

# **From the “What” and “How” to the “Where” Class Distinction as a Matter of Place**

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## **Abstract**

Research on the symbolic boundary work of upper- and middle-class actors has placed a greater emphasis on the “what” and “how” of cultural consumption than on the “where”. However, the spaces where actors move are important: the “what” and “how” of marking distinction vary according to national class cultures and cultural fields. This article focusses on the “where” arguing that interaction settings shape actors’ boundary work. Based upon research on Argentinean Pentecostalism, the study shows that middle-class Pentecostals switch between distinction-marking and “omnivore” performances of Pentecostalism depending on the social permeability of the spaces where they move. These insights suggest that the contextual conditions in which actors present themselves as “omnivores” or “snobs” deserve more attention.

## **Introduction**

Research on the symbolic boundary work of upper- and middle-class actors has tended to emphasise either the importance of the “what” or the “how” of cultural consumption, leading to opposite conclusions. Studies focussing on cultural choices (“the what”) frequently report a shift from exclusively highbrow tastes to cultural tolerance and involvement in lowbrow consumption (Bryson, 1996; Katz-Gerro, 2002; Peterson and Kern, 1996; van Eijck, 2001; Warde et al., 2007). In contrast, contributions highlighting the importance of consumption styles (“the how”) tend to indicate the ongoing relevance of cultural distinction (Daenekindt and Roose, 2014; Holt, 1997; Jarness, 2015; Peters et al., 2017). While distinction seems to have moved from the “what” to the “how”, the “where” has received less attention. However, the socio-cultural spaces in which actors move are also important because the “what” and “how” of marking distinction vary according to national class cultures and different cultural fields (Friedman and Kuipers, 2013; Holt, 1997; Janssen et al., 2011; Lamont, 1992a). This study

engages with this debate by arguing that the specific interaction settings where upper- and middle-class actors move influence how they draw boundaries in relation to others. I also contend that religion is an appropriate field for the cultural study of class boundaries.

These arguments are illustrated through a case study on middle-class Pentecostalism in Argentina. Pentecostalism is a Christian renewal movement that emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has since then flourished in the Global South. In 2010, it was estimated that there were nearly 600 million Pentecostals worldwide (Johnson, 2013). Features frequently associated with the movement are a focus on the Holy Spirit and its blessings, spiritual practices such as speaking in tongues and faith healing, and an emotional atmosphere involving, for instance, loud singing, crying, and dancing (Anderson, 2004; Martin, 1990; Robbins, 2004). In Argentina, Pentecostalism has spread predominantly among the lowest social echelons and is therefore perceived as a mainly lower-class movement (Anderson, 2004; Freston, 1998; Mallimaci, 1999; Míguez, 2001; Saracco, 1989; Schäfer, 2010; Semán, 2004; Wynarczyk et al., 1995; Wynarczyk, 2009). Because the distinction from the lower class is fundamental to the representation of the Argentinean middle class (Adamovsky, 2009; Cueto, 2004, 2007; Cueto and Luzzi, 2008; Svampa, 2005; Tevik, 2006), middle-class actors joining the movement must cross established class boundaries. The resulting class ambiguity encourages them to redraw class boundaries within Pentecostalism by developing a distinctive style of Pentecostal church services. However, middle-class Pentecostal practices are not uniform across settings. In spaces shielded from outsiders, middle-class Pentecostals show less commitment to this distinctive style and engage in lowbrow forms of Pentecostalism. The findings suggest that actors tend to display class differences in spaces where relevant others could potentially step in to judge them and their practices, whereas in more shielded contexts, distinction becomes less important.

The article is structured as follows: I begin with a brief introduction to the debate on cultural distinction, arguing that there is a need to take into account (a) religion and (b) interactional

contexts (the “where”). The second section explains the relationship between Pentecostalism and social class in Argentina. The following two sections describe the methods and main results of the case study on Argentinean middle-class Pentecostalism. I conclude by discussing the findings and outlining potential directions for future research.

