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Guest Editorial
Beyond the Pentecostal Gender Paradox: The Future of Gender within Pentecostalism Research

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Abstract

In this introduction to the special issue on Pentecostalism and Gender, the editors present new scholarly inquiries in the field, emerging from the 14th GloPent conference in Heidelberg (February 2024). Drawing on the keynote presentations by Keri Day, Brendan Thornton, and Naomi Richman, along with responses by Eva Spies, Claudia Jahnel, and Giovanni Maltese, the authors identify three key areas for advancing beyond Bernice Martin's influential concept of the "Pentecostal gender paradox". First, they argue for moving past binary frameworks of oppression versus emancipation by employing the concept of agency to better understand the complex motivations and strategies of Pentecostal actors. Second, they advocate for decentring dominant historiographical narratives, particularly those anchored on the Azusa Street revival, in order to acknowledge Pentecostalism's diverse global–local entanglements. Third, they critique the "add and stir" approach to studying gender and

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Pentecostalism as separate entities, instead highlighting how gender is intrinsic to Pentecostal theology, practice, and identity formation. The authors emphasize that gender dynamics within Pentecostalism must be understood within broader global religious histories and transnational gender regimes, rather than solely as negotiations between global Pentecostal logics and local cultural structures. The contributions to this special issue demonstrate how categories like "Pentecostal" themselves carry gendered connotations within colonial and postcolonial contexts, suggesting new avenues for research that examine global entanglements while maintaining attention on local specificities.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; gender; gender theories; agency; global religious history; global Christianity.

1 Introduction

For several decades, the study of gender within Pentecostalism has focused on women, much of it influenced by Bernice Martin's (2001) influential essay on what she called the "Pentecostal Gender Paradox". In other subject areas, however, the discussion on gender has moved on significantly in the past twenty years, which prompted us to take stock of current research in this field and promote new discussions by arranging a GloPent conference on this theme. On 9th and 10th February 2024, more than one hundred scholars from all over the world came together for the 14th GloPent conference in Heidelberg to present and discuss their findings concerning the topic "Pentecostalism and Gender". Nearly forty panel presentations and three keynotes with respective responses showed how relevant gender is within Pentecostal studies. The contributions covered almost all parts of the world, demonstrating that both Pentecostalism and gender are observed worldwide and can only be meaningfully discussed if they are contextualized within their global entanglements. As an outcome of the conference, this special issue demonstrates these vivid discussions. It contains the three keynotes of the conference, given by Keri Day, Brendan Thornton, and Naomi Richman, as well as the responses by Eva Spies, Claudia Jahnel and Giovanni Maltese together with short rejoinders by the initial presenters.

While the conference showed the continued influence of the research of the early 2000s, it also provided some noteworthy avenues into a future beyond the gender paradox. In this introduction, we will discuss these new perspectives. First, even though the gender paradox was meant as a critique of Eurocentric expectations of "women's movements", researchers have recently pointed out that it still falls behind its own declared goals in this regard, assuming a clear binary of oppression and emancipation

(making Pentecostalism a "paradox" women's movement). Instead, the concept of agency is useful to zoom in on the different positions of Pentecostals globally, their diverging interests and strategies. Secondly, there is a tendency to homogenize global Pentecostalism when it comes to gender research. This happens for example via a supposed origin and historical proliferation pattern of Pentecostalism. Yet, as multiple studies have demonstrated, Pentecostalism is a very diverse movement and warrants a research mode that acknowledges this (Maltese, Bachmann, and Rakow, 2019). Thirdly, the "Pentecostalism AND gender" approach gives the impression that both entities just exist separately in the world and like cake ingredients need to be combined secondarily by the researcher. However, Pentecostals themselves employ an ambivalently gendered theology and practice, and the category of Pentecostalism may itself imply an underlying gender dynamic when "Pentecostalism" functions as marker of specifically "feminine" traits, such as non-rationality, emotional outlook, and body-centred practices. Similar gendering dynamics have been observed for other categories like religion or Christianity. Therefore, instead of singling out Pentecostals, there is a need to embed Pentecostal gender negotiations and practices within wider global religious discourses. At the same time, Pentecostal studies have their own insights to add to the topic of gender.

