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Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Nieswand, B. (2010). Enacted Destiny: West African Charismatic Christians in Berlin and the Immanence of God. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, *40*(1), 33-59. https://doi.org/10.1163/002242010X12580044312982

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Enacted Destiny

West African Charismatic Christians in Berlin and the Immanence of God

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Abstract

The focus of this article is the concept of *enacted destiny*, which was identified among charismatic Christians of West African origin in Berlin. Different from more fatalistic concepts of destiny, it combines a strong notion of free agency with a strong notion of a good, almighty, and immanent God. The imaginary of enacted destiny is constituted by two components: 1. presituational religious empowerment by which charismatic Christians can reduce complexities, anxieties, and insecurities in the context of decision making; and 2. postsituational sense-making by which divine agency is ascribed to an originally ambiguous situation. Both components temporally embrace the actions of West African charismatic Christians in Berlin. Actions thereby become the means through which God becomes immanent in the everyday lives of West African charismatic Christians in Berlin and enacted destiny a category of movement toward convergence of human and divine agency.

Keywords:

charismatic Christianity, diaspora, West African migrants, destiny, agency, immanence

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This article explores a concept of destiny that I encountered among West African charismatic Christians in Berlin. In their practices and discourses, a notion of an almighty, good, and immanent God is combined with a strong notion of free individual agency. It is argued that these two assumptions create theoretical tensions and require some explanation of how the

relationship between divine agency and human agency has to be imagined. These theological reflections do not have to be made by all religious practitioners, who may be more interested in more concrete problems, but by at least some religious experts. Although there is a significant religious publishing industry, much of the theological everyday work among West African charismatic Christians is done in the form of preaching. Based on a series of sermons of a Ghanaian pastor, interviews, and ethnographic observations within different charismatic churches in Berlin, this article carves out a theological conception of destiny that, I argue, underlies religiously empowered everyday activities of charismatic Christians of West African origin in Berlin. As I show below, the charismatic notion of destiny in the studied context is, above all, an analytical frame in which the relation between human and divine agency can be described and understood. It does not imply a strong notion of predetermination but requires human agency for its realisation. In this respect it resonates with pre-Christian West African ideas of destiny. Although the article centers on the sermons of a single Ghanaian pastor in Berlin, the empirical focus of the article is not a single church but the religious field of West African charismatic Christianity in Berlin.[1] Presumably the imaginary of enacted destiny is not a local phenomenon in a strict sense. The translocal and transnational character of the field of charismatic Christianity makes it extremely difficult for a single ethnographer to determine the local expansion of religious everyday discourses. Since the article aims primarily at exploring and explicating the idea of enacted destiny, the question of the local scope of the phenomenon is considered of secondary relevance.

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Before I begin my analysis I start with an ethnographic vignette about a meeting with John, a preacher in one of the smaller charismatic African-initiated churches in Berlin that I call Salvation Church.[2] The church had started its activities in 2000. Its congregation had a remarkably high percentage of women who made up about two-thirds of the twenty to thirty attendants of Sunday services. Although most were Ghanaians of different ethnic

backgrounds, a few Nigerians and a woman from Angola also visited the church. One particularity in the context of Berlin was that a woman, Prophetess Abigail, was central to the foundation of the church. Originally from the South of Ghana, she worked as a hairdresser in Berlin. Before she was involved in the foundation of the Salvation Church she attended one of the larger, more established West African charismatic churches in Berlin that I call the Holy Spirit Church. Because she was considered to have special spiritual gifts, Prophetess Abigail attracted a group of friends and customers who often consulted her in cases of marriage, health, or migration problems when they came to get their hair done.[3] Since as a woman with a relatively low standard of formal education it was difficult for her to expand her own personal space in the Holy Spirit Church, which was dominated by men with a relatively high level of formal education, she and her friends decided to meet once a week in a private flat for a prayer and Bible meeting. Relatively quickly these private meetings caused conflicts with neighbours who were disturbed by the noise. In 2000 the group rented a room in a 'German' Protestant church in one of the poorer, migrant-dominated neighbourhoods in Berlin. Although Abigail was the centre of this process, in the eyes of the participants a male pastor who could preach in English was required to set up a church. In this context John, a south Ghanaian in his early forties who came to know the group through a female friend, appeared to be most appropriate. Generally the meetings of the group were less discourse oriented than in the larger charismatic churches. Instead references to manifestation of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues and praying about personal problems, played a more dominant role. The church attendees appeared to be less middle-class oriented and less formally educated than in the three larger charismatic churches. The Ghanaian language Twi played a more significant role during the prayer sessions than in other charismatic churches in Berlin.

As is the case with many preachers and pastors in the broader context of Pentecostal Christianity, John had no formal theological training. He grew up as an Anglican in Ghana, but stopped attending church as a teenager. After migrating to Europe in the second half of

1990s, he experienced, according to his own description, a revival when he was in jail in Italy and became a born-again-Christian. He then attended different churches in Italy and Germany, but did not play an influential role in these churches. Like most Ghanaian charismatic pastors in Berlin, John's preaching style was inspired by prominent charismatic pastors—partly of U.S. origin, partly of African origin—who were popular on television and video. I became aware of the relevance of the imaginary of enacted destiny when I met John for an interview on the history of the Salvation Church:

> John and I met in a small Italian restaurant where he occasionally worked. Because of his stay in Italy he spoke Italian fluently and had a cordial relationship with the present personnel of the restaurant. When I started to explain my project, I observed that John was looking around nervously. After I had concluded my introduction to the interview, he appeared tense and asked: 'You said you are from the federal police?' I was shocked and said that I had no connection to the police at all. Still uneasy, he began to tell me about how he had encountered God when he was in jail and how he had changed from being a 'sinner' to a born-again Christian. The longer the interview went on, the more his initial nervousness disappeared and the more self-confident he became. Since his narrative included some sensitive migration-related details, it was I who started to feel increasingly uncomfortable because I believed that divulging this kind of information should occur only after establishing a deeper relationship of trust. After a while I interrupted to confirm that no problems would arise for him from the interview. He replied confidently and with a firm voice: 'I know because I prayed about it'.[4]

Since John was considered to be the representative of his church to the outside world, it was difficult for him to reject my interview request, although he felt uncomfortable doing so. In this situation he thus had to choose between avoiding certain subjects or telling me safe

lies, which was problematic according to the Christian moral frame of reference to which he felt committed as a pastor, or relating the narrative that he considered the truth of life. An important reason why John felt courageous enough to meet me was, as he said at the end, that he prayed about it. It enabled him to overcome the anxieties and insecurities triggered by the situation. However, his question 'You said you are from the federal police?' and his nervousness at the beginning of the interview suggested that, despite the divine signs he had received during prayer that had encouraged him to meet me, he was still insecure about how much he could trust the validity of these signs. Nevertheless, the more committed to his decision he became by enacting it, the more his confidence grew. Only after acting out what God suggested he could be sure that what he did was 'really' what God wanted him to do. The sentence 'I know because I prayed about it' was said with confidence only after the situation, although it referred temporally to his prayer beforehand.

