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**Faith in romance: towards an anthropology of
romantic relationships, sexuality and
responsibility in African Christianities**

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Faith in Romance

Faith in Romance

*Towards an Anthropology of Romantic Relationships,
Sexuality and Responsibility in African Christianities*

Rede

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door

Rijk van Dijk

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*Mijnheer de Decaan,
Leden van het Curatorium van deze Leerstoel,
Leden van het Curatorium van het Afrika Studiecentrum,
Beste collega's, familie, vrienden en toehoorders,*

In September 2014, I met an elderly gentleman in Botswana who, in a sense, became iconic in the thinking that I began developing concerning relations between religion and romance in an African context; notions that have inspired my inaugural lecture today. This gentleman is a friendly, respectable, well-educated person of authority in his Pentecostal church and he is also well-known in the country as a 'trainer of trainers'; that is, he is highly involved in training people in the skills of counselling. In fact, he has been involved in the development of counselling in Botswana since the 1980s; creating a mixture of social psychology and Christian moralities in the transmission of all sorts of ideas pertaining to the private lives of individuals and couples. His work involves, for example, training for marital counselling – a practice that teaches couples who are about to get married how to communicate about their lives, their intimacies, their problems and their prospects.

When I met him he was very excited; he recounted with great pride how he had recently been able to capture the minds and imaginations of young people in counselling sessions focused on behavioural change. Such sessions aim to implant notions of self-styling and responsibility when it comes to relationships, sexuality and romance. He beamed as he showed me the latest products he had been using: flyers that he produced on the computer picturing big red hearts; instructions on how to celebrate Valentine's Day; and depictions of how to be romantic. His excitement was about the success of this self-produced material and about the fascination he had encountered from the young people who participated in his sessions. A shared desire for desire, so to speak, can apparently build bridges across the generations. For him, this religious practice of counselling, in which certain feelings, affections and sentiments are expressed in a pursuit of their satisfaction, in no way conflicts with, jeopardizes or contradicts his status as a senior figure. After all, it was not as if he was involved in any frivolity; in things that no adult or self-respecting elder

should engage in for fear of being considered silly. In his conviction, his faith and romance work in tandem – the one amplifying the other, and vice versa.

There are many more examples that can be given in African contexts of a new religious fascination for the idealization of relationships, for the refashioning of sexuality and for the will to engage in a styling of these from a religious perspective. I have come across such examples in my own work; for instance in Ghana in the late 1990s (see Van Dijk 2004), where certain churches began lending young couples gowns and suits so that anyone can hold a so-called ‘white wedding’, irrespective of economic circumstances. A white wedding is considered the epitome of how a glamorous marriage should be styled. Or, examples of prominent church members offering newlyweds the chance to spend their wedding night in beautifully decorated rooms. As I report in a recent article (Van Dijk 2013), while doing fieldwork in Botswana over the last couple of years I became fascinated by the, at times, very sexually explicit nature of the issues addressed by counsellors and pastors during their counselling sessions, and their teaching about romance (see for a comparable case in South Africa, Burchardt 2010, 2013). These pastors and counsellors explained that sometimes they would even bring their own partners to sessions in order to discuss matters of the body, reproduction, sexual pleasure and satisfaction or the dangers of dissatisfaction and diseases, from a multi-gender perspective. In one particular case, I vividly recall a counsellor describing sexual positions to his rather unprepared and slightly unsettled counselees in a group counselling session. Some young couples explained how this kind of religious counselling had indeed taught them about their bodies, being intimate with one another and how to manage their sexual drives for mutual benefit and pleasure (Van Dijk 2010, 2012). This religious domain of interest, including the use of (psychological) textbooks for the exploration of romance and relationships, ties in with a much wider domain than the context of marital preparations. There is a massive stream of religiously-oriented books and brochures basically addressing how to build a successful relationship.¹ They discuss how to become romantic, how to change masculine and feminine role models in this regard, how important it is to have a healthy, fit and attractive body, or encourage participation in counselling and Bible classes that provide in-depth instructions on these matters and which are focused on what Pearce (2012) has called the channeling of emotions and (sexual) desire. Religious sophistication² is developing here, of pastors proclaiming romantic know-how by emphasizing things such as life-skills as well as food, dress, gifts, styles of communication; i.e. an inclusion of consumption, commodities, global images of style and beauty promoting the

ideal partner or relationship. Take, for example, this quote from a Botswana newspaper by a pastor:

“God doesn’t want dull, sexless and conflict-riddled marriages,” Reverend Phillip tells mainly young people at a seminar. “You need to break the routine in your sex life,” he said. “Be creative. Bring back that initial romance. [...] If you are the busy type, set aside a specific day during the week and let nobody, not even your pastor or your children, tamper with that time. When your pastor tells you to come to a meeting, tell him “sorry pastor, we have a little private arrangement at home and I must be there [...]” (*Mmegi*, 26-10-2010)

