

“My wife converted me”: Gendered Values and Gendered Conversion in Pentecostal Households in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

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Introduction

Recent hermeneutical appreciation of gendered production, transformation, and reproduction of cultural discourses, reveal the current anthropological interest for the cross-cultural study of gender. As for the new application of these perspectives to the study of Pentecostalism, as pointed out in the introduction to this volume, at least since the 1970s, the number of publications on gender and Pentecostalism has been steadily growing (Brusco 2010: 74-75). The point, now, is to look more closely into Pentecostalism from a gender perspective.

In this chapter, a gender perspective is adopted to interpret the statement of a Kwara’ae man who struggled to convert to Pentecostalism. Firstly, I focus on the meaning of conversion as a long-term process. Secondly, I illustrate how this process takes place relationally and under the influence of gendered values. Thirdly, I claim that such an influence is understood as resting on conceptions of gender as a set of innate characteristics. This discussion shows the gendered meaning of conversion in the statement of a Kwara’ae man living in a Pentecostal household on the outskirts of Honiara, Solomon Islands.ⁱ

The role of gender in Pentecostal churches and the influence of the Pentecostal message on gender relations are two very different topics. This chapter deals with the latter. However, rather than looking at such influence as a one-way road, it explores the ways in which gender roles filter the influence of Pentecostal ethics. Indeed, the process of conversion to Pentecostalism is gender specific, not just because men and women experience conversion in different ways, but also because they influence each other’s conversion as a consequence of their reciprocal influence as gendered subjects. Although conversion does not necessarily alter the balance between gender roles in its substance, gendered subjects accommodate conversion in a way so as to transform the arrangements that make such balance possible.

In Melanesia, Annelin Eriksen pioneered the study of Pentecostalism from a gender perspective (Eriksen 2008). She observed that, in order to study the then novel burgeoning of Pentecostal Churches in Vanuatu, an understanding of Pentecostal values as gendered values would “illuminate the difference between the new churches and more established churches” (Eriksen 2012: 103). Building upon the basis of this observation, she was able to illustrate how the new churches create a space in which Pentecostal Christians work out a novel form of masculinity. To do so it was necessary to look at Pentecostal notions of masculinity and femininity as gendered values, i.e. as idealised forms of morally-desirable conditions that men and women respectively seek to realise. One of the merits of such an approach is the understanding that Pentecostal values are gender specific, rather than not.

This chapter pursues a similar analytical pathway, in that it also looks at gendered values and the key role they play in the creation of new formulations of Pentecostal masculinity. In particular, the analysis concentrates on households. Since religious and domestic activities interpenetrate in many ways, participant observation during church services and other church-related activities illuminates only in part the concrete mechanisms of value negotiation leading to the formation of gendered meanings. In order to look more deeply into the processes leading to the re-elaboration of Pentecostal identities, the perspective of the domestic moral economyⁱⁱ (Peterson and Taylor 2003) is adopted here. With a thorough observation of care and material transactions among kin and non-kin who look at each other as related, this perspective focuses on the ways in which people express their reciprocal valuation and, more specifically, concretise the gendered meaning of their Pentecostal identity.

At this point, the definition of 'Pentecostal' is in order. However, the definition of what 'Pentecostal' means is complicated by the different and often incompatible perceptions of what a Pentecostal church is on the part of adherents, pastors, and the external observer. Even if the value of these perceptions should not be undermined, there is a risk that the multiplicity of possible definitions prevents the discussion. For the sake of clarity and readability, in this chapter I choose to use the expression 'Pentecostal Churches' to encompass religious groups that, by virtue of the abovementioned multiplicity of perceptions, escape such a straightforward categorisation.

1. The Gendered Character of Conversion in Pentecostal Households

In 2011-2012 I conducted 13 months of fieldwork in Gilbert Camp, one of the settlements that have been mushrooming in and around Honiara since the end of WWII (Hart 2008; Nage 1987; O'Brien 2010), when people from other provinces, especially Malaita, began to migrate. Today, Gilbert Camp is one of the most populated areas of residence for the Honiara workforce. Although permanent residents established daily routines that are rather constant (such as income generating activities, church services, and community leisure), a succinct snapshot of the population is hard to present. The demographic features of the settlement are always changing, mobility is high, and even established residents are constantly travelling between their urban dwellings and their villages of origin, or among different settlements in Honiara. Often people come in just to attend a course of study or to do a short-term job in town, and leave after a month or two. In short, Gilbert Camp can be seen as a place defined by the intersection of a multiplicity of life projects. This chapter is concerned with the religious aspect of these trajectories.

