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GERTRUD HÜWELMEIER

Mediating the Apocalypse – The Disaster  
of the Titanic in Vietnamese Pentecostal  
Discourse

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## Abstract

Global Pentecostalism is one of the fastest growing religious movements in contemporary Vietnam, attracting people in the highlands, in the city of Hanoi, and in the diaspora. While gathering in underground churches in Vietnam, adherents worship by speaking in tongues as well as by being touched and healed by the Holy Spirit. These meetings as well as „crusades“ and prayer camps are recorded by church members using digital cameras and various other technologies, citing the miraculous healings as well as the charismatic authority of the pastors as evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit. By focussing on sermons and visualisations of the disaster of the Titanic, this paper explores how different places and religious actors become connected through the use of media technology such as cameras, video and audio cassettes, and the subsequent circulation of religious messages. The paper argues that religious agents and imaginations are shaped by transnational media circuits, generating people’s emotions and memories, in particular with regard to the flight and displacement of Vietnamese refugees. Moreover, by listening to sermons and viewing videos of religious events that take place elsewhere, people participate in more than one local context and create transnational ways of religious belonging.

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During a one-week gathering of Vietnamese Pentecostal Christians on the Loreley, a cliff along the Rhine River in Germany, a Vietnamese pastor projected an image of the sinking Titanic on a huge screen. Hundreds of Vietnamese, who had travelled by bus, by car and by train from various European countries, attended the meeting and listened to his sermon. In his distinctly loud and sometimes threatening style of preaching, the pastor used the disaster of the Titanic as a metaphor for the imminent end of the world. However, he simultaneously proposed an idea of salvation and resurrection in his sermon by referring to the experiences of Vietnamese boat people, who had fled their home country at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s and many of whom drowned in the South China Sea.<sup>1</sup>

Taking the annual convention of the *Holy Spirit Church* as a starting point, this paper argues that the use of media in Vietnamese Pentecostal discourse in the German diaspora transmits religious as well as political messages. The tragic journey of the Titanic is linked, on the one hand, with the expected judgment of God during the end of days, as portrayed in the *Book of Apocalypse*. On the other hand, and this will be explored in more detail in this paper, the evocation of memories and emotions surrounding flight and displacement of Vietnamese refugees is a central part of the religious message. After the end of the American War in Vietnam, a large part of the population left the home country in small, leaky boats, hoping to be rescued by a large ship and taken to a rich country. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese fled, and tens of thousands of the boat people were taken in as refugees in Germany. Many of the boat refugees were saved by the German freighter *Cap Anamur*. Some of them had vowed on the small boats that if they were rescued, they would honour their religious duties in the new country. A part of the boat people converted to Pentecostal Christianity in the refugee camps in Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia, while other survivors did not convert until they arrived in Germany, where a number of them joined Pentecostal churches founded by Vietnamese refugees.

In the 1990s, after the reunification of Germany, a new group of Vietnamese, former contract workers from the German Democratic Republic (GDR), once the “brotherland” of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, started joining Vietnamese Pentecostal churches founded in West Germany by boat people. Due to obviously

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1 I am grateful to the participants of the conference on trance and trance mediums in Cologne for their critiques of my paper. A version of this chapter was also presented at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen. Thanks to Peter van der Veer and Steven Vertovec and all my colleagues for discussion and comments.

irreconcilable political differences between boat people and former contract workers, most of the boat people left the churches during those years. Since then, some of the converted contract workers who used to live in Germany have now returned to Vietnam. Despite being monitored by the Vietnamese government, they are missionizing with increasing success.<sup>2</sup> While creating transnational religious networks spanning the globe, from Europe to the US to Asia, they spread their messages through sermons, audio cassettes, videos, and DVDs.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Pentecostal churches in Vietnam and Germany<sup>3</sup>, this paper explores how different places and religious actors become connected through the use of media technology such as cameras, video and audio cassettes, and their subsequent circulation of religious messages. By focusing on what Thomas Csordas has called “portable practice” and “transposable message” (Csordas 2007), prerequisites for the spread of religion across borders, the paper argues that religious agents and imaginations are shaped by transnational media circuits. While listening to sermons and watching videos of religious events that take place elsewhere, people participate in more than one local context and thereby create “transnational ways of religious belonging” (Glick Schiller and Levitt 2004; Hüwelmeier and Krause 2010a). Thus, migrants as well as people who do not move are thereby affected by ritual performances on the other side of the globe.