Yet, at the same time, I was meeting with men in Botswana who were roaring with laughter about how puzzled they were about this thing called romance, what to do and not to do? But these men were also genuinely interested in how the Faith can inform them about the quality of their relationships in a situation such as that in Botswana, where relationships fail, where there is domestic violence, an increasing divorce rate and, in recent years, a spate of so-called ‘passion killings’ (Mookodi 2004; Livingston 2009). This is at the heart of my lecture today: how is religion modelling romance, while romance seems to be redefining religion? How can we interpret an intriguing change that seems to be taking place in religious ideologies and practices in various places in Africa – Botswana is far from unique – that appears to portray religion as promoting romance in an inspirational and instructional manner? This lecture focuses on modern Christianity in Africa, while acknowledging that similar issues are also being discussed in relation to the study of Islam in Africa (see, e.g. Badran 2011; Maticka-Tyndale et al. 2007). Furthermore, within the domain of various forms of Christianity I concentrate on the romantic modelling of relationships, aware that within the same domain important developments are taking place concerning masculine and feminine gender models (see, e.g. Van Klinken 2012; Cole 2010; Soothill 2007). While these reformulations of gender models are significant, I particularly aim to address the role that the introduction of romantic notions appears to play in much of this development. Faith appears to be invoked so as to amplify romance,³ giving romance a particular twist while reinforcing its workings for relationships and – in this case – heteronormative sexuality. While many Christian groups, Pentecostals in particular, adhere to strict teachings about sexuality, abstinence before marriage and faithfulness, it is far too simplistic to say that this religion disciplines romance in a crude Foucauldian manner. Romance and religion become strange bedfellows in how these ideas negotiate the everyday

realities and contestations of (sexual) relationships (Burchardt 2010; Cole 2010; Bochow & Van Dijk 2012). While these pastors, counsellors and their people seem to have faith in how romance works for them, there is something paradoxical about such a pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction. Since, how can romance ever be controlled? Satisfaction always seems to create new dissatisfactions, making romance fundamentally open-ended. For this reason opting for a competence in their engagement with romance, these religious groups' pursuit of romance seems to imply significant changes in their dialogue about relationships, sexuality, affections, gender and generations. How can we interpret the apparent rise of a faith in romance?

Secondly, how can anthropology come to terms with an understanding of religion as a domain that not only wants to shape individual and relational behaviour, but increasingly seems to be shaped by messages about desire, pleasure, the affectionate, perhaps even the hedonistic? What kind of development is this? And, what does it tell us of the repositioning of religion in certain African societies AND of the changing foci of anthropology and especially its sub-discipline of the anthropology of religion?

What is romance?

Before we continue, I will first specify what I mean by the term 'romance' and, in particular, its relationship with 'love'. Romance in the most generally accepted meaning of the term indicates an idealization of a relationship and a spiritualized sensuality (Reddy 2010). As the well-known historian of the rise of romantic love in Western cultures, William Reddy (2010: 35, 2012: 6) says, romantic love indicates this idealization and sensuality where there is not only a deep longing for association with another human being, but also a pattern of expectation, of reciprocity, and exclusivity of the relationship. Describing the rise of ideas on love and romance emerging in European history from the twelfth century onwards, he points at the genre of what became known as courtly love. This is a cultural production of an idealization of relationships that qualified love as well as sexuality. One can say that romance developed as a gentle way to deal with sex. As courtly love particularly focused on creating romantic relationships outside marriage – as romance could not be found in marriage – the subversive and transgressive quality of romance, running against dominant Christian conventions, were also noticed. I will return to the persistent tensions between romance and Christianity in the course of their histories. Throughout the eighteenth century, Reddy sees a development of romantic love in which affection and sensuality are elevated

into transcendent experiences. Love and romance now formed the basis for marriage and came to be seen as the expression of individuality and autonomy, thereby running against the conventions of arranged marriage. For Reddy (2010: 35), romantic love is NOT universal, but rather is a typical Western 'invention' of sexual partnerships that began contesting regulatory thinking about the position of the individual in society.

In the development of a sociological approach to romance, its history cannot be detached from the rise of the Romantic age in Western thought, literature, philosophy and social imaginaries. As Campbell (1987) has argued, the rise of a Protestant Ethic – as described by Max Weber (1930/1992) in his treatise on the interplay between economic and religious change in Western history – had a twin brother, an alter. This was the rise of the Romantic Ethic in which a pursuit of enjoyment, pleasure and romance negotiated the strictures of (labour-) discipline, rationalization of production, and bureaucratization. The romantic pursuit of finding one's true self in beauty, pleasure, in the purity of nature, and in inner emotional life becomes perceived as a counter to the impact of a de-personalization that began affecting social conditions in the West. The *sociology* of love, romance and intimacy that emerged through the works of Giddens (1992), Illouz (1997) and Bauman (2003) also explores how ideas on intimate relationships arose in the course of the Western experiences of major social changes. It highlights how the idealization of relationships became mediated through consumer production; diamonds are forever in a world where relations become increasingly impersonal and alienating. The expression of romantic love becomes captured in the fleeting moment of enjoying such signifiers as the red rose, the sweet wine, the refined perfume, the soft music, and the twinkling candlelight. Bauman (2003) speaks of *liquid love* in order to argue that, in the West, all intimacy, all romance in relationships tends to become almost a consumer item itself. Once enjoyed, it is now disposable, emptied and easily exchanged for the capturing of a new instance of romance. Relationships appear to exist only for the moment they provide emotional and sexual gratification (Dowd & Pallotta 2000). One could call authors such as Giddens, Illouz, Campbell and Bauman pessimists, as the pursuit of pleasure, in their minds, turns the creation of such intimacies into a hopeless project of never-ending dissatisfaction; the hedonist always wants new pleasures since the old ones fade so quickly. Western societies have lost faith in romance.