This incident appeared rather banal, but John's behaviour included the practical elements that constitute the imaginary of enacted destiny and that I also encountered in situations with members of other charismatic churches. Although every church has its particularities, there is also a larger corpus of ideas, practices, songs, and slogans that is partly shared by West African charismatic Christians in Berlin. The imaginary of enacted destiny is one of those. Through the fluctuation of persons, media, and narratives between the churches as well as through the embeddedness in a transnational religious field, discourses and practices can easily circulate within the field of charismatic Christianity. Moreover, in contrast to other religious discourses and practices I encountered in Berlin (see Nieswand 2005), there were no indicators that the imaginary of enacted destiny is specific to the situation of migrants, although, as I argue below, it connects well with their life situation. Before I return to the charismatic imaginary of 'enacted destiny', I contextualise it within the frameworks of Protestant as well as West African ideas of destiny.

Protestant and West African Concepts of Destiny

There is a long-standing anthropological tradition of examining how transcendent, supernatural, or spiritual beings relate to the life-world of human beings in the context of African belief systems and religions. Originally witchcraft (for instance Evans-Pritchards 1976 [1937]), belief in the agency of ancestors (for instance Fortes 1983 [1959]), and religious practices of so-called African Independent Churches were at the centre of anthropological interest (for instance Fernandez 1978). More recently anthropological interest was expanded to Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal forms of Christianity in Africa.[5] For a long period, anthropologists were hesitant to focus on these more strongly European- and American-influenced forms of global Christianity because they considered them less 'authentic' expressions of African religiosity and therefore did not feel responsible for them as an academic discipline. In fact, African-influenced forms of Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity transcend classical anthropological views of cultures as distinct, authentic, and territorialized entities. The transcontinental mobility of religious discourses, objects, practices, and persons is a characteristic of these forms of Christianity (Gifford 2004), and was from its very beginning in the early twentieth century (Anderson 2004: 39-45). Nevertheless, this does not mean, as several authors (for instance ter Haar 1994: 57-59; Jach 2005: 172) have highlighted, that these forms of religion do not relate to and get shaped by older, more African-rooted forms of spirituality and religious thinking. Often the ideas, fears, and hopes that non-Christian and more 'Africanised' Christian belief systems dealt with were reformulated within Pentecostalist and charismatic discourses. For instance, it was even argued that by emphasising discontinuity – with the past in general and non-Christian religious traditions in particular – Pentecostal forms of Christianity are somehow, paradoxically, a way of dealing with much older 'African problems' such as fears of witchcraft in the context of kinship obligations, or the anger of ancestors (Meyer 1998a; Meyer 1998b).[6] They thereby become functionally equivalent and in some sense comparable

to these practices from which they distinguish themselves. In any case, anthropological analysis suggests that (neo-)Pentecostalism's relationship to the past and to non-Christian beliefs is more complex than indicated by its own representations of breaking with the past. One characteristic element of Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity in general is a strong emphasis on the point that the Holy Spirit transgresses the borders between the religious sphere and the non-religious sphere by manifesting itself in the bodies and everyday lives of Christian believers. Of special importance is the reference to the direct bodily experience of the Holy Spirit and the use of the 'gifts of grace' (*charismata*), which are above all glossolalia, exorcism, prophecy, and healing (Hollenweger 1997: 77).[7] Despite the internal heterogeneity of the broader Pentecostal and charismatic movement in Africa (Meyer 2004: 452), the manifestations of the divine in the practical world of everyday life, in particular in forms of healing, prosperity, and success, play a key role for the large majority of these churches. More recently, the relevance of this-worldly divine manifestations received academic attention in the context of the so-called 'gospel of prosperity'. This religious discourse, which originates from the United States but is very prominent among West African charismatic Christians, implies the promise that wealth is or can be a reward for religious practices (Gifford 1990; Hackett 1995; Maxwell 1998; Nieswand 2005). In this context it was also highlighted that despite the global character of the gospel of prosperity and its U.S. origin, the importance of religious practices as means of achieving material and physical well-being has a long pre-Christian tradition in the African context.

At the same time, the gospel of prosperity can be contextualised within the tradition of Protestantism. The multiple reference structure of religious phenomena and the dialectics of continuity and change transcend the simplistic binary distinction between 'authentic' and 'foreign' cultural expressions. Several authors (Gifford 1998: 337; 2004: 144; Meyer 2004: 460; Robbins 2004: 131; van Dijk 2010: 110) have pointed to both parallels and differences between the gospel of prosperity in West Africa and Max Weber's interpretation of early

Protestantism (Weber 2004 [1920]). In this context it was emphasized that the major similarity between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century forms of Calvinism and Puritanism on which Weber focused and West African forms of charismatic Christianity of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is that both are linked to waves of pervasive capitalist transformations of society and, related to this, questions of accumulation of wealth. A main difference between the two is the way that individual agency is conceptualised in relation to divine agency. In the case of Calvinism and Pietism, according to Weber, the development of a 'capitalist attitude' was the unintended consequence of individually experienced psychological insecurities, which were caused by the teaching of predestination. Because Calvinist Christians in particular could not assess God's 'mysterious resolution' about their salvation, they had to compensate for their fears with a combination of busyness and humble refrainment from consumption, which then became the characteristic attitude of an emerging class of capitalists. Partly as a result of the reception of Weber's work, God's withdrawal from the social world of human beings and His practical inaccessibility also became a 'key trope in the anthropology of Christianity' (Cannell 2006: 18).

In contrast, charismatic discourses about capitalism and prosperity are shaped by their belief in the accessibility and immanence of God. This explains, for instance, the very different attitudes toward consumption between the two groups. For Weber the 'worldly ascetism' of Calvinists and Puritans was a result of their conviction that human beings cannot understand God's working in the world. It would be vain human arrogance to interpret and display material prosperity as a sign of divine blessing. In contrast, charismatic Christians can religiously affirm consumption because in their view the prosperity of the righteous believer is one way that God communicates His sovereign power over humankind (Nieswand 2005: 255-262; van Dijk 2010: 106). Since divine material blessings in this world can be influenced by ritual practices, like praying or offering money during church services, charismatic Christianity undermines the differentiation between commodities and 'pure gifts' that Parry

(1986) considered characteristic of 'world religions'. According to Parry, a pure gift receives its religious value through the fact that the donator expects no direct reciprocity. In this way an ideological divide is created between a social world in which the morally suspect and materialistic rules of monetary exchange and reciprocity are in power and a morally pure, immaterial, but transcendent world. Interestingly, this division does not apply to West African forms of charismatic Christianity to the same extent as it does to 'traditional' Protestantism (Cannell 2006: 33; Coleman 2006). In particular, in the context of offering or praying charismatic Christians expect their God to reciprocate gifts materially and immaterially, in this world and the other.

