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Religion and Migration in Africa and the African Diaspora

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Alternation

**Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the
Arts and Humanities in
Southern Africa**

*Religion and Migration in
Africa and the
African Diaspora*

Guest Editors
Federico Settler
and
Mari Haugaa Engh

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Durban

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Editorial: Religion and Migration in Africa and the African Diaspora

Federico Settler

Mari Haugaa Engh

Reflections on migration and religion at a time when migration remains a controversial political issue, whether it concerns disagreements in the US senate over financing President Trump's proposed wall at the US-Mexico border, the continuing influx of refugees from Africa and the Middle East into Europe, or xenophobia towards African migrants in South Africa and the Romying in Myanmar. Consequently, continuously changing trajectories, networks and caravans of migration are produced, as a result of peoples differing needs and desires for movement and settlement.

Those who have worked in the field of migration know that the migration of people has been a sustained phenomenon that has shaped the making of societies, it has fractured hegemonies and ultimately produced diverse diasporas. This was evident in the works Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Jamaica Kincaid as they have reflected on the fortunes and hardships of the windrush generation in the United Kingdom. Similarly, their predecessors Frantz Fanon, James Baldwin, Aimé Césaire, and Sol Plaatje wrote widely about the social condition of being black in the world through narratives of migration, where they variously came to confront themselves of the objects of terror, curiosity and the exotic – all tropes that operate to deny black subjectivity. Thus we take as a starting point that transnational migration has significantly shaped the political and intellectual labour has of people of colour.

During the past two decades Africa has experienced significant movement of people from and around the global South, and South Africa has seen a large increase in the number of people migrating to and through the country, to the point where it has become Africa largest container of migrants from across the continent. However, as the field of transnational and migration studies has grown, research about Africa has remained under-represented, and

often Africa is depicted as the place from where people flee from in pursuit of liberty and modernity in the ‘North’- away from patriarchies, poverty and superstition in the global South. Locating this volume within the tradition of transnationalism, we start with the recognition that scholars of migration have developed increasing interest in the ways that migrants “sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch, Glick- Schiller & Blanc-Szanton 1994:6). As a particular field within migration studies, transnationalism denotes a series of networks, activities, relationships and interactions of exchange and belonging that transcend national borders (Vertovec 1999). Recently, scholars such as Asamoah-Gyadu (2015), Huwelmeier and Krause (2010), and Adogame (2014) have argued that these transnational relations are further strengthened by religious affiliations. What this suggests is that migration is not just about networks of movement, or about flows of persons *en route* to an imagined ideal destination, but it is also about deliberately maintaining connections to homelands while simultaneously becoming embedded in new places of residence (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004).

Unlike earlier migration or diaspora studies, where the interest in religion focused on its instrumentalist function in helping migrants navigate and overcome the challenges of dislocation and settlement (Hagan & Ebaugh 2003), in this volume, we are interested in the active deliberations and negotiations of religion in the context of continuous migration (Settler 2018). We sought to examine how African migrants in Africa and the African diaspora imagine, understand, and activate religion and religious practices in their migratory lives. In so doing, the volume examines not only the role of religion in meaning-making and coping strategies, but also the role of religion in the production and maintenance of transnational networks of relationships.

Recent years have seen increased interest in not just Christian theological responses to migration (Cruz 2010; Rivera 2012), but also in traditions that do not fall into the western protestant Christian tradition. While many of these studies have focused on variations of Christian Pentecostalism in migrant communities (Adogame 2013), others have focussed on the reception of the Muslims or religious others in European and north American contexts (Kaemingk 2018; Mavelli & Wlison 2016). By and large, these studies tend to focus on what migrants do (to survive) and how faith communities respond, or should respond (to help migrants survive). Building on this, this volume is an attempt to look beyond these narratives of trauma,

survival, and resilience – to interrogate the agentic, moral, social, and religious economies of exchange between migrants, as well between migrants and host communities. So as to widen our understanding of migrant social worlds, and to develop new methodologies for the study of religion and migration, in particular methodologies that are able to capture the nuance and complexity of African migrations.

To this end we invited scholars of religion and migration from across the world to a three-day conference in Durban, South Africa, in January 2016. The conference drew scholars from Ethiopia, Botswana, England, Turkey, Germany, Zimbabwe, Norway and South Africa. Apart from a vibrant exchange of ideas and experiences, the conference focussed on the everyday lived experiences of migrants in a wide range of contexts. Conscious not to be subsumed in narratives of trauma and vulnerability, the conference delegates worked hard to excavate and demonstrate the agentic in the everyday lives and beliefs of migrants. In producing this volume, we sent out a call for additional contributions and received promising papers from the US, Spain, Portugal and Ghana. The final draft volume contained 10 articles but unfortunately, we three contributors withdrew at a very late stage. These three were focused on architectures of belonging among African migrants in Barcelona, Ghanaian migrants' mobility in Africa, and Cape Verdean missionary narratives in Europe, and would have made fruitful contributions to this volume. Nevertheless, we are proud of the final volume – which we elaborate below – as more than half of the contributions are from emerging scholars who, despite not being primarily located in the field of religion and theology, found that in their research religion emerged as a critical factor in how migrants make meaning, sustain connections and reconfigure their social and legal standing in their places of settlement. Sixty percent of the contributors are women – all but one, being women of colour. In this regard we are proud that this volume not only provided spaces for critical and innovative scholars, but also that the character and feel of the volume is significantly shaped by the gendered, racial and migrant locations of the contributors.

In this volume we explore the religious lives of migrants in Southern Africa, and beyond, with special attention to how various religious traditions shape, and are shaped by, migration. With a deliberate decentering of protestant Christianity, we include in this volume migrants' religious narratives within Islam, African indigenous religions, Santeria and African Pentecostals. We also try to move beyond the idea that when people move, they take

their religion with them, as this approach perpetuates an idea of religion as traditions that are neatly packaged and can be translated and transferred neatly into new contexts. Instead, our work is aligned to Huwelmeier and Krause's approach in *Traveling Spirits*, a text that highlights the complex strategies and practices that religious migrants use to stay connected to sacred places, traditions and ritual practices – including the carrying talismans to transfer island spirits across to the seas, and performing rituals of invocation and possession that invites ancestral spirits to manifest in new places of settlement. In this way, migrants make use of, and form religious communities as networks of support, trust and knowledge, not only to make meaning transcendentally but also to accumulate material knowledge of regulations, languages, expectations, desirable jobs, and desired settlement.

This volume was compiled to illustrate how migrants deploy religion, and to explore the many ways that African and African diasporic religious practices, networks and affinities come under strain and/ or are reconfigured as a result of migration. While some contributors, such as Boaz, explore how the reconstitution of religious practices and authorities emerge as efforts by migrants to align themselves with the values of the host society, others such as Sigamoney and Nyamnjoh discuss the activation of religious resources by migrants in their efforts to foster resilience and reinforce identities in hostile contexts. Elsewhere in the volume, ethnographic reflections illustrate how migrants' agency is especially visible in religious and cultural practices. What ultimately brings these articles together is their recognition that nuanced (feminist, race critical and postcolonial), new epistemologies and methodological practices are necessary for understanding migrants' lifeworlds. This volume is an attempt to speak to these challenges and emerging practices.

These efforts are borne out of a recognition that in writing about religion and migration related to Africa and the African diaspora, we must privilege race, agency and reflexivity. We start with the recognition that much of the scholarship on migration mutes race, despite the fact that much of the field concerns itself with the movement, regulation and victimisation of the people of colour. Likewise, we recognise that brown people, and brown women especially, labour under particular representations that couple black people's migration with criminality (Mahalingam & Rabelo 2013), undocumented movement, and relations of exploitation.

Similarly, while we recognise that much of migration studies rests of the idea of the migrant as victim or villain, deserving either of surveillance or

saving (Collins 2007; Goodey 2009), in this volume we take agency as a critical theme in examining and analysing migrant social worlds. It is our view that the preoccupation with scripting migrants as victims or villains (Naqvi 2007) leads to the neglect in terms of migrants' agency in terms of their own mobility as well as in narratives of resilience and survival. We contend that the privileging of migrants' agency presents a counter narrative to the diminishing weight of the victim trope – which presumes migrants as stateless, without identity, sexless and apolitical.

Finally, in this volume we selected articles that not only privilege the experience of African or African diasporic migrants, but also those that reduce the methodological dissonance and distance between the authors and people we study. Since several of the authors in this volume are themselves 'people out of place', we sought to produce a volume that not only reflects migrants lived experiences, but also to present texts that reduce the distance of the researcher from the field. In particular, as we privilege migrants' agency, we write about our own communities and not of nameless, faceless people solely in need of assistance from development agencies and faith-based organizations. In this regard, we sought to not only highlight agency but also show the *vulnerability* of the researchers.

In the opening article **Danielle Boaz** draws on case law to demonstrate how the reception and criminalization of Jamaican sanetria practices in America, and Canada shaped the religious self-representation among migrants. She notes that "in their attempts to salvage their community's image, these immigrants provided the courts with the rhetoric and, one could argue, the permission, to refuse to provide legal protection to African diaspora religions" (p. 12). In this regard Boaz, through her opening article illustrate the complex negotiations migrants undertake with respect to religion, identity, and mobility.

Across the Atlantic, **Henrietta Nyamnjoh** examines the how Cameroonian migrants' desire for healing reveals interesting meanings and values placed on everyday sacred objects. In her study of Cameroonian migrants in Cape Town, South Africa she notes that "the challenges of migration and the various forms of exclusion in society have not only resulted in migrants turning to religion for refuge, but has equally led to the increased use of sacred objects whose anointing powers are perceived to break the 'yoke' of people and allow them to push back against their precarity" (p. 51). Thus Nyamnjoh, as Jennifer Sigamoney elsewhere in the volume, shows how

migrants use religious artefacts, languages, and practices as interpretive and explanatory resources related to harnessing resilience.

In the next article, **Mari Haugaa Engh** discusses and interrogates the meaning of religion and pietistic practices, among highly skilled, African sports labour migrants in Scandinavia. This ethnography offers vignettes of African pro-footballers' utilisation of prayer in planning future migration, increasing visibility and integration into Nordic society, while maintaining connections to their communities of faith in Nigeria. Engh's notion of transcendental locality offers a promising new way to imagine both professional, gender, and religious networks of belonging. She concludes that "religious faith and practice function as a means for articulating and assigning meaning to experiences of lifestyle sacrifice, emotional and physical pain, as well as personal success and prosperity" (p. 75)

Jennifer Sigamoney and **Buhle Mpofu**, respectively, examine migrant religious lives in the city of Johannesburg, South Africa. Sigamoney, in her examination of Somali Muslim narratives of precarity and vulnerability, highlights the strategies of resilience that emerged on individual and collective levels. Her article shows how strategies of resilience developed by migrants not only reduced risk or harm for the community, but also produced residential patterns, religious affinities and alliances, as well as changing gender roles as a result of local deliberation and negotiation among migrants. Sigamoney asserts that "religion and spirituality play an essential role in motivating them to persist in building livelihoods in the face of problems associated with xenophobia" (p. 82).

Mpofu, in his interrogation of Christian church responses to xenophobia and migrant vulnerabilities, deploys the schema of church as hostile, host, and home to demonstrate the inherent ambivalence in theological discourses of migration. His article challenges not only regimes of hospitality and reception of the migrant other, but the need for the church to reform its own theological and missiological hermeneutics of care. He writes that "such transformation will require appreciating the agency and contributions of migrants in the development of South African communities as well as deeper examination of how these encounters can enrich theological, ecclesial and missional reflections" (p. 116).

The closing two articles explore some of the **Delipher Manda** and **Federico Settler** offer a narrative account of how migration and gender research require new and more enabling methodologies. In the article they open

a discussion about the inherent biases in ethical governance processes with respect to race, gender and migration. They note that “reflexivity of ethics and power inherent in review processes might not only facilitate the development and recognition of innovative research methods, but also reduce the alienating assumptions about black women researchers, as well as the migrant communities we research” (p. 136).

In the closing article, **Trygve Wyller** reflects on how a theological commitment to centering the lived experience of migrants in Christian social practice, produced surprising new epistemological and methodological outcomes for the researcher. Through examining a range of fieldwork interactions – trading, eating and walking – with Congolese religious migrants in South Africa, Wyller reflects critically on how Christian ecclesiology becomes reformed. He advocates for the idea of a decentred ecclesiology, where everyday migrant experiences and religious practices serve as counter-conduct to paternalistic theological and developmental practices.

It is our view that collectively, these articles reveal some of the empirical realities of being migrants of colour, as well as insights into the social and personal religious experiences of African or African diasporic migrants. We see this volume as a small contribution to the field and that we hope will stimulate further deliberations with respect to religion and migration research in Africa and the African diaspora.

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Religion or Ruse? African Jamaican Spiritual Practices and Police Deception in Canada

Danielle N. Boaz

Abstract

African-derived spiritual beliefs described as ‘Obeah’ have played a significant role in policing the illegal activities of Jamaicans in Ontario, where the majority of Caribbean immigrants in Canada have settled. Posing as spiritual advisors, police agents and undercover officers have convinced suspected criminals to divulge the details of their offenses as a component of rituals purportedly designed to protect the suspects against the spirits of their victims and guard against detection by the authorities. Canadian courts have consistently upheld the legality of these deceptions, finding that Obeah rituals fall outside the standards of protected spiritual interactions or confessions. These cases reveal the limitations of the recognition of African diaspora religions in Canada, and demonstrate that, in response to media allegations that Jamaican immigrants disproportionately commit violent crime, persons of Caribbean descent attempt to secure their acceptance in the global north by delegitimizing African derived faiths.

Keywords: Obeah, Caribbean, Diaspora, Jamaica, Religious Freedom

Introduction

In the mid twentieth century, a variety of factors led Caribbean persons to increasingly migrate to North America, forming immigrant communities in major cities like Miami, New York, and Toronto. In the latter part of the twentieth century, as these communities became larger and more established, North American authorities and media outlets accused Caribbean immigrants

of becoming the chief perpetrators of violent crime in these cities. In response, some immigrants sought to preserve their own reputation and space in their host lands by identifying the supposed culprits as a particular sect of their community – newer arrivals who were adherents of African diaspora religions. In their attempts to salvage their community's image, these immigrants provided the courts with the rhetoric and, one could argue, the permission, to refuse to provide legal protection to African diaspora religions.

Scholarship on the relationship between Obeah and the law has increased in recent years, with at least two books (Handler & Bilby 2012; Paton 2015) and multiple articles exploring the colonial prohibition and prosecution of Obeah, as well as the rationale for and legitimacy of its continued proscription (i.e. Paton 2009; Boaz 2017). Two recent works have discussed the Canadian cases that are at the centre of this article, exploring the idea that adherents have deployed Obeah for harmful, criminal purposes (Crosson 2015), and that expert witnesses were instrumental in classifying the practices at issue as extra-legal (Clarke 2017). This article will expand upon these works by examining the background to the litigation and, using theories introduced in Aisha Khan's *Dark Arts and Diaspora* (2017), arguing that these cases are the product of persons of Caribbean descent attempting to secure their acceptance in the global north by delegitimizing African derived faiths.

In *Dark Arts and Diaspora*, Khan (2017) briefly references one of the recent Canadian cases denying Obeah the same legal protections granted to other faiths, noting that a police officer at the centre of the case was described as a man with Caribbean ancestry. Khan uses this case as an introductory remark to explain that 'communities are, through consensus, moral arbiters' who determine what is a 'legitimate religion' (Khan 2017:42). If Khan had unpacked these Canadian cases further, I argue, the central role of the Caribbean community in commencing these cases would have become even more apparent. I also contend that when one examines the work that other scholars have conducted on another important case involving Afro-Caribbean religion in the United States, the *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah*, it becomes clear that these Obeah controversies are part of a larger trend.

Citing the *City of Hialeah* case and comparing it to recent Obeah cases, I argue that legal controversies surrounding Afro-Caribbean religions in the global north followed particular patterns and originated from certain segments of immigrant communities. First, I contend that these cases arose in moments

when Cuban and Jamaican populations found themselves stereotyped as the primary perpetrators of violent crime in their host countries. Persons from those communities then undertook measures to attempt to display a multifaceted immigrant population – with more established persons differentiating themselves from the new arrivals. In both cases, these measures involved denigrating the African-diasporic religions of their homeland, describing them as witchcraft and sorcery, and linking practitioners with violent crime. Courts often (at least initially) adopted these arguments, finding that while African diaspora faiths may be religions, their central practices are nevertheless secular. To reach this conclusion, the courts contrasted African diaspora religious beliefs and Abrahamic faiths.

Miami Cubans and the Santeria Case

In 1986, a group of Santeria practitioners incorporated a religious organization, the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, and the following year announced their plans to open a permanent place of worship and an educational institution in Hialeah, Florida, a residential city in Miami-Dade County known for Cuban immigrant settlement (Palmie 1996). The Church was the first of its kind – a legally recognized organization that planned to bring the practice of this African Cuban religion, which had predominantly been observed discretely in private residences, into the public sphere. In response to the Church's impending opening, the City Council of Hialeah passed a series of ordinances that prohibited the practice of animal sacrifice, a necessary component of Santeria, in an effort to effectively proscribe the religion itself. The Church of the Lukumi challenged the validity of these statutes but district and circuit courts in Florida upheld the laws. However, in 1993, this litigation made its way to the United States Supreme Court, which issued a landmark ruling determining that Santeria was a religion entitled to the same protections as other faiths. These proceedings share some important characteristics with the cases about African diaspora spirituality that would commence in Canada in the subsequent two decades.

First and foremost, the Church of the Lukumi case was born of cleavages within the Cuban community. Cuban presence in the United States was minimal before the mid twentieth century. Immigration dramatically increased in 1959 after Fidel Castro and Che Guevara won the revolution that

turned Cuba into a communist country and dispossessed wealthier, white citizens who had thrived under the previous president, Fulgencio Batista, and his pro-United States system of capitalism and racial segregation. Hundreds of thousands of Cubans fled the island, many of whom emigrated to the United States (Perez 2004). They settled in major cities such as New York and Miami.

The controversy surrounding African diaspora religion arose from Cubans' concerns about how their host society perceived them. In the first two decades of Cuban immigration, these primarily white, pro-capitalist arrivals enjoyed political, social and economic mobility in North America. Popular perceptions of Cubans began to shift by the 1980s, however, with the arrival of more racially and economically diverse immigrants (Palmie 1996). No longer wealthy former-business owners fleeing after the seizure of their property and destruction of their way of life, Cuban immigrants of the 1980s became stereotyped by the Mariel boatlift which, among its hundreds of thousands of 'refugees,' is believed to have brought immigrants released from Cuba's prisons to the shores of South Florida (O'Brien 2004). Fighting against the typecast of a crime-ridden, drug-trafficking immigration population, Cubans in South Florida seized upon the rejection of an African diasporic religion, Santeria, as one mechanism to salvage their diminishing reputation. They depicted practitioners of this 'black' religion as barbaric and dangerous, alleging that they distributed drugs and spread AIDS in the midst of their animal sacrifices (Palmie 1996). Scholars have argued that the response of the Cuban community in Hialeah and the Cuban-led City Council represented an effort of earlier migrants from the 1950s and 1960s to protect their reputation as 'good and white' immigrants, against the influx of darker skinned Cubans and rising crime in South Florida communities (Palmie 1996).

The *second* important aspect of these cases that parallel recent Canadian controversies is that these more established immigrants grounded their arguments in the idea that African diaspora belief systems were not real religions, and denigrated or dismissed the aspects of these religions that are different from Abrahamic faiths. For example, when the Hialeah City Council first met regarding the Church of the Lukumi's proposed plans to open in Hialeah, Herman Echevarria, the council president, asked 'What can we do to prevent the church from opening?' (O'Brien 2004:44). Immediately turning to their method of animal sacrifice as a distinctive characteristic of Santeria, city council member Andrew Mejides explained that 'The Bible says we are

allowed to sacrifice an animal for consumption, but not for any other purpose. I don't believe the Bible allows that (Santeria methods of slaughter)' (O'Brien 2004:42). The City Council then passed a series of ordinances that, without mentioning Santeria directly, were so closely tailored to target this African Cuban faith that no other animal slaughters would be proscribed. In particular, they carefully carved out exceptions for recognized religions, such Jewish kosher and Islamic halaal slaughters, by only prohibiting the killing of an animal in a 'private ritual or ceremony not for the primary purpose of food consumption' (O'Brien 2004: 45, 163-168).

