

ABSTRACT IAMS 2020

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Worship as affective bodily practice

In Kenya, Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity is strong and plays an important part in society, not least in urban areas. Especially the so called neo-pentecostal churches have established a niche in catering for the needs of the up-wardly mobile, urban Kenyans. Their attraction is especially strong among young people, and a major explanation to that is what Ogbu Kalu calls “the charismatic liturgy”, with songs and music appealing to the young, modern, Kenyan. Church is a place to go for good music just as much as for good preaching or good friends. The first part of the charismatic church service integrates communal songs, music and prayers and is often called “praise and worship” or simply “worship”.

Starting from an ethnographic description, this paper explores a range of somatic and affective aspects of worship. For example: What do people do with their bodies during worship? What emotions do they seek, and report? Why does clothing seem such a big deal? When are they dancing, and how? What does African culture and pentecostal theology have to do with it? Drawing on ritual theory, cultural studies and theology, the paper seeks to deepen the understanding of congregational music-making in an African context. It introduces such theoretical concepts as: Tomas Csordas’ “somatic modes of attention”; Kyra Gaunt’s “kinetic orality”; and Steven J. Land’s “orthopathos”, to show how inseparable the body and the senses are from whatever goes on in the charismatic liturgy.