The two churches with the highest attendance in Gilbert Camp are the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM), and the South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC), with respectively 32% and 30% of the settlers attending them. The rest of the settlers belong to the Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-Day Adventists, United Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and 5 different Pentecostal churches. Although the attendance of each of the latter does not exceed 5%, if grouped together, all the Pentecostal churchesⁱⁱⁱ become more statistically important. With 14% of the population attending them, they become the third major form of Christianity in Gilbert Camp in terms of attendance, even more statistically important than the Roman Catholic Church, the first form of Christianity to reach Solomon Islands.^{iv}

The statistical importance of Pentecostal churches is even more interesting if we compare it with the percentage of religious homogeneity in Gilbert Camp households. A religiously homogenous household is a household where all or most of its members, including the head of the household and his wife, are members of the same denomination.

Today, religiously mixed households are more and more common, probably as a consequence of the increase in people mobility and the growth of local parishes, be it in the urban or rural context. Despite this tendency, however, in Gilbert Camp nearly all the members of Pentecostal churches live in religiously homogenous households. This is perhaps due to the strong emphasis that Pentecostal leaders put on the evangelistic responsibility of the individual. It is very common, indeed, that a person converts to Pentecostalism as a consequence of his/her spouse's conversion. This shall not be considered an exclusive feature of Pentecostal Christians, though. Post-marital conversion is not specific to any denomination. In general, women tend to change their denomination to join that of their husband, immediately after their wedding. In contrast, those men who change their affiliation to join a new church tend to do so for reasons that are not related to their marriage, albeit taking place post-connubially.

These brief notes serve the purpose of contextualising the equivocal statement that gives the title to this paper. "My wife converted me", a Kwara'ae man named Stephen told me once. It happened during a semi-structured interview I had with him and his wife, conducted as part of the demographic survey of the settlement. Sitting in the shadow of their veranda, Stephen told me he was born in Malaita, son of a man from Kwara'ae and a woman from To'abaita, who came to live in Gilbert Camp when he was still a child. He grew up in the settlement and studied in the local Anglican school, until he was expelled when found cheating on a test. He later started to work as a builder, got married, divorced, lost four fingers of his left hand in a work accident, married again, and started to attend the Christian Outreach Centre. When he speaks of his life before meeting his second wife Jenny, he describes it as if it was a numb wandering without direction. Then, he says he realised who he wanted to be as a consequence of his second marriage and conversion to Pentecostalism.

However, when he said that Jenny converted him, he did not mean that she had convinced him to leave the Anglican church and join her Pentecostal church.^v Indeed, he was among those men who, although converted after marriage, consider such conversion to be the result of an individual choice. Men like Stephen, arguably, insist so much on the independent character of their post-connubial conversion for two main sets of reasons: firstly, because they do not want to represent their conversion as anything less than the result of their fervent initiative;^{vi} and secondly, because they do not want to describe themselves as anything less than Malaitan men who, by virtue of their patriarchal^{vii} ideology, should not 'follow' their wife, but rather be followed by her. Their insistence on the independent character of their conversion shall not be interpreted as an attempt to mystify the reality that, contrary to what they affirm, they converted after their marriage because of reasons related to the marriage itself and the affiliation of their wife. Rather, the meaning of the statement 'my wife converted me' has to be sought in the gendered character of conversion, i.e. in the ways in which gender defines the potential, limits, mechanisms, and outcomes of spiritual re-birth.

2. Membership and Discipline in Three Types of Churches

The demographic survey of Gilbert Camp shows that there is no significant difference in conversion patterns between spouses who convert to Pentecostal churches and those who convert to other denominations. First, in all churches women tend to change denominations more frequently than men. Secondly, in all churches denominational changes most commonly result from the imperative of 'following' the husband. However, at least one major difference suggests that couples that convert to Pentecostal churches are different. This aspect is the meaning of conversion, which is not the same in all denominations. Let us

take three examples.^{viii}

In the ACOM, membership is granted by going through a set of ritual practices, namely infant baptism^{ix} by aspersion and oil anointment, confirmation, and first communion.^x In the SSEC, one becomes a member after undertaking adult baptism by immersion and Holy Communion.^{xi} In Pentecostal churches, instead, there is no fixed procedure to become a member. For example, in the constitution of the Kingdom Harvest Ministry International (KHMI), one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Honiara, an informal subscription to the objectives of the Ministry is enough to be granted full membership.^{xii} The to-be member is not even required to experience the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, although some believe this to be the fundamental aspect of conversion.^{xiii} However, a small proportion of believers experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit before being granted membership to a Pentecostal church. In most cases it takes some time before one 'learns' to receive any kind of charismatic gift, such as the glossolalic speech that is considered to be the evidence of being born-again. It is commonly understood that becoming a Christian is a process, rather than a sudden event (cf. Gooren 2010: 93-112). To be sure, the narrative of the break with the past is as appealing to Solomon Islanders (Burt, 1994: 4-7; Hogbin, 1934: 261-263; White, 1991: 7-10, 53-77, 127, 139, 245-246; and others) as it is to anthropologists of Christianity (cf. Engelke 2010; McCauley 2013; Meyer 1998; Robbins 2007; van Dijk, 1998; and many others). However, the experience of most, if not all Pentecostal Christians, is rather one of continuous backsliding and redemption. Penitents can certainly seek the forgiveness of the pastor, but this is not necessary, encouraged, or compulsory.