It appears that the ontological cleavage that separates humankind and God in traditional Protestantism became a mere practical problem in the context of charismatic Christianity. These almost antithetical views on consumption and on the divide between the human and the divine sphere are not accidental, but as Keane (2007: 38) points out, the charismatic and evangelical movement can be interpreted as a conscious reaction to traditional Protestantism's discourse on austerity and – directly connected to it – its emphasis on divine transcendence. Not least, these differences are based on distinct conceptualisations of the relationship between human and divine agency. In Weber's view, the fact that Calvinists became an avant-garde of capitalist entrepreneurship is the paradoxical outcome of their idea of an almighty and eternal God who has predetermined the past, present, and future of His creation by His ultimate resolution. Against this background it was not possible to think of God as ignorant, erring, or reconsidering His decisions. It therefore excluded the possibility that human actors might be able to surprise or bargain with God. As I show below, the notion of destiny that is employed by West African charismatic Christians in Berlin is significantly different from traditional Calvinist ideas.[8] Although they share the premise of an almighty and eternal God, they arrive at a different understanding of the role of human agency.

West African charismatic ideas about enacted destiny resonate not only with traditional Protestantism but also with traditional African belief systems. Although in this context the question of salvation is less important, these concepts also address the question of how freely human beings can act insofar as their lives and their futures are predetermined by spiritual or supernatural forces. In Yoruba religious and philosophical thinking, the polysemic concept of *ori* is, in one of its meanings, comparable to the English concept of destiny.[9] According to Yoruba belief, every human being is born with a personal destiny (*ori*) that realises itself in a person's life course (Ali 1995; Awolalu 1979: 8-10; Oduwole 1996). Although there is dissent among Yoruba scholars about whether *ori* has to be understood in a deterministic way, it seems that the concept leaves space for individuals to renegotiate their fate (Balogun 2007). A good *ori*, which is associated with prosperity, has to be actively appropriated, and a bad *ori*, which is linked to poverty, illness, and failure, can be attenuated by religious practice such as offerings to ancestors. In this respect the concept of *ori* combines elements of determination with elements of individual agency. Balogun (2007) highlights the fact that the Yoruba can pragmatically switch between an idea of personal responsibility and free will and a concept of predetermination.

In the traditional Akan belief system destiny is connected to the soul (*okra*) (Wiredu 1987: 160-166). Before the soul enters into life its destiny is chosen. Two myths co-exist that differ in regard to who is considered to have initiated the process of determining an individual's destiny. In one version it is God who gives personal destiny to the individual; in the other it is the individual soul itself that asks God for a certain destiny. Both versions agree on the fact that by the time of birth the personal destiny has already been predetermined. As among the Yoruba, the question of how far-reaching destiny should be understood is contested in the Akan context. However, despite dissent on the details there seems to be a consensus that certain aspects of life are determined by destiny while others are not (Gyekye 1986: 114-115). Some of Gyekye's informants argued that being wealthy or poor is included

in one's destiny while others considered it to be a result of individual agency. They agreed on the point that the time and place of an individual's death and some apparently inexplicable events are part of a person's destiny.

Both the Akan and the Yoruba notions of destiny are interpretative frameworks that enable individuals to make sense of fateful or extraordinary events, and to assess the extent of the involvement of 'spiritual' agency or whether they are the result of human agency. As explanatory schemes, they compete with others like chance or witchcraft, therefore they should not be understood as holistic thought systems that provide an authoritative religious explanation of the human existence as such but rather as partial and contextual schemes of interpretation of concrete incidents.

This pragmatic approach was also emphasized by Fortes (1983 [1959]). In his classical work '*Oedipus and Job in West African religions*' Fortes highlights the fact that the idea of predetermination by destiny as well as that of free agency, which were both employed by the Talensi, were contradictory on a logical level but complementary to each other in the course of social practice. For him both concepts made sense within the contingent process of incorporating individuals into the Tale society (Fortes 1983 [1959]: 39-40). While an individual's failure to establish a positive relation to his parents and his ancestors as a useful member of society was explained by an evil prenatal destiny, the Talensi described the successful incorporation of an individual into society as good destiny. In the former sense destiny gave comfort to those individuals who failed to fulfill norms of their families and society; in the latter sense it implied the expectation that individuals who actively subject themselves to the norms of society and respect the wishes of their parents and ancestors can expect to lead a good life. While agency is denied in the case of 'bad destiny', in the case of a 'good destiny' it is the condition for its accomplishment. Moreover, if identified by a diviner even an evil prenatal destiny could be renegotiated through religious rituals.

All three West African concepts of destiny—the Akan, the Yoruba, and the Talensi—offer individuals the possibility of switching between an interpretative scheme that allows for human agency and one that denies it. The dissent of Akan and Yoruba scholars about how far-reaching predetermination is imagined highlights the point that these ideas should not be understood as coherent and dogmatic theories but rather as symbolic language in which often-ambiguous experiences of everyday life can be interpreted in the face of concrete situations. The examples show that the basic tension between predetermination and individual freedom was already inherent in the pre-Christian West African knowledge and belief system.

All cited ideas of destiny, the Christian as well as the non-Christian, presume an unequal power relation between human beings and their divine/spiritual counterpart(s). It is noteworthy that West African religious ideas of destiny in particular do not presume a complete predetermination but leave much space for human agency. Even Calvinism and its radical doctrine of predestination experienced historical changes in the course of time and, as Weber already highlighted, practically motivated activities rather than impeded them (Keane 2007: 56-58). In this sense it would be insufficient to conceive of destiny as a concept of predetermination of human existence. It is much more accurate, as the cited cases show, to understand it as reflexive discourse on the relationship between human and divine agency.

Indirectly related to the imaginary of destiny is the distinction between immanence and transcendence. In the context of this paper the notion of immanence is primarily used to address the anthropocentric and pragmatic question of how divine agency can be perceived and understood within the lifeworld of human beings. In this way the agnostic anthropologist's question of how religious belief systems distinguish between divine manifestations from other phenomena in their everyday lives intersects with the religious practitioner's question of how he or she can distinguish divine manifestations from other phenomena in his or her concrete life situation. Since the question bridges the two spheres of

knowledge, it provides an effective point of departure for exploring the conceptualisation of the relationship between human and divine destiny that I encountered among charismatic Christians of West African origin in Berlin.

