

**EASA Media Anthropology Network
e-Seminar Series**

<http://www.philbu.net/media-anthropology/workingpapers.htm>

**E-Seminar on Katrien Pype's working paper
"I do not want to marry my ngatiul"
Mass-mediated alliances between youngsters and Pentecostalism
in Kinshasa"**

(21 – 28 February 2006)

John Postill (University of Staffordshire)

jpostill@usa.net

Dear all

The 10th EASA Media Anthropology Network e-seminar opens now and will run on this mailing list for a week ending on Tuesday 28 Feb at 9 pm CET.

We'll be talking about a working paper by Katrien Pype who is writing a PhD at Leuven supervised by Filip De Boeck. The paper is entitled "I do not want to marry my ngatiul." Mass-mediated alliances between youngsters and Neo-Pentecostalism in Kinshasa. To find out more about Katrien's background, see

<http://www.easaonline.org/networkbiosm-r.htm#KP>

You can find the working paper at

<http://www.philbu.net/media-anthropology/workingpapers.htm>

The discussant will be Kelly Askew who is Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies (CAAS), University of Michigan. Since 1987 she has carried out extensive fieldwork in East Africa along the Swahili Coast of Tanzania and Kenya on music and politics, media, performance, nationalism, socialism, and postsocialism. As most of you will be aware, she has co-edited 2002 *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader* (co-edited with Richard Wilk). London and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers. More on Kelly's work at

http://www.lsa.umich.edu/anthro/faculty_staff/askew.html

The rules of the e-seminar are as follows (please note that there is a 3-post limit per participant per seminar):

- 1. The discussion starts when the discussant emails his or her comments on the working paper to the list.**
- 2. The author(s) then replies to those comments.**
- 3. The rest of list members can then add their comments, questions to the author, points of information, etc. These will be addressed by the author(s) at their own convenience throughout the week.**
- 4. Full bibliographic references are not required, but they are always welcome.**
- 5. All contributions should be emailed directly to the list (medianthro@abyznet.net) not to the seminar chair.**
- 6. Contributions should have a clear, concise subject, e.g. 'Research methods'. Please avoid uninformative (e.g. 'Your comments') and empty subject lines (NB abyznet rejects empty subject fields).**
- 7. Contributions should be kept as brief and focussed as possible.**
- 8. Contributions should be sent in the body of the email, not in an attachment.**
- 9. Participants are allowed to contribute a maximum of 3 postings per seminar (this restriction does not apply to the author or to the chair).**
- 10. The usual offline seminar norms of courtesy and constructive criticism apply.**

We shall be saving the seminar transcript it and uploading it onto the website in PDF format, as we think these discussions can be a useful resource for future research and teaching.

Finally, I wish to thank both Katrien and Kelly for taking the time to participate in this seminar and would like to invite Kelly to post her comments later today.

Best wishes

John

P.S. New list subscribers who are unsure about how these e-seminars work can download transcripts from previous e-seminars from <http://www.philbu.net/media-anthropology/workingpapers.htm>

Kelly Askew (University of Michigan)
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Discussant comments on Katrien Pype's paper, "I Do Not Want To Marry My Ngatiul': Mass-Mediated Alliances between Youngsters and Pentecostalism in Kinshasa"

for the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) Media Anthropology Network e-seminar 21-28 February 2006

by Kelly Askew, Department of Anthropology and Center for Afroamerican and African Studies, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

In her essay on television and Pentecostalism in Kinshasa, Katrien Pype weaves together analysis of popular Congolese television serials with conflicts over generational cleavages, urban migration, religious transformation, and shifting conceptions of kinship. As such, she contributes to (yet seems largely unaware of) the burgeoning literature on religion and mass media, best exemplified by the work of Birgit Meyer (see also her new volume co-edited with Annelies Moors on Religion, Media and the Public Sphere), recent work by Jacques Derrida, a special issue of *Journal of Religion in Africa* -- vol. 33, no. 2 (2003), and *Religion and Media*, edited by Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber. Pype's focus is the dominance in Kinshasa television offerings of what she terms 'Pentecostal melodramas': locally-produced serials about social issues familiar to average viewers (e.g., witchcraft, illicit relationships, competing loyalties) that are depicted as best resolved or understood within the framework of a Pentecostal, born-again Christian, ideology. The genre has become ubiquitous fare found not only on church-owned television stations, but also on the two state-owned stations and on private channels without religious affiliation. Pype presents these teleserials as a privileged space within which young actors/actresses (and, by extension, their audiences?) critique customary practices, reject the authority of consanguineal elders, and celebrate escape from both through conversion to Pentecostalism. They are privileged not only due to their tremendous popularity, but because their casts are dominated by youth who do much of the creative work in developing storylines, often drawing on their own personal experiences. One such plot narrates the story of a young man who wishes to marry a fellow Pentecostal but whose parents insist upon customary practice in which his predetermined marriage partner is his matrilineal second cousin. In the end, the church-based union occurs, custom is portrayed

