

Research Statement

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Pentecostalism is a prominent form of Christianity around the world and is increasingly pervasive in the Global South. There is ongoing debate within religious studies regarding whether or not Pentecostalism gives rise to social justice efforts and civic responsibility. My work identifies various forms of Latin American Pentecostal social action in order to complicate stereotypes and reveal an inherent orientation toward public engagement. It also opens pathways for ecumenical and inter-religious conversations in a religiously pluralistic world.

My dissertation research nuances the debate through the development of a typology of Pentecostalism(s) ranging across a spectrum of publicly active spirituality. My findings show that popular Pentecostal practices such as glossolalia are inherently counter hegemonic allowing communities to define themselves in contradistinction to narratives of domination. Diverse worshipping communities also create contexts in which contact can generate an ethic of embrace across boundaries of difference. I give attention to the affectional force of worship rituals to generate social-ethically and civically active behaviors.

I focused one chapter of my dissertation on these material dimensions of Pentecostal rituals; my second project will expound upon this exploration. I will draw more heavily upon ethnographic fieldwork among Latin American Pentecostals, along with my own musical background within the tradition, to more deeply explore the generative force of worship rituals to foster action in the public sphere. I am particularly interested in ways such rituals impact Pentecostals' capacity for social boundary-crossing in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, and sexuality.

My third project will place Pentecostalism in dialogue with other spirit-possession traditions such as Santería, Vodou, and Umbanda. Utilizing ethnographic methods, I will draw Latinx Pentecostalism into comparative perspective with these religions to uncover ways spirit possession empowers marginal communities and provides prominence and agency to marginalized social actors. Presenting these traditions in such a light will also “de-exotify” indigenous creole traditions that are often demonized by many Pentecostals, paving new paths for inter-religious conversation.

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