The *third* element that would be repeated in Canadian cases was that the residents of Hialeah, the City Council, and even the District Court, justified the infringements on the Church of the Lukumi's religious freedom by describing Santeria as more comparable to 'voodooism', devil worship, or witchcraft than to mainstream religions. In the City Council's first meeting about the opening of the Church, when the leader of the Church, Ernesto Pichardo, addressed the room, residents referred to him as 'Satan', and 'the anti-Christ'. The chaplain of the Hialeah police department further proclaimed that Santeria practitioners worship demons (O'Brien 2004:43; Palmie 1996:187-188). When the Church of the Lukumi's appeal reached the U.S. Supreme Court, the City Council adopted this language, arguing that animal sacrifice was legitimately proscribed because it was not just a practice employed by Santeria adherents but was also utilized in the performance of 'malevolent magic' and was 'engaged in by Satanists, by witchcraft, voodoo' – belief systems not previously recognized as guaranteed religious freedoms (O'Brien 2004:128).

The *fourth* significant element of this controversy is that there are undertones of the City Council and Hialeah residents' denunciations of Santeria found in the District Court's ruling approving the legislation barring animal sacrifice. For example, the District Court stressed that Santeria was not a religion of the entire population of Cuba; rather, it was an 'underground religion practiced mostly by slaves and the descendants of slaves' that eventually 'spilled over from the black population to the white population' (District Court 1989:1478). The Court also noted that historically, 'Santeria was seen as backward' (District Court 1989:1478). Perhaps most explicitly, the Court asserted that 'the practice was not, and is not today, socially accepted by the majority of the Cuban population' (District Court 1989:1478). Despite these allusions to the divisive nature of the practice of Santeria in South

Florida, the District Court found in favour of the government, averring that there was no intent to discriminate against Santeria itself; the only issue was a particular practice – animal sacrifice – which the City intended to prevent no matter ‘whatever individual, religion or cult it was practiced by’ (District Court 1989:1479).

The *final* aspect of these cases that would be repeated in Canadian decisions is that the yardstick by which the litigants measured Santeria was to examine how comparable it was to Abrahamic religions. There are many examples of the City’s efforts to draw distinctions between Santeria and Abrahamic faiths that could be cited, but some of the clearest come from the City’s arguments when the case reached the Supreme Court. In the City’s brief to the Supreme Court, they argued that Santeria/Lucumi sacrifices were more ‘inhumane’, ‘indifferent’, and ‘unreliable’ than those in Kosher slaughter (Respondent’s Brief 1992:58-59). They also simply contended that the practice of animal sacrifice was ‘non-religious’. The City averred, ‘The evidence at trial, however, established and district court found that animal “sacrifices” also occur in secular “ritual[s] or ceremonies” [citation omitted], which are not constitutionally protected. Petitioners did not even attempt to argue that the ordinances would be unconstitutional if applied to sacrifices of animals for nonreligious purposes’ (Respondent’s Brief 1992:58-59).

Rather than arguing that all religions should be afforded equal protection regardless of their social acceptability or similarity to mainstream faiths, the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye emphasized that their beliefs were more closely related to Abrahamic beliefs and practices than the City had represented. In their brief to the Supreme Court, the Church contended that ‘Animal sacrifice is one of the oldest and most widespread religious practices,’ which ‘remains important in modern Islam’, and ‘was central to Jewish scriptures and to Jewish ritual practice’ (Petitioner’s Brief 1992: 30-31). Further they argued that the practice was only eradicated from Christianity because ‘they believe that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is good for all time and all people’ (Petitioner’s Brief 1992:30-31). Ultimately, the Supreme Court seems to have reached a decision that animal sacrifice in Santeria is analogous to ritual slaughter in mainstream religions. The Court accepted that animal sacrifice has ‘ancient roots’ in Abrahamic faiths, as it is ‘mentioned throughout the Old Testament’, and is present in modern-day Islam (Church of the Lukumi v. City of Hialeah 1993:524-525). The Court asserted that ‘given the historical association between religion and animal sacrifice, [citation omitted]

petitioners' assertion that animal sacrifice is an integral part of their religion cannot be deemed bizarre or incredible' (Church of the Lukumi v. City of Hialeah 1993:531).

The *City of Hialeah* case would later become famous because of the ultimate success of Santeria practitioners in securing a decision in favour of their freedom exercise rights. After six years of litigation, the Supreme Court of the United States struck down the Hialeah ordinances, recognizing that the City Council had impermissibly intended to ban the practice of Santeria (Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah 1993) Although this case stands out because of its result, the passage of this legislation against animal sacrifice in Cuban-dominated Hialeah, the divisions between older and newer generations of Cuban immigrants, the demonization of religions of the African diaspora and the comparisons with Abrahamic religion, are all patterns that would be repeated in later litigation in Ontario.

Jamaican Canadians and the Obeah Cases in Canada

This section will now turn to the Obeah cases recently heard by the Court of Appeals of Ontario and examine how the origins of these controversies repeat the pattern of internal policing in immigrant communities that commenced the *City of Hialeah* case in the United States.

Obeah and its Historical Proscription

Obeah is a vague, broad term encompassing a variety of, primarily African-derived, spiritual practices in the former British Caribbean. It is difficult to define because specific beliefs and ritual practices might vary greatly from island to island; however, this belief system is generally characterized by individualized relationships between Obeah practitioners and their clients. Caribbean persons consult and compensate Obeah practitioners for performing a wide range of services related to bodily health (healing or inducing physical ailments), financial wellbeing (finding employment, increasing the success of one's business, or getting money that was lost or is owed), family relationships (finding or keeping a lover), and the legal system (evading arrest or winning a court case) as well as conjuring and expelling spirits. Obeah rituals are

typically conducted through the manipulation of supernatural and natural forces, rather than by appealing to a god or pantheon of deities. Practitioners can, and historically did, perform malevolent, individualistic rites as well as benevolent, community-oriented rituals (Olmos & Gebert 2003; Murrell 2010).

The legal history of Obeah long precedes its arrival in Canada, dating back more than 250 years in the British Caribbean. It was first banned in Jamaica in 1760, after so-called Obeah practitioners administered ritual oaths of allegiance and distributed protective charms to participants in a major slave uprising known as Tacky's rebellion. Before emancipation in the 1830s, colonial authorities proscribed Obeah in many other parts of the Caribbean as well, claiming that spiritual rituals were used to terrorize enslaved Africans, forcing them to participate in insurrections and causing them to die from wasting illnesses when they believed themselves the target of harmful rituals (Paton 2015).

After the abolition of slavery, legislators broadened their description of Obeah practices and the statutes that proscribed them from the focus on Obeah's use in insurrections and destructive rituals to a general assertion that individuals who professed to have supernatural powers were charlatans and vagrants. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these laws were enforced frequently against individuals who performed divination and medico-religious healing, or provided rituals to generate good luck in matters of love, employment, and legal proceedings for their clients. The practice of Obeah remains illegal in most former British colonies in the Caribbean, including Jamaica (Handler & Bilby 2012; Paton 2015).

Recent developments suggest slowly changing attitudes toward Obeah in the Caribbean. Since the 1970s, four countries have decriminalized Obeah, including Trinidad and Tobago whose parliament determined in 2000 that these colonial laws infringed on the religious freedom of practitioners of African diaspora faiths (Handler & Bilby 2012, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago 2000). While other Caribbean nations retain these laws on the books, they have generally ceased to enforce them (Paton 2015:279). Yet this long history of proscription of Obeah has had a delegitimizing effect on African derived spiritual practices and the bias against Obeah appears to have become embedded in the minds of Jamaicans as they travel to the global north. Obeah has become a mechanism for internally policing the criminal activities of other Jamaicans in Toronto, where approximately three-fourths of Caribbean immigrants in Canada reside (Jones 2010:81).

Background to the Canadian Obeah Cases

In January of 1999, Jamaican-born cousins Marlin Rowe and Dwayne Lawes, alongside Dain Campbell and 'Brownman' robbed a Toronto-Dominion Bank. During the process of the robbery, Rowe shot and killed a bank teller named Nancy Kidd (Mitchell & Mascoll 2001). Rowe and his accomplices were apprehended after another Caribbean immigrant, Rhyll Carty, pretended to be their spiritual advisor then reported their confidential communications to the police (Queen v. Rowe 2006).

In 1998, Rowe and Lawes solicited the assistance of Carty in circumventing arrest and prosecution for their planned criminal activities. Carty was a self-described 'spiritualist' and 'psychic counsellor', who had a reputation in the Toronto Jamaican community as an Obeah practitioner (Queen v. Rowe 2006:4). He owned a shop in Toronto called O'Shanti's Herbal Store, advertised as a location that provided counselling services, as well as sold religious articles, candles, and herbs. Carty's primary source of income came from 'performing 'psychic' or 'spiritual' readings for clients from the Caribbean community' (Queen v. Rowe 2006:3). Rowe and Lawes became aware of Carty's reputation as an Obeah practitioner through Rowe's friend, Jacqueline Thompson, and Rowe's aunt, Sonia Gallimore, both of whom were Carty's regular clients. The latter introduced Rowe and Lawes to Carty, and they quickly inquired about his services. They told Carty that they were bank robbers and promised to pay him a substantial sum of money if he could help them evade the authorities.

Over the following weeks, Rowe and Lawes met with Carty twice, first at his shop and then at Gallimore's home. They detailed their plans for the robbery as well as renewed their requests for spiritual protection for their illegal activities. Whether Carty provided them with any 'protection' services at this time is unclear; but he reportedly admonished Rowe and Lawes not to do anything 'crazy or stupid', and threatened to turn them in to the police if anyone got hurt as a result of their crimes (Queen v. Rowe 2006:4).

On January 11th 1999, Rowe, Lawes, and their accomplices carried out their plan to rob a Toronto bank. Within 48 hours, Carty learned of the robbery, and reported his knowledge about the crime to the police. In exchange for payment as a police agent and a \$200,000 reward, Carty agreed to help the authorities in their investigation. He allowed the police to set up equipment to record his phone conversations and the activities in his shop, and he contacted

Rowe and arranged a meeting to discuss how he could help them. Lawes and Brownman had already fled to Jamaica¹, but Carty convinced Rowe and Campbell that he could assist them in evading the authorities.

Carty instructed Rowe and Campbell to each place an egg inside a black sock, knot it twice, and bring the socks with them to Carty's shop later that evening. When they arrived, Carty, who had donned a bulletproof vest under priestly robes, explained that in order to 'protect' them, Rowe and Campbell would have to divulge all the details of their participation in the crime. Rowe described the guns they had used in the robbery, and confessed that he, not realizing the safety of his weapon was off, had accidentally shot the bank teller, Nancy Kidd. Additionally, Rowe described the stolen minivan that they had used as a getaway car and informed Carty where they had stashed it. He and Campbell also paid Carty a fee of 3,000 dollars for his spiritual services, taken out of the proceeds of the robbery (Queen v. Rowe 2006, Mitchell 2000).

After Carty helped the police build a case against his 'clients,' they were arrested and charged with bank robbery. Carty was called as a witness for the prosecution, and he testified about what Rowe and Campbell had admitted to him during the Obeah rituals. As the police had collected little other evidence against the defendants, Carty's testimony was a central part of the prosecution's case (Queen v. Rowe 2006:13). Rowe was particularly aggrieved by Carty's subterfuge because, prior to his admission to Carty, the police had not known who had shot the bank teller. On the basis of this confession, Rowe was also charged with first-degree murder.

Rowe raised numerous challenges to Carty's evidence against him at trial, arguing that the statements he made to Carty were inadmissible for two interrelated reasons. First and foremost, Rowe claimed that his communications with Carty were part of a religious exchange that should be protected by the special privilege that safeguards confidential communications with spiritual advisors. If not shielded by religious privilege, then Rowe argued that Carty's ruse constituted a 'dirty trick' – that it transgressed the boundaries of permissible deceptions that the police and their agents may employ in solving a crime. The trial and appellate courts found against Rowe on both challenges,

¹ Lawes was finally apprehended approximately two years after the robbery but it does not appear that 'Brownman' was ever conclusively identified or charged with the robbery.

determining that the defendants' interactions with Carty represented 'a corrupt criminal relationship, not a legitimate relationship between a religious practitioner and a penitent' (Queen v. Rowe 2006:10). Ultimately, and based largely on the introduction of Carty's evidence, Rowe was found guilty of first degree murder and both men were convicted of robbery.

While the Rowe case was making its way through the appellate courts, a Toronto police department decided to employ similar tactics in a murder investigation. In 2003 and 2004, a series of homicides occurred and the police suspected that Jamaican Canadians were involved. These murders began in December of 2003, when a man named Adrian Baptiste was found dead in Youhan Orah's car (Queen v. Welsh 2013). Several months later, Shemaul Cunningham was killed, and police suspected that Orah had committed the murder in retaliation against those who had shot Baptiste. When Orah himself was gunned down by multiple assailants about one month after Cunningham's death, police believed that the individuals who murdered Orah were part of this cycle of violence. They suspected that two Jamaican Canadian brothers, Evol Robinson and Jahmar Welsh, were involved because Cunningham had been the latter's best friend.

Lacking sufficient evidence to prosecute anyone for Orah's murder, a Jamaican Canadian police officer named Andrew Cooper employed an elaborate scheme to obtain Robinson's and Welsh's confessions. He posed as an Obeah practitioner and befriended their mother, Colette Robinson, after the authorities learned that she believed in spirits and thought the ghost of Cunningham was still around her. Going by the name 'Leon,' Cooper convinced Ms. Robinson that she and her sons were being haunted by an evil spirit (Orah), who was in conflict with a good spirit (Cunningham). Cooper insisted that he could protect them, but only if they confessed what they had done to anger the malevolent ghost. To this purported end, he met with Ms. Robinson over the course of four months, and had ten meetings with her son Evol and two with Welsh's friend, Reuben Pinnock. All of these sessions were secretly taped, as were all of Cooper's phone calls with Ms. Robinson and the suspects, to be presented as evidence against them at trial (Queen v. Welsh 2013:10).

From their first meeting, Cooper's interactions with Ms. Robinson, Evol Robinson, and Pinnock were infused with detailed deceptions meant to convince the suspects of his powers and thus encourage the disclosure of their involvement in Orah's murder. Cooper initiated his relationship with Ms.

Robinson by staging an accident between his car and hers. When he introduced himself, he claimed he felt a ‘vibe’ from her and offered to pay for the damage to her vehicle. Several meetings followed the accident, and Cooper warned Ms. Robinson that a vengeful spirit surrounded her and this spirit was capable of manipulating police officers and judges (Queen v. Welsh 2013:14-16).

After Cooper began performing ritual services for Ms. Robinson, he had his fellow officers place a dead crow on Ms. Robinson’s doorstep. Cooper told her that the crow died because of the protection spell he had performed for her. Later, Cooper asked another police officer to pull Ms. Robinson over for a traffic stop. To illustrate the purported power of a handkerchief he had provided to keep her out of trouble with the police, Cooper arranged for this officer to pretend to become ill when he approached her and release Ms. Robinson without citation. (Queen v. Welsh 2013:14-16).

Once he finally convinced Ms. Robinson and the suspects of his powers, Cooper persuaded Evol Robinson and Pinnock to take him to the scene of the crime, claiming that in order to protect them from the evil spirit, he needed to go where it was created. They took him to where Orah was murdered and confessed to being present at the time of his death but insisted that was the extent of their involvement. Frustrated by the limited confessions, Cooper had Ms. Robinson arrested, and convinced her son, Evol, that her detention was brought about by Orah’s spirit. Cooper insisted that the spirit was escalating, and that Evol needed to be more forthcoming about what he had done to anger it so that Cooper could protect him from being arrested as well. Under this pressure, Evol admitted his involvement in Orah’s death, and also implicated his brother Welsh and several other accomplices.

Soon thereafter, Welsh, Robinson, and Pinnock were arrested and charged with first-degree murder. At trial, Robinson and Pinnock raised similar arguments about the inadmissibility of the statements they made to Cooper as Rowe had made about his interactions with Carty. They contended that they had viewed Cooper as a religious adviser or sacred specialist, analogous to a priest or imam; therefore, their statements to him should be protected by common law privilege and his deception violated their charter rights to freedom of religion. They further asserted that Cooper’s actions constituted obtaining evidence through a ‘dirty trick.’ The Court of Appeals for Ontario once again determined that the Obeah exchanges were not protected by religious privilege and that the police interest in catching criminals outweighed any harm caused by their deception.

Internal Policing in Canadian Obeah Cases

Unlike the former British West Indies, where persons of European heritage imposed restrictions on Obeah practices, in Canada, persons of Caribbean descent developed and implemented the ruses that employed spiritual rituals from their homelands to help uncover criminals in their midst. Exploiting the bonds that often exist in immigrant communities, they used language and customs from the Caribbean to solicit Jamaican Canadians to engage rituals where they were forced to divulge their illegal activities. To justify their deceptions, the architects of these plans undermined the legitimacy of this African derived belief system, describing Obeah to the authorities as sorcery, witchcraft, or charlatanism.

The first evidence that these controversies were the result of internal policing in Jamaican Obeah communities is that, similarly to the Santeria controversy in Florida, these cases began at a time when there was widespread public debates about whether Jamaicans, who were the largest population of Caribbean immigrants in Canada, were frequent perpetrators of violent crimes (Government of Canada 2006). In 1994, Jamaican immigrants were convicted of two high profile murders – the first of a white Canadian woman who was shot in an ice cream parlour, and the second of a police constable killed in an apartment complex. The following year, partially in response to these murders, Canadian legislators passed a federal statute that facilitated the deportation of immigrants who had been convicted of a crime that was punishable by at least ten years' imprisonment (Tyler 1998). Three years later, in 1998, Julian Falconer and Carmen Ellis released a report on the application of the law, asserting that Jamaicans were by far the largest immigrant group removed from the country for serious crimes. They argued that, as Jamaicans formed the basis for passing the statute and comprised an astounding 138 of the 355 individuals who had been deported from Ontario since the law went into effect, authorities discriminated in its application. Their claims that police and immigration authorities discriminated against Jamaicans may actually have had negative repercussions for public perceptions of Jamaicans because they resurrected conversations about the 1994 murders, and encouraged speculation about whether Jamaicans were more prone to commit violent crime than the rest of the population.

Rowe and his associates committed the bank robbery less than six months after the release of the Falconer-Ellis report. Furthermore, the death of

Nancy Kidd during this crime marked the first time in twenty years that someone had been murdered during a bank robbery in Canada (Mitchell & Mascoll 2001). One cannot separate Carty's decision to go to elaborate lengths to help the police apprehend his 'clients' from the impact that this robbery would have had on public perceptions of Caribbean immigrants in Canada.

One can see a similar pattern of public discourse about the prevalence of crime in Caribbean, particularly Jamaican, communities in Canada before the police developed the Obeah ruse in the Welsh case. These discussions reached their height in 2002 after the *Toronto Star*, the largest newspaper in Canada, featured a series of articles asserting that black people in Toronto were the victims of the police's racial profiling (i.e. 'Black Crime Rates Highest'). The Citizen's Centre for Freedom and Democracy responded by publishing a multi-author report asserting that 'blacks were simply involved in more such (violent) crime', and that this was true 'particularly among immigrants from Jamaica' (Stock 2002:50). Although Jamaican Canadians comprised less than 2.4% of the population of Toronto, the authors claimed that they committed 9.5% of violent crimes in the city. Quoting a Toronto criminal lawyer who explained that 'Canada has inherited Jamaica's crime problem', the authors contested the continued immigration of individuals from the island, reminding the public that Canada 'is not required to continue the importation of large numbers from one of the most violent and corrupt countries on earth' (Grace 2002:38). Again, one should consider that this resurgence of discussions about the relationship between Jamaican immigrants and violent crime may have been one of the catalysts for a police officer of Caribbean heritage to deploy an elaborate scheme to identify the persons involved in the series of murders that plagued immigrant communities.

Secondly, like Cuban opposition to Santeria in South Florida, these Obeah cases appear to have been the products of older, more established generations of Jamaican Canadians protecting the reputation of their community against younger and, in some cases, more recent arrivals. All of the known bank robbers, Campbell, Lawes, and Rowe, were in their twenties, and the latter were described as individuals who had been born in Jamaica but were living in Canada 'for several years' (Mitchell & Mascoll 1999:np). Few details were disclosed about convicted murderers Welsh, Pinnock, and Robinson, though all were described as being of Jamaican heritage and in their early twenties (Powell 2008).