### **Distinction: A Matter of Religion and Context**

The practice of religion, like any other cultural practice, is susceptible to the drawing of class distinctions. While the cultural study of class has rarely taken religion into consideration, sociology of religion has produced numerous studies demonstrating a relationship between social class and religion (Coreno, 2002; Davidson and Pyle, 2006; Keister, 2008; Sherkat and Wilson, 1995; Smith and Faris, 2005), thereby indicating the relevance of religion in drawing class boundaries. Moreover, religion has increasingly become a matter of “free” choice; actors can choose religion, combining and practicing it along with their preferences (Davie, 2006; Stark and Finke, 2000). Because these preferences are related to the class background of actors (Sherkat and Wilson, 1995), religious affiliation and style are likely to be chosen along class lines and can constitute class markers, similar to food and clothing. Finally, studies employing Bourdieuan frameworks to study class differences in religion (Nelson, 2009; Schäfer, 2011b, 2015) find that both religious affiliation and religious practices demarcate class boundaries: distinctive religious styles reflect class aesthetics and indicate class belonging. Nevertheless, upper- and middle-class actors may also refrain from showing class differences in religion: settings that allow for more relaxed performances or even require the downplaying of class differences are likely to incite more omnivorous styles that involve lowbrow religious practices. Given that class boundaries can be drawn through religion, approaches theorizing the relationship between cultural consumption and class can also generate new insights in the study of religion. In addition to offering new avenues for analysing religious practices, it can also enrich the cultural study of class.

This study of middle-class Pentecostals in Argentina contributes to the cultural study of class by demonstrating how interactional settings influence class displays. Research on cultural omnivores has focussed on the types of practices that upper- and middle-class actors conduct, showing that being a cultural omnivore and undertaking lowbrow practices is increasingly regarded as honourable (Bennett et al., 2010). Contrasting this research, critical discussions around the omnivore-thesis indicate that the “modes of expression” (Jarness, 2015) are crucial for signalling class position, because upper- and middle-class actors engage in distinctive styles when undertaking lowbrow practices. While they may become more omnivorous in their choice of cultural practices, their style transforms these into class markers, thereby driving class distinction.

However, whether, and in what way, cultural distinctions are drawn also depends on the specific social settings in which actors move. The marking of class differences are influenced by different settings: (a) national contexts, (b) cultural domains, (c) situations of class ambiguity, and (d) interactional settings.

Upper- and middle-class signals vary across different *national contexts* (Friedman and Kuipers, 2013). In France and Argentina, it is more common to display class position through cultural sophistication than in the United States. The national or regional culture will also influence how class position is expressed. For instance, in countries with strong egalitarian values, openly disdaining others’ cultural tastes is viewed negatively (Holt, 1997; Ljunggren, 2015).

The drawing of symbolic boundaries also varies across *cultural fields* (Holt, 1997; Janssen et al., 2011): while in some domains, such as pop music and television, upper- and middle-class actors engage more freely in lowbrow consumption, in other domains such as classical music, comedy and housing, actors tend to draw symbolic boundaries (Crawford et al., 2014; Silva and Wright, 2009).

Situations of *class ambiguity* often encourage boundary work: When upper- and middle-class actors engage with lowbrow cultural forms, their class position does not automatically render the practice legitimate or honourable. Lahire, for instance, observes the cost of culturally dissonant behaviour; upper- and middle-class actors who engage in lowbrow practices often express regret and try to distance themselves from it (Lahire, 2004/2006: 634–635, 2005). Actors can also attempt to resolve this ambiguity by clarifying their class position (Hendley, 2016). These efforts involve the boundary work of creating distinctions within the lowbrow practice. For example, Peters et al. (2017) show how upper- and middle-class actors singing karaoke in the Netherlands distinguished themselves from other singers through their apparently ironic performances.

While research more frequently highlights the importance of the broader context, it only rarely considers *interactional settings*. Studies about Norwegian class culture show that middle-class actors downplay class differences in more public settings (Jarness and Friedman, 2017; Ljunggren, 2015) because they are essentially Goffmanian front regions (Goffman, 1959). While they might refrain from class displays and avoid visible snobbism, actors do not hold this in check in the less visible, private back regions.

