Parenting, Identity and Children's Spirituality in Ethiopian Orthodox Migrant Households in South Africa

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Abstract

During the last two decades, transnational approaches to migration have drawn attention to the multiplicity of simultaneous relationships migrants have, and sustain, with their families and friends in their homeland through remittances, culture, politics and religion. Similarly, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo community in South Africa navigate multiple relations with their home country as they seek to nurture the spirituality of children and young people. Based on ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews, conducted with this community, between January 2016 and September 2017, this article explores the challenges faced by Ethiopian migrant parents in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa and the strategies they employ to facilitate their children's spirituality and cultural identities in the diaspora. Our focus on households who are members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church makes visible how migrant parents' scaffold their children's religious, cultural and social identity. In this regard, the church, in concert with family and cultural community, emerged as a primary locus of religion and identity for Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church migrants. The study revealed that social isolation, cultural and linguistic challenges are key issues faced by migrant parents in developing their children's religious, cultural and social identities. The study demonstrates that a range of transnational religio-cultural strategies and resources are used to mitigate such challenges, and migrant parents utilise such resources in their efforts to help their children to navigate religious and social relations.

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Introduction

Human migration has been a constant phenomenon throughout history, as people have moved across borders for economic, political and personal reasons, and in the process produced a range of transnational networks and relations (Jackson & Passarelli 2016; Glick Schiller 2005). It is only during recent decades that scholars have begun to theorise about human migration as a field of inquiry (Vertovec 2009; Glick-Schiller 2005; Levitt 2003). Since migration was historically imagined in terms of the movement of single persons, generally men, there has been limited research focussing on families, women and children. In general, this research focussed on women and children as affiliates or companions (Mahler & Pessar 2001), and was concerned with living arrangements, remittances and economic autonomy, and childcare (Pessar 2005). Although migration research on children and young people, tended to focus on intergenerational tensions in migrant communities, or on children left behind in their homeland, there has been an increase in scholarly research on the experiences of parents, on children and youth in migrant households, and how these are gendered (Levitt & Jaworsky 2007).

With respect to religion and migration, research suggests that migrants tend to take their religion with them, and their religion plays a role in enabling them to construct new lives, linking their homeland and country of settlement (Adogame & Spickard 2010; Hüwelmeier & Krauze 2010; Levitt 2007). These studies show that migrants frequently use religion and religious institutions to retain connections to their homelands, maintain their identity and develop new practices of transnational belonging. Levitt (2007) suggests that 'transnationally-lived' religion becomes central to the organisation and meaning of migrants' lived realities and faith, and thus becomes a crucial part of their sense of identities and belonging.

In this article, we note that although the immigration of Ethiopians to South Africa has largely occurred during the last two decades, the number of Ethiopians migrating to South Africa has been increasing (Tesfaye 2017). The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo (EOT) faith community is a growing community, established in South Africa (Landau 2005; Tesfaye 2017), with organised concentrations in larger metropolitan cities, including Johannesburg,

Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The EOT migrants in South Africa, like their counterparts in the United States of America (USA) and in other countries, find that their orthodox faith does not readily facilitate incorporation into other Christian denominations, or Orthodox churches (Tesfaye 2016). After migration to the USA, South Africa and the Middle East are significant migration destinations for Ethiopians (Selema & Cochrane 2019). The relatively small size of the EOT migrant community, numbered at approximately 16 900 in South Africa in 2011 (Ghebreyohannes 2014), adds to a sense of social isolation and cultural alienation in South Africa. Coupled with the absence of formal Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) religious institutions and structures in South Africa, through which to mediate religious development (Tesfaye 2016; Engedayehu 2013), these issues pose critical challenges for the EOT migrants and, potentially, negatively impact on their spiritual and socio-cultural lives.

These challenges make it even more necessary for this community to maintain vital links to family, cultural and faith leaders in Ethiopia. In this article, based on ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews, we specifically explore how parents in EOTC households in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal Province, access, utilise and activate various cultural remittances in an effort to mediate their children's social, cultural and religious identities in South Africa.

EOTC Diaspora, Culture and Beliefs

In order to fully appreciate the unique social and religious challenges faced by EOT parents, we offer a brief survey of the EOTC diaspora and migration, parenting, and children's spirituality.

