

AN AUTHOR MEETS HER CRITICS

Around Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria by Ruth Marshall

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■ Comments by J. D. Y. Peel

In the now very rapidly growing literature on Pentecostalism in Africa, Ruth Marshall's book occupies a special place. In disciplinary terms, most of that literature falls under religious studies or history. The anthropologists came later, particularly those from North America, who had to get over their distaste for a religion that seemed so saturated in the idioms of the US Bible Belt. The originality of Marshall's book is grounded in its linkage of questions derived from political theory with rich data collected through intensive and sustained fieldwork. But she insists it is not "an ethnography of the movement" (p. 5), so what exactly is it?

Fifteen years in the research and writing, Marshall's book carries the melded histories both of the Pentecostal movement and of her own theoretical development. The insight from which she began was that the study of African politics, from the Marxist to the positivist, has often defined the field of 'the political' too narrowly and imagined it too thinly. It needs instead to embrace all practices of power, notably those exercised in daily life, a critical site for the fashioning of new subjectivities. In Nigeria, the sphere of 'religion' is especially productive in this respect, and in Pentecostalism it stages, in a particularly cogent form, "the possibility of acting, of beginning anew" (p. 50). It is Foucault and his disciple Paul Veyne who inspire Marshall's emphasis on the irreducibility, the originality, and the 'strategic' character of Pentecostalism. Such historicity, opposed to all static, essentialized conceptions, has a two-sided implication. On the one hand, it underscores the temporal 'rarity' of events, their placement in unique historical conjunctures, so that nothing *really* repeats or recurs, no matter what people think. On the other hand, these events are set in a time flow, with many of their constitutive features enduring or recuperated from the past, even if people are prone to deny it. This Janus-like character of events is picked up in a specific way in the literature on Pentecostalism, with the running argument about the balance to be struck between its elements of rupture and continuity. Although Marshall's emphasis is primarily on Pentecostalism's promise of rupture from the past, it is a *redemptive* rupture. And as she is right to argue, what it has to redeem is (in part) the failures of an earlier strategic program of redemption, that of the evangelical missions of a century or more ago.

The experiential baseline of 'Born-Again Christianity' is, in Marshall's succinct phrase, "the ordeal of everyday life in postcolonial Nigeria" (p. 53). This translates into a generalized critique of the crisis of the Nigerian present, that chaos of corruption and mismanagement whose effects are everywhere present in social life, involving a massive disjunction between the rhetoric and

the reality of the nationalist project. Pentecostalism is in a sense post-nationalist, yet it takes the failed promise of the nation most seriously and offers the Holy Spirit, working through the lives of Born-Again Christians, as the solution. But in the end, the core narrative that Marshall has to tell is a poignant one: it is of the overall failure, at least at the public level, of Born-Again Christianity's strategic project to effect a radical break from Nigeria's fallen condition. She tracks this at three levels. The first has to do with "the work of the self on the self" (p. 46) through such practices as prayer, witnessing, fasting, restitution, and other forms of *askêsis*, by which individuals realize themselves as persons reborn. This shares much with Pentecostalism elsewhere and seems to be its most enduring and effective feature. More specific to Nigeria are two other levels. One has to do with its economy—with the arbitrariness and excess of its patterns of accumulation and with the disruption of historic forms of debt and obligation, as between parents and children or big men and their followers. The other relates to the nation-state, where Born-Again Christians use a highly charged rhetoric of 'conquering Nigeria for Jesus Christ', that is, of restoring public virtue through widespread conversion. Inevitably, the religious divide in Nigeria sets this goal on a collision course with Islam, which has its own, incompatible political project.

The failure of the larger Born-Again project is much more evident in 2011 than it was a decade ago, still less in the early 1990s, when Marshall began her work, or the mid-1990s, when Nigeria was ruled by a man whom Pentecostals could only regard as a true Prince of Darkness—the brutal Muslim dictator, General Sani Abacha, during whose rule they had a strong sense of living in a pre-millennial end-time. But that was then. Now, and especially since the presidency (1999–2007) of a self-styled Born-Again in the person of Olusegun Obasanjo, there has been a return to politics much as usual. Forms of violent Islamic radicalism, such as Boko Haram, are now much more a challenge to the Nigerian state than Pentecostalism ever was.

But Marshall's main concern is less with the external conditions of the Born-Again trajectory than with the effects of its own internal incoherence. The original orientation of Born-Again Christianity—which comes over very strongly when you talk to those who pioneered the movement in the campus prayer-fellowships of the 1970s—was centered on 'holiness', or the urgent sanctification of the self within a messianic end-time. Miracles played a part in this, but more as a means to guarantee faith than for their material outcomes. However, a shift came about, bringing two orientations to the fore: first, miracles became a primary objective, especially in the prosperity ministries; second, the conquest of demonic opponents became the focus in so-called deliverance ministries. With these developments, associated with the rise of charismatic, miracle-working pastors, some of whom became wealthy celebrities, the Born-Again imaginary "inscribes itself within occult forms of accumulation and power" (p. 173), analogous to (and not clearly distinguishable from) those in the wider political economy against which the Born-Again movement had originally set itself. The problem of the 'discernment' of divine from demonic power reasserts itself within the Born-Again community, and the Pentecostal promise loses its liberating force.

It is attractive to interpret this shift as a reversion to the default system of indigenous Nigerian culture—specifically with respect to its typical emphasis on religion's this-worldly benefits. Some have seen it as a 'revenge of paganism' or the return of the *génie sorcier*, supposedly expelled by the Christian God. Marshall strongly resists such arguments, not just because of their essentialist flavor, but because they treat the demonic as external to the Pentecostal framework, whereas its 'return' is in fact witness to its internal incoherence. Drawing on Agamben and Arendt, she argues that the roots of the problem lie in a fundamental crux of Christian (especially Pauline) theology: the relations between grace (or faith) and the law (or works). Only if these are held in a relationship of dialectical tension will their critical, liberating potential be released. Yet in Nigerian Pentecostalism they have slid toward fusion.

The essential boldness of Marshall's book is that it sets out to analyze the political content of what might appear as the least political of religions. Since the book's title comes from an essay Foucault wrote in 1979 on the Iranian revolution, a comparison with Islam—emphatically *not* the least political of religions—strongly suggests itself. Of the many aspects of her work that I have discussed with Marshall over the years, few have engaged us more than the extent to which Pentecostalism and reformist Islam should be seen as resembling or differing from one another. I think it is fair to say that, from early drafts through her DPhil thesis to this monograph, she has shifted the balance of her judgment somewhat from resemblance toward difference, although she still characterizes the two movements as “doppelgangers” (p. 222).¹ To focus on resemblance is plausible in relation to processes of subjectivation at the individual level² or where the two movements face up to one another in situations of conflict. But when it comes to the larger and longer-term political implications, the differences must surely weigh more heavily. Marshall herself acknowledges that their “political theologies are radically different” (p. 215). Whereas many Nigerian Muslims have very definite ideas, grounded in local historical precedents, about what kind of polity they want to see, Pentecostalism—infused as it is with the qualities of “individual salvation, interiority, and affectivity” that it derives from its parent evangelical tradition—has only a “negative political theology” (p. 165). It is impossible even to imagine a Pentecostal state—as distinct from a state where Pentecostals exercise influence—although there are continuous calls for an Islamic one. What Pentecostalism has to offer is at once both much less and much more than what Islam does. It has nothing like a *sharia* of its own to offer, yet it holds out the possibility of a world completely transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling in those who are born again. The great achievement of Ruth Marshall's book is its penetrating analysis of the theo-logic that informs the assurance that all can be made over anew.

