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The Pentecostal gift

Ghanaian charismatic churches and the moral innocence of the global economy

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INTRODUCTION: IS THE GIFT MORALLY INNOCENT?

In the decade and a half since Michael Taussig's pioneering work on commodity fetishism (1980), anthropology has contributed to the growth of a paradigm which investigates economy, the functioning of markets and the exchange of commodities, in terms of culture. A particular concern of writers in this vein, has been the extent to which an increasingly disengaged, and alienating, economy is interpreted in terms of moral peril. Following Taussig (1980, 1987), these writers have argued that the interaction of local societies with global capitalism provokes a sense of danger which is translated into religious, symbolic and ritualized behaviours through which local cultures cope with the perils that ensue from such interaction (see Miller 1995; Fisiy and Geschiere 1991; Geschiere and Fisiy 1994; Appadurai 1986; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). The penetration of foreign commodities into local societies takes place through their links with the market place; and foreign commodities seem able to elicit a sense of alienation, because the market mediates what is a rupture: between the places and cultures where commodities were produced and those where they will be consumed. Since the previous 'social life' of such commodities is unknown to the local cultures which consume them, these authors argue, commodities appear to be enchanted, and to function in local systems as if they possessed a will of their own. The result is that their local appropriation and use are not considered as innocent, but as ridden with evil and embellished with forces that threaten society and personal identities. Social anxieties express these perils that arise when foreign commodities become objects of local social desire.

Examples abound. Plantation labourers in Columbia secretly establish pacts with the demon of the sugar cane, the 'Great Reed', in order to assure themselves of access to the sources of wealth that the cane seems to yield only for a small number of absentee landowners (Taussig 1980). But as a consequence of this contract with the Devil, these luxury items possess their owners and trap them in

immoral relations, which finally remain 'barren' since their consumption is based in wasteful and destructive desires that never lead to (re-)productive benefits. Geschiere and Fisiy have shown how, in some rural areas of Cameroon, witchcraft crazes and fantasies may also be interpreted as cultural responses to an engagement with new wealth created through involvement with foreign, Western capitalist, agro-industrial plantations. Such involvements provoke suspicions of immoral behaviour from which accusations of witchcraft arise (Fisiy and Geschiere 1991; Geschiere and Fisiy 1994). In Malawi, there are traditional healers who provoke fear by using 'telephones' – made from horns, bead-strings and wild-cat furs – to communicate with the spirits about the diagnosis and treatment of their patients (van Dijk 1995). Meyer (1999) describes how Ewe-Pentecostals in Peki, Ghana, treat the purchase and possession of Western commodities with care because they fear that the Devil, or evil spirits from the sea, work through these products to possess them. Only through prayers in deliverance meetings can commodities be de-fetishized and turned into innocent objects that no longer endanger their owners.

How far should this paradigm – of the enchanted global economy and the moral perils of involvement with foreign commodities – be generalized (van Dijk 1995; Englund 1996)? The paradigm suggests that anxieties about the devilish, or generally immoral, powers believed to exist within foreign objects result from an imperfect understanding of the global market place, and from a partial apprehension of the processes through which commodities are produced and distributed before they become available locally. The paradigm enshrines an ethnocentric notion that *we* understand the functioning of global capitalist markets whereas the *other* doesn't, and remains a perpetual victim of it. Thus, the paradigm seems to primitivize the other's capacity to deal with the uncertainties and the porous quality of social life which result from engagement with the global economy.

This essay shows that, as locals, urban Ghanaian Pentecostals do not suffer from a deficit in their understanding of global economies, and asks whether we need to question the applicability of the linkage between foreign commodities and moral panics elsewhere. These Pentecostals are deeply engaged with the global economy, but this does not lead them to elaborate the moral dangers of commodities as such. Instead, their attitude stresses that modern global capitalism is plural, not exclusively Western, and hence accessible and understandable to the non-West, at least insofar as it is comprehensible from any other locality. Within the urban forms of Ghanaian charismatic Pentecostalism, the *impersonalism* of market commodities is transformed into *personalized* gifts which may be imbued with certain messages or invoked with dangerous powers. While gifts cannot be refused, there is nonetheless moral ambiguity about the messages, sentiments and powers that may have been incorporated within them. Ghanaian Pentecostalism remains dependent on a gift economy, and it has thrived on an ideology of gift-giving and a capacity to embrace and sanctify other formal gift-giving ceremonies which already exist as part of customary practice. It is not modern commodities that are morally problematic, but gifts, and especially the 'social biographies' of gifts. Pentecostalism therefore deals with the intricacies of its pivotal position: between global commodity exchanges, driven by capitalist forces, and local gift

exchanges enveloped in a specific and moral gift ideology. Because gifts are what commodities are not, moral perils attach to the realm of gift-giving rather than commodity exchange.

The anthropologist wishing to study the meaning of gifts in modern African societies is confronted by a dearth of modern studies. Jonathan Parry (1986: 466) notes only two contributions to the anthropology of modern gift exchange and gift economy in an African context (citing Bloch (1989) and Bourdieu (1996)). Cheal concurs, stating that despite an anthropological tradition exploring the meaning of the gift in pre-capitalist societies, work on the gift economies of modern societies is remarkably undeveloped (Cheal 1988: 1–19). This essay begins to rectify the omission by exploring the meaning of the gift with reference to charismatic Pentecostalism in one of the main metropolitan areas of the modern African state of Ghana. My analysis of the gift in this context draws upon two anthropological precedents.

Marilyn Strathern has used her anthropological appreciation of Melanesian gift-exchanges to highlight the cultural specificity of blood, semen and organ donations in the modern West (Strathern 1992: 128–32). Her contrastive analysis of relations between the subject, and the alienability or inalienability of its bodily products, shows how productively anthropological techniques can be applied to the analysis of gifts in modern societies. Pnina Werbner's insights into bride-wealth exchanges of British Pakistanis develop a transcultural account of gift exchanges on which I draw in the sections of this paper concerned with the diaspora of Ghanaian Pentecostals (Werbner 1990).