Diaspora and Migration

The EOTC was founded in Ethiopia in the 4th century (Tesfaye 2016; Chaillot 2002) and historically, the EOTC was defined as the state church of Ethiopia (Getahun 2006). Its teaching largely dominated the life of Ethiopian people (Gitore 2012; Tesfaye 2016: 12). In the text, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the Diaspora*, Engedayehu (2013) not only maps the movement of the EOTC from Ethiopia across the world, but also highlights the religious and political tensions within the church, both in Ethiopia and the

diaspora. Drawing attention to the two EOTC Synods, one in Ethiopia and one in North America, Engedayehu (2013) highlights the negative impact of competing religious centres on the religious development of the EOTC diaspora.

Furthermore, Getahun (2006), in *The History of Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in America, 1900-2000*, highlights that Ethiopian migrants in America would often attend Russian, Greek and Armenian Orthodox churches, particularly when seeking baptism for their babies. However, these churches were not able to provide many Ethiopians with the spiritual guidance or cultural and linguistic connection they longed for (Getahun 2006).

Within the South African context, the leading scholar and historian of EOTC migration, Tesfaye suggests that Ethiopian immigration and settlement in South Africa is frustrated by institutional and social hostility toward migrants (Tesfaye 2017). While he concedes that EOTC diasporic communities are prone to isolating within the host context, three distinctive religio-cultural institutions are highlighted: *equb*, *iddur*, and *mahbar* – voluntary associations through which members of the EOTC community provide money, social security and spiritual commitment to new migrants who need support, and who will at another future point, similarly provide support to others:

> all three practices are linked to different aspects of Ethiopians' daily life, their commonality is that they foster bonding, bridging and linking social capital among the members of each of these three groups for what has been described as 'mutual benefit' and societal stability (Tesfaye 2017: 125).

Although, Getahun (2006) and Engedayehu (2013) highlighted various challenges that Ethiopian Orthodox migrants experience, it is Engedayehu who specifically noted that finding places of worship may become the dominant preoccupation of these migrants. According to Tesfaye (2016), pastoral care through EOTC religio-cultural practices forms an important part of the endeavours of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches in the diaspora, as this forms one of the primary social institutions linking the migrant community to their country of origin. The general lack of access to formal religious structures in much of the diaspora, has led Engedayehu (2013) to argue that informal EOTCs are the most indispensable community-oriented

organisations, not only due to their social and spiritual significance to migrants, but also because these churches offer important support services to new migrants (Tesfaye 2017).

Parenting and Migrant Households

Historically, researchers have tended to regard children as an 'appendix to transnational family mobility' (Emond & Essar 2015:100), despite the fact that family commitments and attachments have emerged as a key factor in determining migration and return migration (Carling *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, Carling *et al.* (2015) concluded that when returning to their homeland is not an option for migrants, 'active transnationalism' becomes crucial to the maintenance of a sense of belonging and transferring this idea and expectation to the next generation. In the book on migrant religiosity, *Networks, Homes or Congregations*, Spickard (2005) argues that by and large, the expectation amongst migrant parents is that they will only spend a limited time in their country of settlement, and that they harbour an expectation that their children will maintain a connection to their homeland, by spending part of their schooling there, through religious formation, or through work (Spickard 2005).

Elsewhere, McPhail (2019) points out that children from households where the parents identify with two different religions tend to be less religious than those households where parents attend the same religious services, thus reinforcing the notion that children learn religion by imitating the behaviour modelled by their parents. While Smit (2015), in *Trying to Make South Africa My Home*, identified employment, access to schooling, social networks and language acquisition as some of the key challenges affecting the mobility of migrant families, Petts (2019) suggests that migrant families often incorporate religion as a way of finding meaning in family relationships insofar as family routines serve as the primary source of religious socialisation.