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■ NOTES

1. This term seems to arise due to its use by Larkin and Meyer (2006: 287).
2. See the articles in “Les sujets de Dieu,” a special issue of *Politique africaine* 87 (2002).

■ REFERENCES

Larkin, Brian, and Birgit Meyer. 2006. “Pentecostalism, Islam and Culture: New Religious Movements in West Africa.” Pp. 286–312 in *Themes in West Africa's History*, ed. Emmanuel K. Akyeampong. Oxford: James Curry.

■ Comments by Daniel Jordan Smith

Ruth Marshall's *Political Spiritualities* is an original and theoretically sophisticated analysis of the dramatic rise in popularity of Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria and its influence on social and political life. In this innovative study, Marshall focuses on what she describes as the “political productivity” (p. 3) of Pentecostal religious belief and practice, effectively moving beyond social

science scholarship that treats religion as a second-order phenomenon. In Marshall's astute hands, the investigation of Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria offers a window into contemporary politics, post-colonial statecraft, and the everyday struggles of ordinary citizens as they try to cope with poverty, inequality, and corruption—and the profound uncertainty and anxieties that these produce. Marshall shows how Pentecostalism creates possibilities for redemption and radical change, having what she calls “insurrectional force” (p. 48) while often simultaneously serving to justify and reinforce existing structures of elite domination and inequality. It is precisely its capacity to reveal and explain the multifaceted and often contradictory dimensions of this burgeoning religion that makes *Political Spiritualities* such a compelling and informative contribution.

Marshall draws heavily on the work of Foucault to craft an analysis that is intellectually provocative and theoretically powerful. Engaging directly with contemporary scholarship on religion and politics in Africa, she is bold in her critiques of—and divergences from—major strands in the literature. In particular, she criticizes what she characterizes as ‘culturalist’ perspectives, which reduce the appeal of Pentecostal Christianity in Africa to issues of identity and tradition, thereby obscuring the political nature of ‘Born-Again’ religious beliefs, behaviors, and lifestyles. Most forcefully, she departs from what she describes as the “domestication of modernity” paradigm (p. 5), which seems to be dominant in current scholarship on African studies and is associated in its most sophisticated form with the work of anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff. In Marshall's view, explaining the popularity and significance of Pentecostal Christianity as a means by which Nigerians (and Africans) interpret, understand, and ‘make African’ modern life—which she claims the domestication of modernity perspective does—understates the politically productive capacities and consequences of religious practice.

Marshall rightly insists that the explosion of Born-Again Christianity in Nigeria must be properly historicized, and she effectively traces the emergence and evolution of this popular religious movement, both with regard to its roots in earlier mission Christianity and in relation to Nigeria's political evolution and crises. Particularly fascinating is her attention to the transformation of Pentecostal doctrine in Nigeria from a more ascetic and other-worldly orientation, dominant between the 1970s and the early 1990s, to the ‘prosperity gospel’ of the last decade or two—an approach that emphasizes the achievement of wealth and success in this world as the mark of salvation. Marshall elucidates how these two dimensions of Pentecostal orientation can be embodied ambivalently in individuals and in contradictory ways with regard to the collective political effects of this religious movement in Nigeria.

As Marshall shows, Pentecostalism (especially the prosperity gospel versions) can serve to reinforce inequality and elite domination as well as challenge it. While Marshall's account of the prosperity churches is rich and intriguing, I would like to have seen both a clearer explanation as to why the prosperity churches have become so popular and dominant and a more direct engagement with what this implies for Marshall's political productivity thesis. To what extent does it matter whether religion's political productivity serves the interests of power? One argument might be that the insurrectional aspect of Pentecostalism's political productivity has been co-opted and that this religion now serves elite power quite effectively. Marshall grapples in various ways with this question, but she seems hesitant to conclude more forcefully that the turn to the prosperity gospel amounts to a negation of Pentecostal Christianity's more revolutionary potential.

This manuscript can also be viewed as an effort to answer the question as to whether the theoretical perspectives of Foucault, derived mainly from thinking about Europe, can be applied appropriately and effectively in non-Western—and particularly African—settings. Marshall's position on this is a resounding ‘yes’. Readers who are conversant with Foucault, or who are interested in thinking about the application of his work cross-culturally, will surely view Marshall's endeavor in this regard as one of the centerpieces of the book. In my most critical

moments, I found myself asking whether readers not steeped in (or those critical of) Foucault could fully appreciate this book. Overall, I believe that they can, but I would have welcomed a more insistent effort to concretize the book's Foucault-inspired theoretical arguments with more ethnographic examples.

Indeed, in many ways this is a very theoretical book. One of its great strengths is Marshall's erudition: she engages anthropological, philosophical, and political science literatures that inform an understanding of the relationship between religion and politics, in general, and post-colonial Nigeria and Pentecostalism, in particular. Marshall explains at the outset that she is not attempting to write an ethnographic account of Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria. Her specific disinclination toward ethnography is combined with a critical view of social scientific understandings of religion more generally, which she sees as reductionist and inadequate for a full comprehension of religion—not only on its own terms, but as a politically productive arena in social life. Yet, in my view, many of the book's most insightful contributions depend on Marshall's deep understanding of politics and society in Nigeria. Rather than shying away from ethnography, I would like to have seen Marshall embrace it. Her dismissiveness of dominant anthropological accounts of Pentecostalism seems to have deterred her from utilizing forms of evidence that could have been useful for her argument.

At one point in the book, Marshall critiques other scholarship by asking whether local actors would recognize themselves in these accounts. I found myself asking the same question of Marshall. I am not suggesting that she (or any scholar) should craft an argument based on whether the subjects of the study would agree with it. However, with more ethnographic material it would be easier for the reader to judge whether Marshall's theoretical positions are supported by on-the-ground events and Nigerians' own experiences. It seems to me that the basic argument of the book—that Pentecostalism in Nigeria involves a transformation in processes and forms of subjectivation (a term from Foucault that I found more obfuscating than clarifying) and that these changes involve first-order rather than derivative political productivity—calls for more access to the subjective experience of Nigerians.

Of course, accessing the subjectivities of other people is always a fraught and at best a partial endeavor, but ethnographic evidence is, I think, among the best tools we have. Given that Marshall places subjectivation at the center of her account, I find it surprising that she does not include more observations, voices, and experiences of ordinary Nigerians. Although obviously informed by long and rich research in Nigeria, the book has the feel of a bird's-eye view, with most of the empirical evidence coming from published Pentecostal tracts, pastors' sermons, and observations in churches and at church-related events. There are relatively few ordinary people in the text. Surely, with all her experience in Nigeria, Marshall is equipped to provide more ethnographic material in support of her theoretical position. The focus on subjectivation would have been enhanced by greater attention to subjectivity-as-lived-experience. My sense is that her theoretical arguments with anthropology led to an unnecessary jettisoning of ethnographic evidence.

