

The virtuous woman and the holy nation: Femininity in the context of Pentecostal Christianity in Vanuatu

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In this paper I connect an anthropology of Christianity to an anthropology of the body and an anthropology of the nation. I try to achieve this by looking at changing notions of femininity in the Pentecostal context of Vanuatu. I do this on two different levels; on the one hand I show how the meaning of womanhood is changed in what I call the ‘pentecostalised’ neighborhoods of the capital Port Vila, and on the other I show how the household and the nation become contexts into which this new notion of femininity is played. Thus, in the first part of the paper I look at the ways in which Pentecostal Christianity change the meaning of gender, whereas in the second part of the paper I look at how this new form of gendered meaning has relevance for our understanding of wider social contexts.

Keywords: Pentecostal, Christianity, gender, personhood, urban, nation

INTRODUCTION

This volume seeks to establish an analytical perspective that unifies the study of gender and the study of Christianity. In this chapter I will try to achieve this by looking at changing notions of femininity in the Pentecostal context of Port Vila, Vanuatu. I do this on two different levels; on the one hand I show how the meaning of womanhood is changed and on the other I show how the household and the nation become contexts into which this new notion of femininity is played. Thus, in the first part of the paper I look at the ways in which Pentecostal Christianity change the meaning of gender, whereas in the second part of the paper I look at how this new form of gendered meaning has relevance for our understanding of wider social contexts.

In the first part of the paper I give an analysis of changing notions of what a moral woman is, as Ambrym migrants move to the capital of Vanuatu, Port Vila. I show how femininity becomes re-conceptualised on the urban scene. Village women on Ambrym, have, I argue, been less tied to what one might call ‘the domestic sphere’ than have migrant women, especially upwardly mobile, urban women. This change is not only of the social kind; it is not merely a re-organisation of how women move in society and the kinds of social relations women are involved in. Rather, it is also a

fundamental change in what femininity is, at least in its morally and culturally valued forms. Femininity becomes re-defined from what I call an 'outward-oriented' femininity, to an 'inward' femininity. This concept of femininity as 'inside' is present on many levels of the social, the body and the household primarily, but also at the level of the nation. Towards the end of this chapter I indicate how the re-conceptualisation of femininity has an effect on how the nation is conceptualised as feminine 'inside'.

I start with a brief description of how I understood basic female values when I conducted fieldwork on Ambrym in the late 1990s, and then move on to describe in more detail the urban scene based on more recent fieldwork.¹

AN OUTWARD FEMININITY

Based on fieldwork (in 1995/6, and 1999) in the Ambrym village of Ranon, in the north central part of the archipelago, I have analysed kinship and marriage relations and argued that gendered values are fundamental to the dynamics of social organisation. The Ambrym kinship principles are based on two contrasting but simultaneous ways of relation making. The first is called the *buluim*. This literally means 'hole in the house', or 'doorway', and refers to the patrilineal residential group (see also Patterson 1976), but it can also be used to refer to a patrilineal group in a more classificatory sense. The second relational principle is called *batatun*. This literally means 'brother', but refers to a two-generational system where men are brothers in every second generation, making what we would call grandfather and grandchild, brothers. Group solidarity then is constructed in two contrasting ways: one based on linearity and one based on laterality. The first, the patrilineal group, or the *buluim*, is based on inheritance of patrilineal rights and creates a fixed position in the relational cosmos implying, especially for men, taboos on movement in certain areas and meeting certain people, in particular in-laws. The principle of laterality implies a denial of the asymmetry of age and is in this sense contrasting the lineal principle. This lateral principle can be said to be the premise for the marriage system. A woman is classified as a sister of her mother's mother and can thus replace her mother's mother in the kinship system (because the system only works with two generations; the third generation becomes the same as the first generation). She thus marries a classificatory husband of her mother's mother. Women then make connections between patrilineal groups based on the principle that a woman should marry the husband of her classificatory sister, creating thus the principle of lateral connections.

