

## The Demise of Pentecostalism in the Philippines: Naming and Claiming the Impossible Object and the Politics of Empowerment in Pentecostal Studies

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**A**SPECTER IS HAUNTING the Philippines—the specter of Pentecostalism. While David Barrett’s *World Christian Encyclopedia* published in 1982 listed only a few “Catholic Pentecostals (or, Catholic Charismatics),”<sup>1</sup> its second edition published in 2001 lists Pentecostal/charismatics (hereafter PC) as a “trans-megablock” with an estimated adherence of 20,050,000, equivalent to 26.4 percent of the total Philippine population.<sup>2</sup> According to a nationwide survey conducted by the *PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life* in 2006, the PC movement in the Philippines is even said to comprise up to 44 percent of the Philippine population.<sup>3</sup>

Data from field research conducted between 2009 and 2014 by Giovanni Maltese in Negros, Cebu, Manila and Mindanao,<sup>4</sup> however, seems to present a different reality. On the ground, leaders and members of the churches both typically and explicitly subsumed under the nomenclature PC in the mentioned surveys reject this name—they refuse to form a “trans-mega bloc.” Whereas most Catholic groups would identify as “charismatic” (yet not

Pentecostal), Protestant and evangelical churches again distance themselves from the term that to them is reserved for the aforementioned Catholic groups. The name Pentecostal, in turn, is vehemently repudiated by nearly all respondents, regardless of their spirituality, beliefs, affiliation, or organizational background. Even pastors and members of denominations such as the Church of the Foursquare Gospel or the Assemblies of God, usually referred to as classical Pentecostals by researchers, refused to be called by this name. A quick full-text search of the latter's official websites gives remarkably few hits for the term *Pentecostal*.<sup>5</sup> In an interview with Giovanni Maltese, Eddie Villanueva, the founder of Jesus Is Lord Worldwide (JIL), who is regarded by nearly all publications on Christianity in the Philippines as the PC movement's poster child (next to Catholic El Shaddai leader Mike Velarde), made strong objections to being identified as Pentecostal (Villanueva, personal interview March 10, 2013). He also distanced himself from the name "charismatic," albeit compared to "Pentecostal" in a less aggressive manner (Interview, Dumaguete, May 2013). Likewise, leaders and members of local churches whose denomination's official name reads "Pentecostal," such as the Oneness United Pentecostal Church or the Pentecostal Church of God Asian Missions, make big efforts to mark a difference between themselves and "the Pentecostals." Yet whereas one would expect at least those whose name includes the very word *Pentecostal* to engage in discussions about what proper Pentecostalism should entail and define it accordingly, thereby claiming the term for themselves, the contrary is the case. Members and leaders of these groups were found to refrain from defining the term positively—despite their own use of the very term "Pentecostal" in the names of their organizations. Instead, they limited themselves to describing what the others, "the Pentecostals," are like and why they themselves should not be considered "Pentecostal" at

all. The name “Pentecostal” appeared to be an almost derogatory term. When asked to locate their churches within the Christian landscape, the interviewees would sometimes say “full gospel,” “Bible believing,” and other times refer to themselves as “born again” or evangelical<sup>6</sup>—notably, as opposed to Catholic—but not as “Pentecostal.”<sup>7</sup> Are we thus witnessing the demise of Pentecostalism or of the PC movement in the Philippines? Given that studies on the PC movement in the Philippines usually describe the movement as one that empowers its participants (in some way or the other),<sup>8</sup> at first glance it appears bizarre that hardly anybody wants to be part of it, begging the question how to understand this gap between scholarly representation and self-description.

We propose to read this gap as a political gesture. Accordingly, the discrepancy between scholarly representation and self-description may be understood as a form of protest against being co-opted for an ideological, political, or denominational agenda.<sup>9</sup> Against the ubiquitous image of the Philippines as a poverty-stricken country governed by a corrupt leadership and dependent on foreign aid (such as US aid, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, etc.), the media like to characterize “the charismatics” as “numb mass.” They are depicted as a crowd of insecure people who lack proper self-consciousness and do everything their money-grubbing demagogues command them—even if this means turning umbrellas upside down and waiting for God to fill them with peso bills, rather than acquiring a proper self-consciousness and change their own and their fellow people’s fate.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, although in a more sophisticated manner, researchers have been using the PC movement as a projection screen for promoting various approaches to understanding the disease of the “sick man of Asia”<sup>11</sup> and its cure. The self-given task to explain the “explosive growth”<sup>12</sup> of a movement that cannot be clearly defined and is yet assumed to be a