Language, Culture and Religion among Young Migrants

As asserted previously, while there has been much research conducted within the field of transnationalism and religion over the past several decades, there has been relatively little research conducted on children and adolescents using a transnational lens. Despite this seeming paucity, Levitt and Jaworsky (2007)

suggest that in the context of migrant households, inherited religion can be viewed as a 'primary source of identity.' With respect to the development of children's spirituality, Benson *et al.* (2003) contend that the spiritual and religious beliefs of children do not necessarily require engagement in religious practices, while Grajczonek (2011) asserts that a child or young person's innate spirituality is the most appropriate starting point for their religious education. Taking a different view, Hay & Nye (2006) argued that the spirituality and spiritual development of young children should take preference over their religious development. Despite their differences, these scholars agree that identity and a sense of belonging are enhanced by children's spirituality (Grajczonek 2011; Hay & Nye 2006; Coles 1990). Although Petts argues that research on 'the intersection of religion and family life is not as extensive as one might expect, given the broad societal importance of these two social institutions' (2019: 1), there is increasingly valuable research done on the role of schools and religious institutions in shaping children's identity and spirituality (Grajczonek 2011; Hyde 2008; Roux 2006; Nesbitt 2000).

In their research on parenthood among migrants, Merry *et al.* (2017: 10), found that 'transmitting language, culture, values and religion was not only described as a form of building capital (social, economic, cultural), keeping children safe (by being strict), and maintaining an identity for families but also perceived as a source of pride, strength and coping.'

Several scholars thus conclude that, like religion, language emerged as a key factor which affects the identity, parenting and the maintenance of ties to migrant homelands (Merry *et al.* 2017; Regan *et al.* 2015; Nesbitt 2000). For example, Nesbitt's research into the religious lives of Sikh children in Coventry (United Kingdom), suggests that for migrant parents, their children's inability to speak their mother tongue, Punjabi, leaves those migrant parents with feelings of inadequacy in passing on their religious and cultural tradition. In addition, Nesbitt also found that children who were engaged in studies in Punjabi, were frustrated by their parents' illiteracy and inability to assist them in learning to read and write in their mother tongue, leading to a disconnection between the parents and the children (Nesbitt 2000:49).

This short review suggests that children, especially those in migrant faith communities like the EOTC, variously benefit from the spiritual development facilitated by their families and faith communities, and, while there has been considerable research regarding the significance of the spiritual development of children within the context of schools and education pro-

grammes, more research is required on the role of religion in nurturing social and religious identities of children within migrant communities. It is precisely this intersection of religion, language and spirituality in EOTC households that we will explore below, identifying the resources and strategies migrant parents use to mitigate social and cultural alienation among EOT children and young people in South Africa.

Methodology

This article draws on ethnographic research conducted between January 2016 and September 2017, on EOTC households in the cities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. The theoretical framework that informed the analysis was primarily transnationalism, as it provides a nuanced analysis of migrants' lived experiences and of migration and is regarded as a suitably thorough phenomenological approach (Vertovec 2009). Unlike traditional approaches to migration, which tend to focus on issues of dislocation and assimilation, transnationalism examines the complex ways in which migrants forge simultaneous relationship in their country of settlement as well as with their country of origin (Levitt & Jaworsky 2007; Glick Schiller 2013). A secondary theoretical domain was spirituality, as supported by several scholars (Hay & Nye 2006; Roux 2006; Merry *et al*. 2017), who suggest that spirituality is intrinsic to all humans and a resource for therapeutic practice, resilience, and children's psycho-social development. Although the overall research project sought to interrogate the spiritual development of children in migrant households, in this article, the primary focus was on parenting and how migrant parents help their children navigate issues of identity and spirituality.

During data collection, extended periods were spent with six self-confessed EOTC families residing either in Durban or Pietermaritzburg in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. The sample included migrant households that had been resident in South Africa for more than two years, had children between the ages of three and sixteen years and were members of the EOTC. The research participants were the adult members of the household, who were parents and also, in some instances, Sunday school teachers and/or religious leaders. This age-band of the children being parented was selected because research has shown that this is a critical age for the religious development of children (Cavalletti 1993; Coles 1990).

The process of data collection included observation in the form of a 'go-along' ethnographic study, a self-administered questionnaire completed by parents and guardians, followed by in-depth, semi-structured interviews, once a relationship of trust had been established with the participants. A 'go-along' ethnography was used because it allowed the researcher to accompany the participants, as they went about their day-to-day activities (Kusenbach 2003). This multi-sited ethnography principally involved moving with or following the participants about their home, shopping, taking children to school and going to church.