as not only antiquated but demonic, and the power of Jesus as manifested in Pentecostal Pastors or prophets is upheld.

Pype's stated intent is to examine these teleserials as a means of understanding broader shifts in power relations. The power of village elders, the power of the ancestors, and the power of customary practice all fall victim to the rise of Pentecostalism, which seeks to supplant them with new authority figures (Pastors and prophets), new practices (weekly prayer meetings, baptisms), and a new ideology in which the Devil and his worldly temptations figure prominently. While at some points this comes across as generational rebellion (a recurrent theme in African studies, especially in contexts like this of great economic and social change), in fact Pype is quick to point out that one set of elders (those by blood) is replaced by another (those by faith and by high position in television companies), so youth agency can be argued only to a point. Her data speak to the disillusionment found in marginalized sectors of urban populations for whom dreams of 'making it' in the city prove untenable (see also the 1987 film *La Vie Est Belle* set in Kinshasa), and how Pentecostal communities -- as 'evidenced' in these teleserials -- provide alternate social networks for those far from home.

While a rich analysis overall, Pype leaves some crucial issues unexplored. To what extent is economic access and advancement implicated in this meta-drama? It costs no less than US\$25,000 to start up a television channel in Kinshasa, and while not specific on how many Pentecostal stations exist, Pype indicates that it exceeds the numbers of state-owned and non-religious private stations. From where/whom does this large sum of start-up capital come? Are there any ties to global Evangelical organizations, like that of Reinhard Bonnke whose mass-mediated extravaganzas criss-cross the African continent year after year? Additionally, Pype's young informants tell her of their fears about visiting their home villages, fears that a relative will "put something in your food, because she will want you to leave your money over there." Pastors, on the other hand, promise (and provide?) wealth. Questions regarding the means by which Pentecostal communities obtain their wealth are left unanswered, as are questions surrounding the financial returns of performing as an actor on a Pentecostal melodrama.

Another area that merits more attention is youth perceptions of their dual roles as actors and as role models in these teleserials. Pype describes one actress who draws attention to herself for her beautiful clothes and her (presumed) sexual relationship with the president of the acting troupe -- a relationship not sanctioned by formal engagement much less marriage. For someone who plays the role of representative for an ideology that disdains worldly allures and denounces illicit relationships, this seems like a contradiction. It would not necessarily be one, however, if she (and her lover) drew distinctions between her employer's ideology and her own. Thus, another element I find missing in Pype's analysis is discussion of the lived compromises that entail ideology-in-practice. Pentecostalism, no less than any other ideological form, takes multiple forms in everyday life yet in order to survive as an ideology, must continually present itself as consistent. Understanding how youth actors negotiate their roles on and off the set, how they conceptualize those roles, and how they negotiate relationships with their patrons would further Pype's concern with youth agency. Is Pentecostal morality enforced, and if so, how? Are there cases in which actors were asked to leave a show or occasions in which a storyline was vetoed by higher-ups? What roles do the shows' senior producers play?

In her conclusion, Pype states that "Spiritual leaders compete with the ethnic group for the 'souls' of the young." Based on the evidence she presents, it appears that they compete for much more than that: youth loyalties, youth earnings, and the future children of youth marital

unions. With her fascinating data, Pype can weigh in on existing debates over media in the service of religion versus media as religion (what Derrida has called the 'sacralization of teletechnologies'). I urge her to do so, and look forward to the ensuing discussion.

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Thank you very much for those comments, Kelly. We shall now await to hear from Katrien, after which the discussion will be open to all on the list.