We see then from this brief summary of the structural premises of the Ambrym kinship system, that the two basic principles, the lineal and the lateral, are gendered. The moving women create lateral connections whereas men inherit place based on patrilineal rights. These gendered social principles are also reflected in everyday life and imply that women move freely about; they are often seen on the paths between households or between villages. Women often meet to conduct work in each other's company, sitting either on communal ground in the village or in someone's household area. In Ranon, they would often gather in church, or, on hot days, in the shadow

of one of the big trees outside of it. This specifically female ability to come together across households, kin groups and village-belonging also made women especially interesting for the Presbyterian missionaries when they first arrived on Ambrym. To work with men, who had strong taboos on who they could talk to, work with or generally cooperate with (see Eriksen 2008), was difficult. The strong male hierarchy, established primarily through the ritual society, the *Mage*, also made it hard for men to accept the egalitarian ethos of the mission. As I have argued elsewhere (Eriksen 2006), women became important for the mission on Ambrym, not only because they could more easily form egalitarian collectives, but also because they married, moved, and brought Christianity to new villages. Thus, women on Ambrym were outwardly-oriented, always on the move, and connected to different forms of 'relational wholes'. Men, on the other hand, were more restricted in their movements. Simplified, one might argue that movement and connection-making both in a literal as well as in a more metaphorical sense, was a female value on Ambrym. Place, stasis, and objectifications, however, might be seen to reflect more masculine values² (Eriksen 2008).

COMING TO TOWN

Throughout the last couple of decades a growing stream of Ambrym migrants have moved to the urban areas of Vanuatu, especially to Port Vila, to attend school, to find employment or to seek neutral grounds after a conflict.³ Most young women arrive as 'house girls' however. They come as a helper to a family already living in Port Vila that is in need of childcare while the parents work to support the family.

When Ambrym men and women move to Port Vila, the gendered ideas of movement and place are challenged. Firstly, women are, very explicitly, advised not to move around between households. Women 'of the road' are immoral women, promiscuous women, even 'prostitutes'. Young girls are advised to stay home, especially after dark. As my long-time Ambrym friend, living in the Fresh Wota area outside of the city centre told me, it is especially important in town to keep young girls indoors. Young boys are harder to control, and are almost expected to move around, to visit the kava bars and other such places. Young girls have much more to lose if they move beyond the confines of the household without an explicit errand, such as going to the market or visiting a relative, and she should under no circumstances go alone. Walking around without a purpose, which young boys are seen to do all the time, is not an activity that is morally acceptable for young girls, or women generally for that matter. Adult women might be seen selling vegetables in the market, or working in offices, or as teachers, but can rarely be seen just walking around. In many ways, the most striking feature of urban life, from a village perspective, is the dramatic reversal of the gender of movement. Men move, women do not.

Furthermore, new forms and ideas of the domestic develop in town, where women are encouraged to spend their time inside the house, taking care of children and other household members. These new ideas of domesticity are especially developed and encouraged in the new Pentecostal churches, where the value of the domestic woman

is almost sacred (see also Mate 2002 for this concept in an African context). The Bible church for instance, an independent, Pentecostal-like congregation on the outskirts of Port Vila's city centre, is very outspoken on the role of women⁴; women should not be seen walking around. Women should stay at home and take care of children. Even the now growing microcredit unions for women, some of them organised by churches and some by politicians or other NGO's, although extremely popular and often directed towards women or youth, are discredited in this church. Women should not seek these kinds of avenues that might lead them out of the household.

This is not specific to the Pentecostal church, however, although they seem, at least in the urban context, to be more explicit about it. As Jolly and Macintyre have pointed out (1989), missionaries during the colonial era, from a range of different churches, initiated this domestication process. Jolly pointed out, concerning South Pentecost, the reconstruction of sacred places in the transition from ancestral religion to Christianity involved not only the building of Christian churches but also 'the reconstruction of dwellings and associated efforts to reshape domestic existence and reform family life' (1989: 213). This is indeed crucial. However, I will argue that on Ambrym this process has not been one of absolute transition, but rather more gradual, and very much tied to the rural-urban divide and the Presbyterian-Pentecostal divide.

On Ambrym, the establishment of the Presbyterian Church implied, as I have showed in more detail elsewhere (Eriksen 2008), not so much the redefinition of femininity, as a challenge for the established, hegemonic masculine values. Whereas the graded society as well as kinship-based rituals and ceremonies had privileged male modes of sociality (focusing on personified and objectified social relations, and a competitive, socially stratified mode of sociality), the Presbyterian Church strengthened another mode of sociality, which was much more associated with femininity and female values. The church was open and not exclusive as the male cults had been, and the church was egalitarian and not competitive as were the male cults. The church also had a very explicit focus on community, on creating social relations of an egalitarian form, and in many ways explicitly included women, making them, as I mentioned above, central to the congregation. Fundraising, church services and ceremonies in the church were all based on women's work and on the visibility of women's effort for the social activity of the church.