One adult from each household was asked to complete a questionnaire. To build a view of the migrant's engagement with religion, the importance and frequency of attending church services and the faith practices of the various members of the households were measured. Data collection was concluded with an in-depth, semi-structured interview with one adult or guardian from each household. This was followed by a sustained thematic analysis of the data collected drawing on the work of Clarke and Braun (2013).

This combination of data collection practices and observations were recorded in a field journal to add texture and detail about the social and religious lives of the migrant parents who participated in the study. The methodology allowed for the following to be explored: (1) the importance of religion and spirituality in the EOTC migrant households; (2) the role of EOTC faith community and religious workers; and (3) faith practices of EOTC migrant households – as resources for mediating the religious and social identity of the migrant children.

Parenting, Identity and Children's Spirituality in Ethiopian Orthodox Migrant Households

The consensus among participating parents was that the development of migrant children's religious and spiritual identity plays an important role in helping them manage their social and religious identity. The inseparability of identity as Ethiopians and EOT Christians emerged as pivotal for all participants in the study. Facilitating the religious and spiritual development of their child/children from a young age, as a means of transmitting knowledge about their identity, culture, heritage, tradition, values and Church teaching, was regarded as an integral part of the parents' identity as Orthodox Tewahedo Christians. For migrant parents, the key issues which emerged from the study

with respect to the identity and the spirituality of their children were: (a) issues of language; (b) staying connected to Ethiopia as home; and (c) church and spirituality.

(*a) Amharic Language*

Drawing on the work of Nesbitt (2000), we noted above that language acquisition, whether mother tongue or local language, in the place of settlement, can frustrate the relationship between migrant parents and their children. While mother tongue competency is generally important in migrant communities, here the ability to converse in and understand Amharic is fundamental to their EOT identity. As such language transmission emerged as a critical component of Ethiopian religious and cultural identity. Children's ability to speak Amharic was highlighted as fundamental by all the research participants, not only as the vernacular language of the community, but also because it is integral to the liturgical and religious life in the EOTC.

> Because an Ethiopian Orthodox Church is the one [which] keeps everything, especially, because of the language, Amharic and the alphabet that we are using [we use], is a church language, so there is no way you can separate them (Rediet Interview 4 May 2017).

For this parent, the EOTC, as the guardian of Amharic, is viewed as the repository for everything Ethiopian – religious, historical and cultural. In this context, as elsewhere, language acquisition and linguistic abilities are multi-faceted phenomena (Nesbitt 2000). While on the one hand, Amharic competencies can facilitate participation and incorporation in the EOTC religious and spiritual life, poor Amharic linguistic ability may result in alienation from the church community (Getahun 2006). It also has significant implications for communication and empathy between parents and their children. Although the ability to communicate in English may facilitate children becoming integrated into South African social life (Confait 2017), it may undermine children's appreciation for their mother tongue. Thus, the importance of Amharic for integration into and being part of the EOTC community and, particularly in the church, was articulated by several parents.

> … you know when they [parents] came here they [didn't] speak English and they were very frustrated 'How are they going to commu-

> nicate with other kids?' so whatever material they have, by all means, they [the parents] impose English and [the children] end up hating or forgetting Amharic (Rediet Interview 4 May 2017).

> … the indigenous language Amharic, is very, very important because when the kids grow up or when they are approaching puberty age, how are you going to give them advice in English as an Ethiopian parent coming from the [a] conservative [background]. There are many things that we can support [them with and] tell them, [but] because of language [deficiencies] you cannot communicate (Rediet Interview 4 May 2017).

Research confirms what these parents highlighted, insofar as transmitting language, culture, values and religion not only shapes the identity of the family, but also facilitates resilience within migrant families. In this regard, several parents expressed a concern that the language barrier may lead to a loss of connection between the parents and the children, therefore limiting the parent's ability bolster their children's social resilience. Nevertheless, while for EOTC parents, Amharic may be a source of identity, a connection to Ethiopia and to the religious archive for their children, proficiency in English is viewed as a resource for translation and acceptance into the host culture (Confait 2017). In the context of South Africa, with its high degree of hostility towards African migrants (Landau 2005), some parents reported that their children may be reluctant to speak Amharic as it makes them a 'scapegoat' for the social tensions in South Africa.