2 Beyond the Gender Paradox: Towards the Complexities of Agency

Bernice Martin's intervention from 2001, which coined the evocative phrase the "Pentecostal gender paradox", remained influential in the study of gender and Pentecostalism because it contends with continuously relevant questions like: why do women in huge numbers join a movement that demands their submission? Is it "pro women" to resist and reject Pentecostalism? Martin argued that Pentecostalism acts as a catalyst for modernity, laying emphasis on individuality and the nuclear family. Though gendering the public and private space, this division also grants women a certain freedom as long as they adhere to the expected norms of marriage, the nuclear family, and female submission. Martin named this "paradox" to highlight the difference between the researchers' own and Pentecostal women's convictions. Her essay built on earlier research from the 1990s, which increasingly noticed the active and quantitatively dominant involvement of women in Pentecostalism. Martin Riesebrodt and Kelly Chong (1999) observed that Pentecostalism boosted women's religious authority through the belief in personal charismatic gifts and the direct, unmediated access to the divine. Elizabeth Brusco's work (1995)

took this further by arguing that Pentecostal patriarchal culture granted women a certain form of emancipation. Besides demanding female submission, the Pentecostal family ethos mandated a "reformation of machismo", which called men to sobriety, fidelity, and domestic affairs in order to be "good household leaders".

Studying Pentecostal men, researchers have had to grapple with the suggestion that Pentecostal masculinities are patriarchal and oppressive towards women (Burchardt, 2018; Thornton, 2016; Klinken, 2011; Chitando, 2007). Many point out that Pentecostalism demands more responsibility of men than many surrounding cultures, even to the extent of calling them to "sacrificial love", while others, however, show that Pentecostal men nonetheless stay within established gendered power relations. Concerning LGBTIQ+ rights, researchers have had to address the perception that Pentecostals reject queer folks. Many acknowledge the considerable spectrum of "different Pentecostal theologies, ethics, and politics regarding sexuality" (Klinken, 2023: 289) and its inherent ambivalences (Chitando and Mapuranga, 2016; Richman, 2021). Keri Day has even argued for Pentecostalism's "radical inclusivity" (Day, 2023). Others see Pentecostals as an outright lobby against LGBTIQ+ rights (Parsitau, 2021; Palecek and Tazlar, 2021; Ukah, 2021).

Therefore, even though recent research has introduced important differentiations and has extended gender studies beyond women, it seems that much of the debate is still driven by the underlying question of the "gender paradox": Is Pentecostalism good for women, men, and LGBTIQ+ people? Moreover, the idea of a gender paradox ultimately relies on the assumption that those marginalized by patriarchal structures worldwide (most often, women) seem to have only two options, namely subordination or resistance. Researchers – mostly based in Europe and North America – would generally assume that they should have the desire to resist, which is why it remains "paradoxical" if they do not. We therefore ask: Does the "paradox" – despite its own declared goal of Eurocentric critique – privilege researchers' ideas about gender relations? Would Pentecostal women, men, or LGTBIQ+ folks describe their actions as paradoxical when they apparently leave the gender status quo unchallenged? Whose paradox is the Pentecostal gender paradox?