“trans-mega bloc” offers the possibility to formulate both a problem and its solution. The latter is then evidenced with examples, drawn from the variety of groups subsumed rather arbitrarily under the name PC. The study of Christl Kessler and Jürgen Rüländ, scholars of political and social science, see the PC movement as a hindrance to a solution for the county’s disastrous situation. The success of what Kessler and Rüländ name the PC movement, according to the authors, is due to a populist character, which promotes an “enchanted worldview” and retreat from society<sup>13</sup> and effectively hinders political, economic, and social reforms. The latter can only be achieved through what the authors call “structural change,” yet without defining it.<sup>14</sup> The study does not engage in a discussion about if and how structural change is debated among the various groups interviewed. Rather, the authors use data from interviews conducted in Metro Manila (mostly with charismatic Catholics), which lack a proper contextualization, and apply their observation to PCs in the Philippines as such. The conclusion, thus, sees the movement as a potential threat to democracy and unable to address issues of social justice, albeit they concede it some empowering features.<sup>15</sup> Other studies portray the PC movement as the new face of social engagement, which draws on spiritual resources and is thus best fit to improve the country’s situation.<sup>16</sup> In both cases, it is the assumed statistical significance of the PC movement in relation to the Philippine population as a whole, which lends each argument strength in making claims about the state of the Philippine society as a whole (and even beyond, given the presumed global expansion of the PC movement).

This chapter analyzes one example of such a way of making claims about the current conditions of the Philippines by drawing on Pentecostalism as a coherent movement and offering a solution for the development and betterment of the country, which

does not necessary meet the (self-)perception of what is claimed to be Pentecostal. Our discussion of a recent study conducted by Philippine Assemblies of God theologian Joseph Suico will show how PC-ness is constructed in order to support the researcher's claim concerning the country's status quo and enabling him to make suggestions with regard to the country's future. Most studies on the PC movement in the Philippines<sup>17</sup> center around the statement of a national crisis and the boom of churches subsumed under the name Pentecostal or PC, and then proceed to explain the causality between crisis, the PC's success, and possible betterment of the Philippines. In line with these studies, Suico too suggests possible betterment along the rhetorics of empowerment and change, while the latter is characterized in more detail through notions such as liberation, progress, transformation, and development. Our discussion shows how this work converts differences, found among the people(-groups) studied, into equivalences by means of selection and exclusion, which in turn create relations between the object of research and the researcher's concept of empowerment and change. It is this conversion of difference into equivalences that makes possible to conceive of these (diverse) groups as a coherent movement, which, according to Suico, lacks proper self-consciousness and empowerment and is in need of a proper agenda in order to contribute to the betterment of its participants and the Philippine society as a whole. On the other hand, the very act of converting difference into equivalence also poses a dilemma about how such an empowerment and change at the heart of the PC movement should look like. This dilemma in turn creates a "free space"<sup>18</sup> for the researcher himself, an empty space that needs to be filled by academic research and its subsequent suggestions on how such empowerment and change should look like.

In contrast to the just presented study, the authors of this

paper propose a different agenda for academic research. Instead of making claims concerning the current state of the PC movement in the Philippines and the future development it should take alongside the movement's possible contribution to the betterment of the Philippine society, the authors suggest to show how the research itself produces such claims, and to disclose the contingency of such claims by working out where the research in question works to effectively silence differing voices and exclude alternative readings. It is the authors' hope that this may lead scholars of the PC movement, as well as members of the intelligentsia and leadership of denominations, (mega-)churches, and parachurch ministries, to rethink the way in which numbers and statistics have been used to make certain claims, and at whose costs such claims have been made. As such, the authors wish to offer a fresh reading of the material at hand, which will hopefully again become contested and criticized by future scholarship. With this, the authors seek to raise awareness for the changing interests and concerns at stake in studies of the PC movement.

### **ON THE POLITICS OF HISTORIOGRAPHY**

The work discussed in this chapter is the PhD thesis "Institutional and Individualistic Dimension of Transformational Development: The Case of Pentecostal Churches in the Philippines" (2003) by Joseph Suico,<sup>19</sup> whose results have been published in article form in a journal linked to Assemblies of God theologians in the United States.<sup>20</sup> Suico's starting point is twofold: on the one hand he assumes a national crisis that calls for engagement toward national transformation and development; on the other, he adheres to the common perception that Pentecostals are reproducing neo-colonial relations with the United States, due to their closeness to North American missionaries and that they are seductive of the poor and

indifferent to social change (iii, 1, 9). Drawing from qualitative and quantitative data, Suico then seeks to compare the relation toward social and political involvement between two Assemblies of God (hereafter AG) congregations and two Catholic parishes. Himself a member of the AG who held different positions in the denominational leadership as well as in its flagship school Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (7), he comes to a twofold conclusion. On the one hand, there are no official statements by the AG as an institution regarding active sociopolitical involvement, besides charity projects. Yet on the other hand, the practice of Pentecostal churches on the ground is inherently empowering and transformative. According to Suico, this transformative thrust results from a specific spirituality and experience, i.e., Spirit baptism, that empowers all believers to advance the kingdom of God.

