TOW CENTER, COLUMBIA JOURNALISM SCHOOL

Tow Tea Takeaway: The Atlas of Pentecostalism

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On Feb. 27, the Tow center hosted a Tow tea on the Atlas of Pentecostalism, a project by Columbia alum Bregtje van der Haak. The Atlas of Pentecostalism traces the global growth of Pentecostalism, the most successful brand of Christianity today through big data and visual information – such as interactive maps, videos and powerful images.

Ann Cooper, Professor at the Columbia journalism school discussed the growth of Pentecostalism with Dutch journalist Van Der Haak, who works with information designer Richard Vijgen on this project.

Van Der Haak explained how the project was created, how data was gathered.

She started by showing a video of the international headquarters of the Winner's Chapel, which is based in Lagos. The church, the headquarter of Pentacostalism, seats around 48,000 people and their monthly meeting at Lagos has 500,000 visitors, she said.

There is stupendous growth, she concluded.

"Pentecostalism is growing at the rate of 35,000 people who are being baptized everyday."

She explained research on this project wasn't easy. After scouring through self-help books, buildings, and looking at bibles – old and new, Van Der Haak and Vijgen faced another problem.

They were confounded by how to chart faith. They could use maps to show growth, but they could not chart how people felt.

"We realized a lot of this was about feeling, so we stared shooting videos," she said.

In addition to videos and charts, the project is also available in an eBook or a physical copy . But unlike a regular book, this book expands and changes everyday through crowdsourcing.

"The book now has 200 pages, but like Pentecostalism, it may one day be too big to print," she said.

To journalists in the group, Van Der Haak had one piece of advice.She said the most interesting part of her project was working with a designer and using a network to create this project.

We should probably not try to do it all alone," she said.

To learn more about this project, visit the website: http://www.atlasofpentecostalism.net/

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