On the *one* hand, Presbyterian Christianity, along with the colonial project of 'civilising', carried out through the work of colonial representatives, the District Agents, created new laws and regulations for village housing, sleeping and living arrangements, as Jolly (1989) has also pointed out. On the other hand, these did not, I will claim, challenge fundamental perceptions of what feminine values were. Quite the contrary; it was not the domestic woman who was central for Presbyterian Christianity. It was the hardworking, community-oriented woman. Fundraising, different kinds of bazaars and regular social gatherings in the village became central for the church, and women were the ones who organised these social events. Femininity, as it was developed in kinship-based sociality emphasising the outward oriented and socially

active woman, became even more important as colonial Christianity gained a stronghold on Ambrym.

New forms of mainly urban-based Christianity of the Pentecostal kind however, might challenge these established ideas of what feminine values are.

It is, I will argue, in the urban space that the values connected to these images of the domestic woman become a challenge to the established Ambrym idea of femininity. The idea of female movement encounters the image of the domestic woman. As I pointed out above, in town moving becomes immoral when connected to femininity. The moral woman is the woman inside the house, the woman caring for her family by providing and maintaining the domestic space.

Before presenting the urban ethnography two points should be made. Firstly, it is important to point out here that this distinction between 'an outside' and 'an inside', onto which the morality of femininity is becoming mapped, comes into existence in this urban, Pentecostal space. It is not a prior distinction that gains a new significance in town. We can, of course, not assume that the idea of the inside/domestic space and an outside/public space is everywhere a potential (Rosaldo 1974; Collier and Yanagisako 1981). However, it is equally apparent that in some contexts, Protestant and Pentecostal forms of Christianity being cases in point, these binaries are brought into being and take on gendered significance.

Secondly, when I point to the effect that Pentecostal Christianity has in the urban space of Port Vila on the notion of femininity, I am not suggesting that other processes, such as the monetary economy, development projects from authorities, outside agencies and NGOs are not relevant. However, in this work, I am pointing to a specific connection that can be made between an emerging religious doctrine and new ideas of femininity.

LIFE IN TOWN

It is striking, when visiting Ambrym people living in Port Vila, how differently they construct their houses and their yards. In the village there is ample space between the houses and there are several different kinds of houses for every household. Often, there is a sleeping house for the young boys, one for the parents and the girls and small children, one for a newlywed couple and a shared kitchen house/kitchen area, where women gather to cook together. In town everything is located inside the space of a small house, or even one small room. There are, of course, a number of reasons for this: firstly, space in the village is not at all scarce, and people live, very often, on their own grounds and not on rented and bought pieces of real estate. In town, both in the squatter areas (such as Olhen or Blacksands) as well as in the formally regulated areas (such as Fresh Wota), people build their houses within substantially smaller areas than they would in the village. In the squatter areas the spaces are often very small. Here people establish temporary residences squeezed in between already established houses. People set up their houses close (about a metre or two) to the neighbouring house, often the home of a relative who allows you to set up the temporary

house. A lot of people live together in these small spaces, often sleeping in shifts, some during the day and others at night. It is not uncommon for 15–20 people to live for a time in the same house of about 10 square metres. Some of these people are permanent residents in town; others are just visiting for a month or two from the village. This is somewhat different from the regulated areas in town where people buy their own piece of ground (such as Fresh Wota). Here the areas allocated for each household are somewhat larger. This allows for a bigger house and often a garden area outside. In these areas electricity and proper roads are provided. One of my acquaintances who moved from the squatter areas in Olhen to the regulated area of Fresh Wota, constantly pointed out what a relief it was to finally be able to avoid what she called ‘the dirty roads’ (more like ‘paths’) of the Olhen squatter area, where on a rainy day she would be covered in black dirt from ankle to knees and needed to wash in the sea on her way to work.

The typical development for the Ambrym migrant entails moving from the squatter residence into a regulated area. After a period in town, the migrant will save enough money to buy a piece of ground and build a house. The first house might be of corrugated iron and/or bamboo, but gradually a more permanent house of bricks and cement will be built. The successful migrant and town dweller has, after perhaps a decade or two in town, built a small concrete house on their own piece of ground outside of Port Vila city centre. The more unsuccessful migrants remain in the squatter area and are unable to save up money for transfer into the sector of formally owned real estate.