The recent upsurge of Pentecostalism in Ghana (as reported by Gifford (1994), Ter Haar (1994), Meyer (1995) and van Dijk (1997)), has been accompanied by the rise of new, charismatic Pentecostal churches which explicitly seek a transnational and transcultural context of operation (see van Dijk 1997). These churches occupy a prominent position in the modern diasporic movement of Ghanaians to the West, and are strongly represented within Ghanaian migrant communities. In Accra, where many of the churches have their headquarters, this international presence is manifested in various ways, one of the most prominent being gift-exchanges and gift-relations.

With the exception of Werbner's analysis, the transcultural connotations of gifts, and the objects that comprise them, have scarcely been explored by anthropologists. This is because anthropological writings have typically been based on local ethnographic research, allied to a body of anthropological theory that emphasizes local context. A less locally contextualized anthropology has been developing only slowly and raises particular problems. Studying the gift in modern Africa almost inevitably means dealing with a context that involves the transcultural significance of things and relationships. My analysis is forced to draw upon what Hannerz's work on transcultural connections calls an *a posteriori* orientation. Such explorations, as Hannerz explains (Hannerz 1996: 18), have to be balanced against *a priori* orientations which are defined by their underscoring the originality, primordialness and continuity of cultural forms in the face of increased global contact. In contradistinction to Mauss's view – that gifts in modern society should be viewed as nostalgic remnants 'like the resurrection of a

dominant motif long forgotten' (Mauss 1954: 66) – I will approach the gift from an 'after the fact' orientation of the established global interaction of local society. From this vantage, there is no reason to assume that the meanings gifts acquire in the metropolitan Pentecostal movements of contemporary Accra bear any relation to meanings they may have held in age-old Akan-culture; albeit, nostalgically oriented social science practice tends to stress the latter (see Robertson 1990; van Dijk 1998). Moving out of nostalgia and questioning the hegemony of nostalgic analyses in anthropological practice will open the discipline to the further scrutiny that Strathern proposes, and may go some way towards escaping caricatural accounts of anthropology's understanding of the gift, such as Cheal's.

THE MODERN GIFT IN ANTHROPOLOGY

On a Sunday in November 1996, in an interview with me, Pastor E. of the International Bible Worship Centre at Kokomlemle in Accra explained that he had received a lady for prayers who asked to be healed of her barrenness. She had been unable to conceive for some time and she suspected her problem had been caused by an attractive pair of panties given to her by her mother-in-law. Pastor E. explained that, in the testimony she had given to the full congregation of more than 500 members at the central Sunday meeting, his supplicant had mentioned that her newly-wedded husband was supposed to give money to his mother, her mother-in-law, and that the mother fornicated spiritually with her son. Nevertheless, her husband had succeeded in withstanding the pressure he experienced and been able to redirect his full attention towards his wife. The spirit of envy had evidently been included in the gift of a pair of panties, which the wife had initially worn without a second thought. On advice, and after Pastor E. had prayed for her, she returned the gift and with it, so Pastor E. declared, would go the evil spirit of envy.

This short story includes the complexities of gift-giving, desire, refusal and morals in a nutshell. Significantly for my analysis, the anecdote reveals how a modern, foreign and global commodity (a pair of pants) was turned into an enticing gift. Contemporary anthropology, however, offers few leads about how to deal with the modernity of gifts, quite how they mediate relations with the global economy and are imbued by these relations with messages and morals that are problematic. The most recent anthropological reinterpretation of Mauss's seminal *Essay on the Gift* was published by Jonathan Parry in 1986, and it is there I begin to seek analytic resources. Parry launched his essay with an account of misconceptions common in anthropologists' interpretations of the reciprocity of the gift. Mauss had presented his argument in terms of an account of the evolution of social contract in human societies. This evolution had three stages marked by changing forms of contracts between groups: total prestation, gift-exchange and commodity exchange. Under gift-exchange, the objects given were not alienable from their giver; as a result, some part of the giver is captured and transferred to the recipient by the gift; this is the source of the obligation to reciprocate. Reciprocity establishes and constitutes a social contract and, in this sense, gifts are given in the anticipation of reciprocity. The obligations to give, receive and reciprocate constitute an elementary structure of social life.

Under capitalist relations of commodity exchange, the economy becomes increasingly disentangled from society and, concurrently, objects become totally alienable; property rights are relinquished by exchange, and the parties to a contract do not exchange any part of themselves. It follows that, under capitalist relations, the gift is defined as the antithesis of the commodity. Economic interest is invested in commodities, and the gift is ideologically presented as devoid of economic interest: a 'pure' statement of affect.

Parry amends this common understanding of Mauss's essay in two important respects: reciprocity and traditionality. He emphasizes that Mauss was aware that in pre-capitalist societies the iron law of the reciprocity of the gift also involved notions of giving freely or for altruistic motives. However, Mauss wanted to underscore the social contractual character which rested on the willingness to give, receive and reciprocate. This formalized the structure and sequence of gift-exchange and captured a lot of thought about the cultural embeddedness of economic relations; Lévi-Strauss, and later Gregory (1982), considered the gift as an elementary form of social life which both regulated structural relations between groups, and formed the basis of primitive political economy. Where other, more effective, forms of social dominance and cohesion did not exist, the gift was first and foremost a means to gain control over others (for instance, through potlatching, or through bride-giving and bride-taking relations).

In this application of Maussian ideas, Parry argues, most anthropologists were wrong where Mauss was right. Mauss's account of the spirit of the gift suggested gifts put some part of the giver's nature, substance or spiritual essence into the hands of the receiver. 'To keep this thing', as Mauss indicates, 'is dangerous, not only because it is illicit to do so, but also because it comes morally, physically and spiritually from a person' (Mauss 1954: 10). One solution is to reciprocate; the other, as Parry shows, is to pass on the gift to others, who in their turn also convey it even more distantly into the social system, so that the gift is never reciprocated to its original owner.