As such, Suico considers this spirituality to be an element of radical equality (67), which displays in an effective evangelization and individual healing ministry and which is causative for the numerical growth and success of Pentecostal churches, like the AG (4). Yet a “lack of knowledge and understanding of the significance of the Pentecostal experience” (2), and a dependency on US missionaries with “roots [...] in Fundamentalism” (1), have hindered Pentecostals from formulating a transformational theology of social action needed for a more effective ministry to the society and for the development of the Philippine nation as a whole. Hence, besides what he calls microlevel engagement, there has been no official engagement in social and political issues. Thus, Suico’s work aims at reflecting on this experience in a way that allows Pentecostals to become aware of their (yet to be unleashed) sociopolitical potential for the transformation and development of society at large. Drawing from theologians linked to the US-based Society of Pentecostal Studies, he thus continues to lay out a theological sketch

intended to lead Pentecostals to see and maximize their transformative potential. For Pentecostals this means to regard themselves not merely as agents who help change peoples' private lives, but to develop an awareness of their potential as institutional and collective agents for social change in the Philippines. Thus, rather than playing out political and social action against evangelization, individual healing, and church growth—as is usually done, according to Suico—he argues for a theology that sees these two positions as complementary.

This theological approach therefore not only frees Pentecostals from the stigma of “fundamentalism,” but given its holistic approach—i.e., the integration of social action based on structural change and evangelization based on individual change—it is the best sociopolitical approach for an effective transformation and development of the crisis-ridden nation. His work hence pursues a threefold goal. First, it tries to disprove that Pentecostalism is necessarily and inherently opposed to national development or structural change, a position widespread among Philippine intellectuals. Secondly, Suico accuses fundamentalists in his own camp of misunderstanding their own Pentecostal experience. And thirdly, Suico offers the latter and others, who according to him are Pentecostals, a solution to both the allegation waged by outsiders, as well as the lack of proper knowledge about themselves and their experience, by offering them a theology and an agenda for social and political action (albeit without proper content) intended to enhance both their nation's conditions as well as their own.

## **CONSTRUCTING PHILIPPINE PENTECOSTALISM**

Suico's work begins by placing Pentecostals in the position of needing to justify why they did not actively participate in the People Power rallies that ousted Ferdinand Marcos (1986) and forced

Joseph Estrada out of office (2001). He thus begins with the accusation that Pentecostals would have betrayed their country in its fight against dictatorship and other national crises as the main reference point of his study. Yet, rather than contextualizing this criticism and showing who the detractors are and which people (or people groups) were targeted by this allegation, Suico proceeds to discuss similar criticism found in literature on worldwide Pentecostalism, and especially in Latin America. All the while the existence of Pentecostalism as a homogenous impressive global phenomenon is taken for granted, albeit remaining vaguely undefined, oscillating between the inclusive characterization used in the literature he refers to (which coincides with the definition adapted by Pew and other studies) and a less inclusive definition modeled after his own denomination, the AG. Even when Suico mentions scholars who define Pentecostalism as “a belief in the experience known as the baptism in the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion,” or as the belief in “salvation, healing, baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, second coming of Jesus Christ,” he does not side with either of the two (13). Rather he repeats that the “perceived indifference of Pentecostals toward socioeconomic and political issues has been attributed to various reasons,” thus making this a distinctive element of what he names “Pentecostal” (13). Two chapters later he offers yet another definition, in which Pentecostal is said to include “classical Pentecostals” and “independent Pentecostals,” but again refrains from explicitly defining anything. Again, the term “Pentecostal” remains effectively unexplained (67).

The context of this allegation is the fundamentalist/modernist controversy to which Suico refers in the beginning of his study (1). Emphasizing that Pentecostalism is perceived as belonging to the “fundamentalist camp,” it is clear that the detractors he has in mind

are to be found on the other side of the fundamentalism/modernist divide. These would be, firstly, mainline Protestants close to the World Council of Churches, such as those organized in the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), and, secondly, it would be intellectuals and Catholic theologians. Both are known for their nationalist and rather left-leaning approaches to development and change for the Philippines.<sup>21</sup>