In contrast to the accused criminals, the Obeah practitioners were older

and appear to have had more experience in the global north. Officer Cooper, who posed as the Obeah practitioner ‘Leon’ in the *Welsh* case, was a second-generation immigrant. He was born to a South African father and Jamaican mother in Britain before moving to Canada, where he had worked as a police officer for 18 years prior to the *Welsh* case (Humphreys 2008). Although Carty’s ethnic background was never explicitly described in the *Rowe* proceedings or in newspaper reports about this trial, evidence suggests that he was likely of Caribbean descent. Furthermore, like Cooper, Carty appears to have been an older and a more established immigrant than the defendants.

Carty was known to own a thriving business that had been in operation for some time, and he portrayed himself as unfamiliar with actual Obeah rituals, suggesting that he was not a recent arrival and many not have been Jamaican born. However, he described his main business as providing spiritual readings for Caribbean persons residing in Toronto and he styled his supposedly manufactured rituals on Jamaican Obeah practices. Carty also named his business ‘O’Shanti’s Herbal Store,’ likely a shortened version of ‘Ashanti,’ an African ethnic group who had substantial cultural impact in Jamaica.

In each of these cases, the older, more established immigrants went to great lengths to exploit their common heritage with the defendants, pushing them to become more involved in spiritual practices than they would have been without the traps. First, they gained access to the defendants through a family member who was both a believer in the power of these African-derived rituals and a client of the Obeah practitioner. Rowe and Lawes met Carty through the former’s aunt. Even though Rowe and Lawes had solicited Carty’s help prior to the bank robbery, they were not his regular clients and had no history of hiring him for other spiritual services. Instead, their practitioner-client relationship with Carty began in earnest after the bank robbery, and was commenced by Carty for the sole basis of obtaining their confessions.

While their attempts to hire Carty before the robbery suggest that Rowe and Lawes likely believed in his powers, Robinson and Pinnock appear to have been manipulated and coerced into employing Cooper. After learning that Robinson’s mother was a long-time Obeah adherent and thought herself haunted by Cunningham’s ghost, Cooper employed the plan to ensnare the suspects through their mother. To gain her trust, he spoke to her (as well as the suspects) in Jamaican Creole, and approached her using familiar Jamaican

terminology, referencing the justice system as ‘Babylon’ and the police as ‘the beast’ or ‘beastman’ (Queen v. Welsh 2013:9). Cooper repeatedly engaged Ms. Robinson in purported rituals from her homeland, trusting that she had instilled her children with a belief in evil spirits and would impress upon her sons and their accomplices the efficacy of African Jamaican spiritual practices in eradicating them².

After manipulating the defendants into confessing by convincing them of the efficacy of Obeah rituals, police officers and agents then undermined these African derived spiritual practices by explaining to the courts that they were not religious. These tactics, once again, resemble the Santeria case when the Cuban-dominated City Council and residents of Hialeah contended that the faith at issue was more akin to ‘witchcraft’ than recognized religion. For example, although Carty had been operating as a self-described ‘spiritualist’ and had been profiting off of his reputation as an Obeah practitioner, he denigrated his own practice as a non-religious ruse. According to the appellate court, Carty ‘conceded that he had no genuine spiritual powers and that he could be described as a ‘con man and a charlatan’ because he misled his clients into believing otherwise’ (Queen v. Rowe 2006:4).

The police used similar language when they laid out their plan to have Cooper pose as an Obeah practitioner to gain more evidence against Welsh and Robinson. Detective Sergeant Jarvis, who had worked on the *Rowe* case and, based on this experience, had constructed the Obeah ruse used in *Welsh*, explained ‘that he thought that Obeah was not a religion but a form of witchcraft or voodoo and that he would not use a similar operation for an established religion’ (Queen v. Welsh 2013:31). Cooper, the Jamaican-Canadian police officer who carried out Jarvis’s scheme, also indicated that he regarded Obeah as a type of ‘voodoo and witchcraft’ (Queen v. Pinnock 2007: 9). Even in official police records, the officers noted that the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of Obeah was ‘the use of sorcery and magic ritual’ in the Caribbean and described their plan stating ‘the undercover officer will explore

² Ironically, the Court of Appeals for Ontario ruled that the fact that they had not previously engaged in Obeah rituals before encountering ‘Leon’ greatly diminished the impact that this ruse had on their religious freedom. The Court both questioned the sincerity of their religious beliefs and distinguished this from a scenario where an individual had a pre-existing spiritual relationship with religious official who became a police informant.

the named person's willingness to use *sorcery* to fight the police and the judiciary' (Queen v. Welsh 2013:14, e.a.).

These cases therefore share three parallels with the City of Hialeah case that demonstrate that all these disputes were the result of Caribbean immigrants denigrating religions from their homeland to attempt to repair their reputation in the global north. First, all three cases originated during a time period when these immigrant populations were accused of perpetrating violent crime in their host communities. Second, the initial challenges to these religions clearly arose from the immigrants themselves and were led by older, more established immigrants and lodged against younger, new generations. Third, the tactics espoused in these cases were very similar – the individuals opposing these faiths argued that they were 'witchcraft,' 'voodoo,' or something less than religion. As the next section will discuss, although these strategies to denounce Santeria ultimately failed before the U.S. Supreme Court in the *City of Hialeah* case, they have thus far been successful in Canadian Obeah cases.

Religious Freedom and Obeah in Canada

It is important to recall that when the District Court found in favour of the City of Hialeah's attempts to ban animal sacrifice and the practice of Santeria, the Court noted that Santeria was an African-derived faith that was not socially acceptable amongst the majority of the Cuban population and stressed that it differed from Abrahamic faiths. When read together, the trial and appellate court rulings in *Rowe* and *Welsh* reveal similar considerations about the social acceptability of Obeah as a religion and, once again, Abrahamic faiths were the yardstick for determining what was covered by legal guarantees of religious freedom. Due to the distinct structure and function of the Obeah rituals at issue in these cases, the courts determined that these practices were essentially secular and not entitled to the constitutional and statutory protections that shield religious actors from excessive governmental intrusions.

Rowe appears to have been the first case in which Canadian courts were ever asked to determine whether the Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices known as 'Obeah' satisfied the legal definition of 'religion'. Likely because of the novelty of the consideration of Obeah as a religion, the defence hired a Catholic priest, Father Thomas Lynch, as well as two professors of religious studies, Dr. Abraham Khan and Dr. Frederick Case, to testify to the religious

nature of the Obeah sessions. However, on cross-examination, the prosecution pushed the experts and Father Lynch to admit several significant distinctions between the Obeah rites at issue in the case and the practices of Abrahamic religions, including: the offering of protection from arrest, charging a fee for spiritual services (particularly one collected from the proceeds of a crime) and the absence of repentance. Because of these distinctions, the trial judge determined and the Court of Appeals agreed that while Obeah might be a recognized religion, these specific exchanges were not ‘religious.’ As such, the defendants’ sessions with Carty were not confidential religious exchanges.

Unlike *Rowe*, where the rulings centred on the inconsistencies in the experts’ arguments that Obeah was comparable to recognized religions, the trial judge in *Welsh* analysed the defendants’ exchanges with Cooper under a four-prong test used to determine whether religious communications are protected by privilege. However, the essence of issue remained the same—whether these exchanges satisfied the definition of religious exchanges according to Abrahamic values and whether the religious practices were socially acceptable. The first two elements of the test pertained to the confidentiality of the exchanges; the third was that the relationship is one ‘which in the opinion of the community ought to be sedulously *fostered*’, and fourth was that the injury to the relationship from disclosing the communications must be greater than the benefit derived from ‘the correct disposal of litigation’ (Queen v. Welsh 2013:20). While the trial judge did not dispute the centrality of confidentiality between an Obeah practitioner and his client, he found that it failed the third prong of the test because their purpose in consulting ‘Leon’ (Cooper) was to ‘obstruct law enforcement officials and the judiciary from prosecuting them’ and the judge believed there was no community interest in allowing them to avoid penalties for their crimes’ (Queen v. Welsh 2013:20-21). This same reasoning also led the judge to find that the fourth prong was not satisfied; he believed that the harm in excluding the evidence and letting the defendants go free was greater than any damage to the relationship between Obeah practitioners and their clients (Queen v. Welsh 2013:21). Therefore in *Welsh*, as in *Rowe*, the determination that Obeah rituals were not privileged religious exchanges hinged on the fact that, unlike practitioners of Abrahamic religions, the defendants had not consulted a spiritual advisor to cleanse them of their ‘sins,’ but rather to avoid the legal consequences of their actions. In each case, the court ruled that these communications were not ‘religious’ or were not the type of spiritual

interactions that were intended for protection when the concept of religious privilege was established.

The courts' determinations that police agents and officers posing as Obeah practitioners was a valid method of obtaining evidence followed the same line of reasoning. The analysis was based on *Rothman*, a 1981 case in which the Supreme Court of Canada determined that police were entitled to use some deceit to further their investigations but that evidence obtained through 'dirty tricks' was not admissible at trial. The justices had explained that 'conduct on their part that shocks the community', would render a police tactic a 'dirty trick' (*Rothman v. The Queen* 1981: 642). They provided a series of examples of such 'shocking' behaviour, including '(t)hat a police officer pretend to be a lock-up chaplain and hear a suspect's confession' (*Rothman v. The Queen* 1981: 697). The defendants in *Rowe* and *Welsh* argued that employing a police officer or agent to pretend to perform Obeah rituals on their behalf was analogous to pretending to be a chaplain to take a suspect's confession, and thus constituted a 'dirty trick.'

In both cases, the Court of Appeals for Ontario disagreed. The judges determined that while these situations shared some superficial similarities to the example cited in *Rothman*, the defendants' purpose in consulting an Obeah practitioner rendered an otherwise religious exchange secular. The Court of Appeals explained that the *Rothman* example 'presumes the sincerity of the religious belief of the penitent' who intends 'the use of the confessional as a means of helping people overcome their errors by forgiving their sins' (*Queen v. Rowe* 2006:14). As with the question of the applicability of religious privilege, the ruling hinged on the fact that the Court viewed consulting a spiritual advisor to get away with a crime or rid oneself of an evil spirit as a secular activity that was significantly different from confessing one's 'sins' to seek absolution from god.

Perhaps the most telling part of these decisions is that in addition to finding that Obeah exchanges were not legally protected because they were distinct from mainstream religious communications, the Court of Appeals also emphasized that their determination that police could pretend to be an Obeah practitioner had no bearing on other circumstances where an officer posed as a religious adviser. The judges indicated that these Obeah ruses were the only cases of this kind they were aware of and that 'the police must proceed with the utmost caution' when dealing with religious freedom (*Queen v. Welsh* 2013:39). They explained that the *Welsh* ruling does not mean 'that the police

are entitled to pose as religious advisers and expect that statements obtained from religiously-motivated suspects will be admitted' (Queen v. Welsh 2013:39). They clarified that '(i)n cases where suspects have sincere religious beliefs and seek counselling from a supposed religious adviser for non-corrupt religious reasons, the result could well be different' (Queen v. Welsh 2013: 30).

As this rhetoric demonstrates, the courts' decisions in *Rowe* and *Welsh* reveal a very limited protection of African diasporic religions. The judges assumed that a religion must be centred on a belief in a dichotomy between good and evil, as well as grounded on the idea that a faithful adherent would only use religion for ethical purposes such as confession and absolution. Obeah, on the other hand, is based on the African-derived premise that supernatural forces and beings, as well as the priests or adepts who interact with them, are neither exclusively good nor evil and can be appealed to for any desired end (Murrell 2010). One of the most common functions of Obeah practitioners is to assist their clients with their legal woes, including preventing arrest and impeding prosecution (Olmos & Gebert 2003). Thus, in ruling that some of the most central Obeah rituals were not protected by religious privilege or shielded from police intervention, the Court of Appeals carved out a very narrow definition of 'religion,' and left practitioners of this African diaspora faith more vulnerable to state infringements on their rights than adherents of other belief systems.

Conclusion

As scholars examine the experiences of Caribbean immigrants in North America, it is important to note that litigation over the practice of African diaspora religions has dramatically increased in the United States and Canada since the late twentieth century. In addition to the cases discussed herein, adherents of Rastafari, Palo, Vodou and Santeria have faced numerous challenges to their religious freedom in recent years.³ As this article has discussed, these controversies are not just the response of Western

³ Rastafari practitioners have been prosecuted for illegal use of marijuana, Palo practitioners have been charged with grave robbing and child endangerment, Vodou practitioners have also been charged with grave robbing and Santeria practitioners continue to contend with restrictions on their animal sacrifices.

governments to unfamiliar faiths, they are also partially grounded in the desire of migrant communities themselves seeking to improve their reputation by sacrificing their spiritual heritage. They are part and parcel of disputes between newer and more established immigrants as well as between younger and older generations, and occur in moments when immigrant communities are being portrayed as the perpetrators of violent crime. These cases both cause and represent spiritual and racial cleavages within Caribbean migrant communities in the global north, and undoubtedly have a chilling impact on African diaspora religious freedom in North America.

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The Materiality of Pentecostal Religious Healing: The Case of Cameroonian Migrants in Cape Town

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Abstract

Based on ethnographic research among Cameroonian migrants living in Cape Town, South Africa, this study looks at the use of sacred healing objects among these migrant groups. Exploring the extent to which migrants' everyday lives are rooted in the nexus of attaining divine healing and consolidating healing gains through the use of religious sacred healing objects and the 'word', I interrogate how the use of these objects within Pentecostal churches fulfils the quest for divine healing among Cameroonian migrants. I argue that the sheer challenges of migration and the difficulties that goes with it, increases the tendency of migrants to look towards Pentecostal churches for healing, increases, so too does their belief in the healing powers of various healing objects that migrants buy in a bid to attain wholeness and be at peace with oneself.

Keywords: Religious healing, sacred objects, Pentecostal churches, Cameroon, migration

Introduction

This one, it is golden oil that Pastor Bushiri brings from Israel. He gives it in a small box to international visitors. I have it, see ... this stuff, they do help me ... with a sticker. You buy the sticker, the book and anointing oil. Then they will give

you water for free. When I spray the water I feel different. I'm feeling better since I've started spraying. This is the fourth one. This one, I bought it again last time from our own church. Even that of T.B. Joshua, I got a lot. Each time people travel from here to Nigeria to the synagogue I give them money to buy for me anointing oil, holy water and stickers and that one comes with a free DVD (Zora, 29/06/2017).

In this paper, I use the story of Zora – a widow in her mid-forties who came to Cape Town in 2011 and is involved in informal trading – and those of other migrants to illustrate the extent to which migrants actively seek religious healing through the use of sacred objects. I explore the everyday practices of attaining healing and encounters with objects of healing and how migrants make meaning of lived religion to provide solutions to their challenges. Zora had a swollen leg and foot rot, which she believed was caused by a python living in her body. Zora did not go to the hospital to diagnose the foot rot, but rather used holy water and anointed oil to apply to the affected area, as well as anointed stickers to protect her from future illnesses. Zora's story epitomises that of other migrants for whom the use of various religious healing objects corresponds to that sought from traditional healers. Pentecostal churches have replaced traditional healers by inculcating African cultural beliefs and cosmologies in their healing practices, and offer remedies that are adaptations of traditional practices. While recognising the similarities of their healing practices, their sources are different. This is pointed out by Allan Anderson (2001:106):

The diviner has traditional answers to these questions, which invariably involve the performance of a ritual act aimed at placating an offended ancestor. In keeping with the holistic worldview, the whole of the African environment is given religious meaning African prophets, provide an ostensibly biblical solution to the questions relating to tangible physical needs and the persistence of affliction.

One such solution is the healing and deliverance offered by Pentecostals that fulfils a felt need and therefore produces a 'product' that is attractive in

Africa's religious market (Anderson 2006). Globalisation has opened up the world to accelerated flows of people, goods and services. However, in the face of such accelerated mobilities has emerged the globalisation of Pentecostalism as an export to the rest of the world. As Corten and Marshall-Fratini (see also Droogers 2001) argue, the reason for such exponential growth is Pentecostal capacity to embody the,

open-endedness of a global network of flows, a composite of heterogeneous elements flexible and indeterminate enough in meaning to allow their setting to work in multitude of contexts, yet offering at the same time a stable collection of narrative formulae and well-organised structures which provide a solid anchorage for individuals at large in the frightening sea of possibilities and frustrations (2001:3).

Along with this export is the mobility of sacred healing objects that are sought after and believed to have healing effects. Migration does not always fulfil migrants' expectations in terms of upward social mobility. This, in combination with the everyday challenges of living as migrants, has resulted in the search for alternative possibilities that go beyond local cultural repertoires (Corten & Marshall-Fratani 2001). The fear and excitement born of social dislocation and the desire for new communities coincide with needs for physical healing. For migrants in particular, Pentecostal religion opens up new avenues of possibility and serves to soothe their frustrations, challenges and unfulfilled fantasies. As Ferguson (2006) and Nyamnjoh (2004) explain, Pentecostalism thus offers that opening up to the world that globalisation had promised for some, yet did not deliver. The influence of Pentecostal evangelism with its focus on doctrines such as miracle healing, salvation and the prosperity gospel speak to individuals, and especially migrants, bedevilled by the challenges of migration. Moreover, these doctrines also espouse a cultural context of witchcraft as some of the causes of their problems, which attract migrants who identify with such evangelism.

Amanda Porterfield (2005:174) states that Pentecostalism resonates with experiences of healing associated with indigenous cultures, while at the same time promoting a code that enables migrants to reorganize their lives and cope with the challenges, disease, loneliness, and stresses of urban life. Pentecostalism helps newcomers find themselves among the high paced and

brutal realities of multinational cultures and economies of city life. It also gives people a new chance at establishing themselves and a means of forging new ties of interpersonal and institutional support. In this respect, healing is very much at the centre of what people need and want from religion as it provides a framework for making sense of the world and coping with life (Musgrave, Allen & Allen 2002). While the search for healing is synonymous with cultural forms of healing where those afflicted consult traditional healers who diagnose the cause of the illness and prescribe herbs and a process of ritual cleansing, Pentecostalism provides alternative healing practices that take similar African worldviews seriously, such as the belief that evil spirits are the causes of ill health. From this perspective, Pentecostals invoke the power of Jesus as the divine healer and make use of sacred objects styled after those previously sought from traditional healers as alternative forms of healing as well as providing a cultural community that substitutes the dominant culture in significant ways (Droogers 2001; Onyinah 2006; Kalu 2008; Gornik 2011; Omenyo 2011).

Academic research on Pentecostal healing is extensive, illustrated by the numerous articles that have addressed various aspects of Pentecostalism. However, these studies have paid inadequate attention to the materials and objects that play a part in healing. Sacred objects produced by Pentecostal churches (PC) are very much in demand and churches have placed a high premium on them. By the same token, migrants have added value to these sacred objects by the high demand and healing values placed on these goods. Consequently, these goods are increasingly transnationally mobile and sought after by those in need of healing. This paper explores the various uses of sacred objects for healing by migrants as well as migrants' beliefs about the effectiveness of such objects. Focusing on Cameroonian migrants in Cape Town, I look at the different objects that they buy from PCs. These objects include holy water, anointing oil (olive oil), wall/car stickers, wrist bangle, DVDs containing prayers as well as manuals on how to use the healing objects. In addition, there are equally intangible objects that have proven useful, especially for those unable to regularly purchase the objects. These include invoking the 'blood of Jesus' and one's ability to be 'soaked in the word'. All of which are referred to by David Oyedepo of Winner's Chapel as 'Biblical power instruments' (Oyedepo 2006, cited by Gifford 2011:254). Quite often, Christians are expected to use a combination of tangible and intangible materials to achieve effective and victorious healing. Using this form of

healing therefore is inspired by Jesus' empowerment to all of his followers to pray, heal, and trust God for miracles, just as Jesus himself had done. Paul Alexander also notes that the belief in the healing power of such objects follows instructions that Jesus gave before returning to His Father: 'if you are sick, ask the mature believers to come and pray for you. Ask them to put olive oil on you in the name of the Lord. Prayers offered in faith will make sick people well' (2009:6; see also Kalu 2008:264). The paper asks how and to what extent migrants have adopted sacred religious objects to attain healing.