With reference to a northern Indian community, Parry shows how this process occurs in the context of the 'Indian Gift', as Mauss called it. The gift is imbued with a person's sins and immorality; and this 'loaded' gift, the *dana*, is presented to a specific type of Hindu leader who by accepting it purifies the giver. The gift will never be reciprocated, and it is passed on to others. These 'unreciprocable' gifts exist in other areas of life of the Hindu society Parry studied, to such a degree that the giver who visits the village of a receiver is unable to accept 'even a glass of water' (Parry 1986: 461). Parry thus showed that a Maussian perspective must encompass both reciprocable and unreciprocable gifts and he thereby made notions of the alienability and inalienability, interest and disinterest, of the gift into matters for further empirical investigation.

Parry also amended anthropological theories concerning the morality of the gift and, in doing so, offered fertile grounds for studying the modernity of the gift. As noted earlier, Taussig's important account of the moral evaluation of commodity exchange and gifts on Colombian sugar plantations has been emulated by other writers. The plantation workers described by Taussig sought to increase their wages by pacts with the Devil, but the money they acquired immorally

remained 'barren'. Analogously, in some areas of Cameroon, it is believed that witchcraft is employed to turn people into zombies who work through the night on plantations and thereby increase their owner's 'immoral' wealth. Examples abound in Cameroon of the attribution of witchcraft to those who engage in modern means of production and in commodity exchanges which are subjected to a capitalist market mechanism (see Fisiy and Geschiere 1991; Geschiere and Fisiy 1994; Rowlands and Warnier 1988; Warnier 1995).

By implication (Parry 1989: 65), if involvement with commodity exchange is considered highly suspect, dangerous and threatening, then gift exchange is innocent, safe and good. Such a relation does not hold in the northern Indian pilgrimage cities where, as Parry describes, gifts to the Brahman priesthood embody evil and danger, and money that derives from these gifts is considered barren and can be used only for futile consumption. As in his previous instance, it is because these have been inflated with the sins and evil of the giver that they should never be reciprocated. Even the expectation of, or desire for, other-worldly rewards will render such gifts futile and empty (Parry 1986: 66).

In this Indian case, it is because moral peril inheres in gifts that commerce and commodity exchange are considered 'innocent'. Trade, merchants and the use of money are neither considered intrinsically bad, nor perceived as leading to moral perils to which local society has no answer. Parry contrasts such north Indian perception of merchants, trade and commodity exchange with European medieval views which stressed the amoral character of accumulating money without adding anything to God's creation by the application of human labour to production.

Following Parry, I want to look more closely at the significance of the free or 'pure' gift. The crucial correlation seems to be that those who make free and unconstrained relations *in* the market-place also make free and unconstrained gifts *outside* it. As economy is differentiated from society, and thus alienated from social relationships, there is increasingly room for an ideology of the free or pure gift to develop. In Hindu society the *dana* (which usually is a gift of money) is supposed to be a 'pure' and entirely disinterested gift. Reciprocity is not anticipated here, or in the hereafter. By contrast, Christianity exhorts gift-giving precisely on the grounds of reward in the hereafter.

With reference to modern secular society, both Cheal (1988) and Carrier (1995) emphasize how crucial gift-giving is to the management of interpersonal relationships and the establishment and maintenance of intimate social ties. Cheal suggests that intimate life-worlds are created through exchanges of 'pure gifts', most of which are redundant transactions in other terms. The gift is not considered 'mere duty', but a supplement to what is normally expected in exchanges, and one that brings no substantial advantage to recipients, who may well have been able to provide it for themselves (Cheal 1988: 90). Strathern (1992) makes the same point in her comparison between donations of blood, semen and other bodily products in the West and Melanesia. In the Melanesian context, blood and semen donations constitute social relationships and transpose one subject into another; dividuality is established such that one person is permanently related to another and finds an identity only in and through others. In the Western context, however, blood, semen, and the like, are donated towards an unknown social 'environment' and,

although definitely carrying the identity of the giver, constitute neither intimate social relationships nor reciprocated identities.

Carrier (1995) takes the issue of alienation and personalism further, to claim that, under modernity, the free or 'perfect' gift is opposed to the impersonalism of commodity-exchange. As people in industrial societies believe themselves to be increasingly alienated from impersonal objects and institutions, so the free or perfect gift appears as a new ideology which confronts this alienation. Commodities signal fluidity and fracturedness in social relations, while the ideology of the free gift emphasizes durability in social relationships and supplies the grounds on which people may develop a variety of reactions to impersonalism and alienation.

Whereas Parry questioned an anthropological contrast between the moral innocence of the gift and the moral perils of commodity exchange, Cheal, Strathern and Carrier question whether the free or pure gift is alienable or inalienable. In Parry's ethnography the gift of *dana*, while free and pure (devoid of material or immaterial interests), is imbued with moral dangers because it is inseparably related to a specific individual's sins and transgressions. In Cheal, Strathern and Carrier's work on Western societies, the free gift is both morally innocent and personal, and, at the same time, alienable – since people relinquish subsequent claims on the gifts they give to others. Cheal, Strathern and Carrier suggest that free or pure gifts must be studied in terms of the level of communication and message they involve. By imbuing objects gifted with a message of intimacy, subjects may be striving to create small life-worlds defined against a wider social environment in which they share nothing with one another. In other contexts, free or pure gifts may not be imbued with this message of intimacy; like gifts of blood and semen, they may help to constitute an anonymous social environment in answer to moral calls to do so.