Pastor Jacob and the Word Church

Jacob is a German-trained medical doctor who was born in Kumasi in the early1960s. His parents were relatively well-off business people.[10] In the early 1980s Jacob graduated from a renowned secondary school in Kumasi as one of the best students of his class and began to study pharmacy in Kumasi. After completing his studies and doing the obligatory civil service in Ghana for two years, he decided to study medicine. Since he already had one university degree it was impossible for him to continue his studies in Ghana; he therefore looked for opportunities abroad. Because he had some school knowledge of German and due to the absence of university fees he applied at a few German universities. In 1989 he was accepted at the *Freie Universität* in Berlin. After attaining a German language certificate he began to study medicine in the early 1990s.

Jacob's religious career was closely linked to his education. Secondary schools and universities were important sites for the spread of the charismatic movement in West Africa during the 1970s and 1980s (Hackett 1995: 200). During secondary school Jacob changed from his original affiliation with a mainline church, the Methodist Church of Ghana, to the Baptist Church in Kumasi, which was strongly influenced by the charismatic movement at this time. Kumasi was the centre of the 'charismatic renewal' of the Ghanaian Baptist Church in the late 1970s and 1980s (Omenyo 2002: 194).[11] Religiously enchanted, Jacob also joined one of the charismatic campus groups at the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi and over the course of time became one of its leading figures.[12]

When Jacob arrived in Germany he looked for an English-speaking church. Shortly after his arrival a friend recommended a German-dominated charismatic church that attracted

an international group because the sermons were translated from German into English. After some time Jacob initiated a private praying and Bible circle with other Ghanaian students, which met in the common room of a students' dormitory. The first members were Ghanaian students, but soon Africans from other countries also joined the group. They had to look for a larger room because the group grew, and were allowed to use the facilities of a German Pentecostal Church in Berlin-Schöneberg. The larger the group grew, the greater they felt the need to appoint a minister. The group chose Samuel, one of the older members of the group. He had already finished his studies, worked for the U.S. Army in Berlin, and was married to a German woman. An important argument for selecting him was that his secure economic and legal status guaranteed the continuity of the congregation.

Parallel to the Schöneberg group, another African-initiated charismatic congregation emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Berlin-Kreuzberg.[13] In the 1980s an African American pastor working for a German-dominated church did mission work among Anglophone asylum seekers, mainly from Sri Lanka and Ghana. After a while the Africans among them, mostly Ghanaians and some Nigerians, organised their own prayer meetings. A gradual separation process from the mother church took place, which was completed in 1992.[14] In this year the African-dominated church became financially and organisationally autonomous, though it stayed in the same church building. While students dominated the Schöneberg group, the Kreuzberg group had a larger share of asylum seekers. Nevertheless, both the Kreuzberg and Schöneberg congregations felt that there were sufficient religious overlaps to cooperate. In the mid-1990s they even considered merging the congregations. When the plans became more concrete a conflict arose between Samuel, the minister of the Schöneberg group, and Jacob, leading in the end to the fission of the group. The majority of the congregation went to Kreuzberg, while Samuel and a minority remained in Schöneberg. The new Kreuzberg group, which I call Revival Church, decided to have two pastors: Victor, the founding pastor of the original congregation, and Jacob. Victor claimed seniority and was

more active in representing the church to the outside world, while Jacob became known as the more captivating preacher. The church became a member of the largest umbrella organisation of Pentecostal churches in Germany, the *Bund freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden* (BFP), and both Jacob and Victor participated in a special training programme for religious practitioners to become formally recognised as pastors by the association. Jacob was formally ordained in 1997.

The alliance of the two pastors persisted until the end of 2001. At this point the tensions related to their differently legitimised claims of leadership escalated, and against the wishes of the members they decided to split the church.[15] Jacob left with about half of the congregation, and Victor remained with the other half in Kreuzberg. The majority of the church's functionally important persons—the elders, interpreters, technicians, and some musicians—decided to go with Jacob although many perceived the fission as a painful failure to act according to Christian standards of siblinghood. In general the younger and better formally educated persons joined Jacob, while the older and less formally educated church members stayed with Victor.

The newly founded Word Church was a remarkable international group. Besides the larger groups of Ghanaians, Nigerians, and Cameroonians the members also included Kenyans, Namibians, Americans, Filipinos, and a significant German minority. Although the split also resulted in a significant drop in monetary terms, the Word Church began to grow and managed to achieve a solid financial basis. After the separation the church had to produce its own recognisable image in order to distinguish itself from the Revival Church and the other African-dominated charismatic churches in Berlin. Practially, this meant that new church songs had to be found and special messages and slogans had to be created. Jacob's series of sermons about Christian identity and destiny has to be put in this context. They were part of the social construction of a new church that had to distinguish itself in a positive way from other churches in Berlin.

‘The DNA of God in you’

Pastor Jacob used his sermons during the Sunday services of the Word Church to develop and implement key terms, central topics, and visions of the church, which were frequently repeated by him and others on different occasions. Jacob created a discursive environment in which the broader religious practices of the congregation were situated and framed. Several church members stressed that his ‘powerful’ and thoughtful preaching was an important incentive for them to attend church. One of the themes Pastor Jacob introduced in 2002 was the link between personal identity and destiny. Between 3 March and 17 March 2002, he gave three sermons from which I have extracted the condensed version of his argument. At the centre of his argumentation were theological reflections on understanding the relationship between individual and divine agency. Although his sermons were not representative of West African charismatic Christians in Berlin in a statistical sense they were of analytical value because, as a religious practitioner, he made efforts to explicate what otherwise would have remained implicit in religious practices.

Initially Pastor Jacob distinguished between a ‘general’ or ‘shared identity’ that all human beings have in common, and a ‘personal identity’ that is particular to every individual and that he described as one’s destiny. This idea that destiny is an essential part of an individual’s identity is compatible to the Akan and the Yoruba ideas of destiny, according to which destiny is located in the individual’s soul (Akan) or within the personalised spiritual being of *ori* (Yoruba). The core Bible citation on which Pastor Jacob based his reflections was the confession of Simon Peter (Mathew 16: 13-18). In this passage Jesus asks his disciples what the people in the Caesarea Phillipi area were saying about who He is. They tell him that in the eyes of the local population he was one of the prophets who are wandering in the area. Afterward Jesus asks his disciples their opinion of who he is. Simon Peter answers Jesus, ‘Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God’. In this way Peter distinguishes Jesus from

other Jewish prophets and highlights his uniqueness as the Messiah. In response, Jesus blesses him and confirms his Christian name, Peter, by saying, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church'. The decisive double meaning in this passage is that the Greek word *petra,* of which the name *petros* (Peter) is the masculine form, means rock. Pastor Jacob took up this double meaning. He explained that 'Peter' means small rock in Greek[16] and the big rock, to which its smallness refers, is God himself. Therefore the first and essential message is that Peter is made of the same material as God. From Peter's sameness with God, Jacob deduced the identity of all human beings with God. To illustrate the ontological sameness he used a metaphor from the field of the natural sciences: 'Our divine nature is the DNA of God in us. Everything that God is, everything that God has, everything what God does is included in this nature!'[17] Pastor Jacob frequently used metaphors originating from the natural sciences. By drawing analogies, he imported a notion of hard, positivist truth and used these connotations to authorise his religious messages. He thus also suggested that there is no contradiction between religious and scientific knowledge, and in fact the latter can even prove the former right. This message resonated with the expectations of the African students that attended the church.