My analysis also reveals that actors flexibly switch between distinction marking and more omnivorous performances in different interaction contexts. However, it contrasts with the aforementioned studies by showing how front-stage settings can become vital for marking class distinctions: public settings encourage class displays among middle-class Pentecostals, whereas private settings allow for the engagement in lowbrow practices.

## **Pentecostalism and Class Culture**

In Latin America, Pentecostalism originally spread among the lower classes (Anderson, 2004; Bastian, 1997; Chesnut, 1997; Freston, 1998; Lehmann, 1996). For this reason scholars

frequently saw it as a religious remedy for the impoverished populations, helping them cope with poverty-related problems (Chesnut, 1997; Mariz, 1994). The recent increase in Pentecostalism in the middle class is challenging this view. For example, scholars have noted that in Central America the so-called Neo-Pentecostalism is popular among the middle classes (Garcia-Ruiz, 2007; Schäfer, 2011a). Specific styles of Pentecostalism, that differ from those that originally attracted “the downtrodden” appeal to the middle classes in this region. Similar to the US, charismatic Christianity has been embraced by the middle classes who have been cultivating distinctive Pentecostal styles (Marti, 2008; Poloma and Green, 2010).

In Argentina, most Pentecostals can still be categorized as lower class (Míguez, 2001: 78; Semán, 2000, 2004; Wynarczyk, 2010: 19); a survey conducted in 2008 revealed that almost 80% of the Protestants interviewed did not complete secondary school (Conicet, 2008). Moreover, the national average of Pentecostals is between 8% (Mallimaci et al., 2015) and 10% (Pew Research Center, 2014), but in the slums and lower-class neighbourhoods, the proportion is as high as 20% (Esquivel et al., 2001; Semán, 2010). Given that Pentecostalism appeals most to the lower class, most churches are situated in lower-class neighbourhoods and slums and are therefore better placed to adapt to the cultural preferences of their congregations (Semán, 2000; Wynarczyk, 2009). Pentecostalism is known for its emotional church services (Chesnut, 1997; Corten, 1995; Freston, 1998; Pew Research Center, 2014; Wynarczyk et al., 1995): over the course of a service, participants are likely to pass through a wide range of emotional states channelled through everything from moments of quiet prayer to joyful singing, crying, shouting, and laughing. Speaking in tongues particularly contributes to the lively atmosphere. However, this style does not fit well with middle-class culture in Argentina. Class struggles throughout Argentina’s history have nurtured a middle-class imaginary which perceives the itself as fundamentally different from the lower class (Adamovsky, 2009); the middle class is associated with white skin colour, modernity, rationality, European background, and

civilization. Correspondingly, the lower classes are viewed as uncivilized, chaotic, lazy, superstitious, untidy, and lacking culture, education and good taste (Adamovsky, 2009; Guano, 2004). Examples of lower-class displays mentioned in previous research include: going shirtless in public, drinking beer and littering in public places, disrespecting well-administered facilities, employing brute force, and speaking frankly about one's problems in public (Tevik, 2006: 114-115; 211-214). Middle-class actors avoid displaying characteristics attributed to the lower class because these may lower their esteem in the eyes of their peers (Tevik, 2006: 218). To set themselves apart, middle class individuals cultivate a tidy, well-groomed appearance, controlled behavior, good manners and sophisticated taste. Additionally, the specific consumption patterns associated with the middle class include: dining in cozy restaurants, visiting the cinema, playing sports, driving new imported cars, employing service personnel, vacationing abroad, wearing exclusive polo sweaters, and sending the children to a private school (Tevik, 2006). Cultural capital in the form of educational training plays a crucial role, as higher education titles are extremely valued (Cueto, 2004, 2007; Svampa, 2005; Tevik, 2006: 91-92).

Frequently, Pentecostalism is subject to mocking and tends to be depicted as the religious expression of the "uncivilized" and "superstitious" "culture of poverty" (Frigerio, 1998, 2002; Semán, 2004). This marginalization contributes to the class bias of Pentecostalism: given the risk of facing stigma, middle-class actors are often reluctant to associate themselves with the movement.