Curiously, Marshall says relatively little about one seemingly significant ethnographic—and demographic—fact: Pentecostal Christianity's extensive popularity among women and youth. While Marshall's account clearly acknowledges this, I was surprised she did not offer more analysis regarding the skewed demographics of Pentecostal participation and appeal. The book offers a compelling account of the inherently political and social dimensions of Pentecostal beliefs and practices, including the ways that joining a Pentecostal church enables people to opt out of the traditional redistributive economy of debt and social obligation to kin and community of origin. It seems to me that gender and generational conflict are at the heart of these struggles, but they are not adequately addressed in Marshall's analysis. Similarly, Marshall appears to suggest that Pentecostalism is mainly an urban phenomenon in Nigeria. It certainly started that way, but Pentecostal

churches are now widely prevalent in rural communities across southern Nigeria. More explicit attention to the rural-urban (not just urban) dynamics associated with Pentecostalism would have added an interesting dimension to Marshall's account and would have allowed for a more complete and more nuanced reflection on the socio-political implications of these trends.

Overall, *Political Spirituality* offers persuasive insights that help to explain both the popularity of Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria—and Africa more generally—and its political and social effects. While Marshall seems somewhat skeptical of the capacity of social science to understand religion, her book is actually a testament to the insights that are possible when a social scientist takes religion seriously.

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■ Comments by Joel Robbins

Pentecostal and charismatic Christians around the world have been disappointing the political hopes of their academic observers for several decades now, ever since their numbers began to increase rapidly in the 1970s. For some, the disappointment was immediate, coming as it were at the moment of conversion, as when a whole generation of scholars found themselves both confused and frustrated when the Latin American poor turned up in greater numbers to join these faiths than they did to join liberation theology's base communities. In other cases, scholars worried over the potential conservatism of converts, noting that believers might simply be politically quietist and thus disinclined to do much political damage, even as they were unlikely to do much good. Still other scholars kept up a brave face, projecting some hope for Pentecostal radicalization in the future as members found a way to spread the sometimes democratic nature of their church organizations to the political sphere at large. But even this most optimistic scholarly position, framed firmly in the subjunctive mood, did not counter the generally downcast tone that has colored much social scientific work on Pentecostalism and politics over the last 40 or so years.

Against the background of work produced from within this gloomy paradigm of disappointment, Marshall's book stands out as exciting, creative, and highly original. Perhaps because her training is in political theory, rather than in a traditional social science discipline, Marshall comes at many more or less familiar aspects of what she calls the "Nigerian Born-Again movement" (p. 15) with fresh eyes—eyes attuned to seeing in the Nigerian churches that she has studied an elaborate and consequential construction of politics that others have missed. This is a politics that eludes the usual categories (left and right, activist and passivist, etc.) that previous scholars have used to shape their accounts of Pentecostal political involvement elsewhere in the world. By helping us to see the outlines of this new kind of politics for ourselves, Marshall has written what will surely be one of the most generative contributions to the study of Pentecostalism, not to mention to the study of religion and politics, in many years. There is no question of summarizing Marshall's arguments in the available space. Instead, I want to point to some of the themes of the book that I see as particularly striking and then to raise a final question that I think Marshall's work encourages us to confront.

Marshall traces the Nigerian Born-Again movement from its prehistory in the failure of the promises of justice and progress made during the colonial mission period, to its origins in the

1970s, and through its development in the 1980s and 1990s. As is often remarked for other places in the world, there was a major shift within the movement itself, from an interest in personal holiness and asceticism in the 1970s to an increasing preoccupation with worldly material success as the ‘prosperity gospel’ took off from the 1980s onward. Part of the originality of Marshall’s argument is her recognition that, despite their obvious differences, one can see continuities between the holiness and prosperity moments that render their political projects not wholly dissimilar. She accomplishes this in part through linking (although not conflating) the holiness interest in messianism and the prosperity concern with the miraculous. Figured as aspects of a political theology, both messianism and the miraculous attest to a commitment to the value of disrupting the status quo, a cleaving to “the possibility of . . . beginning anew” (p. 50). Recontextualizing by now common observations about the Pentecostal desire to break with the past as a move that underwrites primarily personal or narrowly religious projects, Marshall insists that we reckon with the political force carried by the conviction that rupture with the world as presently constituted is a genuine possibility that ought to orient the way in which people lead their lives.

Along with helping us to rethink our notions of rupture by showing how they are at work in both the holiness and prosperity strands of Nigerian Pentecostalism, Marshall similarly reorients common understandings of Pentecostal individualism. Such individualism, which is another feature common to both forms of the faith, generally expresses itself as a need to purify oneself of demonic influence. This task often requires not only a personal moral strictness but also an effort to cut oneself off from one’s relatives and to adopt a wary attitude toward other people in general, since any person might act on behalf of the devil. Scholars have often analyzed this kind of Pentecostal and charismatic individualism as ultimately social and economic in intent, bent on liberating the self from the debts and obligations of traditional social life and freeing it for accumulation through the market. Marshall attends to issues of debt and obligation, but once again insists on reading them for their political import. More than this, she convincingly argues throughout the book that in many respects Born-Again individualism makes sense only in relation to the radical uncertainties of contemporary Nigeria, where life is dangerous and unpredictable. Moral work on the self in these conditions becomes a political project of creating order in the only domain that one has even a small chance of controlling, and then of encouraging others to order themselves likewise in the hopes that ordered individuals might eventually come together to create a more orderly and just polity.

I have only sketched the barest outlines of the new vision of Pentecostal and charismatic politics that Marshall offers us, but it will have to stand in for a more thorough account. Having presented it, I should also acknowledge that Marshall has little confidence that the Nigerian Born-Agains will succeed in creating the polity they envision. This is not only because prevailing conditions in Nigeria work against them, but also because in the end, as she sees it, their model of politics is flawed. As I read Marshall, one key flaw of the Born-Again movement is the lack of a model of how to get from individual work on the self to the building of community (p. 164). Perhaps even more damaging is the way that the movement’s rootedness in a social ontology of suspicion and fear renders it profoundly difficult to foster the bonds of trust between human beings upon which the kinds of community that Marshall favors must be built (p. 236).

What I want to draw attention to in Marshall’s diagnosis of the limits of charismatic politics is not the details that she brings forward. As with all her analyses, her argument in this regard is original and stimulating. Instead, I want to point out that, because of this argument, her deeply original book ends in a place not very far removed from where most of the works of gloomy normal science in Pentecostal studies also end: in disappointment over the potential and reality of Pentecostal political practice. This raises a crucial question about what we want from the people we study. As an anthropologist, I generally want to learn about possibilities—about the horizons

and spaces of action that different ways of life open up. Marshall quite powerfully shows us such horizons and spaces for Pentecostal politics, sensitizing us to what it is like to live toward radical change and to cultivate the self as a stake of order planted in the muddy ground of a chaotic social life. But it is clear that Marshall, and many others who study Pentecostals, want more than just this disclosure of possible ways of living. They also want the people whom they study to reach some normative benchmark set outside the world in which those people live. I find the work that Marshall does from this position extremely stimulating and rich. But I also find myself hesitating when it comes to taking the last step of exercising judgment on the lives of those with whom I carry out research. I raise this issue not in the hopes of settling it. I think we are in the realm of profound disciplinary differences here. Instead, I raise it because Marshall's book has forced me to think about how I approach these questions as an anthropologist and to imagine that future discussions across these differences might be quite fruitful.