> Otherwise, they are happy, but they feel there is something missing and they [blame] the Amharic (Yenu Interview 23 May 2017).

What emerged from the research is that Ethiopian migrant parents and guardians use various strategies to mitigate their concerns about language. Some parents seek to actively encourage multilingual strategies through language practice and exchange within the household. These include teaching both languages to children from a young age to facilitate local integration, as well instilling pride in their Ethiopian identity:

> in fact, when he is talking to us, he prefers Amharic. When he's with

> his colleagues, his classmates, he just switches to English. Some of his friends sometimes come home, so we will speak with them in English and then [when] he addresses us, it will be in Amharic. He easily switches between the languages (Zelalem Interview 11 June 2017).

In other households, the focus is on language as a means of maintaining of ties to Ethiopia, as their homeland (Merry *et al.* 2017; Regan *et al.* 2015). As such transmission of the migrant's home language are viewed as central to migrant children's identity formation (Regan *et al.* 2015). In these EOT Christian households, parents reported a deliberate privileging of Amharic over English as a way to connect children with their faith and family.

> If they speak English, I jump in and scold them 'You can't really give up on your identity. One day when things are right, we will go for good, not only for [a] vacation. So how are you going to talk with your aunties and uncles in this accent?' (Rediet Interview 4 May 2017).

As a community, the EOTC in Durban have organised a language programme which runs on Saturdays as another intervention to develop Amharic among children and youth. The perceived need for this language initiative is reflected in the widespread support the programme receives from the community and the number of children who attend. Interestingly, it was found that despite the seeming reluctance of some children and youth to attend the EOTC Sunday services they are more willing to attend this activity. Coles (1990) argues that in contexts where differences in language lead to exclusion and 'othering', it is precisely migrant children's religious beliefs and experiences that help them cope with discrimination.

The importance of acquiring and developing linguistic ability in Amharic is essential for the EOT community, and it is integral for EOT religious and cultural identity. Apart from it being a resource for resilience and coping, it also facilitates important relations between children and their parents, as well as the wider migrant community, both in the country of settlement and in the homeland.

(b) Ethiopia and Staying Connected to 'Home'

The underlying assumption of the study, out of which this article emerges, is

the notion that transnational migrants take their religion with them when they migrate (Adogame & Spickard 2010; Hüwelmeier & Krauze 2010). They use religion to remain connected to their homelands and to maintain their identity, while simultaneously becoming embedded, as opposed to assimilated, in their countries of residence (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004).

In most of the interviews, Ethiopia emerged as a spiritual home and with a great deal of nostalgia for migrant parents as they navigate the value conflicts between home and host cultures. Migrant parents view Ethiopia as 'home' and as important for the formation of identity, spirituality and a sense of belonging in their children. The indivisibility of EOTC religion and Ethiopian identity is shared by parents through oral histories, to teach their children about Ethiopian identity, culture, identity, norms, heritage and, essentially, their love for their homeland.

> So, you can't separate [them], it's too hard to [teach] them separately. You'll tell them about the flag, difference[s], different leader[s], different sign[s], language, the colour[s] but [the connection is] still there. And if I can, I will teach them how much I love my country (Bereket Interview 25 June 2017).

For migrant parents, that their children self-identify as Ethiopian emerged as being crucial, in terms of the connection to 'home' and the parent's desire to return to their homeland. Oral histories about Ethiopia and 'what is good at home,' was an important influence in the child's self-designation and sense of belonging. Two migrant parents recounted their exchanges with their children.

> I said you [were] born here but you are Ethiopian. I told [tell] them that the most important [what is most important is] that they are Ethiopian despite being born in South Africa. I don't want them [to think] that they are South African because they [were] born here. [It] Doesn't matter [that] they [were] born here. If they feel that way, there is no hope to go home (Amanuel Interview 1 July 2017).