John

Katrien Pype (University Leuven)
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I would like to thank Kelly for her cooperation in this e-seminar, and for nicely summarizing the themes that wanted to bring across. Her comments are inspiring. With respect to the absence of any reference to the work of Birgit Meyer or the reader by Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, I should mention that the text that I have posted on this e-group is a small part of the PhD thesis that I am writing for the moment. I intend to have about three main parts in the thesis, the first dealing with youth, the second with the mediations of the invisible (the divine and the occult invisible) and the third one with gender (as domestic affairs are still the main problems dealt with in the serials themselves). The text that you have read will be part of this latter part of the dissertation, concerning sexual politics and the representation of women. I only hinted at the intertwinements between visual media and religion when I noted that the special effects are cultural codes for visualizing the occult divine. This is a very fascinating and rich domain for analysis, which was not intended to be included in this working paper.

Kelly's first question concerns wealth: the money needed for setting up a television channel, promises by the Pasteurs of a wealthy future if one becomes a reborn Christian, and the money gained by the actors; this all touches upon the distribution of capital in the city. I do not have data about all the television channels, but I can give concrete information about the two television channels with which my theatre company worked/works. Their capital stems from political networks. For the confessional channels: no doubt money comes from abroad, both from wealthy Congolese in the diaspora and from evangelical networks.

These directors have hardly any influence on the storylines, and politics is not an issue in the serials. Propaganda is done through other programs. The audience however is more important for the 'filling out of the play' to use a phrase of Karin Barber. (indeed, the audience can

promote a subplot to become the main storyline, as was in fact the case for 'le feu dévorant' - which had in its first episodes the stories of four spiritual leaders - as the audience preferred the romantic problems between Paco and Belinda, the troupe adapted the story to the preferences of the audience.) The actors themselves however are meagerly remunerated for their work. As the leader of the troupe receives monthly a certain amount (that changes often accordingly to the popularity of the serials), the members of the troupe have no idea at all about what their president receives. The distribution amongst the actors depends here again on their popularity, but also on intergroup politics. Often conflicts between an actor and his leader results in a fine that can be the salary of three months work. The salaries for the actors range from 100 US\$ to 5 or even less. As such, the actors cannot make a living with what they get from television. There are two ways for the actors to raise their money. Firstly, each week they integrate small commercials in the episodes, what gives the troupe up to 10 US\$ per commercial. More important for the actors themselves are the social networks they can engage in as a result of their appearances on television. The phenomenon of 'libanga' ('throwing one's name') is extremely popular in the production of music and serials in Kinshasa ? as the mentioning of the names of local big men/women sparks off patron-client situations that might be lucrative, i.e. financially and/or socially.

The second topic raised by Kelly concerns contradictions in ideology and practice. This is indeed a topic that should be more elaborated. Thank you for bringing that up. These youngsters have to stage themselves publicly as Pentecostals, and therefore they should behave according to the strict rules. Although they seem to manage their 'public selves' (both on and off screen) in a good way, there are sometimes slippages, and the one of the young actress residing for a while with the president is one of these. For Pentecostals, there is no problem in 'being engaged', as long as they state publicly that they postpone sexual relationships until after marriage. This young couple was extremely careful and very discrete. One could only notice that she slept there if you lived yourself in the compound or if you would visit them early in the morning. And even then, they would have excuses. Nevertheless, it raised disagreement amongst the young actors once it came to the open.

Of course, the members of the troupe were all concerned about their reputation, but above all, they do not merely represent themselves as Pentecostals, they are convinced about the Pentecostal ideology. And having sex out of wedlock is sinful. The honor of both the president and Mamy was severely damaged, and it took lots of energy, palavers and public asking for God's forgiveness.

As such, the Pentecostal ideology does not come from above, but comes from the youngsters themselves. The directors of the television channels do not impose this ideology on their troupes. And, more importantly, the actors themselves sought for a Pasteur of which they believed he could guide them in a spiritual way. They literally screened several Pastors and then opted for the one they were cooperating with now. In the past, they had been working with another Pasteur, whom they now depict as 'a false prophet'. This led them to search for another spiritual leader. If one day, troubles would arise between the troupe and their current Pasteur, they will have no problems searching for a spiritual leader that they feel can guide them better in their work for God and spiritual life.