## Revitalisation of religion in Vietnam and the creation of transnational religious networks

In Vietnam, religion has become a thriving force in the last few years. After decades of state suppression, pagodas and temples are being renovated in many places, and pilgrimages are being undertaken by large crowds. Due to processes of globalisation

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2 Only recently, in October 2009, the Assemblies of God, one of the biggest Pentecostal mega-churches worldwide, received a permit by the Vietnamese Government to operate in Vietnam. <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=01REL201009>, access 4.11.2009. This is the first step in becoming a legal organisation. According to “Vietnam News”, the “Assemblies of God” has around 40, 000 followers operating in 40 provinces and cities across Vietnam. However, there are hundreds of independent underground churches, still being monitored by the government.

3 Ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in 2007 and 2008 in Berlin and Hanoi. The research project on “Transnational networks, religion and new migration” was financed by the German Research Foundation, DFG.

and the country's integration into the market economy, a growing number of people have been participating in ancestor veneration, spirit mediumship, soul calling, and fortune telling over the past few years. Taking spirit mediumship as an ethnographic example, scholars even talk about a "spirit industry" (Endres 2010) that began to appear with the opening of the market and the emergence of capitalism. By referring to the resurgence of so-called "traditional" religious activities as well as of Buddhism and Christianity, Philip Taylor discussed the reflowering of prosperity cults, pilgrimages and spirit worship in terms of the "re-enchantment" of religion in post-revolutionary Vietnam (Taylor 2007). Yet, while so-called "traditional" religious activities are newly flourishing, they continue to be labelled as "superstition" by the state. Interestingly, they are rejected by Vietnamese Pentecostals as well, as they are considered to be the work of Satan.

As part of the Vietnamese pantheon of gods, spirits, and mother goddesses, the power of the Holy Spirit, as inherent in Pentecostal discourse, is viewed as a "new religion" by many Vietnamese. Evangelical Protestantism, and in particular charismatic Pentecostal Christianity, is one of the fastest growing religious movements in contemporary Vietnam, attracting people in the highlands as well as in the city of Hanoi. In the capital of Vietnam, adherents of Pentecostal charismatic Christianity gather in underground churches and worship by speaking in tongues. Many of them are healed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Preaching sessions in private homes are recorded by church members using digital cameras and various other technologies, citing the miraculous healings as well as the charismatic authority of the pastors as evidence for the power of the Holy Spirit. However, in contrast to *len dong* spirit mediumship, which is quite popular in contemporary Vietnam and of which CDs and video tapes of performances are available for purchase in shops and on the streets of Hanoi, the mediation of Pentecostal gatherings is restricted to the more private sphere of house churches.

Contrary to Africa and Latin America (Martin 1990; Meyer 2004; Robbins 2004; Vasquez and Williams 2005), where the global expansion of Pentecostalism manifests itself in the public sphere (de Witte 2003), this kind of Christianity is highly suspicious in the eyes of political authorities in Vietnam. Despite being monitored by the state, evangelical and Pentecostal movements are spreading in numerous places throughout Vietnam. In part, the rise of these movements is a consequence of migration. Although US missionaries are still travelling to proselytise in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and other places, there is a growing number of evangelists, apostles, and preachers who are Vietnamese nationals. Some of them converted outside

their country of origin, like Vietnamese boat people and contract workers in Germany, and only later returned to preach the gospel in Vietnam and other places in Southeast Asia.

Much like African Pentecostal churches in Europe (van Dijk 1997; Nieswand 2005; Krause 2008; Adogame 2010) that were founded by migrants, Vietnamese Pentecostal networks in Germany were created by Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s. Yet in contrast to African Pentecostal churches in the diaspora, where followers already knew about the success of Pentecostalism in their home countries or had been adherents themselves at home, Vietnamese in Germany, in particular those in former East Germany, hardly had any knowledge of this kind of “new” religion. Former contract workers, who came to live and work in the GDR, arrived as Communists and non-believers. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, an increasing number of the 60,000 former contract workers gained a new interest in religion. Unlike their co-ethnics in West Germany, the Vietnamese boat people, many of whom are Catholics or Buddhists (Hüwelmeier 2010b) and who had brought their religions with them when they arrived in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the former contract workers were not interested in religion at the time of their arrival in the GDR during the 1980s. Only after the reunification of Germany in 1990 and the breakdown of Communism in Eastern European countries did a growing number of them begin visiting Vietnamese Buddhist pagodas in western Germany and western Berlin. In the GDR there were no such places.