This study draws on ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews conducted between 2016 and 2017 in Cape Town, South Africa. A total of 18 migrants (12 women and 6 men) were interviewed. Some of the informants were interviewed repeatedly, especially those who were regular buyers of healing objects from different churches. The aim of repeated interviews with this group of informants was to ascertain their beliefs about the effectiveness and motivation for using multiples healing objects simultaneously.

Migration from Cameroon into South Africa started after the demise of apartheid in 1995. Between the late 1990s and early 2000 South Africa was considered as an alternative to route into Europe, following the tightening of Europe's border. From the mid-2000s, South Africa became the destination of choice for many. For most migrants, however, South Africa was still considered as a springboard to onwards migration; a process which eventually stalled when migrants realized the impossibility of securing a visa due to being undocumented. Faced with the reality of life in South Africa being different from the utopian ideas held, coupled with the challenges of settling in in the margins of society and financial expectations from families back home, the health of many migrants has been affected (Nyamnjoh 2017). The corollary to this is the feeling of perceived witchcraft (attributing illness because of witchcraft by relatives at home), psycho-social illness, physical, spiritual, and emotional ill health. While some resort to conventional health seeking behaviours, others resort to PCs for healing. For the latter, categorisation of most of their woes as spiritual inhibits them from going to the hospital to seek biomedical healing. Rather, they approach PCs for divine healing and prophesy to unearth the root causes of their ill health. As Andrew Chestnut intimates, having reached a point of despair at the 'closed door' the afflicted listen to the Pentecostal proselytizers who offer an immediate and comprehensive solution to the sufferers' physical, psychological, social or spiritual illnesses (1997:172). In the process, migrants are inducted into the healing powers of 'Biblical power

instruments' to attain total healing and wholeness.

This study draws on literature at the migration-precarity-agency nexus (Paret & Gleeson 2016). In addition to this, I add a fourth connection – religion – to understand what makes migrants' lives precarious, and the ways in which they redress the precariousness. It is in this regard that I leverage the migration-precarity-religion-agency intersections to understand migrants' health challenges in the host country, and the agency that drives health-seeking ways. Inasmuch as migrant existence is often precarious in multiple, and reinforcing, ways, the three dimensions without religion has been used to mainly to comprehend structural inequalities and labour related marginalisation. The addition of religion to the above nexus foregrounds the fact that religious migrants can be agentic even when faced with challenges or operating within oppressive institutional contexts.

Religious multi-sitedness provides reasons for migrants' going to different churches to seek answers, meaning and expression across multiple social institutions (Ammerman 2010). Following Paret and Gleeson (2016: 280) the central 'significance of the precarity concept lies in the way in which the concept connects the micro and the macro, situating experiences of insecurity and vulnerability within historically and geographically specific contexts'. Migrants' experiences, from the vantage point of sickness, psychosocial trauma and perceived witchcraft (attributing illness to witchcraft by relatives at home), in the host country therefore provide a crucial window into another form of precarity. Conversely, the notion of precarity provides a beacon of hope for overcoming passiveness because it represents a possible reference point to actively seek life-changing solutions (Waite 2009). It is this meaning-making and seeking of solutions, referred to by Neilson and Rossiter (2008) as 'translation', that reflects agency among migrants. While Paret and Gleeson (2016:282) identify four forms of agency, this study will be limited to one form- 'individual agency' – which migrants use to both understand and address their illness.

Biblical Pathways to Divine Healing

Facing illness, psychosocial trauma or spiritual attacks that magnify the fragility of existence can lead migrants to question the purpose of life. Divine healing and the sense that life has meaning can provide them with the opportunity to develop a personal symbolic visualization of and closeness to a

higher power. Through prayers and church attendance, as well as the use of healing objects migrants can reify their faith in God. As Musgrave, Allen and Allen (2002) and Wuthnow and Offutt (2008) show, reaching out to attain total healing involves spiritual practices and encounters with various religious objects and information, including audio/video recordings and books/pamphlets. Healing can include the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil. The healing offered to people relies upon various symbols, especially the sprinkling of holy water, which is a sacrament providing ritual purification and protection. In this regard, Popoviciu, Popoviciu, Birle, Olah, and Negrut (2013) note that the way religion interprets, theorizes, and responds to illness plays an important role in how that illness is understood, and also determines how persons affected by various ailments are (mis)treated in a given context. It is for this reason that migrants actively purchase and rely on religion and healing objects, they place trust in their efficacy and what they offer in terms of healing and protection against marginality (McCullough & Larson 1999). Symbolic healing practices are justified by the Bible, where Jesus used mud and spittle to heal a blind person, Peter used cloths to heal, and Old Testament prophets used staffs, water, and various other objects to perform healing and miracles (Anderson 2002). Such practices have ancient roots within the Christian tradition. In the Old Testament, olive oil, mixed with various spices, was used in anointing priests and kings. During the early Middle Ages this became the sacrament of Extreme Unction, which was administered as a last rite in the Roman Catholic Church. Since Vatican II, however, it has been restored as a sacrament of healing, and is in wide use in PCs. They signify and seal God's power and gifts that the church uses in healing: forgiveness, reconciliation, hope, and love. They remind us that Christ has given of himself for all of creation (Evans 1995).

Similarly to the use of these objects, the belief in the 'word' or one's ability to be 'soaked in the word' is a fundamental way of attaining healing. Having one's life directed in a meaningful way was the essence of spirituality for many of the respondents in this project. Pentecostal hermeneutics thus 'underscore the emphasis on the power of the word in spiritual formation; the word resists forces that could lead one to backslide, reverses curses and provides deliverance' (Kalu 2008:269). My informants confirmed that they get healing through the 'words of knowledge' (liturgy), sacred objects such as, anointing (olive) oils, holy water, handkerchiefs, and anointed wall/car stickers (see also Lartey 1986).

Sacred Objects/ Biblical Power Instruments and their Healing Powers

The following excerpt from my interview with Sam captures the mobility and healing powers of sacred objects;

Prior to Pastor John's¹ coming to Cape Town for a three day crusade, he shipped cartons of anointing oil, holy water handkerchief, wrist band and stickers, and his autobiography which will be sold during the crusade and thereafter as a package. Here is some in my car [showing the researcher], I always have some in the car. I never go out without anointing oil and holy water. In the event that I have to drive out of town, I always spray holy water on my tyres and anoint myself with the oil. This is to protect me and ensure a safe journey. Most especially, when I am going to a place that I am not sure of the people I will be meeting, I simply carry both on me after first anointing myself before coming out of the car for my protection (Sam, 01/05/2017).

Sam came to South Africa in 2000, and found a job in the film industry. In 2006 he decided to return to Cameroon and set up his own business, which was unsuccessful. Two years later he returned to South Africa unemployed and with a broken spirit. After a lengthy interview with Sam, and as I walked him to his car, a phone call came in asking whether he still had anointing oil for sale, to which he responded in the affirmative and arranged to supply the prospective buyer after we separated. I was curious to know more and a conversation ensued as to how he came to be the contact person for people in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria wanting to buy the healing products. He then went on to tell me how it was an important aspect of his spirituality. Drawing on his narrative, these objects are used for healing as well as for protection to evade ill health and to ensure permanent health.

Jacques Matthey (2004:408) notes that to 'experience healing is not just to experience freedom from sickness and illness, or problems and suffering'. Healing is a sign of what the Old Testament calls 'Shalom' (peace, salvation) as the establishment or restoration of right and reconciled relationships, now and at the end of time'. From this perspective, Sam's use of

¹ Pastor John came from Cameroon at the invitation of Sam in February 2017.

anointing oil and holy water is to ensure good health and protect against anything that may cause ill health. Significantly, the use of these objects is reassuring, and gives him a feeling of peace, of God's grace being with him and protecting him in his encounters. Sam's actions equally point to the dynamism of healing. As intimated by Matthey (2004:408) healing is not simply to 'experience freedom from sickness or problems and suffering', healing includes a 'state of wellbeing of the individual; of physical, mental, spiritual, economic and social wellbeing in harmony with each other'. Sam's experience also underscores the influential teachings of PCs regarding the power of anointing; 'the empowering presence of God that makes things happen ... "anointing" is the power of God in action' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:22). While anointing may simply be the laying of hands over a Christian seeking healing, it also involves various religious materials that are believed to possess healing powers to connect the sick to God.

Like Sam, Cathy believes in the power of anointing oil and holy water, and believes they are a 'must have' in the car and be used when embarking on a long drive or meeting unknown persons. The holy water and anointing oil that Cathy has in her car are considered prized gifts because they were given to her by Pastor John after she worked as an usher during a crusade in Cape Town. As such, the holy water and anointing oil have double anointing powers given that the pastors prayers are perceived as more powerful than those of a simple church member (Währisch-Oblau 2001; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005). When she enters her car, she sprays some holy water on the car and on herself. This is to remove any bad spirits that may enter into her car and keep her car 'immune to accidents and scratches' (Oyedepo, cited in Gifford 2011:259). Although she is a nurse, Cathy's medication of choice is anointing oil and holy water. Narrating her experience regarding experiencing a painful leg, she explains that:

I woke up one morning with excruciating pain on my right leg, deep inside my leg. I thought many things. I thought again, maybe it's the evil spirits that has been stopping my friend from getting a job that has attacked me now for trying to help her, but I said no, I'm not going to go to the doctor because I know if I go they're going to say, oh you have a blood clot, oh you have this, nerve pinched or you have that. I know all these things, I'm a professional nurse, but I'm not going to go to the doctor. I took the bottle of anointing oil and holy water that

Pastor John gave to us as ushers during the crusade, prayed over it again and rubbed and sprayed on the leg. Although the pain did not go completely, I was relieved of that excruciating pain (Cathy, 27/04/2017).

Despite being a nurse, Cathy avoids biomedical treatment because ‘its use is viewed as evidence of “weak” faith’ (Anderson 2002:526). In particular, Cathy believes her objects have a special potency as they were given to her by the pastor. The efficacy of these objects has been expounded by Bishop David Oyedepo who maintains that the oil will ‘give a man or any object on which it is poured immunity against any form of evil...It is an all-purpose drug for any ailment of life’ (Oyedepo 2006, cited in Gifford 2011:254). Cathy is happy with the partial healing she received and draws strength from the fact that the excruciating pain disappeared and she could at least walk. Her thinking is corroborated by Onyinah (2006:125-126, see also Kalu 2008) who posits that God chooses how and when he wants to act in response to people’s pleas for healing. To the informants in this study, the healing powers of sacred objects are considered as panacea for any ailment, even spiritual attacks and difficulties in navigating the everyday life.

Zora’s Story

Zora is a widow in her mid-forties, who has three children living in Cameroon with her mother-in law. She came to Cape Town in 2011 and is involved in informal trading. When meeting her for an interview, she was quick to show me a section of her closet that is packed full with bottles (some of which were empty) of anointing oil, holy water, wall stickers, DVDs and other memorabilia she has bought. Her attendance at crusades is propelled by the fact that she has a big problem – she believes there is a python living inside her body that has led her right leg to swell and caused foot rot. The use of the oils and water is to quell the movement of the python in her body, as well as to treat the foot rot. In particular, she considers holy water as ritual purification and protection from further evil spirits. The oil is used to rub on her stomach and leg. On other occasions, she sprays the handkerchief with holy water and oil and wraps it around her leg when it is painful.

She explained her problem and narrated to me how she has been buying the various sacred objects:

The Materiality of Pentecostal Religious Healing

I was having big problem. I was physically feeling a snake is moving in my body, even in my stomach. I feel movement all over me, even my toes, when I sit it's like a python all over inside me. It was so serious, I went to other churches, when I hear that a pastor is coming in Johannesburg I go as international visitor². You see, this problem of python is something which is like a strong spirit in the family, which to deliver is not an easy problem... That particular python is affecting my leg, you can see here [shows the interviewer her swollen leg], it was sore, it's getting rotten. They are very helpful, but that from Synagogue in Nigeria has more anointing. Last week I was limping due to pains I felt on this side [points to her waist down to her left leg], So, I just decided, last Friday I went to this guy [Sam], to buy water from Pastor John just to spray on my leg because I didn't have much left. I don't believe in hospital! If I have a problem, I just depend on this stuff. This stuff, they do help me, the water is important. Since I've started spraying, when I spray it, I feel different. I'm feeling better (Zora, 29/06/2017).

In addition to the holy water, Zora uses stickers for protection. She explained that:

This sticker when I go anywhere I put it like this (stuffs it in her bra), I don't put it by the door. Because when I put it by the door, for me, I'm wasting it. I put it on myself, especially when I am going somewhere I consider dangerous. When I put like this (stuffed in her bra), whatever stress or I'm thinking a lot about something, in the end I will succeed. Me! I believe in their anointing power and it happens! (Zora, 29/06/2017).

The powers attributed to the various objects are enormous and Zora's belief is driven by the faith that she has in the objects. Anointing oil and stickers, have proven their potency to her and she can testify to the 'empowering presence of

² There is an advantage of going as international visitor coming from Cape Town because she pays more and has priority of front row seat and will meet the pastor.

God' that makes things happen. The oil as a substance is a transmitter of invisible grace (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:22). While the anointing is usually obtained by applying the oil accompanied by the touch of the pastor, self-anointing is also common. Those engaged in self-anointing are still able to testify the power of God in action, as seen in the stories told by Zora and Cathy. Migrants believe the objects help them maintain a constant relationship with God, and therefore make all things possible for them.

Inasmuch as Zora is able to buy locally and from crusades, she depends on those traveling to Nigeria to buy sacred objects from Prophet T.B. Joshua's Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN). She regularly sends money through those who travel to Lagos for healing to buy a package comprising holy water, anointing oil, DVDs and a prayer manual. When Faith travelled to SCOAN to seek healing for the lump in her breast, she returned with anointed oil/stickers and holy water and a wrist band. Navigating everyday life for Zora equally requires that she carries a sticker on her person to block anything that impedes her functioning in her daily life. To this effect, she tells me a story about an incident on a train and about how she did not have enough transport money to get home, but because she had the sticker on her, God heard her worries and put someone on her path to give her a train ticket to last for three days. For her, this is a sign of answered prayers. She surmises that, 'You see! Because I was having my sticker with me, so God listened!' The result of going out with her sticker on her and having a silent request to God proves her point about the effectiveness of the sticker to provide solution to her problem.

The benefits of these religious materials outweigh any price tag placed on them. Hence, migrants have come to rely on them as sacred and protective ammunitions that mediate between them and God. Whereas Asamoah-Gyadu (2004:373) cautions whether anointing with oil works, these healing practices must not be 'absolutized' and divorced from other therapeutic methods; those who rely on them for healing believe the effects seem absolute. Zora rationalises the healing of her leg through the use of anointing oil and holy water that she regularly sprays on the affected area, while Cathy believes staying free from accidents is due to the oil that she rubs on her tyres.

For many migrants, crusades are occasions that are perceived to be filled with healing. Zora considers crusades as her best shows because they are filled with anointing. She states that crusades, especially those pastors filled with prophecy and anointing, is where divine healing is often sought. Her problem is the swelling of her leg/foot rot. She stated that 'at times there are

some crusades when I go I feel like someone is taking out shoes from my leg, I feel many things'. Although these crusades are held in Pretoria or Johannesburg with guests expected from neighbouring countries, Zora prefers to attend the crusades as an international guest because of the advantages it includes. International guests pay R5000 (approximately USD384), which includes lodging, meal, and transport to and from the crusade venues. In addition, international visitors are provided with badges that allow them access to reserved front row seats, attend a diplomatic service (a service only for those who paid R5000), and have a one-on-one meeting with the pastor for anointing and are given sacred healing materials. Zora has a lot of experience attending crusades and has travelled to many. She narrates her healing experience with Prophet Omoto Fufeyin:

Before I went to the crusade this my leg was swelling, this particular leg [shows the researcher her right leg] was swelling. Then the day I went, as I was in that crusade, when the pastor passed next to me, it was like a pressure was going out of my leg. That my foot, it was like they are taking out somethings, they are pinching, it was like a serious pressure was being released until I come back, and then my foot got better. It stayed well for quite some time, but when I dreamt that I wore a pair of socks in the night, I woke up and the swelling returned, along with signs of foot rot (Zora, 29/06/2017).

Zora's visits to crusades highlights the fact that healing could be 'gradual' or 'natural', but more importantly, that God sometimes chooses not to heal, and that suffering is part of the divine economy (Warrington 2003). It also shows how Pentecostal preachers and their followers have put a premium on divine healing (Kalu 2008). In order for this premium to be acceptable, the church, it seems, has packaged the product (diplomatic service), such that Christians see its essence as a product filled with 'instant' healing. The reception given to the paying guests reinforced the significance of the premium. Importantly, the language used – international diplomatic service – to address the guests has been politicised to make them feel truly international. International guests receive significant attention and are the ones to be shown on TV regularly. Zora was very proud that on her return to Cape Town, lots of people reported that they saw her on TV.

Healing and Impartation through the ‘Words of Knowledge’

The ‘word’, like healing objects, is a powerful tool to attaining healing. Most informants argued that the word gives them a foundation from which they can more easily move into the other levels of healing. Sahkti Gawain (1997:15) surmises that ‘without the ability to make this inner spiritual connection, it may be very difficult or even impossible to find the inspiration, understanding, and strength they need to confront the difficulties and challenges of healing the other levels’. Through the word, Pentecostals declare a message that reclaimed the biblical traditions of healing and protection from evil (Anderson 2002). The word thus could be likened to that of Jesus to His disciples during the Sermon on the Mount. If they heard His words and put them into practice, they would be able to withstand any storm. Similarly, when migrants listen to the words and obey them, they hope to build their lives on a steady and solid foundation. Healing through the word therefore requires one to have an understanding of what the Bible teaches, to live according to the teachings, to pray and be prayed for. On the effectiveness of the word Grace noted that; ‘what I like about the healing ministry is that they teach you the word of God about healing so that you understand it’s not magic, it’s a process and it’s what the word of God says’. It is through the word that believers seek to understand their problems and get healing. Given that preaching the word and divine healing are inextricably linked, surrendering to the word is an acknowledgement that the full gospel contains good news for all of life’s problems. As Brueggemann (1993:88) articulates ‘the word is embodied in the community and, therefore, the text is read eschatologically as the intrusion of the kingdom of God into the present and as empowerment in living out its promises’. Quite often, the theology of these churches consists of a clear and direct message that addresses the concerns of Christians, particularly those of migrants, in ways that are convincing to them (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005). Importantly, listening to the word in a familiar language (such as Pidgin English, or English with a recognisable accent), makes homiletics accessible and affirms peoples’ experiences to the extent that it is applicable to their lives. It is common that Pentecostal Christians come to church with big notebooks to write down the teachings that they will spend the rest of the week meditating on and apply to their daily lives. Many preachers also encourage congregants to write down and underline sections of particular teachings.

This teaching seems to be what Cathy needs. Recalling her earlier troubled life with relationships leading to emotional instability, it would appear

her emotional problems are still on-going; this time troubled by happenings within her family and she is unable to understand why she is still celibate. As the third child in a family of ten siblings, the burden of assisting the family rests on her. Cathy cannot fathom why she has to be the only one looking after the family, and it weighs her down. She explains her worries,

Growing up as a child, I really respected all these laws of the church and I thought that my life will be easier as an adult. But why must I struggle like this in my life? I am left with two children, I'm alone in my life. My parents didn't have a good job, but I'm the only one to lift up my whole family... I have to spread all my resources that I've gained in my whole life...I was stressing in all these things. Why is it that other people can get scholarships but I have to pay for everything from my pocket? Why is it that people are settled? Married? I am not. Why is it that I had to leave Cameroon to come to a man and be disappointed in this kind of a way? Then I look, I see my children, what can I do? How can I prepare my children? So, all of these things were disturbing a lot and when I went to church and they would preach and they would emphasise that God is the superior, there is no human being that can do anything to you. That consoled me. Now I look back and I say oh my God, even if I had all the money in my account and my sisters, maybe, had died what will I do with all those things. So, that helped me, to be happy. I used to be depressed a lot, but after listening and getting the word, soaked in the bible and the preaching analysed, things became clearer and I started thinking positive (Cathy, 27/04/2017).