I hope I have answered in a satisfying way on the questions. If not, I would like to elaborate on certain aspects.

With kind regards,
Katrien

Francisco Osorio (University of Chile)

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I would like to argue that Katrien Pype is in a direct line with media anthropology tradition (if we could agree on that first), considering the subject, methods and theory involved in her research.

About the subject, an example could be Andrew Buckser, who in 1989 published “Sacred Airtime: American Church Structures and the Rise of Televangelism” (Human Organization 48[4], 370-376). Buckser asked why independent religious television replaced traditional churches during the 1960s and 1970s. Comparing broadcasters and televangelists, he concluded that both structures (organizations) were alike, for example, both appeal directly to the audience, without intermediary levels and both create a strong tie with viewers to collect money.

Pype uses standard anthropological methods and concepts well established in media research, such as mediascape or imagined community. Other examples can be found in the next sentences by Pype: “I am interested in examining how the making of serials participates in the reconfiguration of power and authority in Kinshasa”, “how individuals make meaning out of the local and global flows of images, identity formations and particular experiences”, “these serials become public visualizations of collective experiences and occupy a central place in a genuine cultural public sphere”.

Therefore, her main contribution is the ethnography of how “television in Kinshasa is increasingly monopolized by the Pentecostal ideology”.

Although Pype doesn't say it, I think her work falls into the national identity tradition in media anthropology (a very strong influence from the 1990s). Her comments on Mobutu dictatorship and later the transformations in the 1990s with the Kabila (father and son) government in Congo, takes Pype to an excellent idea: “Pastors and self-proclaimed prophets erected new churches that filled up the gap that the State had left”.

This is not the main object of her research, but a very interesting line to follow in order to understand how nations use television while constructing national identity. In this case, perhaps, through pastors.

Francisco Osorio, Ph.D.
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John Postill (University of Staffordshire)

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Many thanks to Katrien for responding to Kelly and to Francisco for his comments. May I suggest that we add a few more comments and queries to Francisco's before Katrien takes them up.

I have greatly enjoyed this paper and look forward to reading more. I have a couple of questions for Katrien. I was wondering first about your point that the teleserials across all TV channels 'present the same stories, show the same characters and have similar plotlines', a uniformity that you characterise as 'the Pentecostal drama', a manicheistic genre set in everyday life rather than in a mythical realm (p. 5). How do you explain this striking homogeneity given the conditions of rapid social, political and economic change found in Kinshasha? Is it because this is an early phase in the history of this genre? Are any subgenres already discernible? Even if such homogeneity exists, don't viewers and performers alike make significant distinctions amongst serials, actors, stories, etc?

My second query concerns music. As I understand it, Kinshasha is renowned across the region for its popular music scene. Given that most scenes in the serials are set in living rooms, and that bars, discos, etc, are devilish places, how do these serials manage to keep young audiences hooked? Do they sneak in Kinoisian music, incl. trendy music, whilst condemning it? Also, aren't they competing against MTV and its regional variants? I couldn't quite place these serials within a broader popular culture in Kinshasha...

John

Katrien Pype (University Leuven)

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I thank Francisco and John for their comments. It is nice to see what others read/miss in your own text. Here are some clarifications.

1. Reply to Francisco Osorio

Indeed, one could approach the serials from the angle of the creation of a national community, however, this is not the main focus of my research. But, I confirm that religious Pentecostal leaders – whose ideology is transmitted through the serials – take over the role of national political leaders – in the sermons they refer to political figures and processes, there are on the confessional channels television programs entitled 'what is the role of Christianity for the future of Congo', and religious leaders propose plans for the national development, and reveal how the strategies of the devil in the political history of the nation. And of course, Pentecostalism thrives upon an interesting mixture of cosmopolitan imagined communities ('we are all children of God', 'we are all engaged in the same spiritual battle') and local political issues. (see for the cosmopolitan characteristics of fundamental Christian churches in Africa texts by Harry Englund in 'journal of religion in africa', and an edited volume by Marshall-Fratani and Corten on transnationalism and Pentecostalism)

2. Reply to John Postill

- on uniformity of genre: the serials as they are produced today in Kinshasha reveal fundamental similarities which lead me to name them 'the Pentecostal Melodrama'. The moral message – the Pentecostal ideology – has been added to the other characteristics of the melodrama that the locally produced serials in Kinshasha displayed since their early days (i.e. since 1981 with the first serial Mwana Nsusu, little chicken). Before the Pentecostal ideology came to frame the stories, the maboke also recounted the daily experiences of citizens, but

they instructed people to become ‘good citizens’ and social misbehavior was explained in this frame (and now we come back to Franscico’s concern: approaching symbolical worlds through the concern for nationalism).