Like the metaphor of the rock, the phrase 'DNA of God in you' evokes an image of a tight ontological bond connecting God and humankind in a material sense. This primordial sameness is what Pastor Jacob saw as our general identity and emphasized its immense practical impact. In this sense Pastor Jacob positioned himself in the broader Pentecostal discourse. Gerloff (1995: 264-271) depicts the emphasis of the essential sameness with God and the practical empowerment that derives from it as a characteristic theological feature of African-influenced forms of Pentecostalism. It links the believer directly to God as the almighty source of power; as Jacob formulated it, 'The DNA of God in you gives you the divine power to overcome evil spirits.'[18] Because the DNA of God is part of human nature, individuals can overcome the practical obstacles that are created by evil forces. Nevertheless,

the strong notion of identity with God invites theological problems: Why do we face difficulties, suffering, and grief in life if we are identical with an almighty God?[19] In order to tackle this problem Pastor Jacob made a dialectical twist. He argued that divine nature is not simply given but has to be appropriated. Paradoxically, human beings are born in a state of alienation from their own nature, which has to be actively overcome by every single individual: 'When we are born we do not know who we are'.[20] The ontological bond between God and human beings is already there, but it has to be realized by developing a reflexive self-consciousness of one's own divine nature. Because of our initial ignorance of ourselves, a paradox emerges: human beings are divine and not divine at the same time. As Pastor Jacob phrased it, 'We are identical with God, but we are not God'.

His statement points to a fundamental problem in the relationship with God. Humankind was cast out of the paradise of an initial and prereflexive unity with God. That is why we are born in a state of alienation from our true nature, which has to then be reappropriated by religious work. But how is this reappropriation possible? According to Pastor Jacob, the above-cited passage of the Gospel of Mathew (Math.16: 13-18) shows the way. To learn our own divine nature we have to follow Peter. If we identify Jesus as the 'Christ, the Son of the living God' (Math. 16: 16), we discover who we really are and overcome the paradoxical state of primordial alienation from our divine nature. Yet in this same process not only one's general identity with God but also one's personal identity is revealed. For Pastor Jacob the sentence 'thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church' simultaneously refers to Peter (*petros*) as the individual Christian name of a specific person and his personal destiny, namely to be the rock on which the church is built, and to Peter (*petros*) as the rock (*petra*), which symbolises a general sameness of God and humankind.

To describe Jesus in his double nature of simultaneously human and divine as 'the healer' of the alienation between God and humankind is a conventional Christian trope

(Engelke 2007: 13). However, in traditional forms of Protestantism the link, which was recreated by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, made the transcendence of the 'distant God' bearable but it did not make God transparent and immanent in the bodies and lives of Christian believers in a practical sense (Maurer 1999: 34-54). According to Luther, for instance, despite the sacrifice of Jesus Christ believers are left alone, as he wrote in the Heidelberger Disputation, 'in the bare confidence in His mercy' (Luther 2007 [1518]). In distinction to the emphasis on the transcendence of God in traditional Protestantism, the charismatic and Pentecostal movement celebrates divine immanence (Gerloff 1995: 264-271). Above all, this means that, in addition to the promise of an eternal afterlife, the process of learning about one's divine identity is a means of practical empowerment: 'There is power in knowing who you are. If I got to know who I really am, the whole of hell can come AND I WILL SHOUT THEM DOWN! [louder] I WILL SHOUT THEM DOWN!! IN THE NAME OF JESUS!'[21]

At another point in the same sermon Pastor Jacob put a stronger emphasis on the this-worldly dimension of empowerment: 'If you are struggling and thinking in life, and ask yourself, 'Am I going to make it?' [J. claps his hands] In the divine nature you can make it!'[22] By discovering their divine nature, divine power becomes immanent to the actions of individuals. To put it even more radically: individual agency become divine agency. In this sense the distinctions between human and divine, this world and the other, that were foundational to traditional Protestantism collapse into themselves and the 'distant Protestant God' becomes reimported to the material world. However, because the believer is not God nor are his acts initially divine in the literal sense of the word, the identity assumption needs some further explanation about how to imagine the conflation of divine agency and human agency.

‘Enacted Destiny’ and the Problem of Free Will

Paradoxically, individuals’ free will is considered crucial in transforming non-identity with God into identity:

> I told you last week that we become what we think. Many people say our environment, our family or our origin determines who we are. But this is not true. We are what we think we are. If somebody has a mentality of poverty he may get millions of Euros, but he will lose them soon. But if somebody has a mentality of prosperity he will prosper. You may take away everything, he may grow up in the poorest slum; in the end he will become rich. If you want to change your life, you first have to change your mind.[23]

The question Pastor Jacob raises in this quotation addresses how far human actors’ environment determines that they remain what they are, in this case to stay poor, or how free they are to become what they want to become, in this case to be rich. According to Pastor Jacob, to overcome one’s social predicaments one needs a change of ‘mentality’. Ultimately the believers’ capacity to change their lives relies on their ability to choose between alternatives, on the one hand, and their divine identity as a source of empowerment, on the other hand. Only if we decide to have the ‘right’ mentality are we able to overcome our cultural and social limitations:

> Often people are restrained in knowing their true identity by the way they were brought up. Have you seen elephants in the circus? … They are big and strong animals, but if you see them in the circus, they are tied to a small peg. … It would be very simple for the elephant to pull out the peg but he doesn’t do it. Why? Because he is used to being tied … since he was a small baby elephant. He doesn’t know that he could just walk away. It is the same with us. It is possible that there is a Christian, even a born-again Christian, and he would be able to go wherever he wants to go but he doesn’t know. He says, ‘I

> cannot achieve this or that because I am poor or because I am not able to do it.' He stays where he is because he thinks he is pegged. He doesn't know that he is free. Why? Because he does not see what God wants him to do.[24]

As long as people are not fully aware of their true identity, the capacity inherent in their nature is blocked and bound. God provides us with the resources but he does not make the decision for us to realise our emergence from 'self-incurred immaturity' (Kant 2000 [1784]).