Cathy's self-interrogation is suggestive of a emotional/psychological response to marginalisation and the challenges and demands from family in the home country, experienced by many migrants. It illustrates the precarity of being a migrant – often a life of double challenges – navigating the daily life and demands from family in the home country. In a way, divine healing is achieved by practicing love and the need to lay down her life for others. Similar to the woman with haemorrhage in the bible, Cathy stepped forth in faith and grasped God's standing offer of emotional stability. The word thus provides 'an asylum of therapeutic assistance' (Eugene 1995:66), as well as a place of shelter. Her discernment of biblical scripture seems to have empowered and given her agen-

cy to see her responsibility towards her family not so much as a burden but an act of love and kindness. Consequently, she has the simple human desire to have more control and power over her life and circumstances (Alexander 2009).

Understanding and applying the words of knowledge in one's daily life is a prerequisite to attaining healing. This is highlighted by Anita's story. Anita is a student that also works as a waitress. She states that seeking help from Bishop Elijah has helped her with anger management. A particular sermon seemed to have been destined for her – 'This is for me', 'he is talking to me' – she said when the pastor was preaching. According to Anita, she had a problem with anger management and wanted healing from this 'monster' that had taken hold of and made her unable to smile. To her, her life was miserable, and having been to church a couple of times, she felt she could turn to the Bishop Elijah for help. She elaborated:

When I came in South Africa, I was that person with so much anger in me. I was not the person who could smile...bearing grudges with people. But everyone around me look happy, I felt I needed help. That's when I went to see papa (Bishop) ... when I came to church, I got healing from the 'word'. Bishop told me that the things that will help me are to forgive and to love. He teaches how to forgive because when you forgive you will also be forgiven. When you don't forgive it's like you are walking with dirty things, rotten stuff in your head...But when they teach you about forgiving people who hurt you, to start by knowing how to love them, then you'll start to love yourself. Then you see the smile...Now I'm a person that makes so many jokes. At my work place I talk too much. I make jokes. I feel so happy with myself now (Anita, 21/05/2016).

Anita believes that for healing to come, she has to apply the words of knowledge that she has received, which will free her from present emotional and physical problems by learning forgiveness; the gospel is a potent remedy for her affliction.

Conclusion

Migration and settling in a new country is fraught with challenges, and too often causes a strain on migrants' lives. Hence, many migrants turn to religion

for solace and healing. Divine healing is about how people face the paradox of illness and wellness, tragedy and triumph, despair and hope, pain and joy that are always shifting and changing (Stoltzfus & Green 2013). Facing an ongoing illness that highlights the fragility of the human experience therefore provides a connection to the exploration of divine healing through various means. Therefore, when seeing precarity – illness, vulnerability, exclusion, challenges and marginalisation – as opportunities for migrants to cultivate closeness to God, spiritual cultivation and healing become important. Healing goes beyond physical cure or psycho-physical health, but extends to attaining a sense of complete wellbeing and wholeness – ‘whole in mind, body, spirit and relational dynamics’ (Stoltzfus & Green 2013:291). The attribution of healing to sacred religious objects has seen migrants investing in their purchase from different churches to alleviate their plights. Unlike voodoo practitioners who use the occult arts formulas as magic, powders, potions, and other ammunitions to heal (Payne-Jackson 2008), Pentecostals follow biblical scriptures of the Old/New testament’s uses of anointing oil, salt and water, books/stickers, cloths (liken to that used to wipe Jesus’ face by Veronica) and words of knowledge for healing. The challenges of migration and the various forms of exclusion in society have not only resulted in migrants turning to religion for refuge, but has equally led to the increased use of sacred objects whose anointing powers are perceived to break the ‘yoke’ of people and allow them to push back against their precarity. The use of these objects has challenged traditional beliefs and use of amulets, with the call for Christians to turn to God for the ultimate amulet that heals and protects them from all ailments. This in a way is migrants’ ideational discourses against precarity through individual actions (Paret & Gleeson 2016:288) and the purchase and use sacred objects presumed to provide solace in their everyday lives.

While various bodily ailments provoke strong emotions, migrants’ deployment of and encounters with objects of healing, also opens the door to a new form of awareness and healing. Such awareness can be the ‘interventionist’ purpose of the objects (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005), as they are used to seek alternative solutions and understandings of illness and to incorporate divine insight, practice, and self-understanding to bring solutions to problems or healing. In this regard, one of the most influential ways PCs keep their followers, especially those affected by migration, is through the transnational flow of religious materials and goods that are considered to have talismanic powers.

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‘Because I know God answers prayers’: The Role of Religion in African - Scandinavian Labour Migration

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Abstract

Drawing on interviews conducted with highly skilled Nigerian women footballers that have migrated to work in Scandinavian clubs, this article provides an analysis of how religious beliefs and practices function as resources for articulating, producing, and maintaining transnational mobility. Through taking part in transnational Pentecostal communities, Nigerian women migrants access networks and forms of knowledge that supports their status and mobility as labour migrants. Moreover, these women believe that their transnational and daily religious practices, such as prayer, are ways through which a transnationally mobile career can be achieved and sustained. Drawing on material from ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews with migrant Nigerian women football players, I argue that religion provides these labour migrants with access to material, inter-personal and transcendental resources for achieving their career and migratory aspirations.

Keywords: Religion, Pentecostal Christianity, Transnationalism, Labour Migration.

Introduction

Scholars of international migration have, over the last three decades, utilised the concept of transnationalism to demonstrate how migrants maintain connections to their homelands while simultaneously becoming embedded in their new places of residence (Glick-Schiller 2003; Itzigsohn 2000; Levitt &

Glick-Schiller 2004). As opposed to neo-classical theories, a transnational approach to international migration entails exploration of the processes, activities, and connections that are rooted in yet stretch across the borders of one or more nation-states. Although maintaining transnational activities and connections is not new among migrants, scholars have increasingly started paying attention to 'the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (Basch, Glick-Schiller & Szanton-Blanc 1994:6). In so doing, scholarship on international migration has moved beyond analyses of assimilation and integration into 'host' countries and communities, focussing instead on cross-border activities, connections, livelihoods and belongings.

For many migrants, religious practice forms an important part of the transnational activities they take part in on a daily basis (Levitt 2007). When people move across borders and settle for longer or shorter periods of time, they take their religions with them (Spickard & Adogame 2010). Religious activities such as 'singing, offering, playing music, and dancing can be performed anywhere ... [and] followers can fit most of the paraphernalia for their rituals in a suitcase' (Huwelmeier & Krause 2010:3). Moreover, migrants use religion, for example, to stay connected to the places they leave behind, and to forge forms of transnational belonging (Carnes & Yang 2004; Ebaugh & Chafetz 2002; Guest 2003; Levitt 2007; Levitt, Lucken & Barnett 2011; Menjívar 2003). In recognition of the role that religion plays, Nina Glick-Schiller has argued that religion offers particular opportunities for simultaneous embeddedness as it provides 'migrants with a simultaneously local and transnational mode of incorporation that may configure them not as ethnics but as citizens of both their locality of settlement and of the world' (2009:126). Participating in religious communities can thus give migrants access to social capital and spiritual resources relevant to settling in a new context. At the same time, however, inclusion into religious communities can also offer opportunities for transnational 'ways of being' and 'ways of belonging' (Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004) that are not restricted by national or ethnic borders. In this sense, many religious communities are in themselves transnational communities.

In this article, I aim to contribute further to analyses of the role and meaning of religion in migratory processes, by emphasising how religious activities and communities enable skilled labour migrants to embed themselves into their communities materially as well as transcendentally. Illustrating how

religious practice and belief is part and parcel of the migratory journeys and narratives of a particular group of Pentecostal Christian Nigerian women migrants, I examine how migrants draw on religious beliefs, practices, and communities to forge and sustain migratory lives. In particular, I suggest that transnational religious communities and activities offer not merely material resources in the shape of interpersonal support networks and knowledge for migrants, but also offer migrants tools with which to articulate and achieve their migratory and career aspirations. In this, migrants understand daily religious activities, such as prayer, as practices that contribute to the production and maintenance of transnational migration. Labour migrants make use of religious discourse to articulate (and mute) their own agency in producing and maintaining transnational migration.

This article is built on material from interviews conducted with a group of Pentecostal Christian Nigerian women labour migrants who have migrated to work as professionals in various football clubs in the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark). At the outset, the interviews and the ethnographic fieldwork of which they formed part, were not concerned with questions of religion and faith. My attention to the role of religious beliefs, practices and communities emerged as a result of the significant meaning and value the participants' ascribed to them. As such, the material I present in this article emerged from migrants' own narratives and articulations of transnational migration rather than from the focus of my research inquiry.

The Role of Religion in Transnational Migration

Studies of religion and migration have tended to focus on notions of diaspora, and have primarily engaged with three key dimensions: awareness of religious identity, the role of communal organisations, and the maintenance of ties to a 'homeland' (Vertovec 2009; Cesari 2013). This research has illustrated how most religious movements are themselves global societal systems (Beyer 2001) that engender transnational identities and activities (Levitt 2003). Contemporary migrants increase and deepen the transnational nature and connection of religious movements 'by transnationalizing everyday religious practice' (Levitt 2004:2). Through the process of transnational migration, migrants contribute to reconfiguring religious activities and traditions in both sending and receiving contexts. The religious ideas, practices, identities and capital migrants bring with them are reconfigured and/or reasserted in their

new places of residence, and subsequently ‘remitted’ back to sending communities and contexts (Levitt 1999).

In the same way that religious commitments have inspired mission-oriented migrations, migrants themselves contribute to increasing the global and transnational reach of different religious institutions and movements. Religious movements can function as supposed ‘global communities’ in which individuals from a range of different contexts take part in ‘increasingly homogenized forms of worship and organization’ (Levitt 2003:848). The existence of ‘global religions’ presents opportunities for migrants to continue to practice and participate in familiar religious communities despite having crossed borders and settled into new geographic, socio-economic, and political contexts. Hence, religious communities and movements are key avenues through which transnational identities and belongings can be accessed, constructed and maintained (Levitt 2003; Bowen 2004). They ‘embed migrants and non-migrants in transnational organizational networks that contain resources, power, and skills which are relevant to both home and host-country concerns’ (Levitt 2002:15). By emphasising these potentials, scholars of transnational migration have been influential in moving debates concerning the role of religion in migratory processes beyond discussions of integration and assimilation, focussing instead on how religious communities and activities enable transnational ‘ways of being’ and ‘ways of belonging’ (Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004).

Nevertheless, Obadare and Adebani (2010) argue that the focus in studies of migration and religion has been rather one-sided. They claim that the scholarship has focused on certain core topics primarily related to immigrant adaptation, identity-making, transnational religious institutions, and social movements (Obadare & Adebani 2010:31). Hagan and Ebaugh (2003) express a similar sentiment, and argue that as a result of the focus on institutional factors and dynamics, insufficient attention has been paid to the role of religion in different stages of the migration process. Due also to the traditional reliance on neo-classical theories and economic conditions in analyses of international migration, scholarship has been more concerned with the causes and consequences of migration than with the ways in which migratory decisions are made, and how transnational movement is produced and maintained (Hagan & Ebaugh 2003).

Consequently, Hagan and Ebaugh argue that research must start exploring in more detail ‘the spiritual resources [religion] provides for some

immigrant populations in the decision to migrate and the psychological effects of this on migrants' commitment to endure the hardship of the migration' (Hagan & Ebaugh 2003:1146). By participating in religious communities, rituals, and activities from their original places of residence, transnational migrants are able to maintain meaningful connections to the places and communities they have left behind (Levitt & Jaworsky 2007; Menjivar 2003). Catharina Williams (2008), for example, has explored how Indonesian migrant domestic workers used religion as a spiritual resource in coping with daily challenges. Asamoah-Gyadu (2010), in his work on diasporic African Christianities, argues that even before physical movement takes place, migrants draw on their religious beliefs and use prayer as a practice through which residence or work permits can be obtained. He states that 'in the religious life of African immigrants, prayers for nkrataa, "papers" (that is, proper resident documents), rank next only to healing in requests made at prayer services' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2010:90). The important role of religious rituals in preparing for and engendering transnational migration is illustrated also in Van Dijk's (1997) work on Ghanaian Pentecostal migrants, and Hagan and Ebaugh's (2003) study of Mayan migrants from Guatemala to Houston, Texas. In all three studies, religious leaders and rituals are seen to play a significant role in deciding whether to migrate or not, in ensuring 'safe passage,' and in the acquisition of legal status as a migrant.

Hence, for many migrants religion holds a key role at all stages in the migratory process, and 'symbolisms suffuse every aspect of the transnational migration process' (Obadare & Adebani 2010:31). Levitt, therefore, argues that studies of transnational migration and religion provide 'an empirical window onto one way in which religious globalization actually gets done' (2003:849). In a similar vein, in this article I suggest that analyses of migrants' religious practices and beliefs can offer meaningful insights into how transnational migration 'gets done': how it is prepared, produced, maintained, and made sense of by migrants themselves.

By presenting material from a case study of Nigerian Pentecostal women labour migrants, I aim to contribute to understandings of the role that religion plays in migratory processes. I am particularly interested in exploring how migrant women who travel alone for the purpose of work, make use of religious communities and activities to engender and make sense of their own journeys. In other words, I am curious about 'everyday religion' (Ammerman 2006) and the ways in which individuals use, articulate, and understand

religion in their daily lives as migrants. Although research on religion and migration tends to focus on formalised practices and institutions, religion is ‘as much, if not more, about individualized, interior, informal practices and beliefs’ (Levitt 2003:869). It is precisely the articulation of these personal and informal aspects of religious belief and practice that I focus on here.

Theoretical Framework

Transnational approaches to migration centre on the experiences and activities of migrants themselves, and force attention onto the role and form of migrant agency in migratory processes. Of particular interest in this article, is the role that migrants play in producing and sustaining migration: how they dream, imagine, plan, and work at making transnational movement happen. Pessar and Mahler (2003:817) assert that ‘much of what people actually do transnationally is foregrounded by imagining, planning and strategizing’. As such, fears, hopes, aspirations and desires are constituent parts of migrants’ agency, alongside such things as habit, judgement and action (Pessar & Mahler 2003). For football players and other athletes, migration is a desirable part of career trajectories; by moving to another country to ply their trade they are able to position themselves as international professionals. Maintaining this status and position as international professionals, however, requires constant work and investment. The ways in which labour migrants such as footballers achieve transnational migration is intimately tied to how they imagine and plan (future) physical movements, and how they establish connections and acquire knowledge about particular places and employers.

In their work on African women football migrants, Engh and Agergaard (2013) have argued that ‘it is through developing knowledge about, and becoming embedded within, different locales around the world that sports migrants are able to produce and maintain labour migration’ (2013:3). Thus, I posit that athletic mobility is achieved through ‘locality’; through ‘being rooted or anchored – socially, economically or politically – in the country of immigration and/or in the sending country; it means developing/having a set of social relations at specific places’ (Dahinden 2010:327). Often the development of social relations in a specific locality occurs in diverse places simultaneously, depending on whether the migrant in question is planning to stay where she currently resides, or whether she hopes to arrive elsewhere. Gaining locality in a place she has not yet arrived can enable her to arrive

there in the future. Locality, or embeddedness, is accrued as migrants create connections with people and institutions (such as sports agents, managers, former migrant players or professional football clubs) and accumulate knowledge that can support and improve their work performances. This involves gaining knowledge about prospective employers, their expectations, labour legislation, migrant networks etc.

In this article I add to this conceptualisation of locality by arguing that migrants ‘localise’ both through interpersonal networks and the acquisition of knowledge, as well as through their belief in and commitment to a transcendental power. From the perspective of migrants, belief in a transcendental power and religious practices are considered as important as material and interpersonal forms of locality. Prayer, for example, is seen as a practice that itself can promote and produce transnational career mobility. Because of the belief that prayers ‘work’ – ‘that speech acts, through the spiritual realm, foster material transformation of a believer’s situation’ (Maier 2012:67) – prayer plays both material and transcendental roles. On the one hand prayers are part of a continued commitment to their faith and to God through cultivating pietistic dispositions, while on the other hand they are believed capable of changing material circumstances. This paper makes a distinction between transcendental and material forms of locality, although the two, in practice and experience, are inseparable. I do this in order to illustrate that for many (religious) migrants, processes of locality are related as much to the transcendental, as to material and interpersonal relations and knowledge. Moreover, in this article I emphasise the ‘mindwork’ components of agency and find that religion provides a way of framing and articulating migrants’ agency and aspirations. Through prayer migrants not only work at engendering migration, they also articulate the dreams, hopes, and plans they have for the future. In this sense, prayer as daily religious practices are an expression of ‘mindwork’ agency insofar as it denotes ‘the outward behaviour of the body constitutes both the potentiality, as well as the means through which an interiority is realised’ (Mahmood 2001:214), and thus provides insights into aspects of migrant agency that are not easily accessible.

Research Methods and Empirical Material

The material presented in this article is drawn from interviews and observations conducted as part of a larger research project on Nigerian

women's football migration into, and within, Nordic women's football clubs. In the project, ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews were conducted at numerous sites in Nigeria, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark over the course of 12 months. During the fieldwork I lived with the participants, and conducted 2-3 in-depth interviews with each. In total I conducted interviews with 14 current and former Nigerian women football migrants to Scandinavia, as well as with 16 club officials and coaches in Scandinavia.

The project employed a transnational optic to explore migrants' experiences and narratives of migration. In this, I paid particular attention to the ways in which migrations happen; how they are planned, produced, and maintained. Mobile athletes, such as the women footballers introduced in this article, are a type of highly-skilled labour migrants who make significant investments in creating and sustaining international professional careers. In sports labour migration, contracts and careers are often short and the supply of prospective and un-contracted workers remains a constant surplus (Bourg & Gouguet 2010). In this sense, the transnational migration of athletes is akin to that of other highly-skilled labour migrants and cultural workers. These are migrants who do not move with the primary aim of 'settling-down' (although some eventually do), but who work at obtaining transnational migration as a way in which to develop their professional careers. As such, the case study of Nigerian women's football migration presented here offers insights into the dynamics and experiences of highly-skilled labour migration more generally.

At the outset of the project from which the material I present here is drawn, questions concerning religious beliefs and practices were not included. Only about halfway through the fieldwork and interview period did I fully realise that, for most of the participants, religious beliefs and practices were key avenues through which migration was imagined, articulated and believed to have been achieved. While the participants mentioned that hard work and focussed training were important factors in their recruitment into teams outside of Nigeria, they also emphasised 'God's will' or 'God's gifts' as an explanatory framework for their success in achieving international employment. As a result, I began to pay more serious attention to the role of religious communities, beliefs and practices, and proceeded to integrate religion into my analyses of how the migratory movements of women footballers were produced and maintained.

In the first phase of analysis, all statements related to faith and religious practice were isolated and separated into different categories. These included

migrants' stories about their journeys into Scandinavia, their dreams and plans for the future, as well as explanations of their personal success as international professional footballers. In the second phase of analysis, emphasis was placed on exploring those instances in which religious faith and practice appeared to be directly related to the production and maintenance of transnational athletic mobility. The analysis I present below is not exhaustive, but offers insights into how religion features significantly in migrants' narratives about the processes through which their transnational mobility is produced and maintained. Further, based on an inductive approach, the analysis explores everyday activities and factors that the migrants themselves understood as being important.

Analysis and Discussion

The participants in the study all come from the southern and southeastern states of Nigeria, regions within which Christianity is the dominant religion. Although Nigerian women play football also in the Northern, and predominantly Muslim, regions of the country, most professional and migrant players are those who come from the south, and urban regions around major cities such as Lagos and Port Harcourt. The interviewees were clear that their Christian beliefs formed a key part of their identity and daily activities. Two of the participants identified themselves as Catholic Christians, whereas four stated that they participated in a variety of churches that fall under the purview of Pentecostal Christianity. While two of the participants did not explicitly self-identify as Pentecostals, I observe together with other scholars that 'Pentecost occurs outside of Pentecostalism' (Omenyo 2002), and that the discursive patterns which emerge from these participants indicate their 'Pentecost-alisation', even if they do not have membership in a Pentecostal church (Hollenweger 1996; Nadar & Leonard 2006).

Albeit in different ways, the participants all participated in some form of transnational religious community. Chiamaka and Nneka¹, for example, use Facebook to follow and engage with international Pentecostal churches such as 'The Potters House Church', and 'The Redeemed Christian Church of God'. Both regularly post, 'share' and respond to prayers, stories, photos and videos shared by these churches online. Chiamaka very occasionally visits a Protestant Scandinavian church, while Nneka participates semi-regularly in a

¹All participants have been given pseudonyms.

Pentecostal church led by a Ghanaian priest in the Scandinavian city she resided in at the time of the interview.