We have just looked at how one can gain membership in three types of churches. Let us now look at how one maintains such association, i.e. by being obedient to what can be termed 'spiritual discipline'. Again, as for church membership, the definition of spiritual discipline varies depending on the church one belongs to. Let's look again at three examples.

In the ACOM, the Bible is considered to be the basis for the Anglican notion of wrongdoing. When a sin is committed, the pathway towards forgiveness and reconciliation is clearly outlined. A sinner shall seek the assistance of a priest, confess, repent, and perform a set of rituals (usually prayers) in order to restore membership to the church.^{xiv} In the SSEC too, the Bible is taken as the basis for the general code of conduct. However, Biblical laws are understood as principles on the basis of which other rules and regulations can be formulated. This is the case of the extra-biblical prohibition to chew betel nut.^{xv} A notable difference lies in the set of punishments that are used against a sinner or wrongdoer. These punishments are commonly referred to as 'Discipline',^{xvi} and consist of the prohibition to enter a church during the Sunday service, or the humiliation of sitting in the last bench row.

Actually, the difference between ACOM and SSEC is not so great, as far as disciplinary measure is concerned. The conduct of Anglicans, both laity and clergy, is regulated by a disciplinary canon that punishes serious sins in a way not so different from the SSEC. The priest can put a lay member "under discipline" for a period of up to six months. This happens privately, though, unlike the SSEC, in which discipline is announced publicly. During the discipline period, the penitent can attend any public service, and is actually encouraged to do so like any other church member. However, the person under discipline may not receive communion, which is obviously a collective ritual, one in which he or she is likely to be seen not taking the sacraments. Then, the penitent has to go through a form of private sacramental confession. Finally, he or she is received back during a public service. In the past, the whole process was much more similar to the SSEC: the penitent was confined to the back row. As for the clergy, similarly, the bishop can put any church staff under

discipline for up to six months. So, the main difference between disciplinary measures between SSEC and ACOM is that the former is more public and the latter is more private. However, the truth is that people in the Anglican church usually know when someone is “under discipline”. In the end, in the SSEC as much as in the ACOM, one has the same chances of feeling ashamed as a consequence of being put under discipline.

In contrast, in Pentecostal churches in Honiara there is no particular emphasis on sin, wrongdoing, or crime per se. Crime is considered to be wrong in principle, but emphasis is rather placed on the fact that “if you commit a crime you go to jail if they catch you”, that the believer shall be sinless because it is ‘better’, not because it is ‘right’. Wrongdoing and sin are obviously considered to be something one should refrain from, but the church staff does not get involved in guiding the sinner or wrongdoer towards redemption, as is the case in the ACOM, nor does it require him to undertake a period of discipline as may happen in the SSEC.

This discussion concerning membership and discipline brings us to two determinations that are fundamental for the argument advanced in this chapter. Firstly, marital partners who convert to Pentecostal churches in Honiara do not have to undertake any particular process in order to gain full church membership. Secondly, the continuation of their membership is not conditional upon their obedience to norms, rules, or laws. They are fully responsible for their conduct, and do not have to be accountable to anyone else but themselves. This, after all, is not surprising, since it is in accord with the typically Pentecostal principle of direct relationship with God (see Huber & Huber 2010: 133).

Such individual responsibility, arguably, provides relatively weaker incentives to refrain from acts that are perceived to be wrong or sinful. It follows that, if Pentecostal Solomon Islanders were to rely only on the principles upheld by their pastors, they would have only their own discipline as deterrent from these acts. Their absolution and reconciliation with God, thus, depend entirely on their own relationship with him.

In the SSEC, instead, members of the church staff force the wrongdoer into “Discipline”. That is a strong deterrent against possible wrongdoings, for the heavy burden of shame that results from being required to sit close to the church exit. In contrast, Pentecostal pastors, as mentioned above, tend to make their list of negative incentives against ‘unchristian’ acts in rather functional terms: do not commit crimes, “because you go to jail if they catch you”; don’t drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or chew betel nut, because that drains your finances and decreases your health; and so on and so forth.