In an argumentation that is both self-critical and apologetic, Suico thus tries to deconstruct the necessary relation between Pentecostalism and fundamentalism. He admits fundamentalist tendencies but attributes them to something that is foreign to Pentecostalism as such, being the product of “a North American culture” imported by missionaries along with the gospel (9–29). Fundamentalism, as understood by Suico, is an attitude that denies the holistic character of a person by privileging other-worldly needs at the expense of this-worldly, material needs and structural approaches to change. The root of such fundamentalism, according to Suico, is a dualist epistemology stemming from European enlightenment and imported by colonizers and missionaries. “The Filipino culture,” in contrast, is characterized as “intuitive, integrative and wholistic [*sic*],” which includes the individual and the other-worldly dimension criticized by Pentecostals’ detractors (27). Drawing from an essentialist discourse on “Filipinoness,” prominent among said detractors, Suico hence indicts fundamentalists and Pentecostals who stick to fundamentalist tendencies of being a hinderance to the development and betterment of the country, which has to be achieved by Filipinos and on Filipino terms. Yet at the same time he accuses Pentecostals’ very detractors of being fundamentalist too. In tacitly creating an equivalence between a focus (albeit not exclusive focus) on other-worldlyness and on the individual dimension of transformation, and the essence of Filipinoness, Suico places

everything that is critical of other-worldliness as drawing on the same epistemological dualism that would also form the foundation for fundamentalist positions, namely the dichotomization of matter and spirit imposed by Western colonizers. Thus, he reverses the charge, indicting Pentecostals' detractors of being a hindrance to true liberation and development, given their non-holistic attitude. In other words, those who betray the nation are not the Pentecostals who are portrayed as inherently empowering, albeit they lack a proper theology that leads to the full realization of such an empowerment for national development. The true betrayers are those who criticize Pentecostals' focus on the other-worldly dimension. Given that according to both Suico and the detractors of Pentecostals, the liberation and development is something that has to be achieved by the Filipinos on their own culture's terms, Suico's interpretation of the deplored other-worldly focus as evidence of a holistic understanding of human being, essential to Filipinoness (as also the detractors would admit), reverses the charge of betraying the Filipinos. Pentecostals' emphasis on individual healing and church growth, according to Suico, proves the Filipino Pentecostals' true holistic outlook and their compatibility with the Filipino culture. Conversely, those who criticize Pentecostals' other-worldly practice criticize Filipino culture as such and become a hindrance to the development of the Philippines on Filipino terms. In this framework, his own Pentecostal theology is staged as an approach that works outside such a dualist framework and thus as an approach that is originally free from the heritage of colonial knowledge production (10–32). He thus portrays Pentecostalism as especially sensitive to Filipino culture, loyal to the national project, and consequently most promising for liberation, empowerment, transformation, and development of the Philippines. This discussion, however, blurs the distinction between an ideal of Pentecostalism, based on

his own theological standpoint, and an empirical Pentecostalism as found on the ground.

### **(Re-)Organizing the history of Philippine Pentecostalism**

This indeterminate and inconsistent use of the notion of Pentecostalism is found also in the chapter in which Suico sets out to give an account of the history of Philippine Pentecostalism. Notably, this chapter represents the first contextualization of the actual object of his research. While the outline offered in the introduction announces a chronological account (8), the chapter does not follow a chronological order. He begins by giving a historical account of one particular church that for Suico represents the “independent churches,” which according to him are of a more recent date than the “classical Pentecostal” ones founded by US missionaries. Even here, the AG, which in his view the oldest Pentecostal churches belong to and whose missionaries from the United States are the pioneers of Philippine Pentecostalism, is mentioned last (67–78). Thus he first elaborates extensively on Jesus Is Lord (JIL), established in the late 1970s by Eddie Villanueva, then goes on to briefly sketch the Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Church of God, and finally elaborates expansively on the AG. In this framework the account on the AG functions both as denominational history and as meta-narrative, in which the aforementioned churches are located following a three-wave approach: *first*, the period of establishment and special growth of classical Pentecostal churches, i.e., the 1950s and 1960s; *secondly*, the rise of charismatic fellowships and independent groups, which, according to Suico, is the reason why the AG growth was periodically hampered, i.e., the 1970s and 1980s; *thirdly*, the present period, i.e., the 1990s onwards, which, according to Suico, sees a new boom of AG churches. Suico concludes this paragraph with the triumphalist note: “Despite the lack of proper record keeping, there is little doubt that the

Assemblies of God in the Philippines has experienced remarkable growth through the years” (74). He then proceeds to discuss the two case-study churches, both a product of the 1970s and 1980s. The first is International Charismatic Service (ICS) founded by US missionary Paul Klahr in 1975 out of a worship service conducted in a five-star hotel,<sup>22</sup> which, Suico remarks, “was one of the first in the Pentecostal movement which made a successful attempt to penetrate middle and upper class people in the society” (74).<sup>23</sup> His other case study explores the Christ Is the Answer Assemblies of God founded in 1983 by Jerry Cruz, a medical doctor. The church is located in Manila and caters mostly to low-income families (76).