Addressing these points of criticism, some studies have therefore opted to incorporate the concept of agency, opening up new possibilities of interpretation (Soothill, 2007; Klinken, 2012; Attanasi, 2013; Kurzewitz, 2020). These studies signify an important step forward to detach the perception of gender from the frequently assumed dichotomy of oppression and resistance, based on the idea of rational free choice. According to Saba

Mahmood (2012) and Judith Butler (1995), agency only exists within, not against, structures of power. This is because structures of power do not simply exist but rely on repetition and enactment. But each instance of repetition necessarily introduces changes and shifts since circumstances and concomitant motivations never stay the same. This approach allows us to emphasize the individual and specific motivation of the acting parties involved. It also allows for a more layered and complex analysis of "culture", since neither Pentecostalism nor geographically specific social formations are fixed and can be used to determine individuals' behaviour. A recent example would be Nora Kurzewitz's study (2020) of Costa Rican women who join Pentecostal churches for their practices of inner healing. These practices are adaptations of a global discourse on healing, neither specific to Pentecostals nor to Costa Rica. By looking at these practices in more detail, Kurzewitz shifts the focus from asking why women would want a submissive context to prioritizing the interests of Pentecostals themselves and how and why they feel empowered through Pentecostal practices.

The gender paradox appears in a new light in this special issue, following the recent shift towards men. Brendan Thornton, in his article "Ethnographic Excursions in the Pentecostal Making and Remaking of Men", discusses a male version of the gender paradox through his research in the Dominican Republic. According to his thorough ethnographic research, Pentecostalism attracts men but also puts them at odds with the masculinity expected of them within their context. This constellation produces unwanted side-effects like sexual dreams of she-demons that plague the men at night and which Thornton reads as signs of inner turmoil resulting from this male gender conflict. This leads him to interesting points about agency, away from cultural determinism or rational choice and towards a struggle in the web of competing cultural vectors.

In her response, Claudia Jahnel discusses the wider implications of the agency question by referring to the postcolonial critique of the Eurocentric gaze. She points out that the gender paradox runs into the danger of othering if local "culture" is taken as a fixed determinant of gender. European and North American expectations of emancipation create "the Third World woman (or man)" who always fails these ideals. She argues that Pentecostal actions and tendencies towards gender need to be placed within the relevant global gender dynamics.

The question of how gender influences individual Pentecostals, what possibilities and limits it holds for them, is an ongoing debate. We believe it would be useful to focus on the concept of agency as a critique of both the idea of fixed determining structures and rational free choice.

This would enable researchers to look at the intricate dynamics among and beyond Pentecostals and put the "gender paradox" to rest. We also believe it is absolutely necessary to link the question of gender not only to individual believers, but also to Pentecostalism as a whole, which we will demonstrate in the following two sections.

3 Revisiting Azusa Street: Decentring Pentecostalism and Gender

The "*Pentecostal* gender paradox" leads to a further challenge: What do we mean by "Pentecostal"? Some seem to take the term "Pentecostal" for granted. Others point to the difficulty of differentiating "Pentecostal" from other categories. Martin speaks of the "Pentecostal" gender paradox, although she admits that "Evangelical" or "Charismatic" would be more appropriate for the Christians she investigated (Martin, 2001: 52). The situation is similar with Brusco's concept of the "reform of machismo". She points out that the Christians in her research actually refer to themselves as "evangélicos", and that the categories "Pentecostal" and "Charismatic" are irrelevant for her Colombian interlocutors (Brusco, 2010: 75–76). Nevertheless, she uses the term "Pentecostal" with reference to family resemblances, which tends to generalize and thus dismiss diverging empirical evidence. Such a move leads to an untenable imposition: on the one hand, researchers seem unable to differentiate empirically between Pentecostal, Charismatic, or Evangelical Christians, yet on the other, they somehow find it necessary to hold on to the category of "Pentecostal" for analytical purposes.

Pentecostalism is a very diverse global movement, with varied historical and present global–local entanglements. This heterogeneity poses a challenge for researchers. Globally, to be "Pentecostal" can be associated with very different, even conflicting, claims and theologies (spiritual warfare, deliverance, holiness, etc.). For a long time, the three-wave model (Classical Pentecostal, Charismatic, Neo-Pentecostal) (Hollenweger, 1969; Anderson, 2010) dominated attempts to come to terms with the historical and contemporary variety of the movement, operating with the problematic notion of a single or at least predominant origin in the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 in Los Angeles. In the past decade or so, scholars have begun to develop alternative approaches to the historiography and conceptualization of Pentecostalism, in part to decentre Azusa Street in the global history of the movement (Bergunder, 2010, 2019b; Suarsana, 2017; Maltese, Bachmann, and Rakow, 2019; Haustein, 2021; Wilkinson and Haustein, 2023; Kirchner, forthcoming). They criticize the idea of a fixed historical pattern and origin thinking, as these approaches tend to