## **Data and Methods**

The empirical research was conducted in Buenos Aires as part of a general study on middle-class Pentecostalism in Argentina. The investigation was carried out on two levels: the micro-level of Pentecostal church members and the meso-level of Pentecostal churches. For this

article, both levels are included in the analysis because each provides information about the different contexts that influence the prevalence of boundary work.

At the micro-level, out of a total of 44 interviews, 30 were conducted with middle-class Pentecostals and 14 with a control group of lower-class Pentecostals. The focus in this article is on the former. Interviewees were approached in churches that mostly attract the middle class and, in some cases, recommended by contacts within the field (e.g. pastors, previous interviewees). The author of this article conducted the interviews in Spanish. The interviews mostly took place in the church buildings or homes of the interviewees and usually lasted between one-and-a-half to three hours. They involved questions about their biography, their religious likes and dislikes (e.g. shouting or speaking in tongues in church services), religious practices and demographic profile. I also showed interviewees short video clips from various Pentecostal churches and asked them to share their impressions and opinions about them. Video clips were recorded by the author and captured scenes of singing, preaching, faith healing, speaking in tongues, and prayers. The audio recordings of the interviews were sent in for transcription and analysed with Atlas.ti, a software for qualitative data analysis. Preliminary coding identified interviewees' specific likes and dislikes (e.g. "dislike shouting") as well as descriptions of their own practices (e.g. "speaking in tongues"). The codes were assembled in meta-codes according to the area or aspect of the religious practice (e.g. music, sermons). A general picture emerged by analysing the frequency of various topics (e.g. "speaking in tongues") and the attitudes towards them expressed by interviewees.

For the meso-level of analysis, a total of 22 Pentecostal churches were studied. To determine whether Middle-Class Pentecostal Churches (MCCs) exhibit particular religious styles, and whether these are distinct from those practiced in other churches, I selected 12 churches that attracted mostly middle-class adherents and 10 which appealed more to lower-class Pentecostals. The study of churches entailed the observation of their infrastructures, discourses,

and practices. For this article, the most important method of data collection was participant observation in church services, which included observing the activities of pastors and audiences during the church service, determining which types of practices (e.g. speaking in tongues) were conducted, and examining how these were performed (e.g. style of singing). Observations were written down in field notes. In addition, I conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 10 pastors. These interviews included questions about the history and social composition of the church, church activities (groups, social projects etc.), religious practices, and how they compare with other Pentecostal churches. The field notes and the transcripts from interviews with pastors were also analysed using Atlas.ti, determining the specific style of MCC services. In the interest of preserving anonymity, all interviewees' names have been changed.

## **Findings**

### **Distinction in Middle Class Church Services**

Middle-class Pentecostals have to deal with their class ambiguity. They undertake this by evolving a distinctive style within Pentecostalism that signals their class position. This style becomes manifest in their church services and contrasts the liveliness of lower-class churches. In my visits to lower-class churches, the expressiveness of Pentecostalism was clear to see, as described in the following field observations:

Performing the song “Dejalo que se mueva, dejalo que se mueva, el espiritu de Dios!” in the church El Redentor, located in a slum, the singer uses a lot of gestures and moves the pulpit up and down like a rock singer. The song gets faster and louder with each refrain. During the refrain the singer starts to jump and suddenly dances with the pastor on the pulpit. A bunch of elderly ladies run to a free space in front of the pulpit in order to dance there. At the end of the song participants applauded and called out loudly in jubilation. The singer shouted into the microphone while music kept

playing “Yes Lord! The Spirit of God is moving this night! The Spirit of God is moving this night! Umbabababababa [speaking in tongues] Uuhhhhhuuuhhhhh! Yes Lord! Yes Lord! (...)” The audience exalt loudly and many participants raise pieces of cloth and swing them around like flags.

Middle-class church services rarely exhibit such expressive features, as the following observation illustrates.

While performing the song “Canta al Señor toda la creación” by Danilo Montero in Iglesia del Libertador, the singer, a young man dressed in casual clothing, stands at the pulpit and sings in a calm voice while he sways slowly to the rhythm. The vast majority of audience sits in their places and quietly listens to the music. Only a few participants stand up and sing. Some among them cautiously raise an arm while singing. The atmosphere appears highly controlled and to be almost stiff.

