

Converting the Spirit Spouse: Brazilian Pentecostal Confrontational Interventions in the Reproductive Domain of Maputo, Mozambique

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The paper examines the current high number of Mozambican urban women who are married to a so-called spirit spouse. Even though the explanations about this spirit are numerous, they all claim that this spirit plays an important role in the high number of female-headed households, unhappy marriages, and ‘the illnesses of today’, such as HIV/AIDS. Various women, upwardly mobile women in particular, attend Brazilian Pentecostal services where the spirit spouses are seen as demons that need to be expelled from women’s bodies. Women who engage with the Brazilian Pentecostal project to transform the reproductive domain in Mozambique enter a ‘spiritual war’ between God and the Devil. Dressed in the ‘spiritual armor’ they have to detach their body from their social environment, such as local frames of healing and spirit involvement. I discuss how consequently, converts have to act on their environment from an ‘individualized’ position, which can be rewarding and promising for upwardly mobile women but also increases stress and hardship. Moreover, I show how the Pentecostals techniques to break away from the role of spirit spouses in the kinship structure and the local reproductive order leads to contestations that can become violent between different groups in the public domain, such as between defenders of ‘Mozambican traditions’ - e.g. local healers and NGOs -, Brazilian Pentecostal pastors and upwardly mobile women.