In the Pentecostal churches in Port Vila, this transfer to real estate is essential, a goal often made explicit. Establishing a savings account and planning ahead is encouraged (see Eriksen 2013). Both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals are however often explicit in their goal to buy their own piece of land and establish their own house and household. It is the difference between this established form of household in the regulated areas of town and the households in the village that I find interesting for this paper, for it is here that the contrasts and differences are most visible. Although people in the squatter areas might have the same kinds of goals as the migrants in the regulated area, it is more difficult for them to achieve what one might call ‘the morally good domestic lifestyle’.

The domestic lifestyle in the more established areas of Port Vila is very focussed on the inside of the house. Whereas in the village, sleeping areas are primarily inside the house, the goal in town for many households is to have most activities inside the house. Therefore one needs a bigger house that is separated into different parts: bedrooms, kitchen and living room primarily. Only a very few have inside bathrooms. Even very small houses, of maybe not more than 15 square metres, have been compartmentalised in this way: two or three bedrooms with mattresses on the floor (one mattress in each bedroom), separated often only by floor-length pieces of cloth hanging from the roof. Then there is a kitchen, ideally with a gas stove. The biggest room is the living room with a TV and a radio. With this as a general background, I will give a portrait of the life of Eva, an Ambrym woman living in town.

AN URBAN WOMAN

Eva moved to town as a teenager in the late 1990s. I met her in 1999 when she worked in one of the casino hotels in the city centre of Port Vila. She then lived with four other village girls in the Olhen area, sharing a small room with enough space for two mattresses on the floor. They lived close to their aunt and uncle and slept in shifts. Eva worked nights and would often sleep during the day. Eva was a very socially active woman, taking care of elderly relatives in town, sending money back to parents in the village, and going to church. After a couple of years Eva married a man from another island in the archipelago, and, as often happens with interisland marriages, they decided to stay on in town. Her husband was of the non-drinking kind, and he belonged to a Pentecostal church. Here they learnt about money-saving schemes and decided early on that their goal would be a move from Olhen to Fresh Wota. Some years later, when I visited in 2006, they had built a small house of corrugated iron on their own piece of land. Eva told me that she no longer worked, and spent her days mostly inside her house. She had a small garden area where she had flowers and medicinal plants, but besides this, all her attention was focused on cooking (in her small kitchen area) and watching television. She would get up early every morning and cook for her children. She would send them off to school, and she would wash clothes in her backyard. Around noon every day she would watch Brazilian tele-novellas (in Portuguese), sometimes joined by neighbouring women, and sometimes on her own. When I asked her whether she missed the social life of a working woman, she replied that in her opinion women with children should spend their time at home. She always had dinner ready when they arrived home in the evening, and several nights a week she and her husband would go to church services and church groups. She was also responsible for decorating the church before Sunday services.

THE 'INTERIORISATION' OF FEMININITY

Comparing Eva's life in town to her mother's and her aunt's in the village, the obvious difference is their mobility. Whereas Eva almost never leaves her house (except for going to church and going to the market), her mother and aunts in the village are constantly moving between houses, between the village and the gardens and to visit other villages. This difference between mobility and immobility, and inside and outside the house, is not only a difference in social practice. It is also a difference, I will claim, that changes the very notion of what femininity is. It is important to point out that there is a moral emphasis on how important it is for women to remain inside the house and to remain immobile in town. This emphasis, although often most explicit in the churches, is also becoming a general attitude among urban dwellers. In 2010, for instance, there was a gruesome murder in one of the kava bars in the Fresh Wota area. Here a woman and her child were stabbed to death in a brutal way late one night. There was much speculation in the Fresh Wota area, and all over town, about the reasons, but almost everyone pointed out that moving around, especially at night-time,

was dangerous. In the household in Fresh Wota, where I spent much of my time, the young girl of around 16 who lived there was not allowed to go even to the grocery store in broad daylight after this event. There was also much newspaper commentary from readers who pointed out that a lot of crime could be avoided if women would stay at home. There is thus an obvious change in the definition of the moral woman; she is immobile and inside the house. We might call this process the ‘interiorisation’ of femininity. Feminine values among urban women have changed from being mobile, outward oriented and open, to becoming ‘contained’ and immobile.