The *anthropology* of romantic love that has been emerging since the 1990s appears to take as its starting point the question of whether, indeed, romance should be seen as a Western invention; conditioned by the Western histories of Christianity, capitalist production and neo-liberal alienation (see for an

overview Maskens & Blanes 2013). Jack Goody (2010: 21) is not mild in his critique of the works of Giddens and his companions; he calls it a “theft of history,” as if romantic love is uniquely associated with modernization and the history of Europe, denying the same experience to others.

In particular, Charles Lindholm (1998, 2006) has developed an anthropology of romantic love interested in developing a cross-cultural approach to romance. He proposes to also understand romance as a vernacular modernity. Local societies’ conditions in the pursuit of happiness and enjoyment are not preconditioned by the arrival of Western developments, but may have their own heritage, so to speak. Strangely, however, while acknowledging cross-cultural comparability of the rise of romantic love, Lindholm maintains an African-pessimist perspective declaring that (mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa) research on indigenous cultural repertoires and idealized romantic love is largely absent (Lindholm 2006: 15).

Recent studies, such as the volume *Love in Africa* (Cole & Thomas 2009), tend to show a different picture. They examine changing ideas of love relationships and how they are mediated by incorporating consumerist style as expressions of the modern. I wholeheartedly agree with their observation that while an extensive and long-dating anthropological record exists of marital and intimate relations in Africa, comprising studies such as Schapera’s study – in what is now Botswana – *Married Life in an African Tribe* (1940), or elsewhere, Bledsloe & Pison (1994) on *Nuptiality in Sub-Saharan Africa*, issues of love, romance and what Maticka-Tyndale et al. (2007) have called ‘recreational sex’ are now increasingly being addressed.⁴ Moreover, studies of sexuality in Africa have been marked by a slowly emerging interest in aspects of love and romance, something Spronk (2009, 2012) in particular has been aiming to redress.⁵ The embrace of the romantic – in many cases by the younger generations in Africa – often runs as a kind of culture critique vis-à-vis their elders and the way they want to maintain certain traditions in, for instance, marital arrangements. Opting for romance often becomes an expression of protest; an act of deciding for oneself whom to marry or how to express affections. In a sense, the romantic then turns into a battleground of self-direction, self-styling and self-assertion.⁶ Romance has become an accepted field of interest in studying the lives of youth in Africa, their desire for the self-shaping of relationships, their fascination for globally circulating models of love, and the manner in which they want to insert themselves into consumerist appetites (Mann 1985; Cole & Durham 2007; Spronk 2009, 2012).⁷ This kind of romance has become an African reality, making the invention of romance not exclusively a Western import product, although – unmistakably – global images of how romance should or can look like are certainly a source of in-

spiration in Africa as well. As an anecdote here: when I asked young men during my research in Molepolole, Botswana, what they think romance is, one of them answered that romance is “eating a hamburger with your lady at the town’s Kentucky Fried Chicken diner”!

While such romance has become a reality in Africa, the question for the second part of my address is what has religion got to do with it? And, is Christianity in particular a producer and a consumer of romance?

Christianity and its faith in romance

While in European history Christianity remained almost as suspicious of romance as it was of sexuality, I aim nevertheless to argue, perhaps surprisingly, that Christianity in Africa has become an important carrier of romance. In its Western history, Christianity and romance remained largely antagonistic. Christian hesitations about romance rest obviously on the difficulty of worshipping someone else; of losing oneself in the love and admiration of the other, instead of the heavenly Father.⁸ In the Romanticist movement that emerged as a counter to capitalist and industrial developments, the antagonism between Christianity and romance remained. In this movement romance itself began to be worshipped (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995).⁹ It was in the German Romantic movement of the eighteenth century that this notion of finding one’s true self in love, of realizing one’s own destiny in becoming complete by and through the other was fully developed, contributing to the rise of such notions as the soulmate.¹⁰ Especially Singer (2009: 376-431) demonstrates how, in the minds of romantic philosophers such as Friedrich von Schlegel and Friedrich Schleiermacher, religion is not antithetical to finding one’s real self; this realization of one’s full destiny does not per definition require an external deity, a God. They imagined a religion of love in which sex leads to a transcendental oneness between individuals. This not only challenged the Christian immorality of sex, but portrayed it, as Singer (2009: 385) shows, as something divinely mystical in uniting two autonomous individuals. Since Thomas of Aquinas, the Christian problematic had been how to deal with the sinfulness of sexuality and, in particular, the question of how to discipline sexuality even within the marital bond. Schlegel’s ideas now reshaped sexuality as an aspect of “divine humanity” (Singer 2009: 386), a celebration of sexuality as something to be worshipped in a romantic faith (Nivala 2011).¹¹