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■ Comments by Jean-François Bayart

I have already had occasion to say that Ruth Marshall's book is one of the most original and important that I have had the good fortune to read in recent years. Served by a clear and powerful style, based on exceptional fieldwork and primary documentation, showing a remarkable command of anthropological literature and philosophical thought, and skillfully synthesizing English- and French-language traditions in the social sciences, this work puts forward a convincing interpretation of Nigerian political society based on the study of Pentecostalism and is a major contribution to the comparative understanding of religion, one that goes far beyond sub-Saharan Africa. Other people are better placed than myself to prove this. I will therefore, in the course of this review, simply continue the dialogue that I have been pursuing with Marshall for a long time now (ah yes, Ruth, we are senior figures—*ânés sociaux*—now!), suggesting a few conceptual paths to follow, in the tradition of Foucault's problematic to which the author has remained loyal (she has done me the honor of citing some of my work on the 'cultic city' and political subjectivation). I will support the comparison that her work outlines between Born-Again Christianity and Islamic reformism and continue to reflect, with her, on the relationship between religious practices and political citizenship.

The great merit of the book is that it "takes religious faith seriously" (p. 3), challenging the utilitarian or culturalist interpretations of it that occupy the academic high ground, both in North America and Europe. Such interpretations consider religion "as a medium for a message that is about something else, something nonreligious; the religious sphere is not interrogated *as such* for its political significance" (p. 18). However, "religious change is not merely the sign or the effect of change in other domains of human practice, but constitutes rather, in and of itself, a mode of historical and political transformation" (p. 34): "I will consider Born-Again Christianity as a specific regime of practice, in and through which particular moral and political subjects are produced. My approach will undertake to evaluate the sorts of political struggles the movement gives rise to, principally through processes of subjectivation, and their effects on the production of politics in postcolonial Nigeria, without resorting to an a priori notion of either religion or

politics” (ibid.). This intellectual position, with which I can only concur, leads Marshall to adopt and adapt the overhastily derided concept of ‘political spirituality’ that Foucault had put forward to decipher the Iranian revolution of 1979.¹ In this way, she breaks with the condescending *Vulgärmaterialismus* of the social sciences, a materialism that would gladly appropriate the aphorism of Abdullah Cevdet, one of the Occidental reformers of the late Ottoman Empire, that science is the religion of the elite, and religion the science of the people. And since Marshall quotes Foucault’s texts on the Iranian revolution, I feel I must point out to her Fariba Adelkhah’s (2000) book, first published in French in 1998 and translated under the (extremely Marshallian) title *Being Modern in Iran*. Adelkhah’s concept of a confessional public space and her analysis of religious practices in the Islamic Republic of Iran converge to an extraordinary degree with Marshall’s own study of religious citizenship in Yoruba country.

Marshall, then, captures Nigerian Pentecostalism in its historical positivity, without reducing it to a functionalist type of response to modernity, globalization, economic crises, corruption, and so forth (chap. 1). In order to do so, as we have said, she problematizes it in terms of subjectivation, which she makes the key concept of her analysis. Again, I agree entirely with her approach, whose ultimate challenge lies in bringing Spinoza’s thought into our social science research (p. 48). And it is precisely from this angle that I wish to add some philosophical grist to the mill of religious studies. Quite rightly, Marshall draws not only on Foucault but also on his exegete and friend, Gilles Deleuze, from whom she borrows the ‘line of flight’ concept to problematize Pentecostalism (see especially p. 163). I will suggest taking this idea further, grasping the believer in his or her ‘multiplicity’. At the molecular level of micro-analysis, we could indeed see the believer as an ‘assemblage’, in the form of the ‘multiplicity of dimensions, lines, and directions’² that compose him or her: ‘molar or rigid lines of segmentarity’, ‘cut lines’, ‘lines of molecular or supple segmentation’, ‘crack lines’, ‘lines of flight’, ‘break lines’—all of these are positions that the Born-Again Christian can successively or simultaneously occupy in regard to domination.³

On the one hand, the reintroduction of cut lines and crack lines in the study of Pentecostalist processes of subjectivation would enable us to understand better the ambivalence of the movement vis-à-vis domination and accumulation, an ambivalence on which Marshall insists but that cannot be explained solely by the line of flight concept (chap. 5). On the other hand, it would support the author in her concern, as Bergsonian as it is Deleuzian, to restore Pentecostal ‘becoming’ (“*being* Born-Again,” pp. 131–132, and “a *being-in* belief,” p. 146) by leading her to the major concept of haecceity, curiously absent from her book despite being implicit throughout it, especially when describing Pentecostalist techniques of the self.

For Gilles Deleuze, haecceity is, “literally, the fact of being this, the fact of being a this, a degree of power.”⁴ The concept allows us, precisely, to understand “individuations without subject” (Deleuze 1995: 115):⁵ “It is hecceities that are being expressed in indefinite, but not indeterminate, articles and pronouns; in proper names which do not designate people but mark events, in verbs in the infinitive which are not undifferentiated but constitute becomings or processes” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 92).⁶ So a new object offers itself to us, that of the “plane of consistency or composition” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 266), of which the various Pentecostalist techniques of the self provide specimens:

Here, there are no longer any forms or developments of forms; nor are there subjects or the formation of subjects. There is no structure, any more than there is genesis. There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules and particles of all kinds. There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages. Nothing develops, but things arrive late or early, and form this or that assemblage depending

on their compositions of speed. Nothing subjectifies [*rien ne se subjective*], but haecceities form according to compositions of nonsubjectified powers or affects. (ibid.: 266)

The plane of consistency and composition contrasts with the plane of organization and development that the different variants of historicism would claim to narrate in a teleological fashion. For example, in the case of Nigeria, these variants would include ‘democratic transition’ or ‘structural adjustment’. The plane of consistency and composition is necessarily a ‘plane of immanence’. In what was probably his last text, Deleuze (2002: 170–173) expresses this as follows:

Absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in something, not *to* something; it does not depend on an object and does not belong to a subject. ... Immanence does not relate to a Something that is a unity superior to everything, nor to a Subject that is an act operating the synthesis of things: it is when immanence is no longer immanence to anything other than itself that we can talk of a plane of immanence ... Pure immanence is A LIFE, and nothing else. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is sheer power, utter beatitude ... The life of the individual has given way to a life that is impersonal but singular nevertheless, and which releases a pure event freed from the accidents of inner and outer life; freed, in other words, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens ... This is a *haecceity*, which now singularizes rather than individuating: life of pure immanence, neutral and beyond good and evil since only the subject which incarnated it in the midst of things rendered it good or bad. The life of such an individuality effaces itself to the benefit of the singular life that is immanent to a man who no longer has any name and yet cannot be confused with anyone else. Singular essence, a life ...

At the risk of confusing, even shocking, my readers, I would say that Pentecostalist prayer is such a plane of immanence par excellence. And the Nigerian Pentecostalist truly embodies Nietzsche’s Untimely, which Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 296) describe as “another name for haecceity.”

It is, in my opinion, on this level of interpretation that we need to understand the ‘break’ represented by Christianity in general, and Pentecostalism in particular, in the history of Nigeria—a central hypothesis in Marshall’s work and one on which much of the academic discussion about her book has so far focused. With a historicity proper to Yoruba country, Pentecostalism nevertheless represents, for Marshall, an access to universality by way of “extraversion” (p. 89)—by inventing new and singular representations of liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice. Also, the conventional Christian notion of “inculturation” (p. 89) is not adequate when it comes to dealing with its own historicity. Yet again, the work of Deleuze (2001) provides support for the analysis: imitation—in this case religious or even ecclesial—is a production of difference. And, I might add, in the tradition of postmodern anthropology (but without any relativism), universalization, whether political or religious, is necessarily brought about by such a reinvention of difference (Bayart 2005). It is perhaps the merit of the comparative historical sociology of the political to provide us with the means of problematizing these processes of creation, better than the mainstream of political science and, of course, better than culturalism (Bayart 2008).