Emphasizing self-control rather than ecstatic spiritual experiences, MCC services show significantly lower levels of expressivity than other Pentecostal churches. Expressive spiritual practices are absent while singing and preaching are undertaken in a calm atmosphere. MCCs have evolved a style that is more adapted to the representations of the Argentinean middle class: avoiding spiritual practices and emotional outbursts, Pentecostalism becomes more rational, ordered, and controlled. The desire to create a more socially-appropriate style of Pentecostalism is illustrated by middle-class interviewees who mention that they want to bring non-Pentecostal peers to church services without feeling embarrassed. For them, the potential visibility of inappropriate, spiritual practices is a major problem. Thus, watching videos of Pentecostal practices in lower class churches, Camila and Laura state:

It annoys me. Because if someone from outside comes in, he will say “they are mad” and he would be right. (Laura)

You can’t bring anyone here, like a colleague or someone you are dating, because they would say to you: ‘Everyone is loony here. They are all crazy. What is this?’ Do you know what I mean? (Camila)

The possibility of non-Pentecostal visitors from the same class transforms the church service into an event needing careful management. Worried that spiritual manifestations and excessive levels of expressiveness (e.g. dancing in Spirit) could disturb their members and be judged as “mad” by outsiders, MCCs establish boundaries for acceptable expression. Pastors closely manage the level of expressivity, discouraging participants from conducting “disturbing” spiritual manifestations and in some cases even withdrawing them from the service.

As middle-class Pentecostals cultivate a distinct style of Pentecostalism, it is not the practice of Pentecostalism per se, but specific practices associated with it (e.g. exorcisms in church services) that become associated with class. In other words, it is not just the cultural practice but also the style in which it is practiced that mark a person's class (Jarness, 2015; Peters et al., 2017). Drawing symbolic boundaries that define a distinctive style when undertaking “lowbrow” practices, allows upper-middle-class actors to mark their status within these lowbrow practices. This boundary drawing does not take place in a cultural vacuum, as Lamont (1992b) points out, but draws on national repertoires of middle class symbols: these include education, rationality, civility and self-control.

### **Middle-Class Pentecostals Engaging in Lowbrow Pentecostalism**

Actors are not always concerned with class propriety. In specific situations, middle-class actors show more openness to other Pentecostal styles. Distinction becomes less of a concern in the

following contexts: the individual private sphere; participation in lower-class church services; isolated spheres in middle-class churches; and shielded middle-class church services.

Although middle-class Pentecostals remove potentially shameful spiritual practices from their church services, they do not deny the importance of these practices, conducting them in private instead. Here they avoid the censure of outsiders. Several interviewees mentioned that they only practice glossolalia in private:

Interviewer: Do you sometimes speak in tongues during the church services?

Javier: No. I speak in tongues when I pray alone, in my room or alone.

Interviewer: But not in the church?

Javier: I don't like it.

Interviewer: Do you sometimes speak in tongues?

Luis: Yes

Interviewer: During the church service?

Luis: No, I do it in a private way or in a silent way.

Middle-class actors do not always have to seek solitude when they wish to engage in the more extroverted practices of their religion. Isabela, for instance, mentions that she engages in a more expressive style in the “anexos” (branches) of her church which are located in the poor suburbs of Buenos Aires. She describes the church services in the branches in the following way:

Isabela: These are very cheerful church services with a lot of joy where the congregation jumps, dances, claps, no one stays with their hands in their pockets. To us, my husband and me, something special is happening: this enthusiasm, we experience it in the anexos when we go to preach there, [but] it does not exist in the main church, in the mother church. We feel good in our church, but very good when we go to the anexos because of the freedom of expression of the Holy Spirit. We come back with recharged batteries, we fully enjoy it.

Interviewer: What do you enjoy?

Isabela: Being able to praise and worship God in freedom, being able, if I want, to jump, clap, dance, to do it in freedom, and the Spirit and full of the Lord's joy.

Interviewer: Do you do this in your congregation?

Isabela: No.

Interviewer: And what happens if you were to do it in your congregation?