Furthermore, many former contract workers began practising ancestor worship. During GDR times, local authorities did not allow the installation of altars in the workers’ homes. Most of the former contract workers did not practice ancestor veneration as their parents were still alive in Vietnam. However, this changed during the 1990s. Today, ancestor altars can be seen in many private homes of Vietnamese in eastern Berlin and other parts of eastern Germany. In addition, a great number of former Vietnamese contract workers have erected small shrines in their places of business: spirits and gods venerated in “snack bar altars” (Hüwelmeier 2008) are protecting the owners of nail studios, shops, and restaurants in eastern Berlin neighbourhoods with a high proportion of Vietnamese, and guarantee economic success.

## Travelling spirits and new media

Spirit worship, a booming industry in Vietnam, is also to be found in former East German towns. In a suburb of Dresden<sup>4</sup> I visited Mrs. Hoa, a Vietnamese *len dong* spirit medium. She was initiated into the Mother Goddess religion or “four palace religion” in Hanoi some years ago, after she had recovered from a severe illness. *Len dong* spirit possession is a ritual of a Mother Goddess religion known as *Dao Mau* (Endres 2006). A medium can incarnate up to 36 spirits during the ritual, which lasts several hours. Karen Fjelstad describes the hierarchical order as follows: “Goddesses occupy the highest levels of the pantheon and mandarins, courtly ladies, princes, and princesses who incarnate into mediums in established sequences serve them, in descending order. Possession is highly stylised and while possessing mediums the spirits dance, listen to songs, distribute spirit gifts (*loc*), bestow spirit blessings, and read the fortunes of others” (Fjelstad 2010: 53). However, spirit possession rituals flourish not only in Vietnam, but also within new social networks opened up by migration and transnational ties. Mrs. Hoa is married to Walter, a bus driver from eastern Germany. They live with their five-year-old son in a small house with a courtyard. In a former barn, Walter built a temple for his wife, because, as he explained to me, she needed a place for her encounters with the spirits, as well as for counselling. Mrs. Hoa makes regular offerings to the spirits and travels to Vietnam every two years to attend ceremonies held by other mediums.

Mrs. Hoa’s clients travel from eastern Berlin and other places in eastern Germany in order to seek advice in marriage or business problems. Mrs. Hoa, as she told me, is also a fortune teller (*thay boi*). As many people in Vietnam visit *thay boi* on a regular basis, so do a number of migrants in the diaspora. When I first met Mrs. Hoa in her home, she was actually practising soul calling in her temple. A client from Berlin and her sister had arrived in the early morning via train. The woman was asking Mrs. Hoa for help to get into contact with her deceased father, who had died in a car accident in Vietnam. After performing the ritual, Mrs. Hoa, who acted as a medium, was extremely exhausted. While she took some time to recover, I talked to her mother, a 72-year-old lady, who had recently arrived from Hanoi to visit her daughter and her seven children in Dresden. Although Mrs. Hoa’s mother is not a *len dong* spirit medium herself, she participates as an assistant in many ceremonies in Vietnam. She also reported having supernatural powers, such as healing abilities. During my visit

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4 I have changed the names of all places, churches, and people.

to her temple in Hanoi she played videos of *len dong* spirit mediumship ceremonies as well as CDs with ritual music. By travelling back and forth, the old lady as well as her relatives in Germany transport ritual objects such as votive offerings (*hang ma*), paper representations of useful things such as mobile phones for the spirits and/or for the deceased, and bring along ritual clothing and CDs with ritual music.

As most of the recent research on transnationalism focuses on humans, less attention has been given to spirits accompanying people in their travels (Hüwelmeier and Krause 2010a). Spiritual support seems to be quite important while leaving the home country and settling elsewhere. Yet, some *len dong* spirits travel while others stay home (Fjelstad 2010).<sup>5</sup> However, spirits, like humans, are transformed in the context of migration. These migration processes are informed by the increasing connectedness of distant places through media such as videotapes and online messages. In the case of a Silicon Valley temple, photos were used as compensation for ritual goods such as votive offerings, which were not available in the US (Fjelstad 2010). Members of the temple asked their master medium to have votive offerings constructed, photographed, and then burned in Vietnam in name of the US temple. The master sent the photographs to the US and they are now used as substitutes for the original votives.