However, if we assume, with Marshall, that conversion is primarily a ‘beginning’ and that Pentecostalism is the vehicle for “new ‘possibilities of life’” (Deleuze 1995: 98), it is regrettable that Marshall remains trapped in a stock concept, that of agency, which she does not critique sufficiently and which eventually undermines her ideas. It is not just important to disconnect the said concept of agency from the Kantian legacy of the transcendental subject or the Hegelian notion of consciousness (p. 129ff.). Its usage should be drastically limited, as it has become such a portmanteau word. For, if we focus on the actor and his or her agency, we are then often unable to understand the historicity proper to the forms of the actor’s experience and the independence

of action from that of the power exerted on it. Power, Foucault tells us, is ‘an action on actions’. But there is no indication that the latter are confined to their relationship to the former. Let us recall that in the work of Edward P. Thompson, who founded the concept, agency refers to the capacity for action against oppression or social control, not the positivity and irreducibility of the line of flight from domination. Instead of thinking only in terms of agency and imagining society as a linear continuum extending from obedience and conformity to resistance and dissidence, we need to dwell on the ambivalence of each person, taken in his or her ‘multiplicity’, in relation to power. The richly suggestive pages that Marshall devotes to Pentecostalist practices of subjectivation suggest to me that the concept of *Eigensinn*, of ‘keeping oneself to oneself’, proposed by the historian of *Alltagsgeschichte* Alf Lüdtke to analyze how the Germans distanced themselves from Nazism and from the socialist regime of the GDR, may be more heuristic than the hackneyed concept of agency, even when stripped of its ethnocentric, metaphysical, or rationalist trappings. In any case, there may be agency among the Nigerian Pentecostalists, but there is much more than that, and it is one of the contributions of Marshall’s book to teach us as much.

Taking Pentecostalism in its ‘revolutionary’ dimension—and we must be grateful to Marshall for not having a naive, finalist understanding of the latter (chap. 5)—we see how this religious movement can constitute an ‘emergence from minority’, in the subversive sense used by Foucault to define the Enlightenment, and can offer the faithful an opportunity to go beyond the spheres of ethnic belonging or the lines of inequality internal to the very hierarchical Yoruba society by elevating them to the status of ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’, including in the marital (p. 113ff.) and clerical (p. 134ff.) arenas. Perhaps Marshall could have been more specific about the legacy of the political and moral economy of slavery. We know that conversion to Christianity was a form of emancipation for captives in the nineteenth century. We also know that, in the Sahel, the success of some forms of the Muslim brotherhood movement and of Muslim reformism owes a great deal to their ability to overcome the inequalities of status. Is not Pentecostalism also a way of settling the legacy of slavery that the nationalist movement had generally erased so as to set up a fictitious, or rather ‘transformist’ unanimity against the colonizer and to turn independence into a ‘passive revolution’ (see also Bayart 2009; 2010: chap. 5)?

Of course, “God is most definitely not a democrat,” Marshall points out (p. 202), citing various sermons in evidence. But this does not prevent Him from being able at times to serve democracy ‘indirectly’ and ‘unconsciously’, in the words of Ernst Troeltsch commenting on Max Weber’s views on the relation between Protestantism and capitalism. Marshall defends the (very convincing) thesis that Pentecostalism is the Christian counterpart of the Muslim reformism that is mobilizing the federated states of northern Nigeria. Its social base is largely the same, and it is likewise a by-product of school or university education and the mass media (p. 215 and p. 219ff.). I have no competence to judge the relevance of the comparison. However, it is clear that Muslim reformism in the Sahel stems from the same ‘modern moment’ in Islam that Nadine Picaudou (2010: 18–19) has described with respect to the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East in the period between 1860 and the 1930s—a moment in time that saw “its transformation into ideology, prior to any further politicization.” As Picaudou puts it: “The forms of utterance of political Islam today would not be thinkable without the cognitive revolution of this *modern moment*, without the various reconstructions of the Muslim religious referent over this period” (ibid.).

The comparison proposed by Marshall is useful in several ways. Firstly, it highlights the heterogeneity of the Pentecostalist movement as well as of Muslim reformism. Neither of these fundamentalisms, claiming to return to the origins of revelation, is consistent in terms of the dogma, the representation of money, goods, and wealth, or the social project for which it is a vehicle. Let us by all means talk about a Pentecostalist revolution, but not about ‘Pentecostalism’ as such: it is not itself a relevant category, any more, of course, than is Islam, even in its reformed

guise. Secondly, these two religious reformisms, Christian and Muslim, stem from the same historical matrix, from a certain configuration, and are ultimately ‘complementary enemies’, as Germaine Tillon and Fernand Braudel would have put it. Marshall knows Nigeria far too well to impose on us an irenic version of interreligious dialogue. Both fundamentalisms are at war with each other, and this war is indeed religious in that each side abides by ‘political spiritualities’ that are indeed irreducible to any functionalist reading (chap. 6).

In plain and simple terms, it is permissible to assume that, as in Europe, a war of religion can be the tragic vector of state formation or even, ultimately, of representative and more or less democratic government. By showing the diversity of the religious fields of Christianity and Islam, Marshall rejects any nonsense about the ‘clash of civilizations’ and, more generally, the many scientific-ideological variations on identity politics (p. 21ff.). Above all, she sets out all of the combinations that can operate within both camps and between them. In Turkey, for example, the complex relationship of Islam to the Republic and to democracy is inseparable from the pluralism of the Muslim religion, whose many operators—the Directorate of Religious Affairs, subservient to the state, the Islamic intellectuals born in the bosom of the university and the media, the brotherhoods (*tarikats*), the *vaqif* (*waqf*), the Islamic parties, the more or less jihadist or terrorist underground Muslim organizations—have unwittingly helped foster the emergence, in the 2000s, of a neo-liberal Turkish-Islamic synthesis, the complete opposite of the one conceived by the neo-Kemalist nationalists and the military from the 1960s onward (Bayart 2010: chap. 3). Similarly, in northern Nigeria, the interplay between the regional political class, the brotherhoods, the Salafists of Yan Izala, and the messianic or terrorist jihadists may also give birth to political possibilities whose actualization remains open and contingent. As for the Pentecostalist movement, which aimed to be non-denominational or inter-denominational, Marshall shows how it quickly fell back into the ecclesial and bureaucratic rut of confessionalism (p. 76, pp. 108–109, chap. 5). But there is perhaps no need to remind ourselves that the formation of the nation-state and its gradual democratization in Europe have often been an unexpected product of the ‘confessionalization’ (*Konfessionalisierung*) of Christianity in the wake of the Reformation (see Gorski 1999; Wolf 1991).

The cultic city, religious citizenship, and political spiritualities cannot fail to come into conflict with one another, it being understood, or at least hoped, that God will recognize His own. Ruth Marshall’s great talent lies in demonstrating this for us ‘in the heat of the moment’—as a historian and an anthropologist of the immediate—precisely because she takes religious faith seriously. She has added a cornerstone to the building of which John Lonsdale, J. D. Y. Peel, Terence Ranger, Karin Barber, Achille Mbembe, and others have dug the foundations. They have long since accustomed specialists on Africa to think of political change in tandem with religious change, rather than contrasting the two and thus running the risk of rendering any understanding of the modern city impossible. In a country like France, where the most dangerous fundamentalists and the jihadists of thought are the *laïcards*, the simple-minded secularists, a reading of Marshall’s work is a matter of public health.