> I used to tell her what is good at home. There is Ethiopia - what is good, how [about] the culture, how we brought up our self [selves], or how we do have respect for each other …. I think because of the way I [explained it to] her, now she prefers instead of saying [I was]

> born [in] South Africa, or I am a South African, she prefers to say I'm Ethiopian (Bereket Interview 25 June 2017).

For other parents it became apparent that, despite teaching their children about Ethiopian culture and religious traditions, their children do not always share their parents' strong affinity for Ethiopia. Similarly, the myth of returning 'home' at some future time (Bolognani 2016; 2007; Carling *et al.* 2015) looms large in the EOTC community. The representation of Ethiopia as an almost utopian ideal, in terms of religion and culture, meant it not only served as a spiritual and cultural resource for those in the diaspora, but also some parents advocated the idea that visiting Ethiopia would connect their children with their cultural history, and prevent their children from 'getting lost.'

> So, for me I'm thinking to take [of taking] the kids [children] home for like six months to know the Church, to know that society, the culture because they get lost (Yenu Interview 23 May 2017).

The research findings suggested that the nostalgia to return home tends to be strongest in times of adversity and 'home' is perceived to hold the solutions to a range of challenges, including children and young people's rebellion against traditional values. With the lack of formal EOTC religious institutions in South Africa, some parents reported frustration that the diaspora community does not always reflect the religious ideals, fuelling sentiments that it would be easier to develop their children spiritually in Ethiopia. Two parents, in their reflection on developing their children's spirituality in the diaspora, noted:

> It's too hard, it's too hard because, like I said, how [are] you gonna [going to] shape them? (Amanuel Interview 1 July 2017).

> There are times that we think that 'Let's just go home.' Whenever something happens, we say 'If [only we were] at home'. If we [were] there, as they grow with the tradition, they would also learn the religion (Rediet Interview 4 May 2017).

Due to the fact that most of the children in the study had limited contact with relatives living in Ethiopia, largely through telephone calls or through the internet, the families interviewed have developed different strategies to address

the absence of family. In this regard, it seems that parents mitigate this through developing relationships with other local EOTC families.

> So, we try, even [I] as an Orthodox and an Ethiopian, I try to socialise with other people. I even try to mix kids [encourage the children to mix] every weekend to, just to feel, the brother and sisterhood and the family relationship that we lost somewhere (Yenu Interview 23 May 2017).

Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) alert us to the fact that where there is an increase in the exchange of 'social remittances' between homeland and country of settlement, young people demonstrate greater resilience in terms of the challenges that accompany migration. Selema & Cochrane (2019) suggest that there are dynamic material and symbolic exchanges between Ethiopians imagining outward migration and Ethiopians migrants from South Africa. What is evident from the parents interviewed, is that they place a high value, and possible future exchange value, on children and young people's connection to Ethiopia as 'home'. For example, telephone and Skype exchanges, family visits to South Africa, as well as return visits to Ethiopia brings with them the exchange not just of values and norms but also a range of resources such audio-visual religious and cultural materials, DVDs, CDs and books, religious artefacts and food, or knowledge and experience of cultural practices that underscore those values and norms. It can thus be argued that the social remittances generated by direct or indirect exchanges and contact between homeland and the diaspora, strengthen children's cultural as well as spiritual identities.

(c) Church and Spirituality

The EOTC, particularly due to its distinctly orthodox ritual and traditions, emerged as the locus of religiosity and spirituality for the members of the EOT community. Several studies have highlighted the many sites of religiosity, including homes, congregations, churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, as well as formal and informal social networks (Leitner 2012; Brickell & Datta 2016; Perrin 2007; Spickard 2005). In this regard, the EOTC has great social and spiritual significance for Ethiopian migrants and is widely regarded as one of the most important community-oriented organisations for Ethiopians in the

diaspora (Engedayehu 2013). Contrary to much of the prevailing research which suggests that the church provides avenues for integration (Spickard 2005), the research findings in this study suggest that for the EOT migrant, the church plays a pivotal role in preserving and maintaining a distinct, non-assimilationist, Ethiopian orthodox identity. The critical importance of the church space as a container of EOTC spirituality, as an institution for sustaining religio-cultural practices, and platform for the development of their children's spirituality more effectively, was reiterated throughout the study. Finally, with respect to the EOTC as a source of mediating identity and spirituality, two key areas of interest emerged, namely, religious education and the church as surrogate family.