We can also observe this process of ‘interiorisation’ of femininity in the management of the body. In the village, the female body is often only partially covered, at least within the household area. Women breastfeeding a child often wear minimal clothing on the upper part of the body. It is not uncommon for a woman to wear only a skirt that she will pull up above her breasts when she walks around in the village, but easily pull down again when she is about to breastfeed. This is a way of dressing that I have never observed in town. Here women are more concerned with covering up their bodies and wearing proper dresses, even within the house or household area. I have even observed women moving away when they breastfed, as if it were not acceptable in public, or even semi-public, areas. A proper, urban woman dresses in a wide, long Mother Hubbard dress.⁵ Younger women might challenge the dress code and wear shorter dresses, or even trousers (see also Cummings 2008). There are constant complaints in church for instance about the impossibility of controlling young girls and their dressing habits. However, this tendency of younger women to challenge the long and wide dress of their mothers, of course, also involves direction of the locus of femininity to the borders of the body. The management of femininity becomes the management of the body as a container. The body, as the surface of the contained femininity, becomes vital as a reflection of morality. This is very different from the way femininity was displayed by young girls going through the puberty rite *yengfah* in the village of Ranon in 1995 (see Eriksen 2008). Here femininity was marked as ‘on the skin’, the red paint on the girls’ faces and bodies signalling menstrual blood and fertility (see also Stathern and Strathern 1971). In this rite the ‘outward’ character of femininity was signalled by making the inside visible on the outside. This form of femininity is based, I will claim, on a notion of the skin as porous. The risk of a ‘spillover’ of this femininity—of women causing harm by leaving behind menstrual blood in places they should not (see also Gillison 1980, Keesing 1982, Lutkehaus and Roscoe 1995)—was always potentially there *because* femininity was never seen as contained and on the inside. In the urban context, femininity is always a matter of the interior; the skin is the absolute border. The absoluteness of this border is emphasised through clothing ideals. Being fully covered, from neck to ankles in a Mother Hubbard dress, is a moral ideal most common among urban, married women. The other ideal, the shorter skirts and even shorts, more popular among teenaged girls and unmarried women, also ‘works’ on the body surface as a way of managing femininity. Whether the signal is an unavailable femininity (the covered body) or the available femininity

(the more uncovered body), the basic principle is the same: the surface signals the inside. The inside is the locus of femininity.

Femininity has become a stable essence, on the inside of the body. Clothing, and management of the surface of the body, becomes a way of masking, or concealing this essence. As Strathern has argued in a recent publication in HAU (Strathern 2013), seeing the body in Melanesia can be radically different. Body paint and decoration in Mount Hagen, for instance, was not a way of concealing or masking the individual. Rather, it was a way of exposing the inside, of making the relational inside visible on the outside. A painted woman would display her capacity for work, for rearing pigs and for reproduction. In the same way as a ceremonial display of shells and valuables painted a relational map of village life (who was giving, who was receiving), the body decorations in an analogous way reflected the relational composition of the person. An 'outward' oriented femininity works on the logic of relational inside accessible on the outside. The wearing of cloths and body paints, for example, is a momentary display of a certain relational composition; for instance, a young girl during puberty rite, painted with red colour and decorated with flowers, or a bride wrapped in a red woven pandanus mat on her way to the ceremonial gift exchange. The outward display reflects an aesthetic representation of a mobile form of femininity, a form wherein the inside is never only on the inside.

What we see in urban Vanuatu, I believe, is the emergence of a new form of femininity; one based on an idea of an inner, contained, essence. Femininity becomes a stable core, contained by the body. The naked body reveals the inside, the clothed body conceals it.

INDIVIDUALISATION AND FEMININITY

To some extent this idea of the feminine as contained and as an inside-oriented social form—and not as a moving, relational and outwards one—is related to the more general process of individualisation, which has been argued as central to the process of cultural change following specifically the Pentecostal and charismatic variant of Christian theologies in Melanesia (Robbins 2004). Robbins has argued that the relational-based personhood is confronted with a fundamentally different, Christian-based personhood in the Pentecostal mission. To sum up this argument very briefly: whereas the relational personhood is structured upon the exchanges and flows between persons, and thus is essentially an 'open' form of personhood, the individual-based personhood is structured on the idea that an essential part of the person is not transferrable, not exchangeable. Belief, for instance, is such an inner state it is not exchangeable (see Robbins 2002). Belief, as part of a social process, can be learnt and can be 'trained', but ultimately it is individual effort and individual will that forms it. This, according to Robbins, triggers a fundamental process of cultural change. In a relationally based mode of sociality, where women are 'paths' and create connections, as on Ambrym, the immobile woman is also a less interesting and to some degree a morally unacceptable woman. To put it differently, she is more of a woman if she is outward-oriented, 'open' and moving. If she initiates relations, if she is constantly observed being 'on the move' between her