This partial inversion of chronological order and its teleological integration in the account on the AG represents a (re-)organization of history, which, however, is nowhere explained or even reflected. Thus, it calls on the one hand for a closer look at how independent churches are presented in this account. On the other, it calls for a consideration of how they relate to what Suico claims is their classical counterpart, with which they share features that allow for presuming “independent” and “classical” to be one single entity distinct from others. Thirdly, it calls for a consideration of the function they have in his study.

### **Co-opting Jesus Is Lord**

Suico’s description of JIL is the account of a church that is decidedly political and that shows a remarkable social engagement. Along several other activities, Suico mentions extensive social programs, schools, and political rallies (including People Power) organized by Eddie Villanueva, the founder of JIL. This is a strong contradiction to the opening statement in which Pentecostals’ sociopolitical involvement was only at the microlevel and which was presented as the rationale for the study as such. Suico takes no efforts to explain how this exception relates to the rule,<sup>24</sup> but implies that the social

and political activities of JIL are rooted in the Spirit experience elaborated in the first chapter, thus inferring that all other churches who subscribe to this specific experience share the same social and political attitude, provided that they obtain proper knowledge of their experience and are given a theology to live according to this knowledge. Accordingly he goes on elaborating on the history of the other churches that are all relocated in the history of the AG. Its exceptional character notwithstanding, the JIL's story is presented as an organic part of the AG history, while *mutatis mutandis* JIL's characteristics become the characteristics of AG, or rather the lens in which certain characteristics seen at the microlevel ought to be interpreted.

From Sciuo's account of JIL it is evident that the immediate context of the common perception mentioned in the opening sections (that Pentecostals are fundamentalists and indifferent to social change), which is hitherto the only content-filled definition of Pentecostalism available, is not and cannot be JIL. This raises the question of why JIL was chosen as an example for what Suico calls "independent churches." It suggests that rather than JIL (and perhaps the independent churches), from among the churches mentioned in Suico's historical account the AG is the first and foremost addressee of said allegation, which the whole study offers to be apology, correction, and manifesto of. Yet Suico makes remarkable efforts to widen this notion of Pentecostalism. According to Suico's introduction, "Pentecostal" is used by detractors of Pentecostalism with reference to churches like the AG, rather than JIL. Yet in the historical chapter, Suico construes his account in order to make JIL tacitly become bearer of the same name as does the AG, namely "Pentecostal." As a result, JIL becomes also bearer of the connotation attached to said name, and most important, the addressee of the allegation attached to it. Thus, JIL is made equivalent to AG

both on an abstract level and with regard to the name “Pentecostal.” It is also made equivalent with regard to the definitory outside, namely the concrete detractors who accuse the AG of high treason. AG’s antagonist becomes JIL’s antagonist, which merges AG and JIL into a single identity against a common enemy.

Albeit Suico emphasizes a few elements of discontinuity and difference between independent and classical, he claims that the similarities and equivalences would outweigh the differences. Yet, what would these similarities be, given the case that the only available definition for Pentecostal endorsed by Suico is the antagonism between AG and its detractors on the issue of sociopolitical indifference? In sum, Suico’s equivalence postulated between AG, representing the classical churches, and JIL, representing the independent churches, appears to have no other base than the wish to create a united front. It is a co-option that seeks to construct what it names and claims.

### **Co-option and hegemony**

As shown in the previous section, the rationale for Suico’s study is the allegation perpetuated by detractors of AG (and other churches), namely that the AG would be indifferent to what might bring holistic and sustainable social change to the crises-ridden Republic of the Philippines. From this point of view, the whole study could have been written without mentioning JIL, or at least without mentioning it at such a prominent place. Yet the fact that JIL is there and that it is given such significance begs the question, for a yet closer look at what the place of JIL in Suico’s narrative and agenda is. What function does JIL have in the narrative with which Suico promotes his project of transformational development for the Philippines?

First and most perspicuously, it serves as an apology. If the case study was insufficient, JIL would certainly prove to potential

detractors of the AG that there is no necessary relationship between Pentecostalism and fundamentalism. In other words, it demonstrates that being Pentecostal does not necessarily equal refraining from political engagement as understood by Suico and his dialogue partners.<sup>25</sup> Suico's interest, therefore, is not whether JIL understands itself as Pentecostal or feels the need for a theology of transformation based on an experience claimed to be Pentecostal, but to bail out his own denomination, the AG, whose public image he seems to be trying to change.