Isabela: If I do it, I don't care what the others say, but I notice that I do not end up expressing myself in the way in which I do it when I go to the anexos, I do it only partly.

Isabela feels free to engage in style of Pentecostalism that she does not conduct in her own middle-class church. Although she declares that she does not care about what others would say, she does not worship God in her middle-class congregation in the same manner as in the anexos. The anexos provides a space to engage in a style of worship that she personally prefers but does not undertake in the presence of her fellow middle-class congregants. However, in lower-class churches, there are also specific circumstances in which it becomes more difficult to express oneself freely. On several occasions, I accompanied middle-class Pentecostals to lower-class church services where they usually showed low levels of engagement. For example, Javier, a middle-class Pentecostal attending a lower-class church, felt a strong need to distance himself

from his congregation by showing little commitment to the expressive practices conducted during the church service. In an interview, he explained why: “the slum person doesn’t have the same level of culture that we do.” My presence as a middle-class European actor who is not a Pentecostal appeared to inhibit his engagement in the more expressive forms of worship.

When the more feverish practices do take place in middle-class churches, they are conducted outside of church services so that they are not visible to outsiders. For example:

Interviewer: Do you conduct deliverances?

Pastor Manuel: Yes, a lot.

Interviewer: During church services?

Pastor Manuel: No, we take them out. If something happens we take the person out and we do it in the office. Not visible.

If it is deliverance from demons, we do it outside, I have never seen a deliverance in the church service, always outside. Sometimes it can happen that when we are praying in the pulpit when we are finishing the church service and okay, a woman is unwell and maybe she starts crying and shouting, but the people are already leaving. When it is during the church service, we take her out, we don’t interrupt the service because, first, there are new ones that are scandalized by this, second, there are people who are already part of the church but may get frightened (...) (Pastor Victor)

In the case of spiritual manifestations, the manifesting participants are removed from the church service to avoid alarming outsiders or new members of the church. Middle-class pastor Oscar explains that his congregation conducts exorcisms after the church services or privately, seeking to maintain a “certain image” during the church services:

Interviewer: Do you undertake deliverance?

Pastor Oscar: Yes, but in private spaces. Rather than deliverance, we call it inner healing. (...) If we conduct religious practices where we think people may fall down or manifest the Spirit in some way, we do it after the service, not during the service. This is to prevent projecting a certain image to people who are not part of the congregation.

Instead of “deliverance” or “exorcism”, they prefer the less aggressive-sounding term “inner healing.” The church conducts these practices in private spaces rather than during the church service, to keep them invisible to those who are not members of the congregations. MCCs create spaces where members can more freely engage in spiritual practices that could otherwise be perceived as inappropriate. In a similar vein, MCCs offer spiritual retreats where members assemble for a weekend in a remote location outside the city.<sup>1</sup> Pedro describes these surroundings as emotionally more intense than church services:

Interviewer: And what are the spiritual retreats?

Pedro: These are encounters between men where we stay for a weekend in a place away from the city where we have speeches, where we have deep moments of approaching God, where there is deliverance, where there is ministering for those who need healing, being delivered from many things, you share with your friends much about God, you get to know many things. In my case, these meetings helped me a lot. (...) there are people who are depressed that faint, lose consciousness, start trembling, or start laughing. In my case, I start crying and do not stop crying, these types of things.

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from church services, Pentecostal churches usually offer different groups for members. The groups are often divided along gender and age. As such, there will be, for instance, groups for male adults or the female youth. These groups may organize spiritual retreats or other activities in which they stay within the same age- and gender-group.

Pedro regards these spiritual workshops positively and states that they helped him. While some MCCs create separate spaces which offer more liberty of expression to their members, one MCC offered this space directly in its church service.

Doormen at the entrance welcome members and ask strangers like me about their business with the church. After speaking to several people in charge of the church, introducing myself to the main pastor, and conducting a long interview with one of the co-pastors in one of the offices located upstairs in the church building, I gain access to its church services. At the end of this interview, we hear noises from below. The co-pastor invites me to accompany him downstairs where several members are queueing at the pulpit to get the microphone while others gather around the pulpit. Those with the microphone declare their problems and proclaim their wishes to God, while the band provides quiet accompaniment, becoming more forceful when the speaker turns more emotional. Some of the speakers shout and cry while members around the pulpit raise their arms pray loudly, speak in tongues, or cry. This highly expressive and emotional atmosphere during the church services strongly contrasts other MCCs. These sessions occasionally take place at the beginning of the church services. As the co-pastor tells me, members should feel free to engage in these practices. The doormen and the exclusivity of this congregation facilitate this liberty.