Transnational ties are also created by new communication technologies. While telephones are used by US mediums to contact mediums in Vietnam, internet access is still limited in many Vietnamese households, and most of the mediums in Hanoi cannot afford a computer. However, in the US, mediums and their clients view spirit possession ceremonies online. They even purchase videos of ceremonies that are held in Vietnam. As Fjelstad (2010) reported, mediums in Vietnam and the US have their ceremonies videotaped by paid professionals and these videos are freely distributed to other mediums. In most cases the tapes are viewed as a form of pleasure, partly as a method of interacting with the spirits, and as a way of learning about the pantheon. While watching ceremonies, mediums often analyse the mood and behaviour of spirits through their incarnations, and videos help them to learn how the spirits dance and what kinds of clothes they wear when they are incarnated into other mediums. However, watching videos can have unintended effects, as one Silicon Valley medium even became possessed while watching a video of herself becoming possessed (Fjelstad 2010: 62). This example parallels narratives about believers being filled with the Holy Spirit while touching the screen of a Pentecostal video preaching.

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5 Other spirits follow their hosts, who want to get rid of them via migration (Drotbohm 2010).

The use of media among ordinary Vietnamese Pentecostal believers varies, depending on the context. In small house churches in Berlin they sometimes gather around the TV, watching videos about mass evangelising campaigns in Africa as well as DVDs about religious mass gatherings of their own church. Leaders of house churches in Germany practise healing via mobile phones. They attentively listen to sad everyday stories of other followers, while praying over their marital problems, about migraine attacks of female adherents or about children's colds, for example. Some followers use MP3 players and listen to sermons of the pastor. They practise this way of religious life even during their jobs. A female Vietnamese believer in Berlin uses this kind of new media while selling flowers in a metro station. Only when clients enter the shop will she interrupt the practising of her religious duties. Another flower shop owner is actively proselytising in his shop as well, distributing DVDs of religious gatherings and leaflets announcing the next prayer camp. In Hanoi, distributing religious print materials and DVDs may become a dangerous endeavour. Mobile phones are a rather important means of communication: when attacked by violent gangs, charismatic Pentecostals in Vietnam immediately take photos of those who were beaten and send the photos to co-believers via mobile phone. This does not lead the community to help those who were beaten, as this may be dangerous. The photos are a kind of evidence for the church that practising religion is not as easy as portrayed by the government.

## Titanic – the Vietnamese Pentecostal narrative of demise and salvation

New media is used extensively by religious experts in Vietnamese Pentecostal churches as well. Charismatic forms of visual representations include maps, photos, visions, and videos (Coleman 2010). In particular, during big events such as evangelisation campaigns, new technologies play an important role. During the Loreley meeting at the Rhine River, the pastor, who started proselytising among Vietnamese in West Germany from the early 1980s onwards (Hüwelmeier 2010b), projected an image of the demise of the Titanic in the North Atlantic in 1912 on a huge screen. A boat refugee himself, in his preaching he constantly referred to his experiences during his flight on a small boat and thus generated feelings of salvation and memories of survival among church members. Many of the refugees never reached another country,

but drowned in the sea. While referring to imaginings of the doom of all mankind in case they do not believe in God, the pastor simultaneously reminds his followers of the tragic escape of the boat people from Vietnam. He uses the rhetoric of the image and turned the preaching into a powerful message: Repent and follow God or drown in the sea! By visualising the disaster in the mass gathering in Germany, the catastrophe of the Titanic is “vietnamised” and interpreted as God’s plan. As the pastor explained in his sermon, God wants his followers, who were rescued by His power, and who found Jesus in their lives only in the diaspora, to return to Vietnam and bring the gospel to all Vietnamese. He reported his visions, namely that God told him personally to proselytise in the former GDR, Poland, Russia, and other East European countries. And it is proof of the agency of the Holy Spirit, the pastor continued, that the “fruits” of his work, mostly former contract workers from former Communist countries, attend the prayer camp.

In contrast to the African appropriation of the disaster of the Titanic as portrayed in Nigerian videos (Behrend 2005), in Congolese music videos, and in an audio tape album of the Kamunyonge Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Tanzania (Krings 2007), there is no remake of the “Titantic” in Vietnam. According to Heike Behrend, the Hausa remake was produced by the Nigerian filmmaker Farouk Ashu-Brown, who converted to Islam some years ago. The Hausa video is a hybrid construction of illegally copied sequences of James Cameron’s film and locally produced images. The love story was recreated with northern Nigerian actors, including the roles of the captain and the engineer. In the remake, the Titanic is “africanised” und transformed into a ship that belongs to Africans. Europeans are nowhere to be seen in this version.