The modernity of the gift encompasses a principled simultaneity of two processes: one by which an anonymous object is drawn from the market, imbued with personal sentiments and sends an emotionally charged message to another in an intimate field; another by which highly identifiable objects – such as blood or semen – are made anonymous so as to be presented to society at large. In terms of the different types of statements they make about social relationships between members of modern society, anonymized gifts do not, as emotionally charged gifts must, imply the existence of a social relationship.

All these different cases of free gifts which do not require reciprocation pose a problematic of *the subject in the object*. Parry's free gifts to Brahman priests are inalienable and embody aspects of the morality of the giver. In the cases Cheal, Strathern and Carrier discuss, gifts are free, personal and alienable and are only recognized as 'real' gifts to the extent that they express personal sentiments. Both positions occupy one end of the spectrum of possible positions with respect to my problematic of the subject in the object: the end at which subjects establish relationships with objects which become loaded with sentiments and morals, and subsequently emanate from the person, never to return. At the other extreme, the subject in the object is studied in a more 'classical' anthropological fashion to indicate how objects indeed *do* include the person, and how the social relationship that is established by such reciprocal bondage determines a person's identity (as in

Strathern's Melanesian examples).

The degree to which subjects are invested in objects defines a series of (possibly divergent) scales – in terms of such variables as reciprocity, alienability and personal identity – which may help to indicate more precisely the characteristics of different types of gift-exchange that we find juxtaposed. The scales run from the determination of personal identity and social relations through reciprocity at one extreme, to the non-reciprocation of free gifts and the emanation of personal sentiments and personal messages (between already defined personal and social identities) at the other. The moral messages and sentiments of the obverse of this – *the object in the subject* – have been little studied.

Under certain moral regimes, like the Pentecostal regime I present here, it is specific commodities-as-objects that provoke moral peril. For Pentecostals, commodities such as alcoholic drinks, tobacco, drugs, traditional medicines, amulets, etc. are despised and may not enter the private domain. However, this means neither that these moral ideologies see all engagement with market commodities as dangerous and threatening, nor even that luxury consumer goods are subjects of scorn and disapproval (as Meyer 1999 suggests). On the contrary, some types of African Pentecostal movements in Ghana encourage lavish expenditure on expensive clothing and on other items that help to increase a person's sense of prosperity and well-being. Many members of urban Pentecostal congregations belong to the middle classes of societies in which there is a high level of involvement with market commodities, trade, international relations and money. It is the fact that such engagements take place on impersonal bases so that goods do not carry personal identifications, which encourages involvement with the global economy and intercontinental migration (see van Dijk 1997). Under such a type of moral regime, we may ask whether the analysis normally applied to the perils of dealing with commodities may not more appropriately be applied to objects considered to be gifts. What kinds of moral statement and awareness result from the understanding of gift presentation within Ghanaian Pentecostalism? How far does Pentecostalism replicate the free and unconstrained relations of the market place as free and unconstrained gift-giving within its moral realm? If the gift is not innocent, how does Pentecostalism in urban Ghana cope with its ambiguities?

THE MULTI-LAYERED PENTECOSTAL GIFT

The new type of charismatic Pentecostalism which has been developing in Ghana since the late 1970s followed and reacted against an older and more mission-inspired Pentecostalism which had been present since before the Second World War. This new form of Pentecostalism developed rapidly in the urban areas of Accra and Kumasi and, above all, gained a young and urban middle-class following which was attracted by its personal fervour, and its unashamed display of social success and upward mobility. The scores of churches that developed rapidly in these urban areas challenged not just the older Pentecostal churches (such as the Church of Pentecost, Assemblies of God, or Christ Apostolic) but also, and especially, the more indigenized, spirit-healing churches. The latter declined in number, and were largely restricted to their rural base. The principal

difference between the two independent Christian ideologies is that, whereas spirit-healing churches have indigenized Christianity to the inclusion of traditional healing practices, the Pentecostal churches have opposed such a synthesis and instead sought inspiration, particularly from religious ideologies that have arisen within Black American communities. As a result, Pentecostalism has always held a pivotal position between local and indigenized Christianity, and international sources of inspiration, influence and support.

The newer charismatic Pentecostal churches have taken this internationalization to the extreme and, thereby, established for themselves a special position in the new overseas diaspora of Ghanaians (van Dijk 1996). In calling themselves 'charismatics', these churches emphasize highly personalized and individualistic religious notions of inspiration, revelation, morals and lifestyles which they seek to propagate. Leadership also is highly personalized, which means that secessions occur easily. The personality of its leader, as 'a Man of God', gives a church its special character. As there is a great uniformity in religious practice and style of worship, people take this into account when electing for membership of a particular church.

African Pentecostalism encompasses multi-layered notions of the gift simultaneously, and complex contestations arise from these ideas and practices. Most importantly, as an ideology Pentecostalism is itself based on the notion of *charismata*, the gifts of the Spirit, which are believed to become present in practices of healing, speaking in tongues, deliverance, propheticism, and the like. The structuring of leadership involves constant 'mutational work' (in Pierre Bourdieu's phrase) through which the 'symbolic capital' of spiritual gifts is turned into positions of authority. In the type of charismatic churches I focus upon here, religious leaders themselves embody these spiritual gifts which they mediate as 'powers' to their congregation. These powers heal and deliver the congregation from the dark forces of Satan, and from the sins and transgressions that occur through involvement with these forces. This process is ideologically encompassed by the notion that the *charismata* were rendered to the leader for 'free', following a period of deep crisis in their lives. The church members primarily reciprocate the benevolent powers that are made available to them in immaterial ways: by the show of gratitude, respect and appreciation which is a standard element of all meetings. In addition to these immaterial reciprocities, however, explicit material tokens evince the congregation's gratitude for the work of the 'men of God'; and these also are essential to the way churches operate. I shall give some specific instances of this mutational work later.