Secondly, JIL's superfluous inclusion in the category of Pentecostalism, as far as the explicit argument of the study is concerned, serves to make the problem that actually only concerns Suico and the AG a problem of a larger body of churches and thus serves to unite them under the hegemony of Suico's own theology and sociopolitical agenda. With regard to his theological agenda, Suico does not conceal that he claims to speak for Philippine Pentecostalism in general and that he hopes for as many churches as possible to subscribe to his theological insights. His theology of transformation, which he claims represents a middle position, however, is not only an attempt to reorganize the AG's standing in what in the Philippine context is still strongly dominated by the divide between fundamentalist (read: anti-patriotic, paternalist, conservative) and liberal (read: ecumenical, progressive, etc.) Protestants. It is also a move to reorganize the divide along the notion of "holistic mission" and therefore convince "fundamentalists" within his own camp, who shy away from everything that is labeled liberal and ecumenical, that accepting his theology of transformation is not a contradiction to their Pentecostalness. Less obvious, it is also the subtle attempt to mainstream the experience of the Holy Spirit by naming it and locating it within a wider, although not all too dogmatic, AG doctrinal framework. This is evidenced by the emphasis

on Spirit baptism and on Spirit baptism in connection with tongues as initial evidence (19), which is read into the “Declaration of Faith (Jesus Is Lord Church)” attached as an appendix (226–227).

With regard to his sociopolitical agenda, it is not clear what its content is. What is clear, however, is that his sociopolitical agenda needs clout in order to be carried out, which Suico admits himself (208). Thus, the need to name a problem (read: the common detractor and enemy), to stage this problem to be that of many, and proffering oneself as solution, along with one’s own history claimed to be the history of many.

This agenda is also present in his (re-)organization of the history of Philippine Pentecostalism. A reorganization that conceals the fact that in 1983 Villanueva founded the Philippines for Jesus Movement (PJM) because of stark disagreements with Pentecostal churches, such as the AG or the Church of the Foursquare Gospel, on several topics both doctrinal and organizational, but also regarding sociopolitical matters. From PJM’s perspective, these Pentecostal churches were closer to conservative evangelicals (which Suico would not count as Pentecostal),<sup>26</sup> with whom the Assemblies of God had established the Philippine Council of Fundamental Churches in 1964. Against what according to Villanueva was institutionalized denominationalism and outdated Pentecostalism, with inherently paternalist structures stemming from a failed emancipation from US missionaries, PJM was conceived as a network of independent churches that were doctrinally flexible enough to even include the Oneness United Pentecostal Church, regarded as a sect by the classical Pentecostals. Furthermore, PJM formulated its *raison d’être* explicitly as a mission to raise an awareness about social, economic, and political issues.<sup>27</sup> By choosing JIL as the first example of Philippine Pentecostalism in his historical

contextualization, Suico makes this “progressiveness” appear in continuity to the AG.

Thus, the Pentecostalism from which Suico claims to draw his empirical data and which he claims to speak for is no more than a name attached to the AG (and presumably other “classical churches”). He then tries to baptize the “independent churches” into his definition of Pentecostalism, in order to give them a collective self-consciousness and to empower them to become subject to *one*—his own—theological and sociopolitical agenda. Rather than simply being an empirical object of research, as Suico claims, “Pentecostalism” as a category should be considered the result of Suico’s specific reading and reorganization of the history of Philippine Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism as Suico uses this name is therefore something his work attempts to create by naming and claiming different churches to be Pentecostal as the AG is Pentecostal.

### **NAMING THE IMPOSSIBLE OBJECT AND THE MAKING OF A PENTECOSTAL PEOPLE**

It is difficult to state whether Suico’s endeavor to prove to the presumed detractors of the AG and other churches that Pentecostals should not be regarded as betrayers of the Philippine nation vis-à-vis the crises has been successful or not. The fact that most AG believers up until today reject the name “Pentecostal,” hints to the contrary.

As far as his aim to give the various churches that according to him share a common spirituality a name that enables them to become a movement in and for itself, united against allegedly common detractors, empowered by a theological agenda based on his understanding of the Holy Spirit experience, and assembled around a sociopolitical agenda envisioned in his study, is

concerned, it was partially successful. Albeit it is difficult to assess how far this project has been promoted outside academia, it is difficult to imagine that Suico, himself active in the teaching ministry and well connected with other church leaders, would not have tried to propagate it further. Field research indicates a wide reception of phrases and buzz-words clustered around the term “transformation,” although this does not seem to result in collaborative action. Rather it is used to accuse neighbors of being not transformational (not kingdom-minded, etc.), if for example the proposal for a common evangelistic campaign or social event is not accepted or “transfer members” from another church are welcomed. Still, it may be argued that studies like this may have contributed to reinforcing and popularizing the trend among churches associated with the PCEC, to theologize on society and politics.<sup>28</sup> In any case, the attempt to establish a relation between such an approach to understanding the role of the church vis-à-vis politics and society and the name “Pentecostal,” found in the publications of the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary,<sup>29</sup> has failed. Rather than succeeding in redefining the name Pentecostalism, the contrary seems to be the case: Pentecostalism has become a derogatory term, it has morphed into a name hardly anybody wants to be identified with, not even ordinary AG pastors and members themselves.