While the Hausa remake generates memories of the African slave trade and thus places the Titanic within an afrocentric perspective, the appropriation of the Titanic in Vietnamese Pentecostal discourse in Europe is immediately connected with flight and migration. The religious message of the impending end of the world and the condemnation of those who have not accepted Jesus in their lives notwithstanding, the pastor constantly refers to his own rescue by the German freight ship *Cap Anamur* and to his body and soul being saved by God. As the pastor’s audience is no longer composed exclusively of boat people but has been replaced by Vietnamese contract workers, the narrative of salvation and survival on the high seas has to be reported to the new believers and interpreted as spiritual resurrection. Former contract workers, many of whom came from North Vietnam, arrived in the GDR by plane, and are, not least due to political propaganda in the 1970s and 1980s, not familiar with the tragic experiences of the boat people. However, during my fieldwork

in Hanoi, I became aware of the existence of a new film entitled *Journey from the Fall*. This film tells the story of people in a re-education camp in Vietnam and the experience of boat people after the fall of Saigon in 1975. Long segments inform the viewer of the dramatic experiences of the refugees on the high seas and their subsequent arrival in the US. As this film was financed by the Vietnamese-American community and takes a critical stance toward the political developments in Vietnam after the end of the war, it is banned in Vietnam, but circulates underground in pirated form. Informants who were born after the war, educated middle-class people who saw the film in private circles in Hanoi, were shocked by images of the dramatic escape, the living conditions of the refugees after their arrival in refugee camps, and the racism in the US. No one had ever told them the fate of these people and never before, they asserted, had they seen such images of the misery and horror of their own countrymen, images that they claimed led to strong feelings of compassion.

Thus, the story of the miraculous rescue of the pastor in the South China Sea refers to the historical background of the end of the war in Vietnam and the political reasons for leaving South Vietnam. Finally, the mission of bringing the gospel back to Vietnam by those who were rescued is not just a religious message, but is also an implicit political message to transform Vietnam into a Christian country.

Yet, the religious message of salvation, as revealed in the pastor's sermon while displaying the sinking Titanic, is simultaneously the opposite of the disaster. Only via conversion can people be saved, and then only if they survive the constant battle between good and evil. Spiritual warfare, defending oneself against evil spirits and demons, is a central issue in Pentecostal discourse. Dragons and monsters, Satan, and false prophets are also described in the scenarios of the end of the days in the *Book of Revelation*. In this last book of the new Testament, visions were recorded by John, while angels were introduced as transmitters of the revelation. The prophetic writings of John, himself a prophet living in exile, were directed toward persecuted and harassed Christian communities, whom he encouraged, by disclosure of the divine message of salvation, to abolish other religious traditions and to hope for the return of Jesus Christ as the judge of the end of days. In his book "Apocalypse", a debate about Kant and the notion of truth and enlightenment, Jacques Derrida (1985: 13) translates the Greek word apocalypse as detection, [Entdecken], disclosure [Enthüllen], lifting the veil [den Schleier heben]. By referring to the Book of Revelation, Derrida focuses on the complexity of authorship. John did not write because of an autonomous decision, but because he was made a tool, or a medium, by God. The apocalypse, in the sense of disclosure, was mediated by an angel and then transposed

to John, who fell into a state of entrancement and was possessed by the spirit [“ich wurde vom Geist ergriffen” (Offenbarung des Johannes, 1, 10); “I was in the spirit”, Revelation, 1,10]]. In this way, the divine message, the apocalypse, is a complex way of communication and correspondence between God and people.

In his sermon at the Rhine River, the religious message of the Vietnamese pastor was plurivalent. While displaying the sinking Titanic, he generated feelings of anxiety and threat. Those who do not believe in God will die like the passengers on the boat. On the other hand, he presented an apocalypse in the sense of disclosure with regard to political issues: himself exiled, a Christian believer who is not allowed by local authorities to enter his home country will bring the gospel to Vietnam via God’s mediums, namely the many Vietnamese migrants who converted in the diaspora. Seen from this perspective, the apocalypse is itself a critique of the current political conditions in his home country. Moreover, there is also a promise to be found in the religious message: Those who operate in underground churches in Vietnam, living in fear of surveillance and of paid gangs of thugs, will belong to the saved in a new time.

## The rock at the Rhine River – an uninhabited place of worship

The image of the disaster of the Titanic is closely connected with the location of the mass gathering at the Rhine River, where, due to rocks below the waterline and to a very strong current, many boat accidents have occurred over the centuries. Every summer, about 500 Vietnamese Pentecostals from Germany, Poland, Russia, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic gather at the famous Loreley cliff on the eastern bank of the Rhine. The name of the rock refers to a legend from German folklore. Loreley, a beautiful young woman, committed suicide because of an unfaithful lover. According to the legend, she jumped from the steep rock into the Rhine River, thus killing herself. By becoming a siren, a figure known in Greek mythology, she lured sailors to their doom with her hypnotising voice. The famous poem “Die Lorelei” by Heinrich Heine, one of the most significant German Romantic poets, is well known in German culture.<sup>6</sup> The last verses of his poem illustrate the tragic death of shipmen at the Loreley:

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6 It was set to music in 1837 by Friedrich Silcher and is today one of the most famous German folk songs. Heine, a Jewish journalist, essayist and literary critic, converted to Protestantism in 1825.