In sum, the individual member of a Pentecostal church has the responsibility of his or her own discipline as he or she proceeds through the acquisition of habits and behaviours leading towards the condition of health and wealth that is considered to be the symbol of Pentecostal Christianity. However, according to the pastor of one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in Honiara, it is very difficult for Solomon Islanders to discipline themselves to this set of habits and behaviours. While I was interviewing him in the context of his accommodation beside the church, he said:

“One thing I want to tell you about Solomon Islanders: they are so spiritual; spiritual meaning that everything is spiritualised. So, if somebody is sick, if somebody is not doing well at school, if somebody is poor, they will take it spiritually, like: ‘oh, it’s the devil, somebody must have cursed us, somebody must have done this to us.’ So, they always feel helpless, like: ‘I am not responsible, it is always the devil, my father, grandfather...’ They always blame somebody. But then, this is why the Bible came to us. If you are mindful about

what you eat, if you are mindful about how you live, you will become more, you will become rich. [...] This is really where the value system comes [in]. We take responsibilities, and we become more responsible for what kind of future we are going to get, for what kind of person we want to be, for what kind of family we want to build, for what kind of financial state we want to be in. [...] Too many people in the Solomons do not have that kind of mind-set.”

The pastor’s point of view is rather common among Pentecostal Christians in Honiara. It follows that the perception of the individual responsibility of the believer for his own health and wealth is perceived to be a problem with no easy solution. In the absence of a set of negative incentives such as those of the SSEC, and without the obligation to undertake a formal process of redemption, falling into ‘wrong’ habits makes it even more likely for the believer to keep backsliding again and again, trapped in a vicious whirlpool of spiritual deprivation understood in terms of physical sickness and financial scarcity. When this happens, Pentecostal Christians cannot rely on external redemption measures,^{xvii} because their churches do not provide them. That is why, in most cases I observed, they seek the support of their spouses.

My time-allocation analysis suggests that, in Gilbert Camp, men and women tend to be free from work in the same time-slots of an average day. This suggests that, besides the time they spend in the church and the time they dedicate to housework and sleep, they can pass a considerable amount of time together. This is true about Pentecostal households too. In the absence of negative incentives and an institutional pathway towards redemption, the interaction with the spouse becomes the main, if not the only, source of “discipline”, tending to encourage a Pentecostal Christian to stick with his or her on-going process of conversion.

As mentioned above, this process is understood in terms of health and wealth. Therefore, spouses have two main roles in this respect: helping each other to make money, and helping each other to stay in good health. In the following section, the first aspect is illustrated with the ethnographic account of a saving strategy organised by a couple of Kwara’ae Pentecostal Christians in Gilbert Camp. As for the health aspect, it is dealt with in the fourth section.

3. Conversion and Domestic Moral Economy in a Pentecostal Church

In Gilbert Camp I visited several households where husband and wife were making use of their time together to engage in some form of income-generating activity, such as baking cakes or printing labels on t-shirts. Among them were several Pentecostal households. In these households I observed couples cooperating to improve their financial conditions in ways that concretised many of the lessons they had learnt in training sessions organised in their churches. By this I do not imply that they were simply reproducing behaviours they were told to take up. Much to the contrary, they were making a creative use of those lessons of domestic economy, income-generating activities, and the like. The following vignette from my ethnography provides an example of this.

Instead of paying retailed products in the corner shops, nowadays a growing number of people in Gilbert Camp buy a stock of processed foods from wholesale distributors and sell them to their relatives, within their own household, and even to themselves. For example, Mark, the head of a Pentecostal household, buys a stock of tinned tuna and stores them in his house. Every time his wife Jodie wants a tin, she does not just take it from the shelf, but pays for it. Mark requests her to do so for every meal she cooks, with no exception. When she has no money, he writes down her debt on a ‘*Family Kaon*^{xviii} *Buk*’;

literally, the family debt records.

It should be noted that Mark is as much diligent in recording his wife's debts as he is with his own debts. Above I mentioned that people who practice this form of trade can even sell to themselves, and that is what I meant. As Mark was answering some questions about his *'Family Kaon Buk'* I noticed he had written his own name down. "This is your name, so, who are you indebted to?" I asked him. "To myself" he replied. So, the point is not that Mark is gaining a profit by selling to his wife at market rates. As Jodie confirmed, they agreed that she buys from him and that he buys from himself. She said there is a reason for that. And the reason she gave was the same as I collected from other informants who are practicing this form of domestic commercialisation of food stocks.

They explained th

is a way to prevent the money constituting the marginal profit to exit the boundaries of the house. By keeping that money inside, they are trying to avoid the drain of resources that by nature market represents in their eyes. "Why should I give that money to the man running the store in front of my house? I can run a store inside my house, instead!" a mature man from East Kwara'ae told me once.

(This is a saving strategy

Mariz 1994: 81-162; Sjørup 2002: 25), a practice that is not intended to generate money, but rather to prevent its appropriation by someone else.