A third informant, and one that will be given voice in this article due to her illustrative way of practicing her religion, is Onyeka who had been an active member of a church in the city where she lived and played football before leaving Nigeria. A few months after arriving in Scandinavia, the partner of a fellow migrant footballer told her about a Pentecostal Nigerian-based church that streamed services live on their website. Because Onyeka's team often played matches on Sundays she had, until then, not been able to attend church services in Scandinavia, nor did she feel as though a Scandinavian church would offer the same teachings and doctrines that she was used to from her church in Nigeria. Once she learned of the live streams from the Pentecostal church based in Lagos, she started taking an active part in this transnational, online community. Unless her team was playing a game on a Sunday, Onyeka 'worshipped online' by watching the live stream, and she actively participated in the services through prayer, singing, and anointing herself with oils and water. When in Nigeria, she visited this particular church and purchased blessed oils and communion bread that she took with her back to Scandinavia to make use of during Sunday services.

The way in which Onyeka practices her faith is particularly illustrative of how religion 'travels' with migrants, and of the transnational ways in which migrants practice their religion. Not only does Onyeka participate, transnationally, in church services conducted in a different locale, she also brings with her religious artefacts that enable this active participation. For Onyeka, participating in this particular church is a way in which she can assert belonging to a transnational and virtual community of believers, but also remain connected to a particular church community in Nigeria. As her circumstances have changed since arriving in Scandinavia, Onyeka also finds comfort in practicing her belief in familiar ways. Onyeka's religious practice and participation in transnational religious communities illustrates both material and transcendental locality; she travels with religious artefacts and commodities, and belongs to a community of believers that worships together online.

Material Locality: Religious Networks of Support and Trust

Sports migrant's athletic careers are highly contingent and uncertain not only because of the nature of the profession itself (Roderick 2006), but also because

of the constant need to adjust to new contexts, institutional ‘cultures’ and legal frameworks. For recently arrived migrants, acquiring knowledge about their legal entitlements and obligations is particularly challenging. One of the women I interviewed – Chiamaka – turned to the pastor in a Scandinavian Lutheran church for advice when she suspected that her club was paying her less than she was, by law, entitled to. The pastor confirmed her suspicions, subsequent to which she decided to not renew her contract with this particular club.

[The pastor] said ... I should tell them [the club] that this is what I want ... the man let me know what I'm supposed to get. That is my right here in [Scandinavia]² as a non-EU [citizen] ... but when I started talking with them about that they said no, they didn't know that I knew what was happening... and that was when I left (Chiamaka).

Outside of training sessions and matches with her team, Chiamaka had not participated in many social activities other than attending church since arriving at this particular club. This meant that the church and pastor had become reference points for assistance with issues particular to Scandinavia. For Chiamaka, her religious community functioned as a key site in which she could access information about her new place of residence. Her church and the pastor provided her with elements of local knowledge – locality – that she was able to draw on to negotiate with her club and shape her own career.

Religious communities, in addition to providing practical support and advice, also function as networks and sites of trust. Uzoma, for example, argued that her pastor is the preferred person from which to ask for advice. Because of their shared faith, she felt that her pastor is able to provide her with support that is in line with her own religious convictions and morals. In this way, Uzoma is certain that the advice and locality she gains access to through her pastor, is aligned to her own desires and commitments in life. Moreover, because of the pastor's role as a religious authority and spiritual advisor, Uzoma believes he is unlikely to take advantage of or deceive her. As a man

² All references to particular Scandinavian countries have been removed and replaced with [Scandinavia]. This has been done in order to protect the anonymity of the participants as well as the football clubs involved in the research project

of faith, she considers him reliable. Several of the other participants expressed similar views, and argued that they prefer to work with and rely on other born-again Christians. Onyeka, for example, chose her current agent precisely because he is a born-again Christian:

If you are someone who fear God you will ... treat everyone with humanity... I was a little bit sceptical because I [didn't] want an agent but when I look[ed] at him he's a born again Christian, he fears God (Onyeka).

Religious communities and networks, then, are not only made use of as platforms for increasing locality – knowledge about and understanding of new contexts – but also as sites of trust. Due to shared religious convictions, fellow believers are attractive as advisors when faced with uncertainty and unfamiliar settings. In this sense, religious communities function as ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1991) through which migrants can access support and a sense of shared values with others. As many of the participants had previously experienced unreliable and fraudulent agents and managers, insisting on working intermediaries who were born-again Christians was seen as an effective strategy for avoiding exploitation and disappointment. Nevertheless, choosing to work with religiously aligned coaches, managers or agents is no guarantee against abuse or exploitation, particularly not for women.

Transcendental Locality: Prayer ‘works’

For the participants in this study, prayer was considered a fundamental activity in achieving career mobility and success. Several of the participants stated that they had previously prayed to become selected for a national team or be ‘discovered’ by an international coach, scout, or agent. One of the participants, Onyeka, said that throughout her career as a professional player, prayer has been an important daily activity:

I pray to God, God please I want to play professionally, please, I want to play in the national team (Onyeka).

For Onyeka, prayer was one of the ways in which she worked towards achieving her goals of a professional and international career. Nneka, similarly,

stated that she prays several times every day; after waking up, before meals, before training sessions or matches, and before she goes to sleep at night. Ebele was also very clear about the role prayer and faith has played in her gaining employment outside of Nigeria:

It was just training and prayer – in order to find a way to come to [Scandinavia]. I am just training and focussing and praying. Because I know God answers prayers (Ebele).

Fundamental in these assertions is the belief that prayers ‘work’, that they have real effects on the lives of those who pray. The belief that all things are possible through prayer, and that God does answer prayers, is key in Pentecostal Christianities’ understanding of the ‘faith gospel’, as much as prayer is devotional practice is key in Catholic theology (Sheldrake 2012). According to the Pentecostal tradition ‘a believer has a right to the blessings of health and wealth won by Christ and he or she can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith’ (Gifford 2001:62). Thus, by communicating their careers aspirations through prayer believers can actualise their dreams and goals. Both Onyeka and Nneka claimed that it was by praying, and training, that they were able to achieve their dreams of playing professional football outside Nigeria.

Like activities centred on material forms of locality – establishing social relationships, learning languages and acquiring knowledge about a particular context – prayers ‘work’ to promote and support migratory aspirations. Through praying, these Pentecostal believers give ‘positive confessions of faith’; they ‘name and claim’ particular desired changes in their material circumstances. Hence, prayers are part of practices of locality, albeit not in relation to particular locale or social network, but as directed towards the transcendental. According to this logic a successful football career can be ensured, at least in part, through religious practice and disposition. The footballers I interviewed hence expressed the importance of both training and prayer to achieve their desires, akin to the Christian monastic ideal of ‘Ora et labora’ – which hold to the idea of work as a spiritual practice as well as the pursuit of piety. Similarly, Saba Mahmood (2001) in exploring Egyptian Muslim women’s local acts of cultivating piety, offers a notion of devotional practice that is helpful in this regard. She draws on the notion of *habitus* as ‘a conscious effort at reorienting desires, brought about by the concordance of inward motives, outward actions, inclinations, and emotional states through the

repeated practice of virtuous deeds' (2001:212). This conception of prayer as practice helps us better understand the conception of religion and spirituality – ways of believing beyond the church (Giard 1996).

When it comes to talking about their plans for the future 'after football', religious beliefs again play a central role in the players' narratives. The careers of professional athletes are inevitably precarious, and after-careers are commonly viewed with uncertainty. Chinedu and Nneka's responses to questions regarding future migrations illustrated this:

I don't know – 2015 I don't know – anywhere God take[s] me to, so I don't know, I can't tell (Chinedu).

Only God know[s] the next step ... I told you I really am a Christian and if I say ... I want to stay here but God say[s] he doesn't want me to stay here I will leave ... if he say[s] he want[s] me to stay here I [will] stay here (Nneka).

As a way of coping and creating meaning out of these uncertain futures, Chinedu and Nneka invoke the notion that God has a plan, and a 'destiny', in mind for them. So long as they stay faithful to God – in a relation of piety, they can maintain the belief that God will provide them with prosperity and success. Asamoah-Gyadu suggests that Pentecostal Christianities are particularly useful in this sense because they provide 'access to a set of powers embedded in a worldview of mystical causation', a type of belief that 'has demonstrated a strong ability to offer support to Africans who need to deal with those fears and insecurities that arise from transnational life' (2010:91). While traditional Protestantism assigns positive value to sacrifice and piety through the promise of ample rewards after death, Pentecostal teachings however, promise the faithful material rewards also in *this* life. As such, religious belief offers mechanisms for coping with stress and anxiety when it arises – through prayer and meditation – as well as a framework for creating meaning out of uncertainty and instability.

Existentialist sport psychologist Mark Nesti suggests that 'for the Christian athlete ... suffering can be mediated through prayer (Watson & Czech 2005), contemplation and an acceptance that bearing one's cross is the path to salvation' (Nesti 2007:163). Religious belief, then, can offer opportunities for dealing with uncertainty when it arises in relation to career or

migratory futures. Because of their faith in God, and in the power of prayer to actualise aspirations, Chinedu and Nneka are able to assign positive value to uncertain futures. Their statements regarding future developments are not loaded with anxiety and doubt, but rather with hopefulness and belief that through continued practice of their faith they will be awarded with prosperity and wealth. Nevertheless, beyond playing a role in supporting career pursuits and making meaning out of hardship, religion matters in the lives of these migrants in far less instrumentalist ways; religious beliefs and practices are important in the religious lives of migrants. For these migrants, cultivating piety or spiritual disposition is an intrinsic part of their articulation and pursuit of professional, material aspirations.

Articulating Aspirations through Prayer

The idea that transnational mobility is, at least partially, the result of prayers and positive confessions of faith, illustrates the extent to which religious belief frames understandings of career development among the migrants I interviewed. By maintaining the idea that God determines who becomes an international football player, a powerful explanatory framework is made available. Only those who make positive confessions of faith and continue to believe in the power of God are able to achieve their aspirations. Mahmood reminds us that cultivating a spiritual disposition ‘is the means of both being and becoming a certain kind of person’ (Mahmood 2001:215). By highlighting their submission to ‘God’s will’ migrants can, for example, provide an explanation for why they and not another teammate have been given the opportunity to play professional football outside of Nigeria. Or, as is the case with Chiamaka below, such beliefs can offer explanations for why some migrants fall victim to fraudulent agents, who in exchange for large sums of money promise to bring hopeful prospective migrants to attractive clubs in Europe, while others do not. When Chiamaka was asked whether she had ever encountered a fraudulent scout or agent she responded as follows:

God has been so wonderful to me I never spent [money] just for people to bring me here. The man who brought me here God used him to give me that opportunity (Chiamaka).

Although she could have responded that she has been lucky, or that she is too

‘smart’ to be fooled by a fraudulent agent, Chiamaka interprets her success as the result of God’s favour. At first glance, her statement seems to suggest that she herself has played no significant role in her success. Her agency is masked by religious discourse and rhetoric. However, it is also through her efforts that favour is granted; by making positive confessions of faith, prosperity and success is achieved. Chiamaka’s good fortune, hence, appears to be the result not only of God’s gifts, but also the extent to which she has practiced and maintained her faith.

Although all the participants stated that prayer played an important role in them becoming successful footballers and achieving athletic mobility, the ways in which they articulated their aspirations differed, sometimes during the same interview. While at times specific goals were identified and prayed for, other times they would pray more generally for favour and blessings, without naming any particular goal or dream. When Chinedu, a young and relatively inexperienced migrant, was asked how she worked towards achieving her dream of playing professional football in Europe, she said that she spent a lot of time praying for God to assist her:

Yes, I’ll be praying. Please God this is what I want, this is what I want. Please help me (Chinedu).

Chinedu illustrates the practice of making a positive confession of faith; she names particular goals in order for these to be realised in her life. She exerts agency in determining which goals and aspirations that are to be actualised by God. While prayer is seen as a practice or habitus that can actualise dreams, prayer should also be recognised as a way in which to articulate aspirations. As such, the role of prayer and belief is two-fold: on the one hand it enables transcendental locality and the actualisation of aspirations (name and claim), while on the other it offers an avenue for articulating and communicating dreams and goals (habit and practice). Here, prayer becomes a way in which to speak meaningfully about career aspirations.

On other occasions, however, the participants did not name any particular aspirations, but would pray more generally for success and happiness.

I think this is the place [where] God want[s] me to be...I said please, direct me to a place where I will be happy, I will have a good contract,

the people will love me, and when I came that was just how it [was] (Onyeka).

Onyeka, although she does not name a particular club or country in which she would like to play football, states that athletic migration is one of her career goals. Through her prayers she articulates, and thus hopes to also actualise, a migratory aspiration. Onyeka suggests that while it was her dream to play football in another country, her arriving in Scandinavia was due to a plan God had made for her. She interprets the favourable conditions and her happiness as a sign that she has arrived at the location God had intended for her. Moreover, she suggests that it was not due to her own actions and choices, but through the direction of a transcendental God that she arrived there. By concluding that she is happy and successful because she is where God intended her to be, she mutes the role of her own actions and performances.

Chiamaka, similarly, also places emphasis on God's power rather than her own choices and talents when speaking about her migratory journey into Scandinavia:

I never knew I was going to come to trial in [Scandinavia]. I never know that there was a country called [Scandinavian country]. I never knew this was going to happen. And it was just God who just did it (Chiamaka).

Although Chiamaka had thought about playing internationally she claimed that it was not by her own doing that she got an opportunity to do so. According to her interpretation, she had neither intended, nor worked actively towards gaining international visibility and recruitment; it was God who intended and effected her migration. As a result, prayer and faith in God are seen as necessary factors for producing mobility and becoming a successful athletic migrant. In the statements made by Chiamaka and Onyeka, prayers function to mute their individual roles and their agency in the development of migratory careers. Implicit in statements about success being a gift from God is the notion that only those who correctly practice their faith will receive these gifts; 'when people do not receive what they have confessed, it is usually because of a negative confession, unbelief or a failure to observe the divine laws' (Anderson 2004:218). This submission to God's power forms part of migrants' religious practice and efforts to be 'righteous before God' (Maier 2012:89). By living

righteously and faithfully, believers can ensure their own power and agency in relation to God (Maier 2012). Sometimes, however, the role of individual choices, skills and actions in effecting material transformation is masked by religious discourse and rhetoric.

Conclusion

Religious practice is one of the most pronounced ways in which the participants in this study sustained and experienced their daily lives as migrants. Although their church participation and ways of worshipping differed considerably, religious beliefs and communities offered opportunities for belonging and forms of expression were not restrained by physical proximity. As such, religion provided a way in which to simultaneously be both 'here' and 'there'. In this article I have illustrated the important role that religious communities play for a group of highly-skilled labour migrants who travelled alone to places with small migrant populations. Through their religious affiliations they accessed communities of support and knowledge, related to the places they had left behind, where they have arrived, and where they intended to arrive in the future. Moreover, their faith helped them to form networks through which access to partners and intermediaries that were considered honest and reliable were facilitated. For the participants in this study, religious communities provided access to individuals that assisted with negotiating contracts and navigating new contexts. For labour migrants who travel alone to new contexts, religious affiliations also supply a sense of belonging to a (transnational) community.

Moreover, I have argued that, in migration, religious belonging matters not only in terms of the institutional and formal structures to which access is provided, but that informal, individual practices can be equally significant. By living faithfully, migrants ensure favour with God, a transcendental power that is considered able to effect or deny their career aspirations. In this, prayer plays a particularly significant role. By 'naming and claiming' their desires and aspirations through prayers, migrants are also working towards achieving mobility. Prayer, then, is also seen to promote material success and prosperity in life; it is understood as a way in which to achieve transnational mobility. Religious practices such as prayer provide an accessible site for the articulation of migratory aspirations, dreams, and desires, all of which form part of the 'mindwork' aspects of agency that precede and shape migratory journeys and experiences.

Lastly, I have shown how religious faith, practices, and communities provide migrants with important tools and resources. Whether in the initial stages of migration or at the end of a professional career, religious beliefs provide strategies for coping with anxiety and for creating meaning out of uncertain futures. Through prayer and belief in a transcendental power migrants can articulate and actualise their aspirations. What emerges clearly in the material I have presented is that despite the fact that (sports) labour migrants are acutely aware of their outstanding athletic abilities, they choose to articulate their success as being the result of faith and devotion. While this, on the one hand, reduces pressures inherent to individualistic and performance-based occupations such as professional sports, it may, on the other hand, contribute to an attitude whereby athletes surrender to circumstance as divinely predetermined. Nonetheless, religious faith and practice function as a means for articulating and assigning meaning to experiences of lifestyle sacrifice, emotional and physical pain, as well as personal success and prosperity.

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Resilience of Somali Migrants: Religion and Spirituality among Migrants in Johannesburg

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Abstract

Various studies have already been done on the mistreatment of migrants and the psychological effects thereof. This study sought to explore the resilience of Somali migrants residing in Fordsburg/ Mayfair, Johannesburg by interrogating how religion and spirituality may have assisted them in coping with their challenges. A qualitative study was undertaken, using purposive sample of ten Somali migrants. In addition, face to face in –depth interviews were undertaken with participants between the ages of 20 and 55 years. The findings of the study indicated that by supporting the resilience of the Somali migrants, religion and spirituality had played a major role. The interesting part is that their culture and religion becomes integral to their migration. In this regard the community has devised relational, cultural, and religious resources that help them navigate their challenges of migrations. Scholars of migration have, in recent decades, developed increasing interest in the processes and practices through which migrants maintain social relationships that connect the places they leave behind and those where they arrive. Religious affiliations and relationships strengthen these relations. This article argues that resilience can be attributed to their religion, spirituality and cultural identity of the Somali community living in South Africa. The article concludes that high levels of resilience can be linked to the improved socio–economic status of Somali migrants in South Africa.

Keywords: Migration, resilience, religion, Somalia

Introduction

For several decades, the people of Somalia have been confronted with severe levels of armed conflict and forced displacement (Ibrahim 2010; Ingiriis 2016).

Since the civil war outbreak in 1991, about 2 million Somalis emigrated to live in the diaspora, in countries scattered along the route to Europe, North America and South Africa. Communities of Somali migrants have also emerged further afield in Northern and southern Africa and the Middle East (Al-Sharmani 2010). Many Somalis use South Africa as a transit for a third destination (Shaffer 2012). Countries like the United States of America and Canada, as well as countries in Europe appear to be the popular destination countries. Somali migrants are widely dispersed in many countries globally, and they have adapted to live in different environments (Jinnah 2013; Pineteh 2017; and UNHCR 2018). What makes the Somali community in South Africa interesting is that they illustrate their strength by establishing homes and surviving in a foreign country, drawing resilience from their religion and spirituality. Religion and spirituality play an essential role in motivating them to persist in building livelihoods in the face of problems associated with xenophobia. Moreover, they bring with them traditions, values, culture and a sense of community that makes them conspicuous amidst different nationalities.

Shared values and beliefs are regarded as the fundamental pillars that facilitate the process of refugee integration into local communities (Sadouni 2009). The presence of many South African Indian Muslims in Mayfair attracted Somali migrants to establish themselves in the area, because of their common religious identities (Jinnah 2017). Unlike other African Muslim migrants, especially those from West Africa who have settled in non-Muslim areas such as Hillbrow and Yeoville, Somalis have settled in Muslim dominant suburbs such as Fordsburg/ Mayfair in Johannesburg (Sadouni 2009).

The pursuit of refuge and safety, for many migrants, is a life changing process where individuals recognise and build associations through connecting shared meaning and strategies of coping to harness collective and individual resilience. In addition to the individual efforts, an analysis of communal and cultural strategies for coping with physical emotion and mental vulnerabilities brought on by forced migration, help us better understand how such resources are activated and drawn on 'to deal with trauma, and the encounter with and adaptation to the new society' (BenEzer & Zetter 2015: 303). Apart from the movement of economic migrants searching for a better life, migration processes are generally marked by problems such as human trafficking, poor administration of asylum application, exploitation, and xenophobia. In this regard South Africa, due to significant mixed migration, is said to have developed robust instruments and institutions to deal with humanitarian

concerns, but that it has poor law enforcement competencies with respect to migration (IOM 2015). As such, the reception of undocumented migrants at border-crossings creates significant challenges, leaving the migrant vulnerable and the system open to abuses. This kind of mobility not only impacts negatively on and overwhelms existing policies and systems, but also affects other policy domains such as human security, public health, and social cohesion (BenEzer & Zetter 2015).