She combs with a gilded comb, preening,  
And sings a song, passing time.  
It has a most wondrous, appealing  
And pow'rful melodic rhyme.

The boatman aboard his small skiff, -  
Enraptured with a wild ache,  
Has no eye for the jagged cliff, -  
His thoughts on the heights fear forsake.

I think that the waves will devour  
Both boat and man, by and by,  
And that, with her dulcet-voiced power  
Was done by the Loreley.<sup>7</sup>

One may assume that many Vietnamese believers are not familiar with this poem and have never heard about the legend. According to a pastor to whom I talked during the meeting, it is not important whether people know about the legend of the Loreley. Instead, he pointed to the fact that evil spirits are everywhere, even in this place. The famous rock of Loreley, visited by thousands of tourists every year, is a public place obviously taken by the spirit of a beautiful young woman, attracting men by her voice and by combing her long hair, and must therefore be purified before starting prayer, preaching or healing services. Every morning, all participants of the prayer camp gathered in the sports hall, the only big building on the camp ground, to sing and thus chase away evil spirits.

Before the preaching began, the music band of the Holy Spirit Church with its huge sound system encouraged the adherents to sing Christian songs as loudly as they could. The sound system is not just another way of appropriating new technologies, but also a means of transposing religious messages. In close cooperation with the media group of the church, equipped with laptops and a beamer, Vietnamese lyrics of praise and worship are shown on a huge screen and accompanied by the church band and choir with its expressive music style. For more than half an hour religious practitioners are put in the right mood by loud music, the crowd constantly repeating various songs at an incredible volume. Believers clap and raise their hands, some of them jumping in front of their seats. It was argued that by singing with all of one's power, the evil forces will be chased away. During the gatherings many church

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7 Translated by Frank Petersohn, see <http://www.loreley-info.com/eng/rhein-rhine/loreley-song.php>, accessed 25.9.2009.

followers were blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit: speaking in tongues was part of the repeated prayer sessions each day. Some adherents fell down when the pastor laid his hands on their heads or fell in trance during the loudly spoken prayers and songs.

The sermon was translated simultaneously from Vietnamese into German with a special interpretation device, allowing German visitors to listen to the messages of the Vietnamese pastors. Religious messages of the English- and German-speaking pastors were translated into Vietnamese via microphones, as few of the younger generation speak German fluently. Microphones are even used in Sunday services in small rooms with only 50 believers, thus intensifying the charismatic authority of the preacher. All prayer sessions at the Rhine River were recorded by a special media group. Later on, these sermons and prayer sessions will be recorded on DVDs and circulated not just among church followers in Europe, but also to adherents in various branches in Vietnam and other places.

## The Holy Spirit in the map – constructing a global sacred landscape

Two narratives, the story of the refugees leaving Vietnam by boat, and the story of the contract workers, travelling by plane, were displayed in a leaflet that was circulated as an invitation to the international one-week prayer camp at the Rhine River. The leaflet symbolises the movement of Vietnamese migrants to Germany. It displays the globe with two waves of migrants. On the lower and the southern half of the globe, arrows point from Vietnam to Germany as well as to a boat, representing the boat people, arriving as refugees in West Germany in the early 1980s. Another wave of migrants, the former contract workers, arrived via airplane on the northern half of the globe. Taking a closer look at the map, the viewer notices a split between western European countries and eastern countries, displayed in different colours. In the eastern countries tongues of fire are pasted, creating the picture within the imagination that the Holy Spirit has already arrived in the east. In the middle of the sacred landscape a huge arrow is displayed, pointing from Europe to Vietnam, visualising the movement of the Holy Spirit. Vietnam is framed by a church building with a cross on the roof. The “spiritual cartography” (Coleman 2010) generates the feeling of belonging to a global Pentecostal community. As Pastor Tung constantly repeated

in his sermons during the prayer camp, ties across borders connect Vietnamese in Germany, former Communist countries, and Vietnam. By constructing geographies of the sacred, the leaflet on the one hand visually represents the history of migration of tens of thousands of boat people and contract workers to Europe. On the other hand, it points to the success story of the church by focusing on the new branches in various places in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia, symbolised by “tongues of fire.”