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NOTES

1. So much nonsense has been written about this observation of Foucault, especially in France, that Olivier Roy's (2004) salutary comments are required reading.
2. For specific usages of these terms, see Deleuze and Guattari (2007: 505–506) and Deleuze and Claire Parnet (1987).
3. On these distinctions, see Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 192–207, esp. 199) and Deleuze and Parnet (1987: 124ff.). Deleuze takes this vocabulary from Fitzgerald.
4. Deleuze, university class given on 15 February 1977.
5. Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 540–541n33) took this concept of *haecceitas* from Duns Scotus (ca. 1265–1308): “This is sometimes written ‘ecceity’, deriving the word from *ecce*, ‘here is’. This is an error, since Duns Scotus created the word and the concept from *haec*, ‘this thing’. But it is a fruitful error because it suggests a mode of individuation that is distinct from that of a thing or a subject.”
6. On the “logic of the indefinite article, of the infinitive of the verb and of the proper name,” see Deleuze and Parnet (1987: 79; see also 89). See also Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 80, 260ff.).

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■ Response to Comments by Ruth Marshall

Let me begin by warmly thanking my readers for their extremely generous and insightful appreciations of my book. I'll do my best to address their questions and concerns while using this opportunity to expand a bit on where I've taken my thinking since I wrote it. I'll open with John Peel's question: if the book is not history, sociology, political science, religious studies, or ethnography, then what exactly is it? John answers this question generously and exhaustively, but his posing it offers me the occasion to quickly restate what I tried to do in writing the book. Put most simply, I wanted to account for the political productivity of Pentecostalism in Nigeria as non-reductively as possible and to develop an approach to understanding the relationship between the religious and the political that would allow political analysis to take seriously the force of religious faith, as such. After years of puzzling and prevarication, I ended up with a perhaps overly uncompromising critique of the different disciplinary approaches in social science and a rather extensive philosophical reframing. So after having written what Dan Smith calls "a very theoretical book," I hope you'll forgive me for a rather theoretical set of responses to my readers. My sense is that the readers were broadly satisfied with the empirical exposition and analysis of the case and its groundedness in the Nigerian context. Their queries or criticisms appear to turn on my choice of theoretical framework, my methods, and my overall objectives.

On the first point, I want to start by saying that I consider the philosophers I enlisted to help me tackle the empirical conundrum more as heuristic devices—a means of developing a different way of problematizing the empirical material and offering a conceptual lexicon better adapted to a non-reductive reading—than as a way to provide substantive insight into what Pentecostalism in Nigeria is all about. So at one level, deciding whether Nigerian Pentecostals are more Foucauldian, Deleuzian, Agambenian, or even Badiouian is totally beside the point; they are no doubt none of these. Foucault was helpful for largely methodological reasons. Firstly, his work doesn't give us theories of any of the objects he considers but rather provides a new way of framing or problematizing them, of unsettling dominant modes of classification and understanding, while rejecting all normative, metaphysical, or anthropological foundations. His critical enterprise is thus pertinent for a non-reductive, non-essentialist approach to both religion and post-colonial politics. Secondly, Foucault (1994: 30) couches 'truth', what he calls the "most general political problem," in terms of a 'political spirituality', in which upheavals in historically constituted relations of power and knowledge pass through the active constitution of new subjectivities.¹ I wanted to understand Pentecostalism in Nigeria as a form of political spirituality. Specifically, since the Pentecostal revival presented itself as a politically unorthodox form of insurrection, claiming to effect a radical break with the past and bring about a new creation, both individual and collective, Foucault was for me an obvious choice. Or so I thought.

However, I've discovered that Foucault tends to be read in quite a different light in North America. There has been a certain taming of his thought here, a sort of 'functionalized' reception or interpretation that might go some way to explaining the confusion over the notion of subjectivation that I read in Dan Smith's comments and have read in others since the book came out. For me, Foucault is above all the philosopher of insurrection, not simply a thinker of the 'iron cage' of power/knowledge or the normalizing force of biopolitics. A philosopher of the limit for whom 'nothing is fundamental', he constantly showed that, underlying who we are, there is no identity, no truth to be discovered, no necessity—only the haphazard logic of history as event and struggle. Foucault's central aim in his 'ontology of the present' was thus to show how the self might escape the self, how things do not go without saying and could be otherwise. As Jean-François Bayart points out, this guiding concern also animates the work of his friend Deleuze,

who asks, how, as creatures, can we rid ourselves of ourselves? So this is the Foucault I found helpful in trying to understand the Pentecostal ‘revolution’, insofar as Pentecostalism presents itself above all as a means of ‘becoming other’, of overcoming or transcending the past, the self, and the limits of the world.

In answer then to Dan’s observation that my focus on the transformations in modes of subjectivation brought about by Pentecostalism “calls for more access to the subjective experience of Nigerians” and more voices of “ordinary Nigerians,” I would have to say that this constitutes a misunderstanding of what is at stake in processes of subjectivation. (Also, I would have to object that I have no idea what an ‘ordinary Nigerian’ is, or why, in their ‘ordinariness’, they should be my privileged interlocutors.) Analyzing subjectivation, as I try to explain at length in the book, does not depend on accessing individual consciousness or experience. As Jean-François argues better than I did, subjectivity in Foucault’s and Deleuze’s sense has nothing to do with the individual person—“there is no I, only an ensemble of relations” (Deleuze 1990: 158). Indeed, I have an open question for anthropologists as to the exact status of such evidence. In what way, and of what, are such voices representative, beyond the individual and anecdotal? This is not to say that I discount such ethnographic material; in fact, I have many Nigerian voices in the book, and my empirical methods are almost entirely ethnographic. Simply put, I don’t think that these voices give us access to the ‘truth’ of their practices or their ‘real’ being, not to mention something like their subjective interiority. (This issue of method also speaks to Joel Robbins’s question concerning what our respective projects understand themselves as doing, but more on this below.)

I approach Pentecostalism as a specific sort of prescriptive apparatus (*dispositif*) that gives rise to new processes of moral subjectivation whereby “individuals or communities constitute themselves as subjects at the margins of constituted knowledges and established powers, even if this means giving rise to new knowledge and inspiring new powers” (Deleuze 1990: 206). Nigerians ‘get born-again’ and thereby extricate themselves from many of the dominant social norms—modes of classifying and distinguishing among groups and people instituted since the colonial period—in a process of agonistic struggle among multiple mobile relations. In this sense, I read such individual stories and accounts as forms of ‘testimony’, as indeed do my interlocutors, insofar as they speak to me as Nigerian Pentecostals for whom talk about their experiences is a form of Christian ‘witness’. The self who speaks about these subjective experiences is thus neither the origin (autonomous creator) nor the end (revelation) of its discursive practice, but rather an expression of an ‘inside’ that can be understood only in its relation to an ‘outside’. Or better, the self is, in Deleuze’s (1988: 97) reading of Foucault, a *pli*, or folding, an inside that is “merely the fold of the outside, as if the ship were a folding of the sea,” where “[t]he outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside” (ibid.: 96–97). Put more prosaically, the renegotiation of the mobile relations between the self and the world through a new work of the self *on* the self is precisely what is at stake in Pentecostal conversion.