village and her garden, on the paths to neighbouring villages, or is often seen working with other women in the communal areas, she is also praised as a woman. In a mode of sociality based on individualised personhood, where the 'inside' is fundamental, femininity gains another kind of significance. The 'interiorisation' of femininity thus runs parallel to another and also socially transformative process, wherein the idea of belief as an individual property that is produced as well as sustained within the individual, is crucial. Webb Keane (2002) has also described an aspect of this process; the development of an idea of sincerity in Protestant mission context of Sumba, eastern Indonesia. He points to the essential role of language ideology in establishing the idea of an inner self. The idea of sincerity reflects the way in which inner thoughts are more 'real' or more 'true' than speech. These processes of making belief and self 'internal' states are processes that run parallel to what I here have called the 'interiorisation' of femininity. To some extent one might argue that the 'interiorisation' of femininity is a specific variant of the individualisation of personhood more generally. However, this begs the question; if Christianity brings about the process in 'making internal' generally, and femininity is one aspect of this, will there not also be processes that make masculinity an 'internal state' as well? Is this process primarily a general one rather than a gendered one? I suggest that there are specific feminine ways in which the processes on 'making internal' take place, and in specific contexts. We need to see these two processes—the domestication of women and the individualisation of personhood—as two parts of the same form of cultural and social change. The self becomes an 'inner self', and femininity develops as a specific expression of this 'inside self'. The apt image for the feminine becomes the container: the body, the house and ultimately, as I will show in the latter part of this chapter, the nation.

These changing notions of femininity, from mobility to domesticity, from relation to individual, are in themselves interesting, but I think they might be even more so when pushed on to new levels of analysis. Femininity is, of course, not only interesting and revealing as an analytical concept for the analysis of women. Femininity (or masculinity for that matter) might also give us new insights into social dynamics on more general levels, for instance the gender of the nation.

In the second part of this paper I want to move the analysis from the conceptions of the feminine woman, to the conception of the feminine nation. I want to show how the discourses forming the imaginings of the nation rely on the same kind of metaphors and the same kind of values as the urban Christian woman. By not only focussing on what Christianity does to the roles and social practice of women, but also how Christianity fundamentally shapes the very notion of what the feminine is, we can also open for analytical attention the wider effects of (Pentecostal) Christianity.

THE MOTHERS OF THE NATION

In Vanuatu there was much political turbulence during the decade before Independence and during its first years. This turbulence also affected the churches. The colonial churches (the Catholic, the Anglican and the Presbyterian) were challenged.

There was a sense of a new era beginning (see Eriksen 2009). The idea of new governmental structures outside of the colonial apparatuses also affected church organisations. Under the colonial era the Catholic Church had tight connections to French colonial authority, and the Anglican as well as the Presbyterian Church had tight connections to the British side. Breaking away from colonial administrative structures also triggered independent church organisations, where the Pentecostal influence from overseas missionaries was crucial. The Pentecostal wave of revivalism has not only affected several new churches of the charismatic kind in the past decade, but also a sort of Pentecostalisation of mainline churches, as well as a blooming of different kinds of interchurch prayer groups with a charismatic and Pentecostal character. During fieldwork in 2006 and 2009/10 I found that the idea of independence was central for the new Pentecostal movement in Vanuatu on many levels. But first and foremost was the idea of independence connected to ideas of the nation and the anti-colonial project. In earlier work (Eriksen 2009), I have given portraits of the new Pentecostal churches in Port Vila, where the idiom of the nation figures centrally. In one of the churches for instance, a map of Vanuatu is the central art piece above the pulpit. In another church, prayers always start with the blessing of the nation. The phrase, 'this church will 'kaveremap' (cover) the nation' is very common. The image of a church that *contains* the nation, as if the church is the outside and nation is the inside, is very common in several of the churches I visited. Concepts such as 'healing the nation' and 'creating a new unity' have dominated the rhetoric of many newly converted Pentecostals in the last decade.

In other words, the Pentecostalisation of Christianity in Vanuatu runs parallel with the development of the idea of Independence and the idea of nation as a Christian entity. This is not coincidental I think. The concept of the social unit, the individual on the one hand and the nation on the other, is central for both Pentecostalism and nationalism. One might say that whereas Christianity in its colonial forms had to some extent taken on the relational sociality with which people in Vanuatu engaged (Eriksen 2008), the role of the individual as a unit in itself, a target for salvation and a subject of belief, is fundamental for Pentecostalism. I will argue that in this process, wherein the concept of the individual becomes an important social category (at the expense, for instance, of the idea of the relationship), the concept of the nation also gains significance as a category within the same cultural logic, but on a different level. I will argue that the Pentecostalisation of Christianity in Vanuatu, in particular in Port Vila, has also created a stronger focus on the nation as a category for salvation. In the same way as the individual is saved and born again, the nation is also perceived as a social category open for salvation and a new start, a new independence. It is often made explicit in the new churches (of the Pentecostal kind) in Port Vila that not only the individual must undergo a radical change during the process of becoming Born Again, but also the nation needs to undergo a radical change in order to become truly Christian, and therefore also morally good. A woman who was part of a newly started Pentecostal church, whose daughter was married to a minister from the US, clearly stated this to me. The nation needs to undergo the same sort of change that