While a religion of love developed throughout the Romantic era, it is remarkable to note that missionary Christianity began embracing romance pre-

cisely in order to try and condition sexuality. In his 'Technologies of the Self', Foucault (1988) already points at the (self-) disciplining effect of what he calls the 'exercises'; the detailed prescriptions and self-imposed forms of training the intimacies of the heart so that the emotional repertoires pertaining to the body, mind and soul would respond to the right kind of stimuli.¹² He sees a long European history, reaching back into Antiquity but certainly also inspiring Christianity into the Victorian age, of the development of these exercises via confessions, counselling, testimonies and prayers (Foucault 1988: 40). These ideas impacted the arrival of missionary Christianity in Africa greatly. The need to disclose the heart became an important aspect of their conversion to modernity.

The missionary effort that, from around the 1850s, began to involve itself with interventions in initiation, fertility, child-birth or marriage ceremonies was not meant to do away with the romantic pursuits of pleasure, relationality, gratification or satisfaction; but rather, to Christianize and moralize these in accordance to, often, Victorian principles (Hastings 1973; Cox 1998; Erlank 2001).¹³ It is too simplistic to say that missionary Christianity ruined the embedded romanticism of African historical traditions through its interventions; but it did change their course and in no uncertain terms added a specific moral layer to important elements of sexuality, notions of the body and the significance of intimacy. The missionaries attempted to change marital relationships in many corners of Africa, thereby assuming that the locals only entertained a mechanical and instrumental understanding of such relations, meaning by implication that religion had now arrived to teach romance (Falen 2008).¹⁴ For the missionaries, romance was to be used as a heroic weapon against polygamous marriage (see, e.g. Falen 2008), against multiple, extra-marital relationships and as a force in guiding reproduction (Delius & Glaser 2004). Missionary Christianity, though remaining highly fecundist in orientation (see Ellingson 2002) – that is, tying sexuality exclusively to reproduction usually in the context of marriage – was pedagogic in its agenda; romance is required to guide sexuality such that it becomes 'right' and approved, and therefore warrants inspection and intervention. In Malawi, for example, the Roman Catholic Church began providing Christianized forms of initiation rituals – replacing the 'immoral' traditional ones – which became known as *mphunsitzi*; that is 'instructions' that were to be followed by the initiands.¹⁵ At the same time, the sexual agenda of the missionaries rendered suspicious all sexual conduct not related to its fecundist ideology; hence, masturbation, prostitution, homosexuality and so forth were seen not only as immoral, but also as being cold, non-relational and therefore lacking in romantic qualities. Whereas missionary Christianity engaged a romantic pedagogic for its pur-

poses, the question remains to what extent is Christianity shaped by romance and its interests? How have they transformed together?

What has happened to the subversive?

Counsellors talking explicitly about sexuality, the interest in Valentine's Day and in glamorous and amorous weddings – irrespective of costs (see Van Dijk 2010) – or young couples learning through church how to spice up their intimacies, all seem to present romance not only as discipline but as interestingly subversive in a skilled manner. In all of these examples, romance is framed in terms of the teaching, learning and the acquiring of certain (life-) skills and competences, which also seem to counteract conventions and forms of authority. There is an anti-establishment element to it. African Christianities have a long record of running against established forms of political or cultural power: prophetic movements that began revolting against colonial rule, churches vying for democracy under dictatorial regimes, or Christian activists fighting AIDS-stigma indicate that Christianities in Africa cannot simply be seen as 'faithful' followers of the existing social order, despite having contributed *to* that order. I would like to posit that perhaps romance – and especially Christian romance – belongs to this repertoire too, although something curious seems to happen to its subversive quality.

If we take the example of the counsellor discussing sexual positions, we need to note that he was doing this in a context where couples are sent to him for such counselling. This counselling occurs when couples come to the District Commissioner in this town in Botswana to register their marriage. At the same premises of the District Commissioner they are counselled by a Pentecostal pastor. On the surface, it appears that this counselling, and its interest in the romantic, is part of governmentality and discipline for which Christianity serves as a vehicle. One important reason for providing this service is the changing significance of sexuality, intimacy and relationships in Africa over the past 30 years or so and how they have been impacted by the HIV/AIDS crisis (Moyer, Burchardt & Van Dijk 2013). As a result of the growing importance of biomedical interventions and of biomedical knowledge of the body, religious institutions and practices have also been forced to attune themselves to this reality (Epstein 2007). In many societies in Africa – certainly also Botswana – religion had to step in and get involved in the fight against the epidemic.¹⁶ This fight concentrated primarily on what became known as behavioural change, which in terms of the so-called A, B & C-policies in Pentecostal churches usually led to an emphasis on Abstinence and

