence in Sweden itself, claiming at least 14 congregations in the country, including Uppsala [45]. Charismatic Christians from Nigeria are however represented in the Swedish ministry, even if they are not associated with any particular church. We have already seen a reference to Nigerian Christians accompanying Ulf Ekman’s 2011 trip to Israel, for instance. Nigeria also gains a significant presence through the mediation of a figure generally beloved by Christians from both groups, that of Reinhard Bonnke. Bonnke, the leader of a traveling ministry called Christ for All Nations, makes great play of bridging continents, having been born in Germany but remaining active as a missionary in Africa since the 1960s. He is a somewhat controversial figure. For instance, a preaching visit he paid to Nigeria in 1991 is credited with prompting riots among Muslims in the city of Kano. Word of Lifers and RCCG members might know little of each other, but generally they are united in their knowledge of Bonnke, whose mobility actually links the separate sub-worlds of many Prosperity groups. He has in recent years visited both the Word of Life Europe Conference and the RCCG Festival of Life conference, and the Swedish group maintains a link to a You-Tube video on its website depicting Bonnke’s “Revival in Nigeria”, where it is said that he “Touches the Multitudes”. It therefore re-embeds within its own website what Gordon and Hancock [46] see as “Bonnke’s particular Pentecostal visual ideology”, which presents powerful and often panoptic images of mass congregations engaged in worship. Gordon and Hancock argue that such sights/sites do not simply represent reality, but are also understood by believers to relate indexically and iconically to the real, so that “images can trigger gifts of healing and tongues, cause nonbelievers to be similarly filled with the Holy Spirit, and divinely inspire people to go out and evangelize” ([46], p. 389). Their comment suggests an extension of what I have so far called ‘representation’ by giving it a performative power, linked to the assumed ‘presence’ of spiritual power accessed in, or at least through, the image. Note that this argument also indicates how such images can crucially maintain a double addressee, potentially engaging nonbelievers but also those wishing for inspiration to reach out into the world through mission. Such images therefore bring together the two orientations towards the representation of networks that I mentioned at the beginning of this paper,

namely reference to those assumed to be in need of mission but also Christians who are spiritually and ontologically “like us”.

Broader questions can be raised here relating to the political and economic implications of Pentecostal representations of selves as well as others. According to Gordon and Hancock ([46], p. 390) the visual tropes provided by Bonnke are embraced by elites of Pentecostal broadcasting in the USA, for whom “images of the controlled ecstatic excesses of African converts” signify authentic Christian revival ([40], p. 390). In this visual language, African worship appears to carry a particular authenticity to believers in Euro-American contexts, so that “Africa suddenly becomes relevant” ([46], p. 393), coming into a particular kind of consciousness and contributing to “a spiritual economy of export-import” ([46], p. 401). A similar thematization of Africa is also evident in the Word of Life representations of Bonnke in Nigeria that I have mentioned, and of course it takes place in the context of representing Christian activities in many other parts of the globe as well. However, I want here to extend Gordon and Hancock’s argument in two ways.

Firstly, I want to stress that for many Word of Lifers, the evoking of Africa is not merely a means to access the presence of spiritual authenticity, it also provides one way of constructing and valorizing *distance* in the representing of global networks of like-minded Christians. The very notion of reaching far out across the world indexes spiritual power, at least vicariously through the movements of such figures as Bonnke or Ekman. This ‘presencing of distance’ is also highly evident in discourses ranging from preachers such as Ekman telling his supporters where in the world he has just been preaching, to ordinary believers referring to their head pastor as a “great man of God” whose spiritual gravitas is indicated through mobility. Gordon and Hancock’s metaphor of import and export can be further developed here if we consider how ministries and denominations who contribute to the loose conglomeration of Prosperity ministries around the world provide each other with the means to produce and reproduce representations of both mobility and distance: by hosting a pastor from a distant congregation a ministry helps to create images of a network that is valued not only for the personal connections that it makes, but also for the distances that it traverses. In this sense, a preacher coming in from West Africa might actually bring more spiritual-social capital to a Word of Life conference than one coming from an RCCG congregation located down the road. Overall, such processes make up what we might regard as the ‘revealed’ or overt construction of distance in a charismatic economy made up of chains, mediations and exchanges of persons, prayers and images.