Interestingly, the argument that individual empowerment is the result of leaving behind a confining past is also central to the imaginary of modernity (Taylor 2002) and its theoretical reformulations (for instance Beck 1986: 121-160; Eisenstadt 1979; Simmel 2006 [1903]). This homology points to a historical link between Protestantism and imaginaries of modernity. The rope that ties the elephant, for instance, is a conventional modernist metaphor for tradition that at the same time, as Birgit Meyer (1998a: 192) points out, is also widespread in West African Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal religious discourses. Cannel (2006: 44-45) argues that the idea of radical discontinuity that is constitutive for the imaginary of modernity is even a variation of the originally Christian idea of conversion. Keane (2007: 179) emphasizes that the ideological convergence between Protestantism in general and the Euro-American imaginary of modernity is not accidental, but is rooted in the shared belief in 'human powers of self-transformation' through which the limitations of the past can be overcome. Both modernisation theories as well as Christian ideas of conversion, consider the individual's autonomy to act freely as the driving force of progress and salvation (see Keane 2007: 49-50). For Pastor Jacob the reference to modernist narratives of success and development was a means by which he could adjust his religious message to the experiences and hopes of his congregation of formally educated migrants with middle-class aspirations.

Although the reference to free will and agency connects well to imaginaries of modernity, it causes a theological problem. A free will can only be presumed if it is conceived as being different from God's will and therefore reaffirms the distinction between God and

humankind, which is negated by emphasising the ontological identity with God. The solution to this problem is implied in Pastor Jacob's notion of freedom. He understood freedom as accordance between human and divine will—'But he doesn't know that he is free. Why? Because he does not see what God wants him to do'. In this sense the realisation of our destiny, which is just another expression for 'what God wants somebody to do', relies on the individual's free choice to perceive it and act accordingly. Destiny is a mere potentiality that realises itself in a contingent process of its conscious appropriation and not an inevitable predetermined reality. In this respect there are parallels between Pastor Jacob's argument, the Yoruba ideas of destiny that stress the aspect of work in the appropriation of one's destiny (*ori*) as a prosperous person (Abimbola 2006: 80), and the Talensi idea that a good destiny has to be achieved by active incorporation into society (Fortes 1983 [1959]).

Because Pastor Jacob conceptualised destiny, basically the accordance of divine and human will, as independence from limiting external social determination, its realisation paradoxically signifies the state of greatest individual freedom. Above all, being free means overcoming the predicaments of life, which, according to Pastor Jacob, is what the good Lord wants the believer to do. Crucial in the realisation of destiny is finding out exactly what God wants a person to do. Since decision making is a constant and infinite process, destiny cannot be understood as a static condition or final goal that can be achieved, but only as a category of movement toward the convergence of individual and divine agency that can never be fully accomplished. In this respect it resembles the conversion narratives of apostolic Christians in Zimbabwe. As Matthew Engelke (2004; 2006: 8-9) points out, part of their understanding of conversion is that it is an open-ended process of becoming.

Enacted Destiny and Everyday Life

In his sermons Pastor Jacob developed the idea that divine destiny has to be appropriated and enacted by free and autonomous individuals. He reconciled a strong notion of free agency with a strong notion of an almighty and sovereign God. Since individual agency is identified as the theological 'location' in which the divine realises itself, it creates a practical problem for the believers: How do they know which decision God wants them to make? How do they distinguish which actions are in accord with their destiny from those that are not? In this context it is important to look more closely at the temporality of the imaginary enacted destiny. In an interview Pastor Jacob explained it by using the example of a pastor's success:

> To be successful as a pastor you must have this spiritual boldness. It shows that God confirms what you say in order to show that you are his servant. If the people see this boldness, they come to church. If God is there, they come. And if you are not bold, they do not come.[25]

Pastor Jacob argued that divine empowerment ('spiritual boldness') is the precondition for the success of pastoral activities. Only because a pastor trusts in it does he dare to act boldly in front of others. His boldness is thus not human arrogance but an indicator of the divine immanent in his activities ('If God is there, they come'). Most interesting is the implied temporality of divinely empowered action. Individuals have to trust in their divine empowerment before they initiate actions, although they are 'confirmed' only when they execute them ('It shows that God confirms what you say'). Activities are known to be destiny only when it is reflected in their outcomes. But if individuals do not believe in the possibility of their divine empowerment they will not be courageous enough to enact them. In this sense the notion of enacted destiny combines two temporally distinct aspects: individuals' empowerment before and during the action, and the post hoc fixing of meaning.

Retrospective ascription of destiny or other spiritual interferences can also be found in other African thought and belief systems. According to Fortes (1983 [1959]: 28), the Talensi relied on post hoc assessments to identify destiny. As Evans Pritchard shows (1976 [1937]), the same was true in the case of witchcraft among the Azande. Events could be interpreted as having been affected by witchcraft only after they had occurred. Neither Fortes nor Evans Pritchard report a complementary imaginary of presituational empowerment as it was implied in the charismatic idea of destiny spelled out by Pastor Jacob. This absence is not only a superficial difference but implies a far-reaching reorientation of the imaginary of destiny; namely, destiny is not only a scheme of interpretation but becomes proactive and motivates agency. Van Dijk (2010) also observed a shift from reactivity to proactivity among Ghanaian Pentecostal Christians in Botswana. He argues that as opposed to the anthropological tradition of interpreting religious migrant organisations as functional institutions for coping with the hardships of migration and/or 'modernity's malcontents' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993), Ghanaian Pentecostals in Botswana actively encourage or even enforce self-motivated activities. In this context van Dijk uses the strong metaphor of 'social catapulting' to represent the energetic way in which charismatic discourse motivates people to become active. The way that human agency and divine agency merge into each other in the process of the realisation of 'God's purpose' is very similar to what I describe as enacted destiny:[26] 'It does emphasize a high level of personal responsibility on the part of the person … to "realize God's purpose" by planning for set goals, by allowing heavenly inspiration for the decisions to be taken, and by safeguarding the interests of the religious community to which one belongs' (van Dijk 2010: 106).

Against the background of these reflections, the connection between the vignette about the encounter with John and Pastor Jacob's theology of enacted destiny becomes clear. As I have pointed out, John's attitude changed in the course of action. It differed significantly before the interview compared to afterward. On the one hand, his prayers influenced or at least confirmed his decision to meet me, but the signs remained ambiguous enough for him to be nervous regarding the outcome of the situation. It became clear that God had realised Himself through John's action only after he had acted it out and reflected on the results. This is the same figure of thought that Pastor Jacob used to describe the conditions of a pastor's success. He had to trust in his divine empowerment in order to act boldly, but only the effects of his actions confirmed the factual reality of his divine empowerment.