Suico’s study was submitted twelve months before the 2004 Philippine national elections, in which Villanueva ran for president. It is difficult to find out the precise when and how of his decision to run for presidential office. Yet there is strong evidence that in late 2001 there were concrete plans to form a “born-again bloc” in analogy to various already existing Catholic and mainline Protestant blocs in the Philippines, in order to enhance their influence in the coming Philippine government and the public. PCEC leaders as well as bishops of the member denominations (such as

the AG, Foursquare, etc.) were divided in the question to what extent it would be appropriate to officially endorse a specific presidential candidate, not to speak of fielding their own candidate. PJM leaders, on the contrary, had created the Task Force for Change Movement (which included some PCEC people as well) and were pushing this topic.

Against this background Suico's work and his attempt to "construc[t] the [PC] 'people,'" or movement,<sup>30</sup> could be read as the theological rationale for the formation of a Pentecostal bloc uniting PJM and other independents and those PCEC members he calls classical and independent Pentecostals while recommending himself as the theologian of choice for such a movement.<sup>31</sup> The name Pentecostal, and *mutatis mutandis* his decided drawing on spirituality, experience, and theological literature termed as Pentecostal (as distinct from merely evangelical, albeit not opposed to it), indeed represents a free space, a niche within the Philippine religious landscape, which, contrary to Latin America, his theology could have filled with hardly any competing parties. When the Task Force for Change Movement agreed to field Villanueva as presidential candidate, the PCEC criticized this decision strongly, explaining its opposition with reference to the separation between church and state. Several leaders of classical denominations followed suit (Villanueva, personal interview, March 10, 2013). Others have suggested the PCEC had good relations with then president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (who eventually became president albeit being accused of fraud) and did not want to jeopardize this privileged position.<sup>32</sup> Yet, while a number of AG leaders supported Villanueva in 2004, attempts to create a united Pentecostal movement that would include independent churches by giving them a specifically Pentecostal theology were not successful. The differences (and hostilities) among the various churches and leaders were too strong

and the connotation attached to the name Pentecostal too negative in order to be able to unite various leaders. As far as JIL and PJM were concerned, there was no need for a Pentecostal theology of transformation, given that among the teaching arm of PJM, the Intercrossers for the Philippines, there had already been a certain tradition of theologizing on church, society, and politics that was partially received also by leaders of classical Pentecostals, given the public influence of JIL, which Suico himself attests in drawing on JIL as example.<sup>33</sup> To them, identifying with the name Pentecostal would not have brought any advantages.

In 2001, as Suico correctly states, Villanueva was among those who publicly called on Joseph Estrada to resign. The rallies, preceded by what the Catholic Church had called “a Jericho march,” and the rallies known as EDSA II eventually brought Macapagal-Arroyo to power. After Villanueva had lost against Macapagal-Arroyo in an election overshadowed by notable election fraud, he organized a protest rally to expose the corruption involved. Most AG pastors who had supported him on the base of a holistic theology of transformation regarded this as “a rebellious act,” while differentiating this from a legitimate protest, such as the EDSA I rallies. The PCEC leaders who were rewarded for their more or less tacit loyalty to Macapagal-Arroyo raised serious criticism against Villanueva too. Still others started to prepare the 2010 campaign. During this campaign Villanueva forged an alliance with several Muslim groups, among those Nur Misuari, founder of the Moro National Liberation Front and old-time symbol of the armed struggle for a Muslim Mindanao.<sup>34</sup> He also invited Eid Kabalu, then speaker of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), to assist the signing of a covenant, in which he pledged to take the concern of the Muslims and those of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces. Along with other reasons, Kabalu’s participation in

said meeting led to the latter's suspension as MILF spokesperson (Kabalu, personal interview, May 24, 2013).<sup>35</sup> While some regarded this as a compromise of faith, many others considered it "mere politicking" and smiled at it. Still others regarded this as a token of a truly holistic mission and heralded a "moral revolution for peace and righteousness," a slogan that could also be read on Villanueva's campaign placards. Both on the national and local levels, transformation was a catchword for trying to mobilize voters throughout campaigns in both periods, among Christians and Muslims alike, yet no articulation or leader emerged as to make it a name that might have been attractive enough so as to allow significant clout to identify with. In interviews conducted by the researcher after the election defeat of 2010, both Villanueva himself and Nur Misuari seemed uneasy to talk about what brought them together in 2010. According to Misuari, "We needed each other. That's all" (Misuari, personal interview, May 5, 2013).