The membership is also expected to give witness to the extent that these gifts have become an integral part of their own religious experiences and positions in social life. The fight against Satan and other malevolent spirits and forces should be waged by every born-again believer (*wofaye-Yesu* in Twi, effectively, 'he has given himself to Jesus'), and all believers are obliged to show, particularly through speaking in tongues (*kasa foforo*), that they have received this gift. During sessions of *bo-mpaye* ('praying'), every member engages in ecstatic speaking in tongues, which is considered a spiritual power capable both of fighting the evil forces that prevent good health and fortune and of offering protection in social

life, for travel and so on. Evidence of material success in the market-place is far from inappropriate in terms of the intentions, representations or displays of *bo-mpaye*; on the contrary, the possibilities for mutation between the immaterial gift of the spirit, material results and immaterial reciprocity are constantly in evidence. By reference to economic fortune, employment, prosperity, and business success, the market-place is constantly invoked in normative expressions of the Pentecostal gift-ideology.

However, this complex gift-ideology is related to a material gift-economy, which itself is multi-layered. Pentecostal churches celebrate extensive rituals involving the donations that members make towards the church. Money has to be turned into a free gift which is suitable for presentation to the church and its leadership. Leaders cannot receive 'payment', since that idiom belongs with the functioning of the market rather than in the personalized realm of exchange. 'We do not want to be viewed as opportunists', one of these leaders explained; the gifts of the Spirit come freely, and so should not be exploited economically. Leaders do receive money but, as I show below, not before the money has been transposed, by means of the sentiments that it carries, from an impersonal market 'object' into a free and personalized gift.

One stream of donations, which takes the form of ritual taxation, is called 'tithing'. Fully-fledged members are supposed to give the church a tenth of their net income. Tithings remain highly identifiable and personal (see also Herman 1991) because they are displayed on what are called tithing-cards which indicate the value of that tenth of a person's monthly income pledged; tithing cards are sensitive documents since they give a fair estimate of personal income. Through their access to this confidential information, the leaders of the church dominate an element of a member's identity.

During church services, additional collections are held for specific targets and members are urged to give as much as they are able. These gifts are generally construed as 'fighting the religion of poverty' and, as such, particularly challenge mission Christianity. Missionaries, it is claimed, portrayed 'Jesus as a poor man' with no place to stay on earth; while, in fact, as Ampiah Kwofi, leader of the Accra-based Global Revival Outreach Ministry, stated, 'Jesus owned many houses and provided for all of his disciples like God provides for me!' The Christian missionaries stand accused of having introduced a gospel of poverty, thus deforming it by proclaiming that, as Ampiah Kwofi mockingly told his audience in Accra, 'it doesn't matter if you are poor, God loves you anyway'. The missionaries came from a wealthy culture, possessed all sorts of modern equipment, introduced new building and clothing styles that were difficult for the local populace to emulate, yet, in the view of the modern Pentecostals, all this did not lead them to proclaim a gospel of prosperity. Many Pentecostal leaders would later state that 'poverty has crept into the minds and souls' of their flock; donations to the church are celebrated as a reversal of this thinking. Leaders urge their congregation 'to give freely as God will not leave us in want', and this gift-ideology holds that the more one gives the more one will prosper. At special collections earmarked for specific targets – to buy a new car for the leadership of the church, or maintain the fabric of the church building – leaders call for exorbitant donations, and donations of

between 100,000 to 500,000 cedis, or even more, are not exceptional. The collective success and prestige of a church is made evident through such donations, and the ability to give generously is an element of the competition between churches to attract public attention.

Individual donations to the church may be inflated with messages and sentiments, as Cheal, Strathern and Carrier suggested of modern gifts in the West. The leader of the church may indicate to his members when the moment for a collection has come by saying, 'Let this money work for you! Keep it in your fists, raise it up high and pray, pray, pray, so that whatever you will be praying for this money will be working for you!' Fists are raised from which the corners of cedi-notes poke out, indicating that the hand is not empty. An ecstatic session of speaking in tongues may evolve as each and every person shouts out what he or she feels the money should be working for. Donation of money neither impugns the intentions, nor threatens the moral status, of the giver. As Parry and Bloch (1989) have noted, money does not always carry the connotations of moral peril that are common in Judaeo-Christian culture. In giving their money, members of the Pentecostal congregation anticipate return and reward, whether material or immaterial, and expect improvement in their position and fortunes.

I have discovered no ideology in these Pentecostal churches which suggests that money used in the market-place for commodity exchange will remain barren while money used within the confines of the church will yield fruit. On the contrary, donations in the church, as well individuals' money, should both 'work' to improve fortunes in the market. The use of money is neither 'immoral' nor 'suspect'. The distinction made is that money used in the market-place is not invested with a person's subjective identity, nor inflated by their subjective desires, and thus remains impersonal, unable to carry destructive or immoral messages; money used in the church is turned into 'possession' (Carrier 1995: 10) and is meant to be invested by the personality and inflated by hopes and desires. The alienability of money donated to the church does not prevent it from being a medium of subjective personal communication.

Another type of donation that occurs in the ideology and practice of Pentecostal gift-exchange might be labelled syncretic gifts, to refer to forms of exchange that are seen as elementary forms of cultural life. The giving of presents and money to family members, particularly those involved in funerals and marriages, is part of a cultural practice which is maintained in a variety of forms in metropolitan, as well as rural, areas (Arhin 1994). The charismatic churches not only acknowledge, but even emphasize, the importance of such customary practices as *kokooko*, which literally means the knocking on the door of the groom's family for gifts to the wife-givers. The enormous sums of money and lavish gifts given to the family of a bride during the ceremony of *kokooko* are closely monitored by Pentecostal churches when their members are involved (as I have witnessed). Pentecostal leaders want to assure themselves that this 'engagement-ceremony', as they prefer to call it, has been performed properly and that the bride's family is satisfied with the gifts and money presented to them.