To summarise, the imaginary of enacted destiny comprises two components that ideally merge into each another and temporally embrace actions. First, enacted destiny refers to an idea of divine empowerment, which enables believers to deal with risk and contingency. Second, it refers to a scheme of interpretation in which a correspondence between God's agency and human agency is ascribed retrospectively. The interaction of both elements, empowerment and interpretation, create the practical dynamic of the enactment of destiny. In this way, charismatic discourse is able to combine a strong notion of free individual agency with a strong notion of an immanent and almighty God. Divine manifestations become reality in reflection on the believers' efforts to realise them.[27]

Another case that illustrates the enactment of destiny was that of Rita, a young Namibian woman who attended the Word Church. She was the daughter of an employee of the Namibian embassy. In the Word Church she was part of a group of educationally successful and attractive young women of mixed African origin. A couple of weeks after a religious conference during which four other pastors besides Pastor Jacob preached on the relevance of faith, she made a public testimony during a Sunday service.[28] She explained that her great wish was to study in the

United States. However, her parents did not have enough money to pay the fees and she therefore had to apply for a scholarship to realise her dream. She prayed about it and asked God for help, but deep in her soul she doubted that God wanted her to study in the United States. After the religious conference, during which the importance of faith was stressed and Pastor Jacob explained how important it is to firmly believe in one's divine identity, she was motivated to intensify her efforts and overcome her doubts. As the result of this process, she applied for a scholarship at a university in Georgia. Eventually she received a letter from the university granting her a full scholarship. Euphorically, she concluded her testimony with the words: 'If God can make it for me he can do it for everybody'. As in the case of John, this narrative includes the two elements of the imaginary of enacted destiny: Rita highlighted the importance of her faith in her divine empowerment as reason to increase her activities; on the other hand, the contingencies whether 'God really wanted her to go to the USA' and whether she sufficiently believed in it disappeared only after she had received the scholarship. In this sense her successful attempts to get a scholarship in the United States became enacted destiny.

Daniel, a member of Pastor Jacob's church who is married to a German member of the Word Church and has two children, also referred to the imaginary of enacted destiny. Until the mid-1990s he worked as a car mechanic and was a member of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God in the town of Saboba in the northern part of Ghana. Because a friend of Daniel lived in Berlin and offered his help, Daniel applied for a visa at the German embassy. His first visa application was rejected. Normally, being rejected once is a precedent for further rejections, which means that the chances of getting a visa are even lower in the future. Daniel stated that the religious practices of praying and believing in God encouraged him to keep his spirits up and continue to apply for a visa. In the end he was successful, travelled to Germany, and managed to achieve secure legal status. Retrospectively his success confirmed that his wish to migrate to Germany was congruent with God's plan for him to go to Germany: 'I only gave it to God. … Through that I got the opportunity to live in Germany'.[29] Despite attributing his

final success to divine agency, his narrative pointed out that it required his own agency to realise God's will.

As the incidents of Daniel, Rita, and John show, the imaginary of enacted destiny connects well to the life situations of migrants. Migration in general and the migration of West Africans to Europe in particular– not least because of restrictive migration systems and insecure living and working conditions – demands that individuals make consequential and risky decisions under the conditions of insecurity and incomplete information. Giddens (1991: 113-114) speaks in this context of 'fateful moments', situations with a significant impact on the future in which individuals have to act beyond the scope of their habitual everyday activities. Generally the imaginary of enacted destiny provides individuals with devices that are well adapted to dealing with fateful moments and to make sense of them retrospectively. Although the process of migration implies many such fateful moments, they are not limited to migrants.

Enacted Destiny and Failure

Because it is one of the most important religious presumptions within the charismatic discourse that God intervenes in favour of the believer, success, above all things, indicates that an event is divinely empowered. This invites the question of how failure can be made meaningful within a knowledge system that claims success to be the normal outcome of religiously empowered activities. Generally charismatic Christians of West African origin in Berlin do not a priori expect their actions to be successful. The imaginary of enacted destiny is not verifiable or falsifiable in a scientific sense. Instead, it gains evidence and plausibility by an incidental logic. Certain incidents of divinely empowered success are sufficient to validate the discourse as a whole. Moreover, the estimation of whether an event is considered evidence of enacted destiny or not can change over time if the estimation of an action's success changes. For instance, when I asked Daniel in 2003 when God had last manifested in

his life, he told me that it was when He helped him to obtain vocational retraining as a mechanic in Berlin.[30] Since the retraining did not lead to the expected result in the labour market, by 2005 the incident had disappeared from his representation of divine manifestations in his life and was replaced by a narrative that God helped him find a job as a geriatric nurse.[31] Generally Daniel was not concerned with explaining his failures, like his recurring unemployment, the unsuccessful retraining, or the financial difficulties that hindered his ability to visit his family in Ghana; he was much more occupied with his future. The semi-ritual emphasis of the blessings that he had received could thus not be understood as a neutral representation of the successes and failures in his life but as a statement of confidence in God's goodness. Generally, representations of failure were not encouraged by the charismatic imaginary on enacted destiny because this conflicted with the idea of being a righteous and committed believer who was supposed to receive divine rewards. Moreover, the overstatement of the probability of divine blessings is a religious practice by which charismatic Christians can link up their ambiguous present to an optimistic vision of future. By ritually confirming to each other and God the certainty of achieving a goal, charismatic Christians create in terms of the imaginary of enacted destiny the necessary condition of realising it: only those who firmly believe in their divine nature are able to appropriate it and to overcome their predicaments.

Apart from this tendency of avoiding representations of failure, there are also interpretative schemes that explicitly address it. One such scheme is that of 'ritual mistakes'. When I asked Daniel why his actions sometimes fail, he explained that he might not have asked God at the right time, he might not have believed strongly enough, or might have not prayed intensively enough. In this sense failure was seen as an effect of his insufficient belief or his inadequate practice. By attributing failure to a deficient performance of an individual, the knowledge system as a whole is immunised against falsification.[32]

Another interpretation of failure is related to evil forces. It is argued that because of the interference of demons, witches, or the devil himself an action could fail. Nevertheless, the charismatic cosmology is based on the assumption that God is more powerful than the devil. Consequently, the interpretative scheme of diabolic intervention refers either to a temporalisation of the problem – the devil has caused a temporary disturbance that will be overcome in the future, or it refers to the first explanation – the individual made a mistake, otherwise he or she would have been able to overcome the devil.

A third explanation of failure is connected to sin. Pastor John of the Holy Spirit Church, for instance, drew a close connection between sin and failure during an all-night prayer session: 'If something goes wrong in your life, don't blame the witch in your village, don't blame your ancestors, blame yourself. And ask for forgiveness of your sins.'[33] Within the interpretive framework of the imaginary of enacted destiny, sin can be understood as a decision that distracts individuals from realising their divine nature. It is an example of a person not choosing to do what God wants them to do and therefore not being able to overcome their primordial alienation from God. Nevertheless, instead of blaming the believer's sinning, the charismatic discourse is much more occupied with improvement of the individual's life in the future. This orientation toward the future is closely linked to the broader Pentecostal narrative of breaking with the past, which offers believers the opportunity to begin anew their relationship with God at any point in time.

As I argued, the imaginary of enacted destiny is based on an underrepresentation of failure. In contrast to traditional West African and traditional Protestant notions of destiny, it puts so much emphasis on empowerment and progress that failure is interpreted as deviation. Enacted destiny, which considers success divine and failure as human, differs from the cited African models of destiny in which 'good destiny' and 'bad destiny' co-exist with each other.