Conversion thus involves a struggle on the part of the subject to liberate the self from the self, and hence, as a process of moral subjectivation, it cannot take the passive voice. At the same time, this process has nothing to do with agency as classically conceived in social science, as Jean-François so rightly underscores. For Foucault, the notion that nothing is fundamental means precisely that there is no foundation, no anthropological universal in terms of which we could speak about something like a human ‘faculty’ of agency that might be definitive of who we are or of our freedom. This non-foundationalist understanding of freedom enabled me to make sense of the counter-intuitive ways that emancipation is problematized by Nigerian Pentecostals and of the insurrectional possibilities of a Pentecostal faith based on the Pauline claim

that “my strength is made perfect in weakness.”²² Pentecostalism develops an ‘ethics of submission’ to an unmediated divine will as the principal mode of enacting the self’s emancipation—expressed as “the freedom that I have in the Messiah”—and opens up a world transformed by divine miracles and grace. We cannot simply think metaphorically about these supernatural forces and their relation to human action. So while I fully agree with Jean-François about the vacuity of the notion of agency, I still think that my critique is worth making (again), insofar as I feel that many of the current uses of the terms ‘subject formation,’ ‘subjectivation,’ and ‘subjectivity’ often perpetuate the tired old agency-structure dichotomy and the primacy of the transcendental subject (in a neo-Kantian or, most commonly, Husserlian form) without realizing it. In this sense, I’m a bit puzzled by Jean-François’ remark about my remaining “trapped” in the concept of agency, since he appears to argue throughout the paragraph that the book gives ample evidence to the contrary. So if I wasn’t clear enough in the book, I want to restate here that I believe we must talk about action, freedom, and emancipation beyond any normative or metaphysical foundation for them.

I was compelled by Jean-François’ question about why I hadn’t considered Pentecostalism as a form of Deleuzian haecceity. To be honest, the real answer is that when I wrote the book, I hadn’t really pursued Deleuze’s thought beyond his discussion of Foucault. Having subsequently read more Deleuze, I can only say, yes, what an idiot, why didn’t I? In fact, when I argued in the book that the mass of Nigerian conversions to Pentecostalism could be construed as an African struggle for access to a universal, what I should have said is, access to a universal *singularity*. If universality in the classic sense presents an empty, static field, in which particularities are distributed and relative differences consolidated and regulated, and hence always takes a specific or specified form, then we could argue that global Pentecostalism constitutes rather a movement of singularization. Following Deleuze, the singular emerges only in the active transcendence of the specific—its ‘singularization’—where, rather than moving through a universal field presumed to pre-exist it, it unfolds its own time and space, its own medium of extension. As Peter Hallward (2000a: 12) points out, singularity is thus a fundamentally redemptive outcome, insofar as our given condition is specified and mediated, or ‘ignorant’ in Spinoza’s sense—sinful, violent, superstitious, personal, worldly. The ultimate goal of philosophy for Deleuze must be to escape the forms of mediation, in terms of which creatures are consolidated, represented, and administered, through a movement of singularization, following a ‘line of flight,’ a ‘deterritorialization,’ ‘becoming imperceptible,’ a ‘body without organs.’ All figures that escape capture by the specific trace a route “out of your place, out of your body, out of your self, out of our world,” as Hallward (2006: 58) puts it. This is why he claims that Deleuze’s univocal ontology, his vitalism, is theophanic, in which everything is related not to God (Deleuze insists on ‘pure immanence’) but rather to a de-theologized creative force that “does not so much eliminate the question of transcendence, but rather distributes it throughout creation as a whole” (ibid.: 6). I can see echoes of Deleuze in the Pentecostal account of the movement of the Holy Spirit in the world, in its Pauline conception of conversion that deactivates or suspends all ‘factual’ or juridical properties that define and imprison the believer, and in a universally singularizing movement that gathers believers from around the world in a loose assemblage that has no institutional or organizational substance or consistency—something more like a haecceity along a plane of immanence than a structure in a plane of development or organization.

So I’m not at all shocked by the claim that we could see Pentecostal prayer as a plane of immanence. In fact, Jean-François may be surprised to learn that even some Pentecostals wouldn’t be shocked by this. I’ve also become a better theologian in the interim, thanks to the challenge of conversing competently with my colleague and friend Nimi Wariboko, a Nigerian Pentecostal theologian at the Andover Newton Theological School. Nimi argues that, in Pentecostalism,

divine grace does not take the form of a pure transcendence; rather, it takes the form of a trans-immanence, following Jean-Luc Nancy. In his most recent book, *The Pentecostal Principle*, Wariboko (2011: 15) makes a fascinating case for an existential Pentecostal principle that would deny any form of closure to becoming and counter any claim that a finite or conditioned reality can ever have reached its destiny: Pentecostalism as “dialectics at a standstill.” He argues that Pentecostalism’s attitude to miraculous, divine grace is that of a child at play, which allows grace to float between the serious matter of saving the soul and ordinary, ephemeral, bodily, existential matters, relieving it of the weight of the ends of eternal life. Referring to Agamben, Nimi describes divine grace as “a pure means, a means without ends” (ibid.: 152).

However, just to play devil’s advocate, I would make the following precision. If a Deleuzian haecceity is perhaps more philosophically proximate to Pentecostalism’s articulation of trans-immanent grace and its project of creative overcoming, nonetheless, Foucault’s philosophy of the relation is best suited *methodologically* to my project of trying to understand the empirical conundrum of Pentecostalism’s development in Nigeria and its political effects. I tend to agree with Hallward (2000b: 99) when he argues that what distinguishes Foucault from Deleuze is that Foucault’s thought is grounded in “an ultimately specific rather singular frame of reference.” If the singular is without relation or mediation, then the specific cannot be thought outside of relationality, and for Foucault, whom Paul Veyne calls the philosopher of the relation, the specific is simply the irreducible medium of our existence. Where “Deleuze tries to articulate a field of pure or immediate difference, a deterritorializing difference whose (virtual) relations are external to their (actual) terms,” Foucault explores the limit from the perspective of “the necessarily historical territory in which people are ‘made subject’, so as to ask the eventual question: ‘what is or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects?’” (Hallward: 2000a: 15–16). So a Deleuzian singularizing philosophy doesn’t really help us understand how Pentecostals, with their eyes fixed on heaven, nevertheless negotiate the limits of the historically circumscribed territory that is post-colonial Nigeria. It is only through an examination of Pentecostalism’s modes of de-specification and re-specification—its relation to others, to its environment, to history in this specific Nigerian case—that it is possible to say anything much at all about it.

This brings me to Joel’s open question about the nature of our intellectual projects and my judgment of Pentecostalism’s “gloomy” political outcomes. Joel quite fairly points out that my book “ends in a place not very far removed from where most of the works of gloomy normal science in Pentecostal studies also end: in disappointment over the potential and reality of Pentecostal political practice.” This is true. But to a large degree, this judgment of ‘failure’ is made with respect to the criteria set by Pentecostals themselves, what a Pentecostal political spirituality claims it aspires to be and to create. I take Pentecostal aspirations at their word, and although I know this isn’t what Joel is getting at when he speaks of a “normative benchmark set outside the world in which those people live,” Pentecostals do deploy such a benchmark in the sense that all aspirations to redemption gesture to a ‘beyond’, a ‘not yet’, a virtuality to be actualized. This is why I end the book with Pastor Tony Rapu’s indictment of how the movement has betrayed its original impulse. But I hope it’s clear that I never expected Pentecostalism to provide some sort of miraculous solution to the multifarious ills of Nigerian society and that this is where my Nigerian Born-Again friends and I part ways. This may sound paradoxical, given my commitment to, and faith in, the possibility of emancipatory politics, but redemption is generally not of this world. Indeed, history teaches us to be profoundly skeptical of pretensions to the contrary.