## Practices of mediation

As anthropologists focusing on religion and media (van der Veer 1999; de Vries 2001; Birgit Meyer 2006; Marleen de Witte 2010) have demonstrated, media and practices of mediation (Meyer & Moors 2006: 7) transport messages over long distances and connect religious adherents who live dispersed across continents (Richman 2005: 167). The concept of religion as a practice of mediation (Meyer 2006: 290) contributes to an understanding of the creation and maintenance of links between believers on the one hand as well as between religious practitioners and the spiritual realm on the other hand. Instead of separating religion and technology into different domains, the focus on practices of mediation demonstrates how ideas about the supernatural, the spiritual, or the transcendental are made accessible for believers and are reconfigured via media. Religious imaginations are shaped by transnational media circuits that change and transform people’s imaginations of “proper” religious behaviour and feelings. Cassette sermons (Hirschkind 2006) move outside the framework of the mosque. Muslims in northern Nigeria as well as Christians in the south use videos and cassettes to spread their religious messages (Behrend 2005). Muslim scholars and healers employ audio cassettes with quotes from the Koran, the cassettes being imported from Saudi Arabia, to cast out evil spirits (O’Brian 1999). Pentecostal Vietnamese believers, by watching videos of charismatic Pentecostal mass gatherings and other religious events that take place elsewhere, participate in more than one local context, thus creating “transnational ways of religious belonging” (Glick Schiller & Levitt 2004). People who do not move are thereby affected by religious events and rituals on the other side of the globe.

New media technologies enable the spread of religious messages outside of traditional religious spaces such as temples or churches. Cinemas, shops, warehouses,

buses, stadiums, and other locales of the public sphere, are turned into arenas of proselytisation by Pentecostal believers, whereas media is used for representational purposes and to circulate religious messages. The Holy Spirit becomes particularly well transposed in visual media such as television. This is evident in narratives of converts, who experienced being filled with the Holy Spirit by touching the TV screen. Participants of Pentecostal “crusades” may be converted by watching healing ceremonies on huge screens.

Advancements in visual media technology greatly contribute to the spread of religious messages. Photographs of pilgrimages and holy places, documenting huge crowds and the many activities and rituals in places all over the world, are to be found in religious mass media, books, pamphlets, and flyers as well as magazines. By referring to maps and media, Simon Coleman (2010) analysed how technologies of visualisation relate to space, place, and travel. Focusing on the tension between the proximate and the distant as an important feature of Pentecostal charismatic practice, media generates visual witness and an immediacy of spiritual experience. While spiritual landscapes are made up of travelling preachers, prophets and pastors, charismatic agency evolves from travel and mobility (Hüwelmeier 2010c). The sense of belonging to a global religious movement is also produced through the use of digital cameras and mobile phones, allowing images of religious events to be sent to friends and relatives in other places within seconds. The internet is increasingly influential in globalising religion and has become the site of new social forms, such as online Christian churches. However, the internet is not accessible for everybody. Besides access to technology, politics also play a role in facilitating or hampering the broadcasting of religious messages. In socialist countries such as Vietnam, where TV and press are state controlled, spreading the gospel via TV channels is not possible.

Although American televangelists have long been very successful at transposing religious messages, the focus on the transnationalisation of media and the emergence of “alternative circuits of media flows that operate outside the West” (Ginsburg et. al 2002: 14) have only recently started being taken into account. Simultaneously, local appropriations of new media have come to play an ever larger role in the production and circulation of videos for proselytising purposes (Ukah 2003). As Tam Ngo (2009) has demonstrated, radio was and still is an important means in proselytising activities in Vietnam, in particular among ethnic groups such as the Hmong, who live in remote areas in North Vietnam and in the border zone between Vietnam and China. Video and television production sites are vital places for investigating the relationship between media discourses and the transnational spread of religion. Recent

studies have focused on practices of cutting and censorship, the transfer of religious messages across borders, and in particular on the impact of such performances on the sensations and emotions of people far from home (de Witte 2003). Concerning global Pentecostalism, the Holy Spirit is as transnational as other spirits, travelling through audiovisual media as it does through migration networks. As Marleen de Witte (2010) has shown, videos produced in the African context for specific Pentecostal churches are used by competing religious groups in different locales in order to imitate the habitus of pastors, performances of healing practices, and mass events. The transmission of video recordings does not occur only in one direction, but consists of a reciprocal exchange between religious adherents in various locales. In this way, technology helps to facilitate transnational interactions.