individuals undergo in the process of salvation. Unless this happens, she pointed out, one could never achieve development (see also Eriksen 2009). The born-again nation is as important as the born-again individual.

Yet, how is this specific Christian discourse on the social and on the national gendered? How are the ideas of nationhood, unity, and 'new life' connected to fundamental constructions of gendered ideals within a Christian universe (see also Yuval-Davis 1997)?

I have visited one of the many active Pentecostal inspired prayer groups several times during my periods of fieldwork in Port Vila. This specific group call themselves 'The mothers of the nation' or 'national mothers' (*mama blong nation*). In weekly prayer meetings these women come together in order to pray over issues that might threaten the nation, such as financial issues, crime, or corruption. I will claim that in these discourses the nation is created as a parallel to the domestic family space in a very concrete sense: the women took it upon themselves to care for the population, to pray for them, even using a map as a symbol of the nation while praying. In these discourses the nation is presented as a pristine and untouched space wherein the growth of the ni-Vanuatu children, their future, etc., will take place.

This image of the nation as a domestic space is of course not at all unique. As McClintock has pointed out, 'Nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space' (1998: 62). However, what is interesting in the case of Vanuatu is the connection between the idea of the nation and a prior construction of what a woman is. As Chatterjee (1989) has pointed out regarding the post-colonial situation of India, nationalism was dependent on an inside/outside dichotomy wherein the world/the outside is masculine and the inside/the nation is feminine. This was achieved through a paradoxical process: On the one hand, the Indian woman was constructed as the opposite of the English woman, and thus her negative parallel or counter image. On the other hand, the Indian woman was constructed as unchanged, as untouched by colonialism and as a representative of a pure and authentic space. The process I am pointing to in Vanuatu is comparative in many ways. However, whereas the Indian woman was represented as 'the unchanged India', the Christian woman in Vanuatu is one that has undergone a radical transformation. The Christian woman is transformed from an uncovered, 'open', relational femininity, into a contained and covered femininity, where the locus of femininity is on the inside. The conceptualisation of the nation as a feminine space relies on a parallel process wherein the very concept of the feminine is changed from what I have called 'the outwardly' to 'interiority'. This new concept of the feminine is, as in India, fundamental to the way the idea of the nation becomes established.

The process of imagining the nation is dependent upon the process of imagining the Christian woman as a 'contained' space, as an 'inside'. This idea of the nation as an 'inside' and a 'feminine space' has different versions and expressions. One is what I will call 'the vulnerable nation'. This image creates the discourse in which the nation is gradually losing its 'inside space'. Outside forces are therefore always threatening to potentially violate the nation. Here the nation is imagined as always open to the

outside. The surface of the nation thus needs to be managed in order to make the penetration of outside forces less damaging. Within this imaginary, the inside is already pure and morally good, but it needs protection against corrupting forces. In one of the prayer meetings, the prayer leader distributed a piece of paper to everyone containing a list of issues that were seen as threatening the nation; some examples are Muslim missionaries and Chinese entrepreneurs. The prayer leader, in her introduction, also pointed out that Vanuatu was a vulnerable nation. She did not elaborate on this, but when asked, she said that Vanuatu was still 'innocent'. Much of the 'evil' operating elsewhere was not yet in Vanuatu. Within this same imaginary, certain masculine ideals develop as well. If the nation is a feminine, 'inside' space with a surface in need of protection and control, then the masculine ideal is developed as the symbolic guardian of this vulnerable nation. This takes place at many levels, and in many contexts, but perhaps the most obvious is within the realm of the police. As has been pointed out by others (see in particular Lattas and Rio 2011), the ideals from which the police (in Melanesia) work are explicitly connected to the idea of protecting the 'holy nation' (for Vanuatu, see Rio 2011). Also, the church leader/the pastor sees himself as the protector of the nation, when for instance a pastor in one of the Pentecostal churches, standing in front of the map of Vanuatu, tells his congregation that he, and his church, will 'kaveremap' Vanuatu; thus guarding the national with spiritual force.