However, Pentecostal leaders also expect that some of the customary order of things will be omitted in the performance of the 'engagement' ceremony: there

should be no pouring of libations to the ancestors, no alcoholic drinks should be offered to the guests (such as the customary *schnapps*) or included in the gift-exchange. The 'engagement ring' is revered as an object of special religious devotion and prayed over by the Pentecostal leader. Members of spirit-healing churches are recognizable by the rings their members carry as a means of protection (the spirit-healing Ablengor church is particularly renowned for its powerful rings). So, when Pentecostal leaders pray over the engagement ring, they invoke special sentiments and moral messages, hence both turning the ring into a proper gift and differentiating it from the rings of other churches. Only after the *kokooko* has been held, in a manner monitored and found acceptable by the Pentecostal church, may the wedding be blessed in church on one of the subsequent Sundays.

If the Pentecostal church and its leader have taken responsibility for funerary observances, then gifts given to the bereaved family will be monitored on lines similar to engagement gifts. Far from being anonymized, the identity of a gift-giver is made known both to the family and to the wider circle of church members. An offering bowl is placed by the pulpit, and a relative of the deceased, representing the entire family, stands close by to announce the names of the church members who take their turn to walk to the offering bowl and make their donation. During the funerary ceremony, which takes place a week after the burial, further gifts are made to the family; and again a representative of the family will announce both the name of the giver and the amount given. Anonymous and impersonal gifts are unwelcome. Just as in the case of engagement parties, while the Pentecostal churches follow a customary pattern of gift exchanges, they also monitor these customs and exclude elements that are incompatible with their beliefs (particularly libations to the ancestors, which are vehemently rejected).

Thus, we have seen that the Pentecostal gift economy is multi-layered, and gifts made within it range from the reciprocated to the unreciprocated, and from the alienable to inalienable. By encompassing the gift exchanges customary at marriages and funerals, the Pentecostal moral realm incorporates and supervises the forms of reciprocity which structure the elementary forms of social life. These syncretic gifts structure the very relationships between groups and individuals they establish through reciprocity. Such gifts contain the identity of the giver to a high degree and, because the subject is invested in the object, have a high degree of inalienability. For instance, should a marriage fail, the Pentecostal church endorses the customary practice that, once the wife is returned to her family, so do the gifts given as *kokooko* should also return to the family of the husband.

When gifts of money are given to the church, Pentecostalism further inflates the messages concerning the giver which are communicated. The money collected – through tithings, offerings and for special purposes – is transposed from the realm of commodity exchange to that of the gift-economy. This happens, not by turning money into an inalienable object for which reciprocation would be the norm, but by inflating money with special personalized messages and sentiments. Investing the subject in the object, under the umbrella of the Pentecostal gift-economy, permits the structures of reciprocity and the 'free gift' to become entwined: money or a commodity is transformed into an unreciprocable gift by the sentiments and moral messages it is made to evoke.

This simultaneity of the reciprocable gift with the free gift in Pentecostalism operates to distinguish and separate this religious discourse and practice both from non-gift relations (market or commodity exchanges), and from highly localized gift-relations (that bind and enslave the individual in local (power-) relations). In some other local (non-Pentecostal) religious practices, objects are made and given to individuals in order to manifest spirits, evoke the ancestors and tie a person to spirit-controlled webs of obligation to relatives, or to the *fie* (the 'house', or shrine, of an ancestral deity). Pentecostal ritual practice usually excludes use of the specific objects – candles, sticks, statues, water, oil, etc. – which are central to the healing practices of spirit-healing churches. In their objection to the use of these and similar objects, Pentecostals instead emphasize the healing power of the Holy Spirit as a gift to the community which cannot be reciprocated.

So far, I have explored the multi-layered character of the Pentecostal gift through an analysis of the way the subject may be invested in the gift. In the simultaneity of the reciprocable and the free gift, Pentecostalism seems to offer diverse answers to the questions of whether the gift is alienable, and what sentiments and messages it carries. The investment of a subject in an object, which I illustrated in my initial story – the gift of a pair of panties imbued by a mother-in-law's spirit of envy – now needs to be explored further. I shall do this through a case study which illustrates the converse of the envy-imbued panties: the capacity of Pentecostal gift-giving to take a commodity from the global economy and attach wholly beneficent meaning to it.

THE OBJECT IN THE SUBJECT AND ITS MORAL

An event which occurred during my fieldwork in Accra, first led me to consider the positive moral implications of gift-giving in Ghanaian Pentecostalism.

In November 1996 I attended a gathering of the International Bible Worship Centre (IBWC) at its main meeting hall in the Accra-Kokomlemle area. About 500 people were in attendance at a church service of this charismatic-Pentecostal church, which was led by its founder Revd S. Ankrah, a man in his mid-thirties. The IBWC is one of the many Pentecostal churches in Accra that signal their international presence by displaying, at the pulpit, the flags of every country in which a branch has been established. I have discussed some of the ramifications of this sense of global presence previously (van Dijk 1997), and can confirm that the Dutch flag displayed in Accra genuinely does represent a branch of the church in the Netherlands (The Hague).

The meeting was in full swing – Ankrah leading with great displays of dynamism and energy, and one song following another accompanied by band music, dancing, shouts and cries – when all this was suddenly stopped by the chairperson of the board of governors. He had an important announcement to make, for which, he said, he needed everybody's attention. He produced a set of car keys from his pocket and announced it was time that we should all be ready to show our appreciation for the Revd Ankrah – founder and leader of the IBWC – and for all that he had done for the church.

'This Man of God', the chairman proclaimed, 'should be elevated by the gifts that we may give to him, while by showing our gratitude in the form of giving the benevolent heavenly powers will be honoured. Do we want our man of God to stand and wait by the side of the road in the dust for as long as it takes to get one of these shabby taxis to take him to a place where God wants him to be?'