Migration has become an increasingly contentious and a politicised issue as governments strive to take action to balance the human rights of its citizens, with the obligation to provide protection to refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers (Abdi 2015; Wellman & Colema 2011). There are over 1 million Somalis living in the diaspora and remittances are a focal point of the lives of Somalis living abroad. It is estimated that between US\$750 million and US\$1 billion enters Somalia each year, making it the fourth most remittance-dependent country in the world, with remittance contributing between 20% and 50% of the country's gross domestic product (Hammond 2014).

With a significant diaspora population in the United States, Minneapolis, Minnesota emerged as a preferred destination due to the low cost of living in a smaller town, a healthy economy, and friendliness towards migrants. Also, transnational networks of Somali migrants led to a surge in migration Somali migration into Minneapolis (Horst 2008). Likewise, Lewiston in Maine proved attractive because of the small-town atmosphere and a low unemployment rate (Abdi 2014). Similarly, there is a large Somali diaspora of Somali migrants across Europe. There are significant numbers of Somalis in Scandinavian countries: in 2007 Norway had about 20 000 Somalis; Germany, Netherlands, Italy and Britain had smaller numbers; and France and Switzerland had between 1 000-10 000 Somalis (Horst 2009:327). Because Somali migrants experience labour market discrimination in much of Europe, they rely on social security grants to support themselves, which in turn, (a) limits their prospects of regular integration, and (b) fuels anti-immigration sentiments.

According to Sadouni (2009), Somali migrants in Africa have been reluctant to live in refugee camps in Kenya and Uganda, and have instead opted for more varied settlements (Al-Sharmani 2010). According to the UNHCR (2018), Kenya has the largest Somali diaspora community in Africa, although Jinnah (2013) and Shaffer (2012) show that Somali movement and settlement in Kenya must be understood in its broader geo-historical context, insofar as

many Kenyans and Somalis share common ethnic and language origins, which are divided by colonial borders (Kleist 2008). Thus for most Somalis who leave their country, Kenya is the first and easiest option for refuge (Coy 2017). In contrast, South Africa does not extend comprehensive social security to non-nationals, and only offers limited and selected social assistance to refugees. As such Somalis tend to rely on their social networks for jobs or entrepreneurial opportunities (Kleist 2007). While South Africa assures migrants and asylum-seekers basic human rights, such as work, study, and freedom of movement (Sigamoney 2016; UNHCR 2016), they remain vulnerable to xenophobic prejudice from locals who assign their own 'economic misfortunes like poverty, joblessness to the presence of the Somali migrants' (Hickel 2014:108).

Between 2008 and 2016, South Africa experienced regular national and regional cycles of xenophobic violence directed at foreign nationals, and local traders. These acts included looting of shops, verbal abuse, physical violence and murder (Hickel 2014; Ingiriis 2016). As such Somali migrants have had to develop competencies and strategies for learning how to survive in hostile public spaces. In addition to regular visits to mosques for prayers and fellowship to sustain them through trying times, the Somali community also sought assistance from formally constituted cultural associations, such as the Association of the Somali Community and Somali Board located in Fordsburg/ Mayfair (Jinnah 2010). Established migrant networks in Mayfair and Fordsburg proved attractive to those Somalis who were entering the country for the first time (Jinnah 2010), and the presence of Somali-owned cafes, restaurants, and shops, often alongside homes, has created a distinct Somali cultural resonance in the area (Jinnah 2010; 2013).

This article examines personal narratives of migration and resilience as recounted by Somali migrants that live in the Fordsburg/ Mayfair area of Johannesburg. I hope to illustrate how they utilize and incorporate religion and spirituality into strategies of coping in times of adversity and calamity. In particular narratives of their native country and separation from family and friends, sustains memories that help makes sense of their ideas of belonging, and particular social location their host society (Douglas 1991; AlSharmi 2010). This sense of dislocation sees Somali migrants relying on religion and spiritual practices, which they bring from the native country and ultimately serves to sustain them during trying times (AlSharmi 2010). To develop my argument, firstly, I position Somali migration within its historical and political

context; secondly, I describe my methodology and the data-collection processes. Finally, I analyse and discuss the narratives of religion and resilience as they emerged from the interviews with Somali migrants.

Social, Cultural, Religious and Spiritual Context

Somali people inhabit the eastern parts of the Horn of Africa and are spread over several countries: Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya. They are an ethnically and culturally homogeneous group, distinguished by a shared common ancestry, a strong ‘clan’ system, a single language (‘Somali’), an Islamic (Sunni) heritage and an agro-pastoral tradition (Shaffer 2012). Adogame and Spickard (2010) have noted that as people move, so too do their religions, which suggests that, like for Somalis, religion or mosque is not just an institution or structure for local, but a transnational community of believers (*ummah*) held together by shared values. This allows Somali migrants to remain connected although they move to and live in different countries, and the mosque becomes the beacon of hope in the direction of their spirituality. Therefore, their socio-cultural and religious associations play such a vital role in migrant’s resettlement and resilience in the host country (Sigamoney 2016, 2017), that I have sought to argue for the constitutive meaning of religion and spirituality in building resilience among Somali migrants.

Social Context

Somalis face constant discrimination and xenophobia from South Africans in their daily lives, which adversely affects their social mobility and opportunities in the country. This physical and economic insecurity compels Somali migrants to live in Mayfair where they feel protected and supported by their networks and ethnic kin. Due to the patriarchal structure of Somali society, men are ascribed leadership positions where they assume control over their families and community, while women are charged with household management and have a limited ability to challenge these arrangements in broader society (Shaffer 2012; Jinnah 2013). There are conflated patterns of participation for women and men in Mayfair, that appear to contradict customary structures, because as changes in economic activities occur, power is reorganized and cultural standards are adjusted. In effect, for Somalis, these relationships are enmeshed in varying notions of roles and responsibilities, of

control and leadership, and of religion and culture as they adjust to living in a xenophobic social context. Consequently, the new arrangements threaten traditional social positions for Somali women and men – a risk many Somalis cannot accept and will contest – as they redefine community support and protection for their new home.

The resilience is evident from the adaptation of different gender roles in the family (Shaffer 2012). While more men than women own businesses in Fordsburg/ Mayfair area (Sigamoney 2016), women increasingly participate in trading such as street vending, jewelry trade, cloth retailing, tailoring, and restaurants. According to Shaffer (2012) and Sadouni (2009), Somalis attribute male domination in business to African cultural (and patriarchal) values and practices that are still strongly embedded in Somali society. Under the pressure of surviving in a new social context more Somali women participate in business, including those previously run entirely by men – resulting in shifting gender roles (Abdi 2015).

Likewise, in hostile social contexts, most Somali migrants prefer to live in neighborhoods inhabited by members of their clan, although this ambition is often limited due to a lack of low-income housing challenging their ability to do so (Sadouni 2009). While it is clear that external pressures are changing Somali social relations as well as family or clan patterns, it is difficult to estimate the significance of clan divisions in the diaspora, as Somalis rarely deliberate clan dynamics outside of their communities (Shaffer 2012).

Cultural Identity

Like most migrant communities, Somalis rely on sustaining transnational connections to help them cope with the challenges of settling in the host country (Vertovec 2009). The majority of Somalis are Muslims, and for that reason Islam plays a very important role in Somali culture and social life (Sadouni 2009). Somali Muslims generally believe that religion cannot be separated from social and political life, because religion informs every action (Pentiah 2017). Additionally, scholars of migration have shown increasing interest in the religious developments and rituals that aid migrants in building social relations that connect their societies of origin and settlement (Kabir 2014; Jinnah 2013; 2017; Pinteah 2017). Derain and Asay (2014) contend that these associations are reinforced by religious institutions, religious specialists, and family members.

At the same time, Somalis, like other migrants, create community spaces to construct their own cultural identity through a sense of unity, cohesion, shared history, and solidarity (Abdi 2014). The building of a distinct diasporic cultural identity – both as a product of, and response to, cultural dissimilarities with South Africans, and their perception that Somalis are unwilling to integrate into South African society – further complicates the relationship between Somalis and South Africans (Langellier 2010). However, the presence of South African Indian Muslims in Mayfair incentivized Somali migrants to establish themselves in the area because of their shared religious identities (Jinnah 2010). Unlike other African Muslim migrants, especially those from West Africa who settled in predominantly non-Muslim neighborhoods, Somalis aspire to live in Muslim suburbs (Langellier 2010; Sadouni 2009). Thus although Somalis find it difficult to integrate and wish to retain their cultural identity, this is lessened by the shared Muslim identity that transcends cultural or racial difference (Al-Sharmani 2010).

Religion and Spirituality

In the sociology of religion, scholars have grown increasingly interested in the use of religion in the context of migration, whether to make meaning, cope with anxiety, or build networks of belonging, information, and exchange. Adogame and Spickard (2010), for example, confirm the sentiment that when migrants move, they take their religions with them, while other studies focus on how migrants use of churches and mosques as first place for building social relation in the new society (Settler 2018), while others point to how migrants reproduce religious institutions and practices in various sites of settlement as assertions of cultural and religious identity (Robinson 2013).

Ennis (2011) defines interaction between religion and spirituality as an individual's relationship to the revered or divine, as well as a relation that informs other associations and the meaning of one's own life. While religion signifies practices and beliefs related to a particular dogma system, spirituality may or may not include worldviews, dogmas, and practices. For this reason, Gozdziaik and Shandy (2002) suggest that religion can be viewed as the external sign of a spiritual receptiveness, or simply a set of culturally cohesive practices, beliefs, and habits. For this reason, and Gozdziaik and Shandy (2002) argue that religion and spirituality are frameworks for dealing with grief, loss, and other aspects of human suffering, all of which migrants might encounter.

Islam provides the single most stable source of strength and public communal identity for Somalis in the diaspora (McMichael 2002). states that while in Christianity, suffering presents a problem in relation to how a loving God can permit suffering, in Islam suffering is viewed as integral to what it means to be alive. Thus for Somali Muslims, suffering is viewed in light of God's omnipotence, part of His purpose and plan for human 'betterment', that requires submission to God. Generally speaking, in Islam suffering has two purposes: as a form of punishment for sin and as a spiritual test or trial (McMichael 2002). Thus, resilience is attained through pious spiritual practice and submission to the will of Allah, who empowers the Somali believer to resolve their pain and suffering.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the strategies and patterns of resilience among Somali migrants in the Mayfair/ Fordsburg area in Johannesburg, I developed a qualitative, phenomenological study as this enabled me to explore the lived experience of the Somali migrants (Giorgio 2009). This article emanates from a larger study, the purpose of which was to explore and understand how the lived experiences of the migrants influenced their resilience. Consequently, a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach was determined to be the most appropriate method to conduct this research (Creswell 2014; Patton 2002). This type of research uses descriptions of experiences to uncover meaning about the phenomenon being examined, by focusing on the perceptions of individuals and their lived experiences, which take place in their natural setting (Lopez & Willis 2004; Denzin & Lincoln 2011). The hermeneutic approach is applicable to this study because the researcher is able to reflect on her own 'assumptions, beliefs, and presuppositions as an integral part of the phenomenological interpretive process' (Cresswell 2014; Neuman 2011). The hermeneutic phenomenological approach was the logical choice for thematically analysing experiences into collective themes of persistence in a dynamic, ongoing, and reflective exploration of the phenomenon in order to provide a rich, thick description.

A purposive sampling method was used in the selection of Somali migrants. The inclusion criteria were that participants must be Somali migrants who had lived in the Fordsburg/ Mayfair suburbs for a period of at least five years, and were aged between 20 to 55 years. Among the 10 participants there

was a chef, students, businessmen, university graduates and restaurant owners with whom I conducted individual, face to face, semi-structured interviews between August and October 2015.

The interviews took place at premises of the Somali Board in Fordsburg (Johannesburg) as this was a familiar space to most participants, and in close proximity to where the majority of them lived. In negotiating the time and place for interviews, I had to be aware Somali migrants feel vulnerable, and that they believed that their dress and language makes them conspicuous. As such, a few participants, such as Shireen, Moosa and Abdul recounted that *'We don't speak to other nationalities as we are afraid, our culture and language is different'*. To mediate such anxieties, I made use of a gatekeeper, a 25-year old student who was completing his studies in Fordsburg/ Mayfair. He assisted me with gathering the participants in the area of Mayfair. Additionally, I used a translator for interviews with Somali participants who were not fluent in English. In total I was able to conduct 10 interviews, with all participants who gave their consent, and I ensured their anonymity through using pseudonyms for the names of people and places, both in this article and in other writings.

A protectionist model guides current scholarship on migration and resilience because it is presumed that migrant experiences are defined by vulnerability and precarity – lives characterized by risk and in need of protection. In the context of Somali migrants, a protectionist model is exemplified by the emphasis on past traumatic experiences (and present post-migration stressors) and mental health problems, such as anxiety or trauma- and stress-related disorders. However, resilience is measured according to the presence of individual or collective resources and assets. For instance, as already stated for Somali migrants, these strengths and benefits may be in the form of religion, spirituality, and culture and community support (Hammond & Lindely 2014).

According to Richardson (2002) resilience *'is the process of coping with stressors, adversity, change or opportunity in a manner that results in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors'* (2002:203). Furthermore, authors like Luthar and Cicchetti (2000:857) recognise that *'resilience is a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma'*. Richardson (2002) argues that it has been a challenge that western resilience researchers have fixated on outcomes that privilege individual agency, resourcefulness, and adaptive capacity, at the expense of relational aspects or

collective practices of resilience in populations. Subsequently, the idea of resilience does not incorporate the cultural traditions, norms and rituals that sustain communities daily (Sharma 2015; Jinnah 2017; Coy 2017).

Despite the lack of agreement pertaining to how to define resilience, there are two main turns: that of the presence of adversity or risks, and, in spite of those risks, the ability to have successful or positive outcomes (Coy 2017; Ungar 2012). In response to significant adversity, whether psychological, environmental, or material, for understanding the strategies of resilience among the participants in this study, resilience is regarded as both the capacity of individuals and communities to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, as well as the pursuit of feelings of well-being. In this way, I set out to identify situations where the individuals, families, and the cultural or faith community, generate and provide resources and shared experiences that work to sustain Somali migrants in a culturally meaningful way (Luthar & Cicchetti 2000).

Findings and Discussion

The data discussed below reflects the experiences of participants that speak to the ‘presence of adversity’ and strategies towards a successful and positive outcome, despite the presence of hostilities. The rich and thick data shared by Somali migrants brought out several themes, which will be discussed in the next section. To honour their narratives as well present their stories in a theoretical and thematic frame, the discussion will be presented as follows: (a) presence of adversity with respect to discrimination and xenophobia; and (b) narratives of resilience with respect to religion, and gender.

Discrimination and Xenophobia

Discrimination and xenophobia were cited as common experiences among the participants, who stated that they often experienced discrimination and xenophobia from the South African police force as well as residents of the townships and were consequently robbed of their freedom in South Africa (Coy 2017; Jinnah 2013). It was apparent that the participants were hurt by the discriminatory treatment, as is evident in the following quotes below. The participants highlighted the fact that they had experienced considerable xenophobia from other residents in the areas where they lived. Recent

anecdotal evidence indicates that Somali migrants living and owning businesses are at the receiving end of criminal xenophobic attacks by the locals. Mr. Abdul stated,

My uncle was shot and killed in the location, Sebokeng. I hide behind the counter with my brother's friend. My brother told him in my language not to tell them about the money, then they shot him, and they sprayed us with spirit (Mr. Abdul).

Mr Moosa added that crime towards Somali migrants is common in and around the Fordsburg/ Mayfair area.

So in 2008 I opened shop in the same place, but xenophobia started, in the same shop, so they take back everything they burnt the shop, they take everything, again we back, the owner said they don't allow any foreigners because these people are robbing you. He refused to give us our fridge for the cold drink, two fridges with the chicken, four fridges, two for the cold drink and two for the chicken, he refused because that fridge belong to us, we can't do anything so we left it...When xenophobia took place in 2015 the shop got looted, so I left the shop was demolished, everything was taken from the shop...my brother opened a shop there; he opened a grocery shop there in 2007...I was working with my brother; selling in the shop he was selling blankets, and shoes (Mr. Moosa).

Looting of Somali businesses is common in the townships and upon analysing the interview data it was evident to me that the migrant population felt under attack. Mr. Dawood also confirmed that looting was common.

When I get the difficulty just the one day of xenophobia, I did not go to school ... because of the xenophobia and the raping and looting. Well, well I was very frightened and did not go to school for many days, but my friends told me I will miss school work and the police are on guard in the streets. I thought maybe I must hide in the flat (Mr. Dawood).

The analysis also highlighted participants' difficulties experiences with

relocation, injury, and, in some cases, death. Mrs. Ebrahim pointed this out to me.

All our shops we close in December because they looted. It because they have xenophobic attitudes towards the foreigners...the only reason Somalis are a target to crime in South Africa is because they do business no other reason. They are robbed and their shops are often looted. My brother was looted and killed in Bloemfontein. The xenophobia affected me, because I had to take my children and go to a safe place. No husband to look after us. No business, no money (Mrs. Ebrahim).

Mr. Suleman claimed that Somali migrants did not place their trust in the police in the township, as they were considered to be corrupt. They reportedly posed as debt collectors, and went into Mr. Selma's home and demanded the takings from his business. He added that the police attacked his brother. From the interview material it is evident that discrimination and xenophobia were common experiences among the participants. In addition, the participants drew similarities between the trauma experienced in Somalia and that experienced in South Africa, although the modes of violence in Somalia and South Africa were different, participants tended to narrate their experiences of xenophobic violence as a familiar way of life. There was a sense of *déjà vu*, in which xenophobia was normalised. According to Mr. Isaak:

There is no difference between xenophobia and the war in Somalia. When I was leaving Somalia I thought I would live in peace and be free from all sorts of problems if I reached South Africa. But I just found out this country is not different from Somalia (Mr. Isaak).

Mr. Moosa concurs with Mr. Isaak.

I am saying this because all the things that made me to escape from Somalia have happened to me here. I have been robbed, my shop has been burnt and I have been shot. It is bad here but this violence is nothing,

While Mr Moosa agrees with Mr Isaak, he nevertheless appears to suggest that

his experience in South Africa is not as extreme as it was in Somalia. He concurs that the violence is bad in South Africa, but he does not agree with the statement that there is no difference between Somalia and South Africa.

As such, they agree about the harsh reality of life in South Africa. Having to measure wellbeing in terms the degree or extent of violence, whether in South Africa or Somalia, reveals the consistent precarity of their lives. This signals their resilience. Despite these narratives of incredible trauma and the challenges that Somali immigrants face in South Africa they also spoke with resilience and pride at having progressed as a community in the Fordsburg/ Mayfair area.

Narratives of Resilience

Resilience is understood as the capacity to anticipate, manage, adapt to, cope with, and recover from risks, and it expresses the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise itself so as to retain essential functions, structure, identity and feedback (Richardson 2002). In conceptual terms, the resilience of a household depends on the number of options available, such as assets, income-generating activities, public services and social safety nets (Ungar 2012). In contrast to when shocks (endogenous or exogenous) occur, households react by using available coping strategies (Ungar 2012). The following are reasons highlighted by the participants, when they sought to explain how they coped with adversity and adapted to life as migrants in South Africa.

Religious Compatibility with Indian Muslim community

Somali migrants were accustomed to one language, one culture, and one religion in their country, hence on arrival in South Africa they found it difficult to adapt as their culture did not equip them to integrate with other nationalities. Consequently, adapting to the various lifestyles and diversity of the local populations, presented a major challenge for the Somali migrants. The Somali migrants in the Fordsburg/ Mayfair area stated quite categorically that living and integrating with other Somali migrants enabled the resilience that they shared as a community. The support received from the local Indian Muslim community enhanced this resilience and assisted with indigent migrants (Sadouni 2009; Chonka 2017). The participants emphasised the strong ties that

they shared with the Indian Muslim community in Fordsburg/ Mayfair. Mr. Moosa stated that,

It's Muslim and has an Indian community, and the Indians help me. I feel safe... When you ask the Indians job they going to give you job; we are related because we are Muslims, because we are same religion And accommodation, as it is customary in our community to help (Mr. Moosa).

The Fordsburg/ Mayfair Indian Muslim community took it upon themselves to be the guardians of the Somali migrants and welcomed them into the local mosque. There, it was possible for Somali migrants where to share their challenges with fellow Muslims. Mr. Abdul and Mr. Dawood confirmed that when Somali migrants were in need, they received assistance from the local Indian Muslims, for example Mrs. Ebrahim said '*When I'm sick they help me lot*'.