However, if Jodie sells home baked cakes and uses her profits to buy the retailed tins that her husband bought in the wholesale store, her money is redistributed inside the house. With the profit made with the domestic sale of tins, Mark can do other things in his own turn, or just put some money aside. Thus, following market rules and applying them to domestic kinship relations, Jodie and Mark, who do not have a formal employment, manage to make enough money to feed their children, pay school fees and, at the same time, to save for the cycle to continue.

What is interesting, and to a certain extent surprising, is that they buy commodities from each other. They are not immune from the consciousness that this form of exchange is not appropriate to the relationship between wife and husband, who should rather give to each other on the basis of love, not of maximising interest. Indeed, when asked if they sell to each other, they say: "No, we do not sell. It's just a way to keep the money inside of the house". The point, in other words, is not that selling to each other is right or wrong. The point is that 'it is better'. The same kind of explanation was offered when they were asked about their debt relation: "It is not really a debt. It's just because we have to eat every day, and I don't want to give the money to the shopkeeper". Is it a debt? Is it a sale? "Not really", they say. Although they seem to find the matter embarrassing somehow, on the other hand they are proud of their strategy. They say it is a way to become "responsible". By that they mean that they are becoming aware of the threat posed by the constant drain of money that results from being involved into a market economy. By organising this strategy, they seek to avoid such a drain.

However, realising this strategy is not something that can be done in cold rationality, for buying and selling between husband and wife is seen as morally embarrassing. That is why it is necessary for the members of these households to find an agreement: they have to switch to a new relation between object and meaning. Mark does not want his wife to consider the fact that he is selling at market rates to her, as a distancing practice. Rather, he wants her to take this as an economic behaviour intended to make them a wealthier household. In selling at market rates to her, he is not saying "you are just like anyone else", but rather "you are helping me to become responsible for our resources." The strategy is this realignment of object and meaning, in which Mark and Jodie agree that a certain economic behaviour does not result in a moral scandal, but it is "just a way to keep the money inside of

the house.” Husband and wife, in other words, redefine their notion of the appropriate way to perform domestic transactions in order to make them evaluative of their relation. Selling at market rate to one’s wife, in this way, does not look immoral any more. Rather, it becomes a way to value her as partner and companion in the difficult challenge of surviving in a settlement on the outskirts of the capital city of a Pacific state with a shrinking economy.

It might be tempting to interpret this strategy as a shift towards the individual responsibility that Harvey (2005: 65) sees as an elementary feature of neoliberal states. Indeed, if freely negotiated contractual obligations between juridical individuals in the marketplace is the opposite of Kwara’ae traditional, embedded and tacit, mutual obligations between relatives, then the strategy described above can perhaps be interpreted as a behaviour between these two extremes? Maybe. The temptation to interpret the cultural influence of Pentecostalism as the religious equivalent of neoliberal economics is a strong one (see, for example, Lehmann 1994: 92). However, this ethnographic example is rather intended to highlight that husband and wife in some Pentecostal households in Honiara redefine their relationship in order to overcome the contradictory values of kinship and money, thanks to a creative use of lessons learnt in sessions on domestic economy. In so doing, they undertake income-generating activities that are understood as part of a process of conversion.

So, what Mark’s statement suggests is that becoming Pentecostal is a struggle between an unconverted, unaccountable self that buys on credit from himself and seeks to repay his debt with himself in order to become accountable and thus, converted. It reveals a gendered notion of Pentecostal masculinity as a value concretised relationally and progressively, i.e. as the idealised form of a morally-desirable condition that Mark seeks to realise with his wife. Indeed, economic activities in Pentecostal households are not simply ways of making money. Rather, they are part of the processes of conversion that are meant to bridge the gap between the present reality and the possibility of prosperity through conversion. However, the inner struggle between the actual self and the potential self cannot be successfully won in solitude. That is the same thing Stephen meant with his statement.

4. “My wife converted me”

Let us now go back to the question formulated at the end of the first section, i.e., what did Stephen mean when he said “my wife converted me”? I argue that Stephen was making a specific point about the importance of sharing the process of conversion with his partner. To put it in other words, he meant “without my wife I would have never been able to go through the process of conversion that I wilfully decided to undertake after my marriage.” Rather than depicting conversion as a sudden rupture with the past, resulting from an agent-patient relationship, he was making reference to the fact that becoming Christian according to the definition of Christian in Pentecostal churches in Honiara, is very difficult when you have only your own “discipline” to help you to remain consistent with your purpose. The possibility of being born-again every now and then, in addition, provides the possibility to repeatedly cleanse the sins one commits, which means that one is not particularly encouraged to break up with a ‘sinful’ life. Stephen meant that he needed someone who would hold him accountable for the commitment he made to become converted, but which he struggled to stick to.