Coming back to the question of whether we are witnessing the demise of Pentecostalism, the answer is: on the ground, Philippine Pentecostalism as understood, redefined, named, and claimed by Suico never did exist; it existed only in the minds of some members of denominational intelligentsia and researchers as an (im-)possible object.

## CONCLUSION: A HISTORY OF THE NAME

As religious studies scholar Michael Bergunder has argued,<sup>36</sup> ever since Walter Hollenweger's monumental work published in 1969 established Pentecostalism as an object of research, Pentecostal studies have in large parts also been identity politics.<sup>37</sup> And even before Hollenweger's publication, anthropological studies on *evangelicós* in Latin America published by Emílio Willems and Christian Lalive d'Épinay have made claims concerning the Latin American

sociopolitical status quo and the future of the countries in which the studies had been conducted respectively—based on the specter of a coherent movement.<sup>38</sup> The diversity of churches subsumed under the name Pentecostalism and the overdeterminedness of the name have intimated the specter of a coherent movement and at least implicitly invited prognoses with respect to the “modernization and democratization” of Latin America, positive (Willems) or negative (d’Epinay).

On the ground, ordinary believers and leaders reject the name Pentecostal as well as PC. It has never shed its association with neo-colonial relations with the United States, resulting from the historical proximity of some churches with North American missionaries, nor did it shed the idea that people identified by that name are seductive of the poor and indifferent to social change. Another association the name Pentecostal was not able to shake off is the image of Pentecostals as uneducated lower class people praying “at the top of one’s voice and shouting hysterically,”<sup>39</sup> hinted to by Suico in relation to the expansion of the AG among the “middle and upper class people of society” (74). Attempts to renew the face of Philippine Pentecostalism and the attempt to make it attractive for churches rejecting this name and co-opting them and their achievements under this name can so far not be considered successful. As far as Suico’s own work is concerned, the redefinition of the name Pentecostal, as well as the attempt to create through such a redefinition a people willing to unify under the name Pentecostal and under the hegemonic theological and political agenda proposed by Suico, did not encounter positive feedback.<sup>40</sup>

What implications can be drawn from this (pseudo-)demise of Pentecostalism in the Philippines for researchers on Pentecostalism? First and foremost, it calls for a higher self-containment among scholars, and a more disciplined reflection on how PC is researched

and defined. It calls for a critical assessment about which context it is supposed to speak about and what agendas are connected to it. (One might wish this to be taken as a suggestion to leaders of churches and to their intelligentsia, especially when it comes to statistics.) It challenges the researchers to consider the limits of the concept of a PC movement in the Philippines, especially when it comes to selecting empirical data and case studies. This is especially crucial, if the discussion aims at discussing sociopolitical themes and drawing conclusions for the Philippine society at large, given the alleged numerical strength and growth rate of the specter. Furthermore, it calls for an approach that conceptualizes PC in a way that is able to measure up to the instability and fluidity of the (group-)identities in question, which are most often those who do not fit into other classifications, good or bad as they were. While the fact that certain believers and groups do not fit into other classifications may give reason to consider them under one single name (e.g., Pentecostal), it would be a disservice to both, to the academy and to the participants of said groups, to treat them in a way that elides their heterogeneity, even more so if social and political claims are implied.

Bergunder has therefore proposed an approach that conceptualizes its research object along formal criteria. According to this approach, Pentecostal/Pentecostalism should be regarded as a mere name, whose history has to be reconstructed from within the context that is to be studied. In a nutshell, such a “history of the name”<sup>41</sup> would begin with asking when, where, how, and by whom the name Pentecostal (or PC) has been used and discussed as a phenomenon, empirical entity, research object, or even specter.<sup>42</sup> Such an approach would then continue to reflect on what data is used to discuss whatever the name PC is said to mean in a given context. From this point of view Pentecostal studies are critical investigations

that deconstruct connections made by scholars, media, and participants, between people, events, articulations and actions, on the one hand, and evaluations and conclusions regarding the people, events, articulations, and actions in question, on the other. Therefore, along with discussing the agendas implied, such an approach brings to the fore alternative narratives and positions and opens a space for further discussion.

The present chapter has been a contribution to such a study of the history of the name “Pentecostal” in the specific context of the Philippines through a critique of Suico’s work. As such, this chapter too is not free from the zeal to convert differences into equivalences at the cost of excluding subjects and co-opting them for the authors’ own narrative. Therefore, it should be understood as an invitation to *relecture*, to critically assess what has been written here and to bring to the fore yet other alternative voices.<sup>43</sup>