Being faithful, but much less to an emphasis on the use of the condom as a means of preventing the spread of the virus (Dilger 2007, 2009; Prince, Denis & Van Dijk 2009).¹⁷ The absence of any effective medical treatment for the disease meant that intervening and changing people's behaviour – in terms of safe sex practices, fidelity in relationships and responsabilization in safeguarding the body – increasingly became a religious concern as well (Becker & Geissler 2009). After all, religion was and is very capable of penetrating the private, of inspecting personal behaviour, of configuring a moral regime relating to the control of personal conduct. The impact of biomedicine on religious thought and practice resulted in the rise of a plethora of faith-based organizations engaged in mainstreaming AIDS prevention in religious practice, through such activities as counselling or running religiously-based HIV testing centres. In a strange sense, this is the easy bit in terms of exploring how a new pedagogy of romance may have emerged also in religious circles, in a context where sexuality and intimacy became problematized (and moralized) as never before (Prince, Denis & Van Dijk 2009).

A different factor in how Christian religion in Africa has been (re-)forming itself has been the coming of age of educated middle classes – with their aspirations and their socio-cultural and economic resources – in terms of the shaping of relationships, the styling of private lives and in their treatment and appreciation of the body (Spronk 2014). While the new middle class share a fascination for discussing matters of sexuality, the body and intimacies more bluntly than ever before (see Spronk 2012), they are also highly attracted to the popular Pentecostal churches. The well-known Pentecostal leader from Ghana, Mensa Otabil, recently opened a gym called the 'Body Temple', next to his mega-church in the centre of Accra. As Bastian (2001) has shown, middle classes excel in devoting energy and time to matters of romance – much as they are fascinated by global images of glamorous lifestyles¹⁸ – and are willing to spend hard-earned cash on whatever romantic ideals are expected of them in terms of styling their bodies. They appear utterly fascinated by those forms of modern religion that emphasize and showcase such appetites and desires. Linda van de Kamp (2011, 2012), for instance, has demonstrated how the Pentecostals in Maputo, Mozambique, have developed a religious practice known as the 'Therapy of Love'. Here, urban, middle-class couples *en groupe* are required to touch and hug each other while in church and on command of the leader.¹⁹ One could say that in order to keep pace with the development of a rapidly spreading romantic interest in these segments of society, religion developed along similar lines to a romanticized social ideology and spiritual practice.

Thirdly, the global circulation of images, such as those related to Valentine's Day discussed earlier, has had an enormous impact on the shaping romantic religion in Africa. Religion is increasingly capable of mediating these images, as Astrid Bochow (2008) demonstrates, and making globally circulating ideas concerning relationships available for consumption by their rank and file. Thanks to the work of Birgit Meyer, we now understand much better how the media in Africa have been feeding into what she has termed 'sensational religion' (Meyer 2010); that is, the rise of religious forms that are highly interested in addressing the senses, in mediating touch and experience through the use of modern means of communication while also bringing out the sensational through highly electrifying performances of miracles of healing for example. There is a long history of 'Soulmate' and 'Dear Dolly'-type newspaper columns that publicly discuss questions such as how do I know that he or she loves me?, how can we make our relationship more pleasurable? Or what can I do as a man to be more romantic?²⁰ In recent years, the Pentecostals in particular have invested in this work of mediation and sensation by offering phone-in radio programmes and the like to discuss such issues. Often, pastors and counsellors then draw on global images and experiences of the pleasurable, the body and the intimate (Bochow & Van Dijk 2012).

If we return to the example of the Pentecostal counsellor offering his challenging advice to soon-to-be-married couples, there also seems to be a great deal of emphasis on becoming a responsible father, husband, mother and housewife; messages replete with such 'responsibilized' teachings. Yet, such counsellors are perceived as fostering these sentiments against the grain, so to speak. By offering romantic teachings they also move against family traditions, kinship structures, public conventions concerning touching and hugging, popular models of masculinity and even against notions of discretion (Van Dijk 2013; see also Bochow 2008). Romance seems to foster an anti-establishment interest in these messages and public profiling. As I have indicated (see Van Dijk 2010) a number of people in Botswana complained, saying "is this still church?" when they expressed their shock about the explicitness with which some of their Pentecostal pastors discuss matters of love and sexuality in the sermons they deliver or the counselling they provide.²¹ This suggests indeed that romance requires a level of critical social imagination in terms of how such teachings and forms of communication can be fostered by these leaders. While religion wants to model romance, even in the government premises of a District Commissioner, the same romantic elements may challenge the very boundaries of conventions that this

religious service wants to install. Is romance modelling these forms of Christianity in Africa into an anti-establishment force again?