Conclusion

I argued that through the imaginary of enacted destiny God became immanent to the world of everyday life and to the activities of charismatic Christians of West African origin in Berlin. In the process of realising one's divine nature, the boundary between the transcendent and the immanent, this world and the other collapsed. Human agency is considered as a central means through which the divine manifests itself in the world. Instead of being a static model, enacted destiny is described as a category of movement. It provides religious means of pre-situational risk management and practical empowerment that cannot close the gap between human and divine agency completely. They conflate from a post hoc perspective. Only by reflecting on the results of an action can believers assess whether their agency is divinely empowered or not. The imaginary of enacted destiny develops its practical dynamic from the interplay of both elements – presituational empowerment and postsituational frame of interpretation. The ideal implied in it is the dissolution of the difference between human agency and divine agency.

Although the dispositive of enacted destiny appears to not be limited to West African migrants in Western Europe, it connects well with the conditions they encounter in the course of their everyday lives. It provides them with a religious method that facilitates actions under conditions of risk and contingency. Praying before 'fateful moments' helps to reduce situational complexities, and supports decision-making processes. In this respect it implies a proactive element. At the same time, the post hoc interpretation implied in the enactment of destiny creates a positive identity as blessed children of God, and thereby challenges depreciative or racist assessments of African migrants' status in the receiving countries (Nieswand 2005).

My references to both traditional Protestant and traditional African notions of destiny as well as to modernisation theory were not meant to indicate simple and unfractured continuities between those knowledge systems. It can be shown that there are both parallels and

differences to traditional West African ideas of destiny on the one hand, and traditional Protestantism on the other hand that point to the multiple reference structures of religious belief systems. The most striking parallel between traditional West African ideas about destiny and the charismatic imaginary of enacted destiny is that in both notions destiny is not presumed as fixed, static, and predetermined reality but rather as a framework in which the relation between divine agency and human agency could be understood and determined. Although the ideal was the convergence of human and divine will, human actions could also diverge from it. The modernistic accent on freedom of agency and overcoming the constraints of the past that can be identified within the charismatic discourse have to be seen in relation to the factual limitations that West African migrants encounter in Germany. In many cases it constitutes a religiously phrased wish and ambition to overcome present predicaments in the future rather than a realistic representation of the migrants' current situation.

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[1] Empirically, this article is based on seven months of ethnographic fieldwork among West African migrants in Berlin between February and August 2002. Altogether I did interviews and participant observation within twelve churches in Berlin. I conducted regular and constant participant observation for three months in each of two charismatic churches. I also occasionally attended church services in other cities in Germany and Ghana, and conducted interviews after 2002. A characteristic of four out of the twelve churches that I classified as charismatic was that they recruited their members across ethnic and national boundaries. This meant that the Christians with whom I worked were not only Ghanaians but also Africans from other countries, in particular Nigerians and Cameroonians. Two of the churches contained relevant 'white European minorities'. Because the charismatic churches attracted a nationally mixed audience, predominately from West Africa, I refer to charismatic Christians of West African origin. However, the reader should realize that due to my search strategy there is a 'Ghanaian bias' in my perspective and not all participants in the field of study were West Africans.

[2] All names of persons and institutions are fictionalised.

[3] Interview protocol, Peggy Kensah, 24.06.02, Berlin.

[4] Field protocol, 02.08.02, Berlin.

[5] Birgit Meyer (2004) presents an excellent overview of the recent anthropological debate on Christianity in Africa.

[6] Meyer (1998) highlights that the discourse of becoming 'born again' as a Christian, which is central to Pentecostal forms of Christianity, resonates with the wish of an advancing middle class to loosen their kinship ties and reduce the expectations of material redistribution.

[7] Parallel to the emphasis put on bodily experiences of the Holy Spirit, the Bible and its literal interpretation are also of major importance for Pentecostal Christians.

[8] This representation of Calvinism is typical and neglects some of the historical and practical complexities that were highlighted by Keane (2007).
[9] For an overview of the different meanings of the concept of *ori* see, for instance, Awolalu (1979: 8-10).
[10] Interview transcript, Jacob, 26.02.02, Berlin.
[11] The conflict between charismatic and noncharismatic groups inside the Ghanaian Baptist Church resulted in a split of the church in the 1980s (Gifford 1998: 94-95).
[12] Interview transcript, Anthony Oppong, 03.05.02, Berlin.
[13] A third Ghanaian-initiated church existed in Berlin at this time but is not included in this article.
[14] Interview transcript, Victor Owusu, 09.07.02, Berlin.
[15] Interview protocol, Daniel Bemile, 14.07.02, Berlin.
[16] According to Matthew in the original Greek version of the Bible, Jesus said that Peter (*petros*) is the rock (*petra*) on which he would build the church. Pastor Jacob's interpretation that *petra* means 'big rock' and *petros* 'small rock' deviates slightly from this.
[17] Transcript, Word Church, 03.03.02, Berlin.
[18] Transcript, Word Church, 03.03.02, Berlin.
[19] Going back to the German philosopher Gottfried Leibnitz (1966 [1710]), the theological and philosophical problems emerging from the presumptions of the goodness and almightiness of God on the one hand and the existence of evil and individual suffering on the other hand is called the *theodicy problem*.
[20] Field protocol, Word Church, 24.02.02, Berlin.
[21] Transcript, Word Church, 03.03.02, Berlin.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Field protocol, Word Church, 17.03.02, Berlin.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Interview transcript, Jacob Boateng, 23.08.01, Berlin. This passage was translated from German into English.
[26] Despite these fascinating similarities there are also some differences between van Dijk's case and the case of charismatic Christians of West African origin in Berlin. The Word Church in particular but the other charismatic churches in Berlin as well were less business focused than the Pentecostals in Botswana. Presumably, this is related to differences in the economic opportunity structures in the respective receiving areas and the social composition of the examined congregations. Moreover, there are differences in the analytical foci. While in his paper van Dijk concentrates on the empowering side of the Pentecostal discourse, this article accentuates the interaction between presituational empowerment and retrospective interpretation.
[27] That both parts ideally interact includes the possibility that, situationally, either the interpretation or the empowerment part could become more dominant. The two extreme possibilities would be a pure ascription that does not imply any empowering activities beforehand, or empowering religious activities whose results are not interpreted in terms of enacted destiny.
[28] Field protocols, 28-31.03.02 and 28.04.02.
[29] Interview transcript, 24.02.02, Berlin.
[30] Field protocol, 05.03.03, Berlin.
[31] Field protocol, 01.11.05, Berlin.
[32] Mechanisms of protection against counter-evidence are not a specific feature of the charismatic discourse but are in one or the other part of every knowledge system.
[33] Field protocol, Spirit Mission Church, 19.07.02, Berlin.