Concerning subgenres: some troupes are known to explain the stories better than others, other troupes are known for putting too much attention to the actual witchcraft practices (are regarded as ‘false christians’ because these troupes seem to postpone the actual message until the very end), other troupes are known to attend more a ‘middle class’ than other troupes who seem to speak more to the impoverished outskirts of the city; other distinctions are made upon the ethnic groups that are more visible in the serials (for example: Cinarc absorbs Kongo and Luba ethnic customs, whilst Muyombe Gauche in first instance Kongo customs, other troupes more practices from Bandundu province etc.) – but in the end, the same stories circulate, topics are recycled a few years (sometimes only months) by other troupes, etc.

I think these serials are in first instance expressions of the uncertainties that Kinois people (and Congolese in general) are experiencing today. The Pentecostal ideology interprets suffering, social misconduct, etc. within a spiritual frame that promises restoration in the ‘au-delà’ (hereafter). Mobutu’s promises of restoration that he projected in his authenticity campaign have turned out to be false, as such all belief in political leaders vanished. And religious leaders have taken over. Today, the country is preparing for elections. The future will tell whether a new political leader will rise who can offer an alternative interpretation scheme for its ‘citizens’, and what its implications are for the production of Kinshasa's popular culture.

- on Kinshasa’s popular culture in general: your question concerns the popularity of Congo’s urban dance music and its condemnation within the serials. Exactly, as you state it, the Pentecostals sneak in excerpts of songs and dance, which keeps the audience and the actors themselves hooked. This betrays that they enjoy very much the use of these urban and devilish songs and dances. Often also, they invent new dances that are based upon the worldly dances but are accompanied by religious lyrics. As such, they are at once demonizing and sacralizing their own popular culture.

The serials compete indeed with the video clips of ‘worldly’ musicians as Papa Wemba, Werrason and the like. On confessional channels, their video clips are of course not shown, but on the two channels on which my troupe aired/airs their serials, there are even daily special TV-shows that discuss the new songs, the lives and performances of these artists. As such, one channel can diffuse several ideologies.

Katrien

Erkan Saka (Rice University)

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Dear Katrien,

In addition to what is already said:

a) Maybe you should present a more comparative angle on competing ideologies? By comparative, I mean, I feel like "worldly" or more secular media products can be quite competitive with pentecostal ideologies... In order to substantiate the monopolization claim,

there should be more empirical grounding? Secular consumerist ideologies are always more powerful at least in contemporary times and even if they are losing to fundamentalist ideologies, they tend to loosen up them. So more empirical data on Kinshasa, would produce a more local and specific knowledge on the clash of secular and religious ideologies...

b) Do you think you could write more on the generational struggle? I believe, pastors becoming new parents are a great point to exploit but i feel like the actual parents and all those in the position of guardians of "pagan" front are not easy to defeat. There should be grand, political economical forces challenging the local power balance. I cannot imagine local youths and local church organizations without any outsider help defeating the powerful elders! You already hint about this, maybe this can have a more effective role in your analysis?

I don't know, these are just ideas popping up in reading your paper and comments...

Cordially,
Erkan

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Erkan Saka

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* Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Communication in Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey

Katrien Pype (University Leuven)

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Thank you Erkan. Your hints are very useful, and ask for a thorough grounding of the data that I presented you. Here are some of the replies to your ideas.

About competing ideologies: this categorization between 'worldly' and 'Pentecostal' is a Pentecostal one. As the Christian ideology governs social life, those so-called 'worldly' characters represent themselves as Christian in the public sphere, although they are denounced to be worldly by the fundamentalists. An example is Papa Wemba who mentions in interviews that he has become a Christian during his imprisonment in Paris, and who throws from time to time 'Nzambe' (Lingala for God) in his songs. So, the question is, whether there is really a 'clash' going on...