Romance in a romanticist understanding

This leads, finally, to a different dimension in exploring the relationship between religion and the romantic; that is, the *romanticist* understanding of religion.²² As Maskens and Blanes (2013) indicate for anthropology as a whole in which studying love and emotions emerged as a subversive interest opposing positivism, also much of the interest in the anthropology of religion and for religious life has been driven by a romantic pursuit of creating a counter-imagery to a rationalized and formalized society. There was and is a fascination for precisely those forms of expression that escape structures of regulation and rationalization, as can be found in ecstatic behaviour, spirit possession, traditional healing, and shamanism. One can even say that the romanticist interest for religion in anthropology has been a kind of protest movement itself, against the governmentalities of society. In this sense, Maskens and Blanes (2013) identify anthropology in the image of Don Quixote; a romanticist ideal of the anthropologist who goes out into the wild and subjects him or herself to all sorts of secret, occult, mystical, supernatural and electrifying rituals or states of consciousness. The anthropology of religion seems in particular to have been a field in which such anthropological romance was born and bred.

A next step is to make a clear distinction between a romanticist understanding of religion from an *outsider's* perspective versus an *insider's* or a believer's perspective. This problematic is very relevant to the study of the rise of Pentecostalism in Africa. From an outsider's perspective, the highly emotionally driven, ecstatic and electrifying meetings of the Pentecostals can easily be analyzed in terms of how they are juxtaposed with notions of an ordered society, bureaucracy or science (and the Pentecostals seem to debate all of these). Yet, from an internal perspective, in many circles in African Pentecostalism such Romanticist ideals appear rather absent; often they perceive themselves to be the guardians of morality and a God-given order in society, especially when it comes to matters of sexuality. In other words, *inside* Pentecostalism there is little space for a romanticist self-understanding of the faith. The Quixotic is hard to find; instead, in much of its ideology there is a great deal of emphasis on 'civicness' and Pentecostal messages are replete with 'responsibilized' teachings. Yet, and perhaps paradoxically, they perceive themselves (and are perceived by others) as being highly romantic, allowing

such sentiments to take a central place where they move against the conventions of society. Hence, there is the possibility that a romanticist interest in religion on the part of anthropology does not automatically result in a romanticist interpretation of the significance of a particular faith, since Pentecostalism is, by and large, commonly understood as not particularly challenging to the establishment of a society. Yet, its internal discourse seems to show the challenging potential of its romantic messages in the way they contest existing conventions and produce a changing social imagination of relationships.

This is, of course, producing a new research agenda for the anthropology of modern religious changes in Africa; that is, to explore how and why at particular instances romance amplifies a romanticist, anti-establishment positioning of a religious body, practice or institution, and when this is not the case. Often, the opposite seems to be the case in this dialectic between romance and a romanticist positioning as such romance can be conjoined by rather conservative socio-political positioning of especially Pentecostal groupings. The infamous role played by Christian Right-inspired Pentecostal leaders vying for the acceptance of what became known as the 'Kill the Gays'-bill in Uganda is telling (Oliver 2013: 86). Here, a number of Pentecostal leaders became very outspoken public figures, pushing the Ugandan parliament to accept a law that would criminalize any form of homosexual activity and orientation. While this Pentecostalism also pursues romance in the way these churches perceive heterosexual, marital relations in particular (Gusman 2009), this romance obviously does not seem to guarantee a romanticist orientation in the way an anti-establishment, pro-active liberal agenda is being formulated. As a number of authors have shown, the resistance of this Christian Right Pentecostal ideology to certain aspects of sexuality seems to be informed by a post-colonial sentiment; the idea of protecting the African population against the demoralizing influence of the West, of guarding a 'pristine' African sexual culture against something that these Pentecostals perceive as 'un-African', as foreign and as threatening to its values (Oliver 2013; Muller 2014).

I am inclined to argue that it is relevant for the anthropology-of-religion exploration of romance and romanticist agendas to allow for the fact that the Quixotic translates as more than 'progressive'; i.e. there is nothing in such agendas that prescribes that anti-establishment, emotional and sentimental resistance must *a priori* be progressive in nature.

Finally, we return to our elderly gentleman, with his ideas of how his faith may amplify the romance that he is teaching. Is he to be interpreted as a romanticist who runs against the establishment? Or does his romantic endeavour rather reinforce the establishment of moral authority and dominant structures in Botswana society? Yes and no. In terms of age, his seniority

allows him to turn things on their head – by promoting the pursuit of romantic emotions in a sophisticated manner, opening up a new dialogue and speaking to the hearts of the younger generation successfully, even relating to matters of intimacy that otherwise remain cloaked in a veil of decency and discretion. Does it change relational, gender and power structures immediately? Unlikely, and certainly not in the short run; the longer-lasting effects of this socio-religious imaginary of the interaction between faith and romance belong to a research agenda on the changing nature of the interrelationship between religion and sexuality that I aim to explore under the heading of my new professorship at the University of Amsterdam, by arguing that the ways in which religion and romance model each other are highly relevant for understanding modern Christianity in Africa today.