Secondly, however, I want to emphasize the more concealed ways in which the worlds of many of these Christians also remain deeply disjunct in certain respects. My point here is not simply to indicate that, in practice, ordinary members of different parts of the Prosperity network do not have many opportunities to meet each other. Such lack of direct contact might be expected in many cases. Rather, I want to note how apparently conjoined and/or parallel landscapes of action are very differently constructed, both in relation to each other and in relation to the kinds of social gatedness they encounter. We might reflect in particular on how dissimilar the meanings of mobility are for many Word of Life and RCCG members. In the Swedish context, pastors often see their main problem as encouraging longer-term Word of Life supporters to understand that they are attached to a missionary organization and not just a normal, local congregation: for such believers, practising mobility through engaging in proselytization or even merely reflecting on global networking is largely a matter of choice, and not one that is particularly constrained by lack of cultural, political or economic capital.

Furthermore, while Swedish missionaries may not be exactly popular in many of the contexts where they work, they are associated with a country renowned for its bureaucratic propriety as well as its wealth. Mobility means something else for many RCCG members in the diaspora, whose Christian mission not only combines with economic migration but may also inhabit a much more uneasy position in the believer's life trajectory, between active choice and enforced strategy. Even when travel abroad is achieved, it retains a precarious relationship for the numerous RCCG members striving to attain citizenship or just visa status in the diaspora. One of the members of a smaller RCCG congregation in London estimated to Katrin Maier in 2009 that up to two thirds of RCCG members and visitors may be residing in the UK without a regularized permit to stay. Stalls at the Festival of Life not only contain uplifting literature and DVDs produced by such figures as Adeboye and Bonnke, but also professional services for those in need of legal advice. One powerful reminder of the complex interweaving of mobility, demography and cartography is provided by Knibbe's [47] juxtaposition of the ambitious mapping of religious geographies by RCCG migrants to Amsterdam, who prefer to see themselves as "landlords" rather than "tenants" in their new country, and the very different maps produced by Dutch police that depict Nigerian areas of settlement as centers of criminal activity. Another comes from Katrin Maier's and my fieldwork in a small RCCG church that we call Tower of God, based in a poorer migrant area of east-central London. A meeting we attended in April 2009 hosted the visit of a pastor from Nigeria, whose message was permeated by juxtapositions of mobility and stasis, the spiritual and the spatial: "You will get there", he urged his audience: "The news of your testimony, your new job, the news of your immigration status"—all can be assured since "Shiloh cometh".¹⁵ Eventually, "Europe will celebrate you....Those who say you [were] behind will see you ahead".

5. Concluding Remarks: On Gates and Globes

If Pentecostalism—especially in its Prosperity forms in recent years—has become a prime example of the globalization of religion in the twentieth and now the twenty-first centuries, its diffusion remains bumpy, sometimes colliding with rather than gliding easily across religio-political landscapes. At the same time, the imagery of a religion made to travel has resonated with two powerful narratives of neo-Pentecostal spread across the globe. One has been produced by believers themselves, and contains versions of spatiality, temporality and teleology that link mobility with global encompassment combined with global redemption—the spreading of Good News to all as a means of speeding the return of the Messiah.¹⁶ The other narrative, emergent from academia, has often shared something of the triumphalism of its religious counterpart, not celebrating the growth of Pentecostalism but accepting that it is in a stage of intense and almost ineluctable expansion. An important contribution to such a narrative has presented this transnational religious culture as inherently American or at least

¹⁵ Shiloh is said to contain the Ark of the Covenant.

¹⁶ These themes of spatiality, temporality and teleology link closely to measures of Pentecostal activity mentioned earlier: number, mobility, presence and conquest. Much more could be said in relation to such links; however, in this paper I have focused particularly on conceptualizations and realizations of different forms of mobility.

Western,¹⁷ with echoes of dependency theory and assumptions that such Christianity acts as a modernizing force while producing a new form of cultural dominance in postcolonial contexts.

In my analysis, we need to provide both of these narratives with considerable further twists. As we have seen, mobility takes on very different implications in disjunct landscapes of religious practice. Our juxtaposition of the Word of Life and the RCCG indicates not only that gates are differentially opened or closed to believers, but also that the ‘globe’ is not always imagined or accessed in strictly equivalent ways: it expands or contracts, reveals certain vistas and conceals others, according to one’s own subject position in the Prosperity landscape of both faith and citizenship. Bonnke as mobile mediator therefore may “touch” many believers; and the worlds of Adeboye and Ekman may briefly brush against each other in the charged space-time of a charismatic conference; but the worlds they re-present are far from equivalent in the opportunities and identities that they contain. In the connections and disconnections created we see threads of different colonial and post-colonial histories, but also how linear, hegemonic models of diffusion from single ideological or cultural sources do not capture the complexities of articulation and disarticulation that are evident not only in relations between believers and non-believers, but also among believers themselves. As different global imaginaries are created through chains, links and networks, distance may be valorized as much as proximity, and power may be invested in keeping believers apart as much as drawing them together.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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