As the crowd cheered and laughed, the chairman slowly raised the car keys on high. Anticipating what, apparently, everybody knew was about to happen, he proclaimed, 'We will give our leader a car, a practically brand-new BMW-600 series, straight from Europe, Germany, so that he will float over our dusty roads and his feet will never touch dirt again!' People cheered, clapped hands and yelled, and as the chairperson repeatedly demanded 'Do we love our leader?' the gift was welcomed in an atmosphere of the utmost excitement and joy. An ecstatic prayer over the car keys followed, several songs were sung, developing into sheer celebration of the gift with dancing, clapping and speaking in tongues. The festivities accompanying the presentation of the gift, in the form of the car keys, had already lasted half an hour before the acceptance of the gift by the leader, which was even more of a celebration.

The leader prayed over the keys, speaking in tongues as he accepted them from the hands of the chairperson, and continued with a lengthy panegyric to of the joys and luxury of the gift that had been given to him. He dwelled at length on the qualities of the car, its power-steering, its airbags, its tinted glass, and so forth, and how wonderfully he would speed over the roads and highways of Accra and elsewhere in Ghana. Every detail of the car was spelled out, every benefit to his position as a leader and as a man of God was indicated, and all this was embellished with songs and occasional moments of prayer. He expatiated upon the benefits of this exhibition of wealth and prosperity in the eyes of Accra's other churches without any restraint or modesty. By driving a car of this class and style he would show these others how well the IBWC was placed to receive the benevolence of the heavenly powers, and how well its individual members supported their particular church in this show of prosperity. 'We are anointed', he proclaimed, and made the congregation affirm, 'All is well with our souls!' Eventually, the gift-giving ceremony had occupied a full two hours, a duration considered highly appropriate to 'a show of gratitude that becomes our great leader'.

Later discussions with IBWC members revealed several aspects of this gift-giving ceremony which both illuminate its moral implications for them as individuals, and help us interpret the Pentecostal gift with reference to idea of the object in the subject. Initially, the gift is striking for its extravagance and external provenance. It was way beyond any gift that could be contextualized within the normal scope of sociocultural relations. If the *kokooko*, or groom's gift, is considered to be the peak of expense attained by ordinary Accra life and events, then this gift of a BMW – fully loaded with features – went clear off any scale by which extravagance was normally measured. Its value defied comparison even with the *kokooko* of the upper-middle classes with which I was familiar. This fact of transgressing local values and contexts seemed to be signalled by stressing repeatedly that this was a practically brand-new car, shipped in directly from Germany,

giving local evil forces no chance to contaminate the gift. No local influences had been invested in the gift through its manufacture; it could not hurt or haunt the receiver; this sublime object had been brought from a place more elevated than the immediate locality in order to be put into the service of a man of God.

Metonymically, the car keys became a centre of interest – as they were the focus for prayer, sanctification and the justification of the gift within the spiritual circle of the Pentecostal church. The keys were overloaded with sentiments, held on high while the congregation ecstatically prayed in tongues. Despite its enormity as a gift, the car was transformed from a commodity into a free-gift, a gift the leader could use however he wished, alienated and definitely unreciprocable, but imbued essentially with the congregation's personalized sentiments of appreciation and gratitude.

The most striking aspect of the gift to me, however, was that during the presentation the hymn 'All is well with my soul' was sung. In their speeches, both the chairperson (as donor) and the leader (as recipient) had stressed the importance of the willingness to give the gift, and the willingness to accept it, and this had been underscored by the sentiment that 'there should be no bitterness in our hearts and minds'. The gathering was repeatedly prompted to search their hearts and minds for any sign of bitterness, jealousy or envy while this gift was given. This needs some further elaboration.

The church services of this, and other, charismatic churches give a prominent place to testimonies of deliverance (*ogyee*) from binding spirits. People are invited to explain how they became subjected to evil influences emanating from their social environment, and how calling upon the power of the Holy Spirit delivered them from the 'grip' these powers had on their lives. Nine times out of ten these testimonies are success stories that celebrate the fact that once again the power of the Holy Spirit, which is particularly manifest in the speaking in tongues, had been able to combat the detrimental effects of a social milieu. Witchcraft is often construed in terms of jealousy, envy and bitterness, and it is the close circle of relatives, called the *fie*, who are usually considered most prone to these feelings which may cause their victim's social life to be unsuccessful, plagued by obstacles, and never crowned by the acquisition of wealth and prosperity. The long and binding threads that emanate from the *fie* represent a personal history, a past by which the present circumstances of the individual can be explained and combated. If the gift of a pair of panties seems to have caused barrenness, then the powers that have been invoked in the object must be 'broken'. Breaking (*obubu*) these powers, however, does not resolve the root cause of the problem; its spiritual source still inheres in the binding threads of kinship and resentment. The panties caused barrenness because they were imbued with a mother-in-law's resentment from which deliverance (*ogyee*) must be sought. Jealousy, envy and bitterness are the key words here; they are indicative of the propensity to, or actual presence of, witchcraft (*obayi(foo)*), by which someone's close relative is being kept down. At the 'prayer-camps' of Ghanaian Pentecostalism, huge 'breaking' ceremonies are held to which flock hundreds of people who suspect that binding threads of resentment have prevented their attainment of social fortune (see van Dijk 1996). Soul searching involves investigation of the individual and subjective cosmological

space to discover whatever powers exist there that might translate into witchcraft.