serve hegemonic interests in the present. According to them, the notion of global Pentecostalism is relatively recent, barely predating the 1970s – a time when scholarship began to produce global histories of Pentecostalism, followed by statistical data suggesting the significant growth of Pentecostalism in the 1980s. While some connections can be traced further back than the 1970s, identifying a definitive "origin" of Pentecostalism today remains elusive (Bergunder, 2019b; Wilkinson and Haustein, 2023).

Further research towards a complex genealogy of present Pentecostalism is needed to account for its heterogeneity. This includes the investigation of naming and categorization practices (Bergunder, 2019a; Maltese, Bachmann, and Rakow, 2019; Bachmann, 2019; Kirchner, 2019; Haustein, 2021). Which theologies, practices, and overall local understandings are associated with "Pentecostal"? Which are excluded as "non-Pentecostal", as "Evangelical", "Charismatic", or other? And: what do these observations mean for a scholarly definition of Pentecostalism? It may be time to let go of the denominational categories within the study of global Christianity altogether and find other organization logics within it, like Christians' attitudes to the theme of "Pentecost" (see Haustein, 2021; Eriksen, Blanes, and MacCarthy, 2019).

The debate on the role of Azusa Street and the usefulness of a global category of Pentecostalism is very much present in this special issue as well. Keri Day's article "Queering Azusa: Towards Pentecostal Fugitivity" draws on the Azusa Street paradigm in a subversive way, namely as a queer theological resource for contemporary Pentecostalism. Azusa Street, Day argues, introduced a queer social and religious life world, rejecting both norms of race and gender at the time. Not only did black women experience the freedom to explore authoritative ministries like preaching and pastoring, but black and white bodies also intermingled in ways which were found shocking at the time. Day thereby decentres Azusa Street from a hegemonic (potentially queer-excluding) narrative to an ethics of fleeing from and rejecting norms of exclusivity.

Although appreciating the relevance of Azusa for Pentecostalism in the USA, Eva Spies draws on the heterogeneous experiences of Pentecostals worldwide and asks to what extent Azusa can have a fixed historical relevance within them. She demonstrates this through the example of Pentecostals from Ghana and Madagascar, for whom other historical and contemporary entanglements are formative. Spies thus questions Azusa's function as a theological resource for African Pentecostals, who engage with queerness on different terms than black US Americans. She invites the exploration of different resources to negotiate queerness within each specific location of Pentecostalism.

Both contributions demonstrate that there is a need to revisit the Azusa Street historiography critically. Its current dominance cannot be denied. Yet, its story can be retold with different aims in mind, and researchers need to foreground the present experiences of Pentecostals locally when considering its relevance. This may imply that Azusa does not figure in any sense at all in a genealogy of the group one focuses on, while for others it remains an important paradigm in the reconstruction of the present. Inasmuch as Pentecostal history and identity discourses are rooted in a particular legitimating praxis in the present, the discussion of gender and Pentecostalism needs to avoid globalizing stereotypes and engage with local identity discourses. Of course, there is need to consider how global dynamics and templates are instantiated locally, especially as gender, as the next section will elaborate, is not ancillary to the discussion of Pentecostal identity but has produced certain stereotypes about this religious form with repercussions globally. Yet one must be wary not to confuse global dynamics with local homogeneity. It is from this vantage point that Pentecostal studies can make important contributions to the discussion of global gender regimes.