Concerning the generational struggle: the parents of the youngsters turn more and more to Pentecostalism too. They state not to be involved in those 'customary practices'. It is interesting to observe how the rituals of traditional marriage are accompanied by sacred music.

In order to reply on your question about the reaction of the parents towards the Pastors as new parents, I have to refer to the impotence of the parents or of the lineage as a whole to provide their children with money to get fed, to go to school, etc. Youngsters are often the ones who bring in the money in the households, as they are still energetic enough to engage in small coops (cooperations), stories abound of young girls who are forced into prostitution to

get money so that the parents could eat, etc. This leads to an incapacity of the parents to maintain the authority over their offspring.

Another approach in the generational struggle shows that youngsters often convert one or both their parents and become thus 'spiritual fathers/mothers' of their biological/social fathers/mothers. This leads to the possibility of reprimanding their parents in a way that was 'traditionally' impossible.

Katrien

John Postill (University of Staffordshire)
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Dear list

A reminder that the present e-seminar on Katrien's paper runs until Tuesday evening CET. Please bear in mind that these sessions rely entirely on list members' active participation!

Many thanks

John

Jens Kjaerulff (Aarhus University)
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Hello everyone - and Katrien in particular,

Regrettably I know very little about the subject areas you most immediately touch on in your paper, Katrien, so I don't feel I have much to offer by way of more pointed commentary.

However, given the relatively modest seminar activity so far, I wonder if anyone might find it reasonable to comment in terms of comparative dimensions with regards to connections between religion and television more generally as they see it extend from this paper? It strikes me that what is described here in some ways may be seen as 'extreme' cases of more widely prevalent patterns 'truth-mediation', identifying 'devils' (e.g. 'axis-of-evil'...) and what not ...the location of TV's in living rooms, the way people congregate around them, the regularity of the congregations ... intuitively it is not difficult to see what appears to be 'religious' dimension to TV consumption ... but I am clearly not on 'home ice' here. Nonetheless, I would venture to toss a squid on the ice (pardon the hockey lingo): What might we learn from this African case, that may be considered of more general relevancy - anyone?

// Jens

Anna Horolets (Polish Academy of Sciences)
labusia_xl@wp.pl

Dear Katrien and the List,

I do not feel "on the home ice" in TV research either, but picking on what Jens has written I would add rather on the general relation between TV and religion in one very particular case. I would just give it as an example and hope that perhaps Katrien and others could interpret it in more detail.

This particular case is the last days and death of the Pope Jon Paul II, who is generally recognized a national hero in Poland (due to a number of historical and political circumstances). During the last days of his illness the TV was "watching the events rather closely", which means that roughly 5- of news very devoted to it. Right after the moment of his death most of the entertainment TV channels such as MTV or Animal Planet stopped their transmissions (black screen or short text about the death of the Pope). During several days after his death there were almost no entertainment programs and no advertising. This refers both to public and commercial TV channels. Advertising was also withdrawn from the largest newspapers and some of the billboards.

This case is of course quite different from what Katrien describes. However, although TV (and some other media, notably mobile phones) was to an extent reinforcing the wide-spread and to some extent dominant forms of religious practices, it also got engaged in quite a peculiar practice:

1. It was trying to become a mediator in the moment of death and mourning (which is traditionally the role of church)
2. It was re-creating its virtual space as "sacred" by means of withdrawing joyful elements (programme; tone of narration; clothes of the journalists etc) from it etc.
3. It was controlling people's behaviour by means of informing about the places of sermons; so it extended its influence beyond the living room (to an extent, of course) At the day of burial several tele-beams (large TV screens - is that the right word?) were placed in several large cities in Poland and the ceremony was transmitted through them, the gatherings counted up to a million people.
4. TV producers and Church rather co-operated than competed.

At the political level, this of course the traditional role of cementing the national community through honouring a national hero. However, these several days seem to produce very peculiar experience in which TV and other media very mediating the religious moment (existential moment) on an unprecedented scale.

I wonder if this case can be connected to your findings somehow, Katrien?

Best,
Anna

Katrien Pype (University Leuven)
Katrien.Pype@ant.kuleuven.be

Thank you Jens for your question.