As a continuation of this, we can also see 'the virtuous nation'. In the same way as the woman needs to be 'pure' on the inside, in the sense that her body is covered up, and not 'spoiled' by the outside, the nation as well needs to be protected from what is experienced as damaging and impure outside forces. It is especially the immorality of the western tourist, the loud and noisy expat, and the drunken youngster that are seen as threatening the virtuous national space. This image of the virtuous nation feeds back onto the discourses about women's dress code and behavior. It is within this discursive frame that, for instance, chiefs and church leaders argue that women who are seen dressed in shorts and mini-skirts in the streets of Port Vila, are corrupting the nation as a whole (see Eriksen 2012). There is thus a constant move between these two levels of the 'feminine interior': the woman and the nation. They become, to some extent, metonyms of each other.

Taking this into consideration, one might understand the lack of action taken to prevent violence against women, or, to be more precise, the discursive legitimisation of this violence as a process of controlling the virtuous nation. Women behaving in ways that are threatening to the image of the nation as a pure 'inside space', by dressing 'improperly', frequenting kava bars, or by moving around too much in places outside of the home and church, are an explicit threat. Men who are violent towards women almost exclusively use this rhetoric as a legitimisation strategy, both in public debates (for instance in 'opinion columns' in newspapers) and when they talk about it amongst themselves or to an anthropologist. The argument is that women need to stay out of the areas where the corrupting forces are present, where the 'outside' is threatening. The case referred to in the first part of this paper, in which a woman and her child were stabbed to death in a kava bar, is an example. In this case the whole debate circulated

around the necessity of keeping women away from these places. The bottom line is that it is not only the woman herself who will be corrupted, but the nation as a whole.

Vanuatu is of course not unique in this respect. As MacClintock (1993: 62) has pointed out, 'Women are typically construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation'. However, the Vanuatu case is interesting because it shows how not only the nation is being constructed but also how the very idea of femininity, of the woman, is constructed in a parallel process. It is not as if the idea of the woman as a 'virtuous interior' was always there. On the contrary, the woman as well as the nation is being constructed in a parallel process, within a Christian framework.

There is thus a connection I will claim, often only implicit, but in some instances (as in the prayer groups mentioned above) made explicit, between the changes that are necessary for a woman and the changes that are necessary for the nation. In the same way as the woman is transformed into a 'closed' and 'contained' form, the nation needs to be explicit about borders, not only geographically, but also morally. As was pointed out with reference to church prayers above, Christianity is imagined as being the 'cover' of the nation.

A UNIFIED ANALYSIS: OPENING THE PERSPECTIVE ON GENDERED IMAGINARIES

A unified analysis of gender and Christianity in Vanuatu opens up perspectives not only on women's roles, status and social practice, but also on how the very notion of femininity is being formed. In this paper I have pushed this perspective onto several different contexts; the woman, the body, the house and the nation. These are different versions of contained forms of femininity that are gaining meaning within a Pentecostal imaginary.

Mbembe has pointed out that, in the (African) post colony, power is conceived in terms of virility. 'Its effigy is the erect penis', Mbembe states (2006: 163). The masculine guardians of the nation, in the police force, or among the chiefs and pastors, might provide instances of this kind of power, where the showing off and the force of the voice in itself is attractive. The gendering of the nation however, might be related to a different imaginary and also dependent upon concepts of not only the Christian self, but also a concept of the Christian, virtuous woman. In order to understand not only how power is conceptualised in the post colony, as Mbembe does, but also how community, the social, and the nation, is conceptualised, the gendered ideas of the nation are crucial. In this paper I have thus made an effort to shed light on both the domestication of urban women and the feminisation of the nation, as parallel processes that are tightly related to what I call the Pentecosalisation of Christianity in Vanuatu.

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NOTES

- 1 I conducted fieldwork in Port Vila in 1999 (six months), in 2006 (three months) and in 2009/10 (six months).
- 2 See Eriksen 2005, 2008 for a more thorough outline of this.
- 3 Conflicts over access to land have been dominant in this respect, but also witchcraft and sorcery accusations.
- 4 The leading pastor has a clear and outspoken attitude on this, and it is also a topic often discussed in the youth groups and women's groups
- 5 A Mother Hubbard dress is a Victorian-style dress introduced by the missionaries as part of the 'civilizing' project transforming 'the natives' from 'naked savages' into Christian, and moral people.

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