

Megachurches in the Making? Pentecostalism and Globalization in North Cameroon

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This paper will present some of the changes occurring in Ngaoundéré, a town of approximately 300.000 inhabitants in northern Cameroon. The study is based on fieldwork in 2008/2009, and is part of a book project to be published later this year. The growth of Pentecostalism is analysed from a globalization-perspective, and the paper will discuss to what extent this radical change in African Christianity is influenced by local or global trends in terms of social, economic, and religious changes. This region is poorly described in academic works, but analyses of new Pentecostal movements is of particular interest because North Cameroon is a predominantly Muslim area, it is a French speaking region, and it has little influence from American evangelical missionaries. This social environment influences the way the numerous new churches (with relatively few members each), try to establish a space of their own in a town where Islam and the mainline churches dominate the religious market. A presentation of the new congregations, where three are depth-studied, gives us information about the social and religious strategies of Pentecostal churches at an early stage. They all aspire to become megachurches, modelled on the rumours of success-stories they hear from the big cities in other parts of Anglophone West Africa.

Christianity becomes, through these new churches, vehicles of a global culture and manifests the role of religion as a social force which moves human beings towards a global consciousness. At the same time the churches are locally grounded, and the 'glocalization' processes, which emerges as the Pentecostal Gospel (initially inspired and funded by US Evangelicals) meet African everyday life, reshapes and changes the questions asked and the answers given by Pentecostal believers.

Christianity as a social instrument combines African spiritual worldview with global communication technology, and connects a remote part of Africa to a global discourse. The new churches also create new networks where social and ontological security is provided.