It is a bit surprising that the comments on my paper seem to push me in the direction of religion and media. Although this is a major part of my thesis, I wanted to offer you another part on what I am working on now, being the way television mediates social relations. The more general relevancy of my aim resides in particular configurations of power, the mediation of the social real through (fictive) narratives, and even the redistribution of public/private through mass media.

The latter angle is something I want to elaborate on now. Whereas in Kinshasa, the actors stress in interviews that their personal histories inform the ‘fictive’ worlds, I see Flemish actors (as the Flemish situation is what I know very well too) hiding themselves behind the ‘role’ that they are incarnating on screen and their personal lives. They are often more than happy to discuss the latter in tabloids, another channel that however marks a sharp distinction between their ‘work’ as a dramatic artist and their identity as a ‘public figure’. This brings us back to the social role of public figures as artists. In a society as Flanders where ‘arts’ (as we can bring the serials under this umbrella noun) occupy a sphere totally set apart from ‘mundane’ reality and the actor has no specific moralizing role, in a setting as Kinshasa, the artist occupies a central place in the mediation and interpretation of social values and social truth.

Freestyling on the ‘public/private’ discussion then, how should we interpret shows as Big Brother? Tonight, this show starts again on a Flemish commercial channel. Already for some weeks, the journals and the hosts are focusing on ‘now, there is really no privacy anymore’, hinting at the glass walls that promise total transparency and voyeurism in the rooms and the house itself as the outside walls are made of glass.

I guess television has always been dancing on this rope of being (often in its first days) a public instrument for public government and nevertheless being a mediator between that government and its citizens. In Kinshasa, as religious leaders occupy in an increasing manner public space and media, they reshape the configuration of public/private in the sense that ‘the spiritual state of mind’ of the individuals are to be ‘gained’ in order to ‘heal the city, the country and the world’.

I hope with these comments I have brought the Kinshasa data closer to what others are studying.

Katrien

Katrien Pype (University Leuven)

Katrien.Pype@ant.kuleuven.be

Dear Anna, and others on the list,

Although I wanted to focus on social aspects rather than on the religious dimensions, here are two comments on your message. Your data show a lot of similarities with what I encountered in the field:

1. television reshapes the domestic living room into a ‘sacred divine space’ – as is for example also described for Hindu viewers in Mankekar’s inspiring ethnography (see bibliography on the media-anthropologists site). She describes how Hindu viewers prepare themselves for watching a televised version of a Hindu myth in the same way as they prepare

for another religious ritual. As for the serials produced by the troupe that I work with: each episode starts and ends with a religious song of the Christian group 'Adorons l'éternel'. Sacred songs orientate the mindset of participants (and the audience is also a participant) towards the Divine. The rituals amongst Pentecostal groups in Kinshasa start and end with singing sessions, in order to concentrate upon the presence and/or message of God that they will receive. The serials are clearly intended to be 'revelations from a divine origin' as they are used to evangelize the city. Nevertheless, my informants also stated that the devil can work through television. Pornographic films, American catch shows or action films, science fiction films, and even extremely popular films are often inspired by the Devil who uses these films as strategies to create destruction. They said that after watching those kinds of films, they feel angry, violent, they want to slap someone, they are sexually aroused and are inclined to have sexual intercourse. And these sensations, as they inspire people to commit sinful acts, are devilish.

In Kinshasa, television is thus incorporated within a larger spiritual framework that reduces everything (every sensation, every image, and every thought) to two competing powers: the Good – God and the Bad – the Devil. These data may lead to fascinating questions on the reception of television programs among a Congolese diasporic community in the West.

2. Ana's mentioning of the funeral of the Pope reminded me of several of those 'global funerals' that I witnessed through television in Kinshasa. Diffused on Euronews or TV5, I watched with my actors or the people in my house the funerals of the Pope, of the Sovereign of Monaco, and also the marriage of Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles. Watching to those live broadcastings was very important in the creation of a 'global audience'. The waiting for the smoke on the square in the living room in Kinshasa gave us the same exciting and even nervous feeling as those who were physically in Rome. They were all Christians – and this is one of the moments in which television in the creation of vernacular cosmopolitanisms.