Religious Education

An important outcome of the research study was the recognition that the religious and spiritual development in EOTC households plays a significant role in migrant children developing their social and religious identity. This echoes the findings of Dreyer and Burrows, who proposed that Christian spirituality is always partially a 'matter of memory and thus an inherited identity' (2005: 304). The research findings supported their assertion that Christian spirituality incorporates an element of the historical tradition of the church and that, while Christian spirituality is shaped by present experiences, it is also constituted through one's memory transposed into the future (Dreyer & Burrows 2005). Despite the absence of a formally constituted EOTC religious institution, the migrant communities in Durban and Pietermaritzburg have established two congregations in temporary spaces, and they are serviced by one priest. For parents in these households, regular church attendance is believed to be crucial for developing a strong Ethiopian and EOTC identity. One parent reported:

> This is my duty – once in a month I'll be in Durban. I want my kids [children] to listen to the voice of the priests. That is why I love my religion. I grew up with that process, so it is good for the development of our spiritual interaction with the Church. So, I always take my kids [children] every month (Yenu Interview 23 May 2017).

This development of religious and spiritual identity encompasses immersing

the children in key aspects of church life to familiarise them with the rituals, posture and movements within the Church, and in so doing parents believe their children will develop a sense of belonging in the community. Furthermore, the interconnection between being Ethiopian and the EOTC, which results in a congruity between the prayers, embodied rituals in the church, as well as those adopted in daily domestic life, creates a deep sense of belonging.

> That's why even though they don't understand very well, we are trying to bring them here, in [to] the Church. At least, they can see the liturgy, the prayer[s] when they do. At least what they see also they will get from it [they will benefit from what they see] (Bereket Interview 25 June 2017).

These parents believe that it is important for a child to experience church and the concomitant rituals, practices and postures, associated with it, for the development of their spirituality. As an extension of the role the church plays in forming identity through church, parents also emphasised teaching through shared activities of prayer, attending church services and reading the Bible together, to nurture a shared identity between parent and child. This is consistent with the assertion that Christian spirituality is essentially experiential (Schneiders 2005) and is reinforced by parents.

Church as a Surrogate Family

In the research conducted, family emerged as a critical factor in developing children's spirituality and identity, and thus the absence of relatives was viewed as having a negative impact on the children, their sense of well-being and belonging. Similarly, Roux (2006) in her research on children's spirituality in South Africa, asserted the important roles played by parents, grandparents and the extended family in enhancing the spiritual well-being of children. In this regard, Roux (2006) focused on how traditional religious practices shape children's spiritual development, whereas other scholars are more overt about the role of family. Grajczonek (2011), for example, emphasised the impact of familial ties and experimentation, while Nesbitt (2000) suggested that children's spirituality emerges most meaningfully through observing and participating in worship with their families.

We found that for most of the children's contact with relatives living

in Ethiopia was limited to telephone calls or through the internet, and with a few very occasional 'home' visits. Thus, the church has become a key facilitator for developing family relationships among its members and some of the households have developed strategies to address the issues arising due to the absence of family. These include enlisting the support of friends who are members of the church to fulfil the roles relatives would play in Ethiopia, and in so doing, alleviating the feelings of disconnection from their extended family in Ethiopia. The second strategy employed by the EOTC community is offering language and religion classes at the weekend to help induct children and young people into the faith tradition.

The role of the church, therefore, as a surrogate family for this migrant community, is a vital component in nurturing their children's religious identity. Through regular meetings and participation in the church, parents are able to offer their children various forms of interaction with members of the EOTC 'family' and nurture in their children, a sense of togetherness and belonging through participating in the church services, including a dedicated children's program. As such, members of the congregation become substitutes for the extended family members through their involvement in the everyday lives of children. This ambition was reported by some of the parents in the previous section; regular contact with the EOTC community is the primary means of socialisation of their children into Ethiopian customs:

> It is good for the development of our spiritual interaction with the Church. So, I always take my kids [children] every month (Yenu Interview 23 May 2017).