While class sensibilities are more important when it comes to the visible practice of religion, shielded spaces—similar to Goffmanian back regions (Goffman, 1959)—illustrate that class does not completely determine the practice of religion. Rather, they have an important, but limited impact, diminishing in influence in the more protected and less visible spaces. Social shielding from outsiders enables these middle-class Pentecostals to engage in lowbrow forms of Pentecostalism: since other middle-class actors cannot easily step in there is no need to negotiate the value of their practice. Contrasting the assumption that distinction has gone

underground (Holt, 1997), this study shows that the omnivorous tendencies of middle-class actors are going underground.

### **Conscious Class Distinction Strategies?**

Bourdieu points out that class sensibilities are seldom conscious (Bourdieu, 1979). Often, they act as automatic scripts that guide the behaviour of actors. However, the switching between highbrow styles of Pentecostalism in church services and the more omnivorous styles in protected spaces raises the question of how conscious middle-class Pentecostals are about the role of class.

In their everyday religious practice, middle-class Pentecostals appear to switch mechanically between styles of Pentecostalism depending on the contexts. They have learned from their experiences in MCCs what type of expressions are regarded as legitimate in these middle-class contexts and apply these scripts accordingly.

However, when reflecting on their own style as well as that of others, middle-class Pentecostals show some awareness of the role of class. One interviewee referred to the lack of cultural capital and the material deprivation among those practicing “crazy” forms of Pentecostalism in their church services:

(...) it seems crazy to me. (...) But notice that all the church's walls are falling apart, meaning, it's in a poor neighbourhood, where unfortunately, because of a lack of education, anything can happen.

(Interview Marta)

When it comes to the shielding of specific practices from outsiders' views, middle-class pastors are also aware of their desire to project "a certain image to people who are not part of the congregation." (Pastor Oscar). The ambiguity of their class position—the experience of middle class peers mocking their religion and the negative depictions of Pentecostalism in the mass media—may explain this awareness. Many middle-class interviewees report negative experiences with their social environment after their conversion and, in some cases, were even excluded from their peer-groups. Nevertheless, middle-class Pentecostals do not portray their style of practicing Pentecostalism as an outcome of class struggles or as a specifically middle-class style. For them it is rather a question of finding the appropriate cultural expression, thereby accommodating Pentecostalism to the sensibilities of non-Pentecostal peers.

Rather than justifying the Pentecostal style on the basis of social class, some interviewees claim that the MCC style is more faithful to the Holy Scripture:

100% word of God that is the important thing, if you look today at the Pentecostal groups where they start to deviate, when they start to move away from the Word. (Miguel)

Judging Pentecostal styles according to how well they align with "biblical truth" renders the class struggle within Pentecostalism invisible; the practices of the "highbrow" style are presented as the enactment of God's will. Class struggles are translated into the logic of the field where they become struggles about religious truth.

However, these again become more visible when middle-class Pentecostals highlight the importance of education for appreciating the Holy Scripture, thereby playing out their own cultural capital and pointing to the lack of education among lower class Pentecostals.

Interviewer: What things do you like in your current church?

Carlos: The things that I like are that it is a church of the holy doctrine, with a strong training, a real training, there is no distortion in the preaching. Those who preach have proven bible studies. I could only start preaching once I finished the seminary after a little more than five years.

Though related to cultural capital, what is described here as class matter rather appears as a question of biblical truth and is, therefore, barely conscious: biblical truth can only be reached via education. Those who have passed through educational training will have the sight to really appreciate the Holy Scripture and, therefore, undertake a practice of Pentecostalism that matches with the Holy Scripture. This reasoning obstructs the perception of differences between the religious styles of lower and middle-class churches as a matter of class tastes. Instead, it converts them into boundaries of actors who due to their education can perceive the biblical truth and those who cannot.