Included in the lists that men make of threats to their personal commitment to a successful conversion are things like cigarettes, alcohol and gambling. These are all things that women tend to do considerably less than men. It does not matter whether they are from a Pentecostal church or from a church of another kind. However, it matters more in a

Pentecostal household, where, as mentioned above, negative incentives against sinful acts are not provided by the church, nor is any clear pathway towards redemption. If a man struggles to accomplish his conversion, he can receive from his wife the support that in households affiliated with other statistically important denominations is provided by the church staff.

The point, thus, is not simply that Malaitan men and women are not seen as equal. The point is, rather, that they are seen as different. As different, they are perceived as unable to do some things and predisposed to do some others. For example, according to the Kwara'ae gendered division of labour, women cannot build houses because their bodies are "not strong enough". Men, on the other hand, "cannot" cultivate sweet potatoes, or at least not as skilfully as women do. Also, it is common knowledge amongst Kwara'ae people that women are expected to cook, whereas men should not normally do that. Men, in turn, are expected to manage the money of the household, including the money their wife earns. As far as agriculture is concerned, "[e]veryone works the land, but men concentrate on clearing the forest and women do most of the tending and harvesting" (Burt 1994: 23). Different roles and values associated with men and women are so important that Kwara'ae people distinguish even between male and female ghosts. Male ghosts support masculine values such as "the benefits of men's hard work and the rewards of stable and peaceful living, but they were also held responsible for male aggression and violence". Female ghosts, on the other hand, promote "peace and calm, prosperity and the growth of gardens and pigs" (Burt 1994: 61).

The differentiation between male and female 'natural' qualities is by no means a thing of the past, as it is demonstrated by the current commentaries of the so-called Ethnic Tensions.^{xix} Men are seen as those who started the conflict, thereby embodying the values of pride, strength, and aggression. Women, on the other hand, are depicted as the resilient, forgiving, and peaceful saviours of the nation. In brief, Kwara'ae people perceive gender roles as resting at once upon the presumption of biological diversity and customary conceptions of gendered difference. The relationship between husband and wife is constructed on the basis of these differences, which interestingly intertwine with the Pentecostal lack of negative incentives and redemption pathways.

Men, as mentioned above, are considered to be responsible for the management of domestic economy. The church a man belongs to, on the other hand, has a strong influence on his economic choices. A member of the SSEC is much more likely to avoid spending money on cigarettes, alcohol and gambling, because his church severely punishes those who indulge in 'sinful' activities such as smoking, drinking, and betting. That is not the case for a man affiliated to the ACOM, which does not consider these activities as sins. In a Pentecostal household, in contrast, a man who wants to become a Christian has to avoid 'sinful' and 'uneconomic' behaviours such as smoking, drinking, and gambling. These are exactly the kind of activities that women are expected not to take up, according to Kwara'ae culture. These are perceived to be men's activities, and a woman who indulges in these is considered of low value, a prostitute perhaps, certainly not a 'good' wife. A man who smokes, drinks, and gambles, in contrast, is not necessarily considered to be someone who acts wrongfully. Men and women are "different", indeed, and so is the behaviour they are expected to have. A heavy smoker, drinker, and gambler, would be treated with relative indulgence if he is a man, whereas a woman would be subjected to all sorts of harsh judgements if she is seen gambling, smoking a cigarette, or drinking a beer.

However, under the influence of the Pentecostal message, both women and men are expected to refrain from smoking, drinking, and gambling. But since Kwara'ae women are much less prone to smoking, drinking and gambling because of their customary gender role,

they are much less likely to be struggling to stick to the Pentecostal prescription of a life dedicated to the accumulation of wealth and the maintenance of good health than their husbands. The negative incentives that lack in Pentecostal churches are provided by their Kwara'ae gendered values. In Pentecostal households, the wife easily becomes a model of discipline, financial rationality, and holiness. Men, in contrast, are seen as constantly risking a backslide, and struggling to refrain from activities that are perceived as uneconomic and unhealthy.

This perspective involves a radical change in the conceptualisation of the role of a wife. Men increasingly see their wives as someone from whom they have something to learn, someone who shall control, assess, and redress their conduct. Wives, in turn, are increasingly perceived as the household members who are best equipped to help men to stick to their commitment to live according to Pentecostal standards. While women are still subjected to the authority of their husbands, their husbands wilfully subject themselves to the judgement of their wives. The authority of the husband is paramount, and sustained by the framework of Malaitan patriarchal ideology. The judgement of the wife, in contrast, is subordinated to the authority of the husband, but not less substantial, because it is informed by the Pentecostal framework, i.e. the same set of ideas and practices to which the husband has subjected himself.

Within such a framework, the wife is perceived to be a successfully converted Christian, because her traditional role and her membership of the church converge and coexist cogently. Correspondingly, the husband ultimately becomes dependent on his wife, to the extent that he wants her to control, assess, and redress his conduct in order for him to be more likely to stick to the Pentecostal prescriptions of a wealthy and healthy lifestyle. In other words, the husband, acting within the framework of his hierarchical superiority, wilfully interposes his wife, in her new role as Pentecostal champion, between himself and his independence.