A word of thanks

Finally, at the end of my inaugural lecture I would like to thank all those who have been directly involved in making my appointment to this professorship-by-special-appointment possible; the College van Bestuur of the University of Amsterdam, the then-Dean of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Science, Edward de Haan, and especially the Director of the African Studies Centre, Ton Dietz. With the backing of the African Studies Centre's Curatorium – for which I am very grateful – and in his well-known mode of energetic action, Ton Dietz developed the plans for the establishment of this 'Bijzonder hoogleraarschap' in close collaboration with Jan Rath, the then-Head of the Sociology and Anthropology Department, with the AISSR, and with Ria Reis who was leading the Health, Care and the Body programme group, which this chair is connected to in particular. In fact, Ria Reis has been hugely instrumental in this venture to establish a new chair in the study of Religion and Sexuality in Africa. She has been a source of inspiration in a friendship that has spanned many years, and which harks back to the wonderful time we enjoyed collaborating with Prof. Matthew Schoffeleers. Ria, the importance of your continued support cannot be overstated! The Health, Care and the Body group has given me a warm welcome under the current leadership of Robert Pool. And beyond the virtual boundaries of this group I have already embarked on intriguing and enjoyable working relations with, among others, Rachel Spronk, of the Amsterdam Research Centre for Gender and Sexuality. I also thank all my colleagues at the African Studies Centre for making this professorship possible and tolerating my regular absences from the Institute, in the certainty that my work at the University of Amsterdam will only am-

plify the attention that Africa and its social science study deserves. My brother-in-academia Jan-Bart Gewald remains my most important sparring-partner in our mutual fascination for African studies; this, despite the fact that we cheerfully continue to agree-to-disagree on almost everything that has to do with anthropological versus historical interpretations of developments on the continent. I am grateful to Anna Yeadell for her assistance in editing this inaugural lecture.

I want to devote special attention to my close colleagues at various places in Germany, among whom I would like to mention, firstly, Thomas Kirsch and his group from the departmental section on Anthropology and the Centre of Excellence of the University of Konstanz, to which I am attached as a Guest-Professor. The Konstanzer hospitality and the intellectual Bodensee climate has been a real feast; an academic banquet of which I have been enjoying every minute. Furthermore, my thanks go to my colleagues from Berlin and Göttingen – including Hansjoerg Dilger, Marian Burchardt and Astrid Bochow. Kristine Krause and her family created a special room for me, both in their Prenzlauer Berlin flat as well as in their hearts, something that I will cherish forever.

I actually need to thank many more people who have been crucial in the development of my academic career and in the development of this Chair, but my final words of gratitude go to my family and friends. My old mother and my family are here with me today; hence allow me to continue in Dutch.

Ik ervaar het als een groot voorrecht dat ik hier vandaag kan verwelkomen mijn familie; in het bijzonder mijn moeder en mijn schoonvader die, op hoge leeftijd gekomen te zijn, mijn benoeming tot hoogleraar met bijzonder veel vreugde tegemoet hebben gezien. Daarbij gaan mijn gedachten ook uit naar mijn vader en mijn schoonmoeder die deze plechtigheid ongetwijfeld met trots hadden bijgewoond. Mijn schoonmoeder heeft zeer naar dit moment toe geleefd, maar is helaas 12 dagen geleden overleden. Al mijn broers, zus, schoonzussen en hun families; dank voor jullie oprechte belangstelling en steun, en goed om te zien dat althans in één geval – een neef – de belangstelling voor de Antropologie ook besmettelijk is geweest; en dat nog wel aan de Universiteit Utrecht waar ook ik mijn carrière gestart ben. Goed voorbeeld doet goed volgen ! Mijn gezin – mijn vrouw Liesbeth, Andine, Elrik, Ruben en hun geliefden Tom en Dafne – zijn en blijven mijn reisgezelschap in mijn omzwervingen door Afrika en in mijn ontdekkingsstochten in de wetenschap. Van Andine leer ik mijn gewichtigheid te beheersen, van Elrik hoe de economie werkt en wat geld is, en van Ruben wat je met graven naar het verleden kan doen; maar bovenal van Liesbeth leer ik wat thuiskomen is, wat er werke-

lijk toe doet, en hoe ik toch bij voorkeur in begrijpelijke woorden mijn vak verstaanbaar kan maken voor anderen; een project waar vooral mijn vrienden nogal eens vertwijfeld over zijn. Mijn vrienden dank ik daarom vooral voor die broodnodige nuchterheid.

Ik heb gezegd.