## **Conclusion**

By exploring the contextual settings in which middle-class Pentecostals in Argentina draw symbolic boundaries through their practices, I have shown that the boundary work depends on the interactional contexts in which actors move. While socially permeable spaces (i.e. middle-class church services) encourage these actors to perform a distinctive style of Pentecostalism, they refrain from this class-marking boundary work when shielded from outsiders. Fearing the entrance of non-Pentecostal peers who could judge their practices, middle-class Pentecostals withdraw stigmatizing lowbrow practices from church services and perform a distinctive style of Pentecostalism that differs from mass Pentecostalism and projects a “certain image” towards outsiders.

Research indicates that Pentecostalism is increasingly reaching the middle class and stipulates that the characteristics of Pentecostalism itself (e.g. ethics of hard work) contribute to this upward social mobility (Berger, 2010; Freeman, 2012). Yet, given that the movement fits poorly with middle class culture, an affiliation with the movement can damage the acceptance in middle class networks and thereby limit the upward mobility. Therefore, to improve their standing in these circles, middle-class Pentecostals are likely to adjust visible performances of their religious practice to conform with middle-class cultural expectations.

This study illustrates how class differences matter in religion and thereby exemplifies in what way research on religion can add to the ongoing debates on the culture-class nexus.

It shows that the “modes of consumption” (Jarness, 2015) are not always important for marking class positions. Under specific circumstances, actors refrain from performing distinctive styles. Preventing relevant outsiders from entering spaces where performances take place creates new conditions: actors feel free to engage in lowbrow practices.

Interestingly, the results from this study contrast two other studies from Norway that also refer to interaction settings: here, the fear of anti-elitist feelings *from below* (not pressure from class peers) leads middle class actors to control their class displays and to downplay class differences in *public front-region situations* (not in the shielded sphere) (Jarness and Friedman, 2017; Ljunggren, 2015). These differences can be explained by the interplay between the national context and the interactional setting. How class-differences are played out—or effectively downplayed—in specific interaction settings, depends on the broader context in which the given practices are embedded: As Goffmann (Goffman, 1959) has highlighted, the “official values” of the given (national) cultural context are important in what finally becomes the front-stage performance. While in other socio-geographical contexts such as Norway, engagement in lowbrow culture is labelled as “egalitarian”, “honourable” (Bennett et al., 2010), or “authentic” (Hahl et al., 2017), in Argentina, marking the difference to the “popular masses” is fundamental.

In the latter, the front region becomes the place to avoid identification with the lower class, whereas in the former, the front region encourages actors to perform egalitarian values and downplay class differences.

The comparison with the Norwegian cases shows how national contexts and interactional settings play into each other and produce specific contextual settings for the drawing of class distinctions. The interplay of contextual factors leads to different displays of class difference. In order to understand these displays, the “where” is crucial, as it determines whether and how actors draw class distinctions.

The impact of contextual factors on displays of class differences calls into question the categories of “snob” and “omnivores” that researchers often use (Bryson, 1996; Jaeger and Katz-Gerro, 2010; Katz-Gerro, 2002; Peterson and Kern, 1996; van Eijck, 2001; Warde et al., 2007). Depending on the settings in which they move, actors switch between distinction-marking and omnivorous performances of the same cultural practice. To understand why actors draw boundaries, we must pay more attention to the surrounding conditions. While some contexts allow more space to engage in lowbrow practices—or may even require actors to present themselves as omnivores—others provoke the drawing of cultural distinctions.

Instead of essentializing “middle-class tastes” or describing actors as “snobs” or “omnivores” (Janssen et al., 2011; Peterson and Kern, 1996; van Eijck, 2001), researchers will have to take into account the situations in which actors present themselves as “omnivores” or “snobs”. In order to determine which situations nurture specific types of boundary drawing, there is a need for comparative research on actors’ boundary work under different conditions. While research in the ongoing debate on boundary work often draws on interviews, multi-method research combining interviews, participant observations, and shadowing could help to uncover how drawing changes according to the social context.

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