In so doing, he is not simply reproducing a form of power relation. Much to the contrary, he is giving up part of his authority role in order to transform his own conduct, thereby conceding more authority to his wife by virtue of her own conduct. This process represents one way in which gender relations are at the basis of the gendered conversion of husbands, and more generally of the transformation of Kwara'ae households into homogenous Pentecostal households.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that the meaning and process of conversion can be explored with a gender perspective on the relationship between husband and wife, for how this is framed within the context of Pentecostal Christianity and within the framework of what is seen as traditional Malaitan *kastom*. More specifically, it shows that men consider their wives to be helpful in the process towards their own conversion to Pentecostalism because they see them to be better equipped, as a consequence of the gendered values informing their behaviour, to stick to the set of prescriptions that, according to the Gospel of Prosperity, grants access to a life of health and wealth.

Since similar claims can be advanced, and have been advanced, in other times and places, this argument can be relevant for comparative purposes. The literature on Pentecostalism has recently become concerned with constructions of manhood within born-again ideas and practices of marriage, family life, and masculinity. Pentecostal discourses that this branch of literature is interested in exploring include themes such as spiritual warfare, demonology, and the influence of Satan on the behaviour of men. Soothill (2007), for

example, highlighted how Ghanaian Pentecostals tend to consider the negative influence of evil forces to be responsible for 'disruptive' male behaviours. They believe satanic strategies to demolish family life and destroy marriages lie behind such behaviours. These include also men's tendency to take up habits seen as uneconomic and unhealthy. Interestingly, Soothill identified within these discourses a tendency to depict women as "responsible for the "salvation" of men through the exercise of "natural" feminine religiosity" (2007: 209). In another passage she explains that women "are regarded as the primary saviours of men and feminine religiosity is perceived to be crucial to behavioural change in their male partners. This stems from charismatic beliefs about both the "natural" feminine qualities of women [...] and the nature of feminine spirituality" (214). Among the qualities that Ghanaian Pentecostals attribute to women, there is purity, modesty, respectful character, gentleness, fervent prayer, and humility. Thus, as one Ghanaian pastor said, "they can break and change their unsaved husbands, and cause them to become saved by Christ" (2007: 214).

In this brief set of quotations it is easy to identify significant commonalities with the Solomon Islands case: firstly, the idea that conversion is a long-term process rather than a sudden, one-off break with the past; secondly, that women are believed to play a crucial role in the accomplishment of such a process; thirdly, that this role is possible thanks to what is seen as a set of innate, specific, and exclusive feminine qualities. These are the elements that are needed to contextualise Stephen's statement, as well as the answers given by all those Pentecostal men who converted post-connubially, but for reasons not directly related to their marriage. That is the reason why a gender perspective was necessary to explore the meaning of that statement and frame it within the context in which it was produced.

With such a perspective it is possible to establish a connection between the reformulation of gendered values and the overall framework of a conversion project intended to realise a novel form of Pentecostal masculinity. In this chapter, part of this analytical connection was developed by looking into to what Annelin Eriksen has termed the "sociological dimension of Pentecostal Christianity and its effect on men and women" (Eriksen 2012: 110). This analysis highlighted how gendered roles, religious laws, church structures and domestic arrangements puzzle together in cogent ways. It showed that the behaviour of an average Pentecostal Christian in Honiara is limited by a set of constraints that result from the interlocking of multiple contextual norms, domestic as much as religious.

The focus on norms of domestic behaviour, and the extent to which these are influenced and complemented by the norms of the religious context, provides fertile grounds for the interpretation of Pentecostalism as "the principal organization of the poor" (Chesnut 1997: 104), or for the appreciation of Pentecostal discourses such as the counterhegemonic idea of women's liberation from patriarchy (see, for example, Burdick 2013). However, one limitation of these kinds of approaches is that they tend to provide an illustration of gender dynamics 'from outside'. In other words, they establish convincing analytical interconnections between norms with a social relevance, but sometimes lack a detailed description of how these norms are concretely transformed into specific forms of social action, if at all.

For a description of this transformation a focus on values can be revealing. Indeed, it provides access to the symbolic dimension of gender and Pentecostalism. That is the rationale with which this chapter explored new ideas of masculinity, recent interpretations of 'natural' feminine religiosity, and what it means to be a man in the eyes of those who undertook a process of Pentecostal conversion in Solomon Islands. This shows how Stephen's statement was charged with symbols of femininity, masculinity, and an emphasis

on the relational and gradual character of conversion, as opposed to a sudden and solitary one. In contrast, trying to understand its meaning by focusing solely on the features that can be identified with a sociological approach, such as the alleged liberating potential of the prosperity gospel, would have concealed the complex reciprocal influence of gendered roles, religious prescriptions, and moral economy. It is at the intersection of these connections that I interpreted an indigenous statement that, if taken at face value, would have led to a more superficial understanding of the point of view of Stephen.