With kind regards,
Katrien

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Dear all

First of all, I'd like to welcome to the list Jo Helle-Valle (SIFO Oslo) and Mary Ghattas (SOAS, U of London) who've only just joined us.

A final reminder: the seminar runs until tomorrow (Tuesday) at 9 pm CET.

One theme that I feel Katrien leaves underexplored in her paper is the question of incest (ekobo). Although prominently flagged in the title and at the outset, it's only at the end of the paper that we are told about it in some detail, esp. how the Pentecostals have enlarged the Lingala notion of ekobo to encompass, in addition to customary concerns 'adultery, pornography and prostitution' (p. 18).

I would be interested to know more about how this syncretic notion is used in (mediated) practice, particularly given that customary rules regulating sexual relationships and marriage

'still prevail in Kinshasha' (p. 18). This prevalence is exemplified in the serial *Makila a nani?* (Whose blood?) by a 'secular' theatre company in which viewers are warned not to marry hastily without looking into the customary interdictions, as the supernatural consequences could be horrific.

1. You say that these 'secular' companies are becoming more Christianised -- how do these companies reconcile, if at all, the three ideologies, assuming we can speak of three discrete 'ideologies' (customary/secular/Christian)?

2. There seems, at any rate, to be a contradiction in the analysis between (a) and (b)

(a) 'the notion of incest is thus expanded to sexual relations outside of wedlock and not any more to a specific group of persons with whom an individual cannot have sexual intercourse (nuclear family, classificatory sisters, etc.).' (p. 18) and

(b) 'Pentecostalism aids youngsters by enlarging the concept of 'incest', thus incorporating traditional marriage preferences (p. 19)

If the notion of incest incorporates traditional preferences (b), then presumably it does specify who the individual cannot have sex with (a)?

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First, apologies for that first reply, sent in error. Now, in response to Katrien's remark:

<Freestyling on the 'public/private' discussion then, how should we interpret shows as *Big Brother*? Tonight, this show starts again on a Flemish commercial channel. Already for some weeks, the journals and the hosts are focusing on 'now, there is really no privacy anymore', hinting at the glass walls that promise total transparency and voyeurism in the rooms and the house itself as the outside walls are made of glass.>

I once heard a terrific observation about these kinds of programs, that they are more about exhibitionism than voyeurism. I believe that in all cases, the participants sign over their rights to be depicted in the media. Not being a fan or even occasional watcher of such broadcasts, I cannot imagine wanting my life -- in any way, shape or form -- shown on TV, but I suppose that enough people want the fame (or infamy) that they don't worry about the intrusion. I guess the overall hand-wringing over dwindling privacy is somewhat legitimate, but much of this loss, particularly when it comes to "reality" shows, is self-inflicted.

Deb

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a small reply on the notion of incest

1. How do the different theatre companies reconcile? All the theatre companies produce the same genre of serials, i.e. stories which explain the visible reality as governed by an invisible real, that itself is explained within a millennial, apocalyptic ideology. As such, there are no 'secular' ideologies in the field of the theatre companies, although some of them are not explicitly linked to a specific Pentecostal church, and therefore, they do not have this explicit label of being Christian.

2. on the incorporation strategies of 'incest': it is important that Pentecostalism installs this new definition, which is eagerly embraced by the youngsters.

Katrien

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does the need to become 'famous' and therefore reinventing the personal borders between one's public and private self not express a fundamental individualism? relating this to the reshaping of private/public in the Kinosis serials-and the lives of the young actors, then I see there a loss of the power of the ethnic group and a highly individual search by these youngsters for a belonging to new social groups. is the exhibitionism of 'big brother shows' not a 'symptom' of an ongoing search for the creation of one's own identity in a society where no ideologies of 'the whole' exist?

Katrien

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Dear list

We've come to the end of the e-seminar. I'd like to thank Katrien for her working paper and participation, our discussant Kelly Askew for her insightful comments and all other participants for their comments and questions. As usual, a PDF of the seminar transcript will be available on our website shortly.

If you'd like to present a working paper from the end of April onwards or have any other suggestions about the list or network do drop me a line off-list.

Also, I'll soon be circulating details of a media anthropology call for papers on the topic of media practices for the forthcoming EASA conference in Bristol, September 2006.

Best wishes

John