Notes

1. These brochures and booklets include, for example, publications such as 'Model Marriage. A Marriage Counselling Handbook', written by the leader of the Lighthouse Chapel International Dag Heward Mills (2006); or 'Choosing a Life Partner', written by the leader of the International Central Gospel Church Mensa Otabil (2006).
2. The notion of sophistication in religious circles in Africa is also developed in a keynote lecture that I gave at the Free University (Berlin): 'Religious Sophistication; An Urban Spirit?' at the conference on: Spirits and Sentiments: Affective Trajectories of Religious Being in Urban Africa Freie Universität Berlin, May 28 to 30, 2015. Spronk (2014) discusses sophistication specifically in the context of emerging middle classes in Nairobi.
3. See Krause (2014) for the notion of amplification in Pentecostalism, especially where the faith is expected to amplify healing and the effects of biomedicine on health through prayers and other religious practices.
4. The extensive record on the study of marital relations in the anthropology of African societies include many more groundbreaking studies, including, for example, Radcliffe-Brown & Forde 1950; Comaroff 1980; Krige & Comaroff 1981; Kuper 1982; and Mann 1985.
5. Important studies on sexuality in Africa and its diversity include, in particular, Arnfred (2004) and Epprecht (2008).
6. The interesting point being that while Joel Robbins (2013) in a recent critique has argued that an anthropology of the *Good* – with an emphasis on hope, beauty and aspiration – is just beginning to develop as a counter to a dominant focus in anthropology on misery, marginalization, poverty and inequality, in fact the anthropology of romance has already been around for a number of years.
7. Publications on the *flâneurs* (Friedman 1994) and the *bluffeurs*, such as that of Newell (2012) or that of my colleague Rachel Spronk (2012) on middle-class youth in Nairobi, lend evidence to the fact that romance and its mediation through consumerism has continued to be a widespread phenomenon in many African societies with a particular historical record; an intrigue of style and beauty that has become crucial in the way modern relationships are being shaped.
8. The idolization of the other, in a romantic pursuit, point at a Christian complexity around the understanding of love; that is, the love in which there is fulfillment of God's destiny of one's personal life, in contrast to the potentiality of a lustful love in which the idolization of the other rests heavily on the drive of sexuality; i.e. a drive that informs motivation and agency as a competitor and effective replacement of the drive that in Christian thinking should be inspired by the search for God and salvation. In William Reddy's (2010) thinking, the rise of courtly love as a critique of Christianity must be understood as a form of romantic love where the possible 'defilement' through sex would not present itself; a platonic love as pure and non-sexualized as a Christian mode would want it, yet being an alternative at the same time. Reddy, however, points at a surreptitious 'agenda' in the interchange between Romance and Christianity whereby Christian depictions of

the saintly (for example of the Virgin Mary) acquired an undercurrent of romantic messages (Reddy 2010: 39); the iconography of Christianity allowed for and advertised a somewhat hidden iconography of romance; of courting couples depicted in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century books on the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for example.

9. Something Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995) have termed the rise of an “*earthly religion*.”
10. I am especially thankful to Kristine Krause for pointing this out to me.
11. The romantic novel *Lucinde* that Friedrich von Schlegel wrote in 1799 epitomized this highly revolutionary notion on the celebration of sexuality as a new romantic pursuit of harmonious relationships such as in marriage.
12. Reddy criticizes Foucault’s scholarship on sexuality as being a hindrance to understanding the power of love, as Foucault had no attention for Western Romantic loved as spiritualized eroticism (Reddy 2010: 47, 48).
13. A number of excellent studies exist that highlight these missionary constructions of sexuality and intimacy in Africa; see, for example, Bowie, Kirkwood & Ardener 1993; McClintock 1995; Erlank 2001; Stoler 1995; and Maticka-Tyndale, Tiemoko & Makinwa-Adebusoye 2007.
14. Ann Stoler (1995), interested in the colonial experience of this effort, emphasizes in her work its disciplining effect and the manner in which such teachings and experiences rather seem to reinforce and sustain unequal gender-relations between men and women; turning romance into an instrument of discipline was from a feminist perspective certainly not a liberating exercise irrespective of the effort missionaries seemed to have been making to emphasize ‘love’ in relationships.
15. See Rasing (2002) for a similar process in Zambia.
16. Important contributions to the scholarly study of this significant development in Africa have been, among others: Becker & Geissler 2009; Prince, Denis & Van Dijk 2009; Trinitapoli & Weinreb 2012; Van Dijk, Dilger, Burchardt & Rasing 2013; Beckmann, Gusman & Schroff 2014.
17. The Roman Catholic Church has also been resisting the promotion of the condom as a means to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections in Africa for many years. In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI changed and modified the Church’s position on the use of the condom (see Benagiano, Carrara, Filippi & Brosens 2011).
18. Recent literature, such as that of Hirsch & Wardlow (2006) and that of Padilla et.al. (2007), has begun to explore the global dimensions and interactions of these images and the way these are appropriated and negotiated in individual and social lives locally.
19. See also Geissler & Prince (2007) for the manner in which new forms of publicness about touching and sexuality has also been changing common notions of relationships in Kenya.
20. In 1959 Gustav Jahoda already published a social-psychology oriented article on this type of soulmate letters to the editors of newspapers in Ghana and the kind of romantic issues they appeared to discuss (Jahoda 1959). This approach was continued by Muntongi (2000) for a similar study in Kenya.

21. See, for a similar expression of embarrassment in the context of the churches in South Africa, Burchardt (2013).
22. In a romanticist understanding of religion, usually the opposition to forms of authority that are based on bureaucracy, office, statehood and so forth is emphasized, a dialectic that Weber (1930/1992) began questioning and investigating.

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