In addition to attendance of church services, participation in church services, and social interactions afterwards, were deemed important by the parents. These social interactions were considered to be an important aspect of developing their children's religion and spirituality to inculcate their Ethiopian identity and create a sense of belonging. The importance of participation and belonging does not only apply to the community congregating at church but is also located in the social interaction with other EOTC children and families in South Africa, on a weekly or annual basis, away from the church site (Confait 2017).

EOTC migrant children's comfort and ease with the ritual calendar and church services, was managed through offering Amharic language classes on a Saturday, and Sunday school or children's service on a Sunday. It is through

this series of formally organised social activities for children, that their religious and social identities are mediated. Thus Wilson (1979) contended that while religious devotion or worship is essentially a personal experience, religious behaviour is grounded in communally shared values and symbolic references and practices. Furthermore, Wilson emphasised that religious beliefs and actions are formed through a process of learning from 'significant others' and influences the development of a person's concepts of self and their relationship with others (Wilson 1979).

On the one hand, parents read the Bible in Amharic with their children on a daily basis in their homes, while recognising the youth worker and language teacher, Kofi, the young man who runs the Durban children's programme, as a significant other in the spiritual development of their children.

> The one talking and teach[ing] them, [is] younger than us, don't [doesn't] have even [even have] children yet but they listen [to him] more than [they listen to] us (Eyasu Interview 1 July 2017).

The interconnection and inseparability of identity as Ethiopians and EOT Christians affirms the necessity for social and religious cohesion within the EOTC migrant community to develop and foster spirituality in their children. Through the continuity between South Africa and Ethiopia, the local church and home, a single life world is formed within which a coherent, transnational spiritual community can be sustained. Furthermore, through households drawing on spiritual guidance from 'home' and accessing resources developed for those in the diaspora to keep links with home, children are equipped to hold and give expression to their spirituality within new/diasporic contexts.

Conclusion

The migrant Ethiopian parents in the study were acutely aware that their children were experiencing varying degrees of social and religious dislocation. The perception of social dislocation is rooted particularly within language tensions between Amharic and English, their connection to Ethiopia as home, and finally, efforts by parents to nurture an appreciation for EOTC spirituality through participation in the church and sustaining relationships with the wider EOTC community in South Africa, as well as the homeland. Although the ability to converse in and understand Amharic, forms an integral component of

EOT religious and cultural identity, parents who participated in this study view it as critical, primarily in terms of its role to ease exchange between children and their parents, to allow access to the EOTC history and spirituality, and finally as a way to sustain their relationship with their cultural and religious community. Parents were willing to participate in the study and to share their experiences on how they manage the religious and spiritual development of their children. The mixed method used in doing this study allowed us to capture the life-worlds of the community, ranging from interactions between parents and children in intimate home settings, as well as in highly ritualised church spaces. The relatively small sample of six households was necessary to do justice to a methodology that was time-consuming, as the participants determined the pace and places for the interaction. We were privileged to gain access to rich, diverse perspectives on parenting practices within the EOTC migrant community.

Finally, the study revealed that for these migrant parents, spirituality is regarded as an integral and inseparable component of their children's cultural identity, and it is viewed as important for mediating feelings of belonging to their family, church community, as well as their parents' country of origin, and country of settlement. To forge these feelings of belonging, EOT parents actively engage in certain faith practices with their children to develop their spirituality, on a regular basis. These included attending church services or the children's program, praying with their children, reading the Bible or Bible stories to them and utilising resources from Ethiopia, including digitised oral histories regarding Ethiopian culture and heritage.

Since the church is the primary locus of spirituality and social identity, parents actively participate in creating a sense of a religious community, in the belief that this will have a positive impact on the development of their children's spirituality. Furthermore, as EOTC spirituality is highly ritualised, embodied and communal, it makes it easier for children to express their religious feelings and ideas in proximity to their parents. With the church emerging as a space for deliberations about identity, belonging and beliefs, migrant children and parents alike rely on the various social and ritual activities, alongside other EOT families, to become simultaneously embedded in both South Africa and Ethiopia. These social and ritual activities allow migrant households to forge alternate architectures of belonging through church relationships, and through Amharic and religious literacy, nurturing in their children an affinity to the EOTC and their Ethiopian identity, culture and heritage.

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