## Shifting power relations

The use and appropriation of media in the religious context raises questions of shifting power relations. In most cases, access to a well-equipped recording studio increases the status of religious leaders and evokes images of a “media empire”, thereby legitimising the power of certain prophets and pastors. Paradoxically, the documentary character of media such as DVD recordings can also turn into delicate matters of evidence in the case of conflicts within transnational religious networks, threatening or limiting the power of the above-mentioned experts. Girish Daswani (2010) discussed the case of a travelling prophet who came under pressure from his church in Ghana when, from a video, the leaders learned of controversial exorcism practices that he had performed on migrants in Europe. In contexts where Pentecostal churches operate in the underground, such as in Vietnam, the production and circulation of DVDs is quite ambivalent and connected with fear and anxieties. Due to restricted access to public space, the distribution of DVDs and Bibles is one of the few possibilities to get into contact with people. Yet, media products will be confiscated by the police during proselytising events and may be used as evidence against believers by state authorities.

During my fieldwork in 2008 in Vietnam, a mass gathering, organized by the Holy Spirit Church, took place in Hanoi. Church leaders had asked for permission to use the space in front of the city’s largest stadium. Local authorities did not grant permission until just several hours before the event was scheduled to take place. That same

evening, a major soccer match between Vietnam and Thailand was to be broadcast on state television. Thousands of enthusiastic fans had started gathering around the famous Hoan Kiem Lake for an early afternoon pre-game celebration. Recognizing an opportunity, the church sent several dozen of its members dressed in white clothing and red Santa hats into the crowd, where they passed out leaflets with an invitation to the evening's event and circulated CDs among the crowd. Secret police collected the CDs, which had been covertly produced by church members weeks before, from anybody who received them. In the evening, in front of the stadium, a massive sound system led the participants in song, while a giant screen presented images and video films of evangelisation campaigns and healing rituals. By proselytising in Vietnam's capital, the church temporarily transformed Hanoi's centre into a sacred space. These practices of religious mediation and place-making were quite provocative in light of Vietnam's severe restrictions on the use of public space for religious events. And despite being only temporary, church members interpreted the appropriation of public space as a miracle and further proof of God's presence. They claimed that the Holy Spirit had "opened the eyes" of the Communist party and local authorities, a view that has been repeatedly stressed by God's mediums in subsequent evangelising campaigns of the Holy Spirit Church in Hanoi, in other places in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, and in Germany.

## Conclusion

In Pentecostal discourse, the spiritual warfare and the dualistic worldview of good and evil is a central issue. The visualisation of occult forces within a Christian Pentecostal framework (Meyer 2010) demonstrates the power of traditional spirits. Born again believers are constantly confronted by the struggle between wrong and right, darkness and light, evil spirits and the Holy Spirit. In this regard, the disaster of the Titanic in Vietnamese Pentecostal discourse and among Vietnamese migrants in Germany fits well into imaginings of the powers of darkness. By visualising images of the disaster of the Titanic on a huge screen, memories of flight experiences of Vietnamese boat people on the high seas are generated and transposed to a wider audience of believers. Simultaneously, by referring to the *Book of Apocalypse* in the sense of disclosure (Derrida 1985), Vietnamese Pentecostal preachers transfer the message of salvation to their followers in the diaspora: The clash between good and evil will usher in a period of peace and prosperity.

The relationship between evil spirits, demons, and the devil on the one hand and the Holy Spirit on the other hand, both obviously part of Pentecostal discourse, is to date a neglected topic in migration studies. Whether spirits travel with migrants depends on various circumstances. As Michael Lambek argues, what is intrinsic to spirits is that they appear and withdraw from materiality. Referring to Heidegger's language of "unconcealment" or disclosure and the linked notion of truth, the presence of spirits "is no more significant than their repeated *coming into presence*" (Lambek 2010:17). In this sense, the Holy Spirit is not different from other spirits. In past research, scholars have neglected the intricate nexus that joins Pentecostal Christianity and non-Christian spirit-centered practices with transnationalism and migration. One reason for this is the pervasiveness of the view that sees the Christian spirit as single, modern, global, universal, mobile and ubiquitous, while regarding non-Christian spirits as many, occult, antimodern, traditional, local, particular, and stationary (Hüwelmeier and Krause 2010a: 2). This dichotomy, which is formulated explicitly in Pentecostal discourse, has all too often limited the scope of studies in religious transnationalism, which tends to presume such binary oppositions when examining Christian and non-Christian religions in a global context.

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