Jealousy, envy and bitterness are particularly anticipated on the part of those who have been unable to disengage from the constraints of local relationships in order to compete in the unconstrained realm of commodities and commodity exchange. It is through engagement in the market economy that people become susceptible to the jealousy and envy in which evil takes root. Commodities do not provoke such powers intrinsically; rather it is the market economy which causes many people to be unable to control the flow of goods and thus to become envious of the mystique of those who have succeeded. Saying this, I do not mean to invoke that primitivization of the local I criticized in some previous anthropological approaches to popular culture; from that perspective, individuals are supposed to have only a partial and incomplete understanding of the local functioning of capitalist markets and, on this account, to believe all involvement in these foreign systems to be imbued with immorality, uncertainty and peril. My point is the obverse of this: the possession of Western consumer items and luxury goods actually refers people to the possibility of external sources beyond the confines of Ghana's economy and outside its cultural parameters. Many members of the families in the new Ghanaian diaspora are encouraged to operate intercontinentally, so as to profit from Western economies and markets, and to send home money or commodities that will help their families 'survive'. The presence of these Western consumption items in the hands of some creates the sense of their absence in the hands of others, even in such metropolitan areas like Accra. It is the externality (both territorially and in terms of social and cultural standards) of non-Ghanaian items of consumption that is considered the main source of bitterness, jealousy and envy. In many cases, it is the distribution of these opportunities that becomes the bone of contention between those who monopolize external relations and those who are excluded from them, between those who intend to migrate from Ghana to the West and those who stay behind, and between those able to participate in the realm of desire – mapped by the acquisition of consumer goods, the appropriation of lifestyles, and the gamble for passports and visas for external travel – and those who are unable to do so.

The fact that in a Pentecostal church, at a particular moment, a set of car keys was the extreme symbol of the political economy of desire in present-day urban Ghana also made those keys an extreme provocation to jealousy, envy and bitterness. The gift was essentially a litmus test of moral standing. Every member of the congregation was invited to search his or her heart and soul to see whether the slightest signs of jealousy or envy could be detected there. If they could, then it would mean that the long binding threads of the spirits of the *fié* were at work, and these would need to be 'broken' and the person delivered from their source. As a commodity, the car was appropriated from the global market and turned into a free gift by the congregation's personalized sentiments and messages of gratitude; but the car retained its externality (both in terms of its origin, which was German, and its expense, which was huge); the simultaneity of its inside- and outside-ness allowed the occasion of the gift to function as a litmus test of morality. The manifest message of this gift was an investment of subjectivity in the object that rejected an impersonalized, alienating global condition; the latent message,

however, was that the object produced effects in subjects which allowed them to interrogate the degree of their own freedom from evil spiritual ties with the forces and powers of the *fié*. On both accounts, however, *alienation is positively translated and transposed into freedom*: the freedom to dispose of impersonal, alienating commodities as free and perfect gifts, and the freedom to use and possess these objects without fear of the binding forces of jealousy, envy and bitterness that tie the individual to the fortunes, limitations and preoccupations of the *fié*.

CONCLUSION

Quoting Daniel Miller, James Carrier underscores the observation that interaction with the global economy is not always, and everywhere, construed in terms of alienation, but instead may be cast in cultural notions of freedom:

Miller is not arguing that all people in industrial societies think they are alienated, separated from impersonal objects and institutions any more than he is saying that they react to that separation in the same way. 'Alienation' has negative connotations, but what it denotes can also be glossed with a word with positive connotations, 'freedom'. At the least then, people are likely to be ambivalent about the separation that goes with alienation, as they are about the joining that goes with durable social relations.

(Carrier 1995: 110)

In the Pentecostal practices described here, no moral peril or ambiguity attaches itself to commodities that are totally alienated, foreign, and not imbued with personalized sentiments and messages. Alienated commodities carry none of the long binding threads of the evil powers which are an aspect of the *fié*, powers which haunt individuals made familiar to them in the shrines where they are worshipped. Alienated commodity exchange is synonymous with freedom from such constraints and anxieties; and through its high level of engagement with non-personal, global economies, Pentecostalism seems to celebrate this freedom in its ritual practice and symbolism. Ambiguities arise, however, when commodities are turned into gifts and shed their innocence. Gifts carry sentiments, messages and intentions, and the obligations to give or to receive them may contain dangers. Unlike the cases reported by Taussig, Geschiere and the Comaroffs, moral peril does not arise from involvement with capitalism and its commodity exchanges, but rather from gifts which may contain evil (from which one has to seek protection) or may provoke evil spirits of jealousy, envy and bitterness (which haunt the person in the form of witchcraft and misfortune). In diaspora, many Pentecostal churches of Ghanaian origin have been established that cater to the needs of Ghanaian labour-migrants (see van Dijk 1997). Migrants usually live under the obligation to send home money, and they commonly fear the consequences should they fall short of expectations back home or arouse the jealousy and envy of relatives who either are unable to share in their repatriated wealth or have had no opportunity to travel abroad themselves. There is fear of reciprocity as one never knows what one will receive and with what sort of powers it will be invested.

Pentecostalism places itself – between the global, transnational economy and the local society – as a ground where free gifts can be given without material reciprocity, where commodities can be personalized and imbued with sentiments and messages without falling prone to the invocation of evil powers, where its members can be delivered from the powers that emanate from the *fié* and are conveyed by gifts that cannot be refused, and where gifts may signal the purity of the giver's heart and soul. Thanks to this multi-layered, gift-ideology and gift-economy, Pentecostalism is able to occupy a pivotal position between the global economy and its own transnational and transcultural relations, on the one hand, and the local cultural structures that are dominated by gift and reciprocal relations, on the other. Local customary gift-exchanges, such as the *kokooko*, are accommodated within Pentecostalism by rejecting the practices that signal the long binding threads with the forces of the *fié*. Gift-giving is made innocent by cutting these threads with the ancestors, which allows the insertion of sentiments and messages intended to enhance personal freedom and fortune. Money is transposed into a gift capable of carrying personalized messages which combat the forces of the *fié* that may attempt to take possession of the gift. Wherever they have become free through alienation, money and commodities are not considered a dangerous aspect of the engagement with the market and the global economy. It is rather in localized exchanges, when subjects may imbue gifts with powers, that dangers arise, and these are caused not by alienation but by its opposite.

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