4 Beyond "add and stir": Pentecostalism as Gendered Category within a Global Religious History

The phrasing "Pentecostalism AND gender" invites the assumption that both entities exist separately out there in the world and only wait for researchers to be combined for their analyses. This may be explained by the fact that gender-focused research in Pentecostal studies takes its insights and theories from other disciplines (social sciences, cultural studies, gender studies, etc.), thereby tending towards a certain juxtaposition of academic theory and Pentecostal practice. Of course, this "add gender and stir" approach has not gone unchallenged. Even Martin encouraged researchers to challenge disciplinary convictions about gender by taking their (seemingly ambivalent) findings seriously (Martin, 2001: 63–64). The tendency to view gender as an independent social factor has also been discussed critically within gender studies, in particular in the fourth wave of gender research, which placed emphasis on how the social structure of gender is produced in discursive practices (see the discussion in Butler, 1995).

This special issue also deals with this debate. In her article "Gendering the Pentecostal God", Naomi Richman expresses her dissatisfaction with a narrow sociological framing of gender. Shifting to an ontological approach, she observes that sexual difference and desire are crucial for

Nigerian Pentecostals in their theologies and practices. This can play out in ambivalent ways as believers are very adamant about differentiating between man and woman, yet all assume a "womanly" role vis-à-vis a "male" God (warrior, king, father, husband etc.).

In his response, Giovanni Maltese takes this critique further to the gendering of categories such as "Pentecostalism". In the Philippines where he did his fieldwork, no one wanted to be called "Pentecostal" because it was deemed emotional, irrational and thus overly feminine. Maltese argues that this is a legacy of colonial gendered power relations that need to be taken into account to understand the genealogies of Pentecostalism.

Gender, as this discussion between Richman and Maltese demonstrates, is not outside of Pentecostalism to be added on voluntarily by researchers as they deem fit. On the contrary, gender is crucial to understanding Pentecostals themselves (and vice versa), what they believe and through which genealogies they arrive at their religious identities today. Both Maltese and Jahnel, in their responses, place Pentecostals and their gendering of religious identity against the backdrop of a global or transnational gender regime: the feminization or masculinization of religion worldwide. We regard this as a promising avenue, especially when considering how the "gender paradox" defines what is "Pentecostal": emphasizing a fluid theology of spiritual gifts, healing, and prophecy, as well as bodily practices (Martin, 2001: 54). Such markers point to epistemological contrasts, such as spiritual vs. religious, and emotional vs. rational, that are deeply gendered and carry with them a history of feminization that is yet to be explored, as Maltese and Jahnel suggest.

To avoid a simple "add and stir" approach, the gendering of Pentecostalism therefore has to be considered in its global entanglements. This runs against the grain of most Pentecostal gender studies, which focus on specific areas and regions of the world exclusively. Gender is then often treated as a regionalized dynamic between global Pentecostal logics and local cultural structures – an issue that comes up in various ways in all articles in this special issue. Although the specific context does of course play a role, today's gender relations are not only related to or positioned against local "traditional cultures", as if these had no history or global entanglements themselves. Rather, they have been negotiated worldwide since the nineteenth century (Kirchner, Albrecht, and Bachmann, 2024). Colonial and missionary legacies as well as more recent geopolitical constellations draw very diverse contexts together, in which gender plays a significant part (e.g. in the legitimization of new nationalist identities). Gender discourses are also shared across religious divides via co-inspired practices like exorcism (Bachmann, 2023). The study of Pentecostalism

needs to widen its scope if it wants to grasp what is happening with gender on the ground. Inspiration may come from the study of religion in general. Recent research uses various regional examples to show how discourses on religion are gendered within global dynamics and what kinds of interactions and instances of agency arise within them (Maltese, 2021, 2023; Albrecht, 2023; Kirchner, Albrecht, and Bachmann, 2024). The discussions between our main articles and responses suggest that an analysis of Pentecostal gender dynamics within their global entanglements is an exciting and promising new direction for the future of research in Pentecostalism as well. The issue also demonstrates that Pentecostal studies stands to produce unique and important insights in this endeavour.

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