So if the place is indeed gloomy, it’s not the same sort of gloom as the fear-mongering predictions of a Pentecostal fundamentalist theocracy, or the propagation of a backward and reactionary form of superstition and false consciousness, or a new mode of Western imperialism, or indeed a simple political passivity. Pentecostalism’s political effects are complex and

contradictory, and I lack the necessary conviction to pretend to know how it is all going to end. Here a quick aside concerning John's remarks about the political difference between Pentecostalism and Islam: without going over this well-worn argument again, I was gratified to see that Jean-François appears to share my sense of the ways in which these political projects proceed in parallel, even if this leads to their confrontation. In fact, Pentecostalism's political ambivalence makes me less sure than John that it cannot be mobilized in a much more theocratic, exclusionary, and positively political sense: witness the recent attempts to institute homosexuality as a capital offense in Uganda and the public incitement to murder in the name of biblical principles. Torn between a quasi-democratic potential and a theocratic impulse, in its present-day, globalized manifestations Pentecostal political theology takes the form of a failed foundationalism or a failed transcendence. It should be clear that I think this is both its chance and its danger. I articulated this more clearly in a later paper (Marshall 2010), which I wrote as a corrective to my arguments about sovereignty and the miraculous in the book. The upshot of the argument is that Pentecostalism does not institute substantive forms of community or identity that might be mobilized in identity politics, nor are there institutional means of ensuring orthodoxy and obedience. Nonetheless, it is precisely this failure to ground theologically both sovereignty and community—to secure the sacred in its purity, its auto-immunity—that may push Pentecostalism into dangerous political overdrive.

In response to some recent reconsiderations of global Pentecostalism,³ I've argued subsequently that Pentecostalism's capacity to help break down "the old hierarchies and social structures, modes of subjectivation, and forms of thinking and being in post-colonial societies of the Global South, and in liberating people from their constraints" mustn't be confused with a "revolutionary form of socio-political action directed against the violence of late neoliberal capitalism" (Marshall 2011). As Wariboko (2011: 152) points out, the "bad news" is that the spirit of Pentecostalism might be nothing more than the spirit of late capitalism. All good Marxists remember Marx's enthusiasm for the capacity of capitalism to destroy the old hierarchies, ushering in the possibility of modern politics and its principle of equality. As Alain Badiou (1999: 56–57) says: "It is obviously the only thing we can and must welcome within Capital ... That this destitution operates in the most complete barbarity must not conceal its properly *ontological* virtue." So for many subalterns among the subaltern, the 'dstitution' that accompanies Pentecostalism's 'new life', one that makes a complete break with the past, is a socially leveling or democratizing force that has accounted in no small measure for its dramatic success in Nigeria. I know this doesn't make Pentecostalism very popular with some anthropologists, but one of its huge attractions in Nigeria is that conversion appears to acknowledge local realities in order to offer an escape from them, thus undermining the hegemony of cultural difference—tradition, the local, the authentically African—as a means of distinguishing, regulating, and administering African lives. This is effected in the triple mode of an emancipatory, quasi-democratic move from the specified to the singular, as I have explained above; a collective claim to a sharing of the material world on different terms; and, finally, a cosmically vital role in the unfolding of God's plan for creation that places African, and more specifically Nigerian, Pentecostals in the historically unprecedented role as the vanguard of a redeemed humanity.

Having said all this, we must never forget that for Pentecostals there is only one straight and narrow road to salvation. For them, as true, militant subjects, the truth is always evangelical and apocalyptic. The demonization of the unconverted other is what maps the personal victory of faith, hope, and love within the self onto the apocalyptic and evangelical necessity of the conversion of the entire world. We need only recall, at the end of the Apocalypse of St. John, the terrible punishments that await all those who will not hear, who do not know how to read, or who attempt to modify or write anew the witnessing text.

This brings me to Joel's real point, which is about sitting in political or normative judgment on our research subjects. I agree with him that I'm not simply content with seeking to 'disclose' different ways of living, first of all, since what I'm really interested in (and I suspect Joel is too) are the ways in which people become what they are not or aspire to become something other than they are. Secondly, I question this sort of disclosure as a judgment-free project, since these different ways can't even be recognized as such without some tacit understanding, some cultural, normative, political, or ontological baseline in terms of which they can be identified as different. In other words, I'm politically suspicious of what this supposedly neutral exposition of difference hides. Rather than a reckoning with real, sustained difference, I suspect that what is often celebrated is difference *as such*, in a generic form, where actual differences dissolve in an abstract universal collection. On the other hand, if we insist that difference goes all the way down, then, firstly, we cannot know or say anything much about these ways of being and, secondly, we're back to some sort of primordialism or essentialism as the grounds for community, whose potentially terrifying political consequences do not need to be rehearsed.

There are definitely disciplinary differences at play here as well. As an engaged critical theorist with an interest in emancipation and the future of democracy, I can hardly claim any such neutrality. The failure of the revolution in terms of Pentecostalism's own claims is clearly not such a bad thing, insofar as I'm fundamentally distrustful of any theologico-political configuration—even one that takes the form of a negative political theology, as I argue that Pentecostalism does. Much greater degrees of violence than it has so far been able to mobilize would be required to make its foundationalism successful: as Pastor Adeboye says, God is not a democrat! So it is indeed the case that I'm prepared to pass judgment on the political dangers that some forms of life pose to other forms of life. How can we call thought 'critical' if it fails to give us the means to distinguish among regimes? I'm absolutely unapologetic about this. I don't want to live under a theocracy or any other regime of the 'One', and I cannot accept the political consequences of any claim to a privileged and exclusive access to eternal truth. I believe that, as students of the human condition, we must provide ourselves with the critical means to struggle against injustice, violence, exploitation, and exclusion—that we can't just passively observe them, which of course also means being absolutely uncompromising with respect to what passes for democracy today. But passing judgment doesn't mean that we have—or ought to have—some substantive normative grounds or form of knowledge upon which to base our decisions. On the contrary, this wouldn't be a proper decision at all but rather the simple application of a rule. Here I rejoin anthropologists in their refusal of such grounds. However, this refusal doesn't let us off the hook either. As Derrida argues, the impossibility of a just decision about justice is the very beginning of ethico-political responsibility (Marshall 2011). And since they are impossible, these decisions are ultimately ... a matter of faith.

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■ NOTES

1. Hence the title of my book: “Is not the most general political problem that of truth? How to link one to the other, the way of distinguishing the true and the false and the mode of governing the self and others? The will to found both entirely anew, the one through the other (discover an altogether different division through another mode of self-governance, to govern oneself altogether differently through another division) that is what ‘political spirituality’ is” (Foucault 1994: 30).
2. Corinthians 12:9: “And he said unto me, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”
3. See the articles in Engelke and Robbins (2010) and also the debate on the SSRC’s Immanent Frame Web site, <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/category/exchanges/book-blog/global-christianity/>.

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