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Notes

ⁱ The country's name, as established in the Constitution of Solomon Islands, is "Solomon Islands", with no definite article.

ⁱⁱ In the 18th century the term "moral economy" was used to refer to morally acceptable economic relationships between people (Blizard 1796; Bell 1807). Later, the social historian E.P. Thompson (1971) used the term to explain the 18th century English food riots. James Scott brought the expression into the anthropological literature with his book on "The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia" (Scott 1976). Peterson and Taylor (2003) engaged with the concept of moral economy by adding the adjective 'domestic'. In order to shed light on a significant economic change that was taking place in indigenous Australia, they proposed a model to account for the centrality of sharing with kin.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a list of all the Pentecostal churches in Honiara, see Maggio 2013.

^{iv} The first Christian missionary activity in Solomon Islands dates back to 1845. It appears that the first mission station was established in Santa Isabel by a group of French Marists. Later, in 1857, the Catholic mission was temporarily closed. In the same year, Bishop George Augustus Selwyn began the first Anglican missionary activity in the Solomon Islands.

^v The theme of the wife who convinces her husband to give up 'unchristian' habits, join her Pentecostal church, and progress towards a 'Christian' form of masculine identity is very common in the literature about Pentecostalism and gender in South America (see, for example, Hallum 2003: 178) and Africa (see, for example, Soothill 2007: 214).

^{vi} The differences between male and female attitudes towards post-marital conversion in Kwara'ae Pentecostal households has noteworthy similarities with the gendered meaning of conversion elsewhere. Eriksen observed that Pentecostal pastors in Port Vila emphasise a personal aspect in their conversion narrative (Eriksen, 2012: 113), whereas female prophetesses are chosen by the congregation. Likewise, Kwara'ae husbands tend to present their post-marital conversion as the result of an independent choice, whereas their wives generally describe it as a consequence of their relationships.

^{vii} As Ben Burt wrote, "The priority of the male line is deeply enrooted in Kwara'ae social organisation. Local communities are usually based on groups of fathers, brothers and sons who normally take wives from other family groups to live and raise children with them, while they give their sisters and daughters in marriage to other families elsewhere." (Burt, 1994:26)

^{viii} Hallum has pointed out that comparisons of this kind can shed light on the "pragmatic reasons women in Latin America are turning to Pentecostalism" (Hallum 2003: 170). Scholars who wrote about the relevance and usefulness of this kind of comparison include Burdick (1996, 2013), Ireland (1999), Mariz (1994), and Smith (1998).

Infant baptism is the norm in the ACOM. However, adult baptisms also take place, though being an exception. When a new member has not been baptised during childhood, or if he or she was a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, he or she might undergo adult baptism in order to gain full membership to the ACOM.

^{*} in *The Sacraments: Student Book*, COM, Solomon Islands, Honiara, p.7-12.

^{xi} in *Constitution of the SSEC Solomon Islands*. August 2010. Solomon Islands Christian Literature, SSEC, Honiara, sec. 5, points 1 and 2, p. 2; sec. 44, p.16; sec. 2 p.6; also in *Pastors handbook*, sec. 5;

^{xii} in *Kingdom Harvest Ministries International – Constitution*, PART 2: Membership.

^{xiii} For example, in the Rhema Family Church and the Living Word Christian Fellowship, baptism by immersion is usually required, and even re-baptism if the new member has been baptized as an infant.

^{xiv} in *The Sacraments: Student Book*, COM, Solomon Islands, Honiara, p.30.

^{xv} in “SSEC Administration Manual”. July 2010, Solomon Islands Christian Literature, SSEC, Honiara. Sec. 3.6, Point 7, p. 13.

^{xvi} in “SSEC Administration Manual”. July 2010, Solomon Islands Christian Literature, SSEC, Honiara. Sec. 3.7.3 Order of Discipline, point 2, p. 15.

^{xvii} The theme of the negative perception of Christian freedom has been analysed by McDougall (2009: 481).

^{xviii} According to Jourdan (2002: 94) the noun *kaon* comes from the English word ‘account’ (at a supplier). *Sensim kaon* means ‘to pay a debt or a loan’, and *askem kaon* means ‘to buy on credit’. It can also mean ‘to borrow’ as in *kaon lo bank*, and ‘to owe’, as in *mi kaon lo iu*.

^{xix} The so-called “Ethnic tensions” began in 1998 in Solomon Islands, when about 20.000 non-Guadalcanese (mostly Malaitan) settlers left Guadalcanal, threatened by armed men and youth organized in paramilitary groups (Carlin, 2004; Dinnen, 2003; Fraenkel, 2004).