New migrants who enter South Africa are aware that there is a large Somali migrant population residing in the Fordsburg/ Mayfair area. The migrants who are settled in this area usually welcome new migrants, as mentioned by a number of participants, such as Mr. Mohamed:

Knowing Somalis introduced me to other friends, new friends to meet Somalis, starting with a friend who introduced me to other friends, from Somalia, who are citizens, playing soccer and going to other areas, shops, going with them and playing with them soccer to the mosque and sharing with them when I eat...also tried finding new friends that are living in this area ... Fordsburg/ Mayfair. We knew each other in Somalia, this made me feel comfortable. The mosques help the Somali community in many ways like the....Imam will stand and ask for money for the people who need help, like fifty thousand and even a million rand (Mr. Mohamed).

The majority of the Somali migrants in my study concur that the Muslim religious institutions plays a significant role in their daily lives. As Jinnah (2010) indicates, the location of a mosque served as their compass to Johannesburg. Hence, their religious affiliation played a key role in them choosing to settle in the Fordsburg/ Mayfair area. The participants added that

their religion and culture enabled them to create a Somali migrant community. In addition, the Indian Muslim community welcomed the Somali migrants and provided a sense of belonging based on shared religious persuasion. Due to the community and the religious persuasion, resilience was built for them to face their challenges in a new location.

Gender Role Adaptation

There are gender-related aspects for resilience among the Somali migrants that can be identified in the empirical material. The continuous adaptation of gender roles within the family, in response to the husbands' absence, was one of the things that built resilience among the female participants, Fatima a 34-year-old participant with children living in Somalia with her mother maintained '*Male is in authority. He is the head of the household in the family He provides*'.

There were times when the men had no choice but to take on jobs away from their home. As a result of their absence Somali women took on roles of authority in their households. In this way, certain forms of patriarchal power was transferred to women.

But majority Somalian woman one day get married, they sit at home, they look after the kids, they look after the husband and them self. But like here you cannot sit. Maybe you open a shop, your husband will be selling and few time people get killed. You have to work. You have to learn how to work and you have to survive (Mrs Khan).

According to Al-Sharmani (2016), Kleist (2008) and Jinnah (2013) Somali women are different, in many ways, from other female migrants in South Africa, as they tend to migrate without a male partner and with or without monetary or emotional support from the family. Once they enter South Africa, they engage in and create new social networks that enable better leverage of resource. (Miss Patel & Mrs Mohammed) explained how they had to work as cooks in the Eastern Cape and Potchefstroom to look after the family.

Somalis woman take care of their children and husband as well. They do tailor; business, and cooking food, not enough, woman does not work in Somalia community.

One particular example of separation from the spouse is the transformation of the migrant household. The transnational household in some cases strengthens marital and family relations and, in some cases, strains them, one of the women maintained how being away from their husbands, made them feel like a single parent,

I feel bad about it, not staying with my husband my children are alone, the children alone, sometime children are fearing the husband. I'm just like a single mother but I'm not single. If I could be single I could be free (Mrs Khan).

Similarly, the female participants in this study felt the strain of taking the responsibility of heading their households as a major responsibility. Mrs Mohammed explained this to me.

He's working in a shop, as a shopkeeper in the location, he's taking three thousand rand a month; I'm staying in a single room with other women, we share a large room with one kitchen and bathroom. I pay two thousand five rand rent a month. The money is not enough for me and my family (Mrs Mohammed).

While the men saw working away from the home as an opportunity for providing for the family, the migrant women saw it as strenuous; this is a direct contrast to their traditional responsibility of staying at home and caring for children. Resilience is displayed with the conflation of values and rituals. In the same way, Al-Sharmani (2010) states that men see having geographically split households as either an opportunity to evade their duties or to take more responsibility. The household disruption reveals the motivation to provide despite the xenophobia and discrimination (Sadouni 2009). Women, on the other hand, find new prospects to access services and to take on decision-making roles in households where males are absent by being engaged in trade or continuing their studies (Sharma 2015). The new household pattern also warrants new kinds of networks. In Cairo, Egypt, for example, a family-based network led by females is the main support system used by Somalis (McMichael 2002; Al-Sharmani 2006).

Given this change in roles questions are raised as to why families to urge women to leave Somalia. Al-Sharmani (2006) points out that there are

three main reasons for migration among Somali women; migration as a means of protection from sexual violence in Somalia, to fuel the mythical notion that women are more likely to be granted asylum than men, and the fact that women are able to find work in the informal economy, particularly in the global recession. In support of the latter, this study shows an adjustment in Somali society where women are not just producers and reproducers of care, but are also beginning to be active participants in the economy of this country. This necessitates their migration to hold their families together in the host country. Resilience becomes the beacon of hope accompanied by religion and spirituality.

Conclusion

The article highlighted the lived experiences and the resilience of Somali migrants who reside in Fordsburg/ Mayfair, Johannesburg. These migrants came to South Africa because of their desire to have an improved lifestyle for themselves and for their children. Migration is a complicated journey that brings loss, disappointment, and dissatisfaction in life. This article presented some of the complex stressors that Somali migrants experienced in their day-to-day lives in South Africa. The participants experienced challenges, including difficulty accessing public transport during their migration, fear that came with the various discriminatory and criminal offences that were committed against them, non-recognition by the Government officials, language barriers, as well as the loss of family and friends. In addition, they experienced challenges to the traditional roles that they were accustomed to in Somalia. For the Somali migrants the distinction between religion and culture, between community and family are artificial.

However, this article also highlights the strengths and capabilities of these Somalis in the face of discrimination and xenophobia. This article served to enlighten readers about the strategies of adaptation that Somali migrants rely on to ensure their survival, and help us better understand resilience. They combined their resources to deal with the challenges in their lives. The participants revealed how strong and determined they had become as a result of the hardships that they endured en route to and in South Africa and they enriched their communication skills by attempting to improve their English. Xenophobia did not halt their quest for survival, and their resilience was significantly influenced by their sense of community, culture, family, and religion.

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Church as Hostile, Host or Home: Perspectives on the Experiences of African Migrants in South Africa

Buhle Mpofu

Abstract

Human migration has been on the rise globally and it has fuelled xenophobia and growing intolerance towards migrants in the receiving communities. This article draws from data collected for a PhD thesis and highlights the experiences of African migrants in religious spaces and congregations in Johannesburg, South Africa. The PhD project this article draws from identified Christian religious identities as a form of belonging and explored models for providing care to migrants and refugees by appreciating their agency and ensuring that cross cultural and socio-religious encounters enrich the developmental agenda within host communities. I argue that instead of being hostile to African migrants, host congregations and communities should engage in mutually transformative mission with migrants and appreciate how migration encounters enrich human relations. They give birth to hybrid contextual theologies through the construction, or de-construction, of congregations by missio-ecclesiological and intercultural forces of migration that challenge their vocation and witness.

Keywords: Migration, Hostility, Host, Theology, Mission, Ecclesiology

Introduction

It is a generally held view that models of providing care and support to migrants have to focus on integration, assimilation, or cohesion. The work of

Jonathan Sacks provides helpful insights into these concepts in his book *The Home We Build Together* (2009). Sacks, as a political advisor, policy maker and leader of the Jewish Community in the United Kingdom, developed three parables as a framework for understanding the relationship between the integration and assimilation of newcomers in local communities. In these parables he tells the fate of one hundred strangers who have been wondering around the countryside in search of a dwelling place and eventually find themselves at the gate of, first, a large guesthouse, secondly a hotel and, thirdly, are welcomed as residents. Sacks contrasts the implications for living in the hotel, the guesthouse and being a resident of the City emphasizing that cooperation between the City dwellers and the newcomers is key to development. Rather than keeping newcomers in guesthouses or expensive hotels, the city has town planners, engineers, builders, and experts who can design and build homes for the new citizens. They set out to work together and unlike in the guesthouse or hotel, the newcomers have an opportunity to invest their energy and build their own houses. In this, local residents have an active role to play as they work with their newly found residents. Based on this model, this article draws on these parables to highlight the differences between Church as hostile, host, and home for migrants within the new congregations of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) in Johannesburg, South Africa. In so doing, I use the term church to denote a local community of Christian believers who regularly gather for worship, and/ or a congregation.

In a presentation at the global consultation for theological students at World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly in Nov 2013, I identified the global experiences of migrants and refugees as an emerging ecumenical challenge for the 21st century and warned that churches should prepare for a coordinated response in the wake of growing intolerance and xenophobic attacks (Mpfu 2013). This article highlights the experiences of African migrants within churches in Johannesburg and draws on the themes which emerged in my PhD¹ study; church as hostile, host or home with the aim to

¹ The Thesis was entitled, '*When the people move, the Church moves*': *A Critical Exploration of the Interface between Migration and Theology through a Missional Study of Selected Congregations within the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa in Johannesburg*. This study demonstrated how migrants appropriate their vulnerability and marginalization to reinvent and

contribute towards alternative models of care which value the agency of migrants. The article also advocates for academic engagement that places emphasis on the experience of migration as the centre for transformational theological reflection.

Literature Review

Given the increased multi-directional movement of people in search of better living conditions globally, there is growing competition for space and resources between host communities and migrants or refugees. Data collected through my PhD thesis highlighted the experiences of African migrants within the religious spaces of the congregations in Johannesburg and identified Christian religious identity as a form of belonging in contested spaces. In cities like Johannesburg, where there are many African migrants, space is increasingly becoming important in observing and understanding contemporary forms of belonging and their social organization (Conradson & Latham 2005; Nathan 2011; Caglar & Schiller 2011). The nation-state has ceased to be the locus of cultural intersections, and instead a more complex space of diasporic contacts structured by globalized trends is emerging in cities (Sassen 1991).

Religion plays an important role in the development and formation of identities in modern cities, and its role in shaping the identity of people on the move through their lived experiences of migration has been ignored by many scholars in the discipline of religion and migration. Hagan and Ebaugh (2003:39) have noted that:

Despite the diversity and prominence of religious beliefs and practices among contemporary immigrants ..., scholars of both immigration and religion have tended to neglect the role of religion and spirituality in the process of international migration.

Generally, the role of religion in various stages of the migration process, including in decision-making about routes and settlement, have been overlooked by social scientists and policymakers alike (Hagan & Ebaugh 2003). Riem Spielhaus (cited in Suarez-Orozco 2008:70) a scholar of Islam,

recreate metaphors of survival through constructing or deconstructing new forms of identity in contested transnational religious spaces.

explains that '[n]ew comers bring with them ideas, customs, and traditions that may be unfamiliar to their host communities'. One of the most visible symbols of these traditions includes houses of worship where migrants gather to retain their sense of identity and pass on their culture to the next generation. In the light of this symbolic significance of the construction of houses of worship, Spielhaus argues that building mosques in Europe has become controversial because houses of worship have powerful symbolic value. Religious identity is therefore one of the means through which migrants affirm their presence and retain contact with their cultural values from the homelands. Reflecting on the struggles experienced by Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong, Cruz (2010:6) echoes similar sentiments about the religious experiences of migrants:

Religious discourse and religious means provide the domestic workers the much-needed courage, hope, and faith in the struggle Religious groups and/or fellowships are established as instruments for forming ties ... and to help them deal with and/ or resist the ambiguities, discontinuities, and difficulties, that arise

Hospitality with regards to the role of the churches in providing care for migrants has drawn scholarly attention in the field of religion/ theology, with the focus on migration developing from two distinct perspectives. According to Settler (2018) the field can be delineated into two fields with the first being concerned with how migrants move with, and use their religious traditions and practices. He suggests this is especially characteristic in theologies of migration insofar as they focus on discourses of incorporation and hospitality. For Settler the second approach is a more sociological inquiry into how migrants use and access churches, mosques, and other religious sites for building social networks and to harness resources for resilience.

Interrogating the complexities around the church's reception of migrants is a significant contribution to the missional church conversation and presents a paradigm shift for reflections about what it means to be a community called church. Within the changing situations of our contemporary times, it also offers an alternative hermeneutic for reading and interpreting the Bible in the light of the experience of migration. Another profound contributor to missiological thinking in Southern Africa, David Bosch, through his seminal work, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991) highlighted the historical and theological dimensions of different paradigms in

mission from the early church through to what he refers to as ‘the emerging ecumenical paradigm’. Bosch believed that the 21st century would see developments that could push the church to seek a new paradigm – the ‘emerging ecumenical paradigm’. He cites the factors behind the emergence of this new paradigm such as Western governments losing dominance in global governance, challenging of unjust structures of oppression and exploitation, how western technology and the developmental agenda are now treated with suspicion and how European theologies can no longer claim universal superiority given that freedom of religion is considered a human right. Indeed, the presence of migrants and refugees at our borders and communities present challenges to our context and if embraced as an opportunity, we can engage in enriching and transformative encounters for both new comers and host communities. But developing programs for such enriching experiences will require alternative theological and missional development that draws on the interface between theology, migration, development, and religio-cultural diversity as means to achieve social cohesion, peace, and stability.

Research Methodology

The empirical data I draw on in this article was collected during my PhD research with respondents drawn from three formerly white congregations of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA). The congregations Yeoville, Mayfair and Turfontein are all situated within the larger Johannesburg area. This research included fieldwork over a period of three months and data was collected through focus group discussions, interviews with key informants, as well as self-administered questionnaires. The names and positions of participants (29 in total, i.e. 13 women and 16 men) were anonymised to protect the identity of the participants and the questions were designed to gather information about age, length of stay in Johannesburg, economic status, living conditions, their experiences and perceptions about living in Johannesburg and participation in UPCSA congregations.

Analysis of Empirical Data

The analysis of extracts from the focus group participants and statements from interviews identified the lived experiences of African migrants within the church according to two themes; firstly, issues relating to the church’s

engagement with migrants, and secondly, those related to the church's attempts to incorporate migrants. Themes in the first category highlighted the hostility directed towards African migrants from the church and the wider society, for example shame and vulnerability, while the themes in the second category pointed to the impediments of the church's mission towards incorporation of migrants and focused on the attempts to salvage the missionary vision of the church as the 'Family and Kingdom of God', a home for all people called by God. In particular, this article isolates data that highlights the differences between how migrants view the church as hostile, host, or home.

Church as Hostile

The theme of 'church as hostile' emerged from the data in which respondents articulated negative statements about how they felt received and treated by members of the local congregations. This hostility of the church towards migrants was also reflected in sub-themes; compassion fatigue [members of congregations seemingly tired of showing compassion to migrants], migrants' struggle for recognition and human dignity, and experiences of shame and vulnerability. All of these were characterised by a 'us and them' mentality where relations between South Africans and African migrants were persistently uneasy and often xenophobic.

They were there just telling us 'you people we don't want you' (Don, 27th April 2015).

This statement is very hostile and instils a sense of fear and insecurity among migrants. The words were expressed by a Home Affairs Official to a migrant as he went to register his marriage.

While running an errand for her hair salon in which she employs three South Africans, Ruth was confronted by a local South African who got into a heated argument about business opportunities for local South Africans. When she explained that she was in South Africa to do business, she was asked why she did not do her business back in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

If things are fine in your country what are you doing here (Ruth, 27th August 2015).

These statements confirmed findings from other studies that some South Africans have negative attitudes towards foreigners and accuse them of crime, stealing their jobs and taking their women (Crush, Ramachandran & Pendleton 2013). The hostility directed towards migrants in Johannesburg exposes them to vulnerability as they are constantly under threat of violence, and they feel ashamed as they lack recognition as human beings with a dignity. Given repeated incidences of hostility and growing anger towards foreigners that we often witness in South African communities with foreign migrants, there is an urgent need for alternative responses to the challenge of migration, not just in South Africa but globally.

In the following statement, Abdul expressed disappointment with the current generation of Africans and their failure to live together in harmony and address contemporary challenges collectively as the historical fathers did during the struggle against colonialism in Africa.

Historical fathers like Mandela like Nkurumah, like Nyerere, like Patrice Lubumba, were able to stand together even to liberate their countries because of the spirit of Ubuntu, they saw themselves as African (Abdul, 30th August 2015).

It is a call to unity in the face of divisions and when Abdul speaks of the '*spirit of Ubuntu*', he draws from the concept of African communal life that is based on an African worldview that places emphasis on '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' (lit: 'a person is a person because of other people'). This is a worldview that views people not as individuals, but individuals only in relation to the community and the world of nature around them. This concept derives from the readiness to share and care for one another. Yet, compassion fatigue has led to hostile encounters between migrants and locals, as locals feel too burdened to care for African migrants. We are witnessing a similar form of fatigue in Europe where migrants fleeing wars in Syria and North Africa are stranded at the borders to Europe. A similar fatigue has been noted by Orobator (2005:167) during his field work in East Africa:

Refugees are rejected by host communities for whom their presence portends disaster for their already strained economic and ecological resources This situation has severely compromised the much-vaunted African spirit of solidarity, generosity and hospitality ...

[and] Today supportive evidence of ‘African hospitality’ for refugees has become harder to find.

Church as Host

Another interesting theme that emerged from this study was the incorporation of migrants through what I call the (in)visible church. By (in)visible church I refer to the blurred understanding of who or what constitutes the church as reflected by the respondents’ inconsistent use of terms such as they, these, and those to refer to local congregations. As a result, they spoke of the church in ways where it was not clear who or what constitutes church. Is the church an institution, the buildings, or the people who inhabit it? If it is the people, does that include everyone including migrants?

If they can have space and use that space to talk to the government because they know very well that these people are foreigners (Kevin, 30th August 2015).

In some instances, migrants spoke about the church as if they were not a part of it, using words such as ‘these people’, ‘they’ to distinguish between local church members from themselves. Statements such as ‘the church should have the means to support its members’ (Ruth, 30th August 2015), indicate that the migrants who participated in the study viewed the church as an institution that exists ‘out there’, without them. However, in reality the migrants are a part of the church and their agency in transforming the communities in which they live should be recognised. These mixed perceptions of the identity and role of the church impact on the missio-ecclesial responses of the church to the lived experiences of African migrants.

As indicated above, there were tensions between what the migrant participants perceived as Christian practice (missional) and church identity (ecclesial) in the face of the realities regarding their experiences. Even more interesting, by associating themselves on the basis of country of origin migrants selectively engaged in discriminating against each other on the basis of their country of origin, but did not seem to view such associations as discriminatory. As the migrants struggle to maintain ties with people from their own countries and cultural backgrounds, they simultaneously attempt to integrate into new communities as they seek to build the ideal family of God.

At the core of migrants' understanding of church is a vocation that revolves around a welcoming and hospitable faith community with life affirming relationships. Where this does not exist the institutional church is viewed as a far removed and irrelevant system, what I argue is the (in)visible church.

The following statement made by a South African is a clear defence of the church, confirming the perception that migrants are a 'burden to the church'.

I'm not trying to be racist or what, to be honest, the church has a lot of duties and we can't keep putting more duties for the church (Steve, 26th April 2015).

Sentiments along these lines were also echoed by other South Africans during the focus group discussions, hence raising questions about what the participants understood to be the role or identity of the church in the context of migrations. Participants alluded to this incompetency and lack of ecumenical engagement on issues affecting migrants, and compared it with how the church was a unified force in the past. For example when a local member says, 'the church has a lot of duties', this demonstrates a lack of commitment and competency in speaking out against injustices that migrants face.

Church as Home

Christian experience where we are able to share together the common love that Christ died for all of us and that love binds us all together as human beings, and because he died for us and rose again for us that brought us together as brothers and sisters and we belong to the family of God (30th August 2015).

Although most respondents held strong views about the family of God living together as a 'family of God', it was clear that in practice this reality still remained a challenge. This was evidenced by the tensions that characterised the atmosphere during the focus group discussions. Participants demonstrated a strong sense of awareness that they are the people of God in exile, although

they continued to express a conception that did not include themselves as integral parts of the church. For example, they made statements such as ‘*God was with the Israelites and Moses in Egypt*’ (30th August 2015). Such statements are in line with what Orobator (2005:172) has argued in relation to East African refugee communities ‘they hold tenaciously to the view that uprootment, displacement, and exile do not dispossess them of the presence and protection of God’ and for him ‘to characterise the church in such terms has implications for our understanding of the function, meaning and theology of the church’.

The following statement implies that migrants ‘feel comfortable’ when they come into the presence of fellow believers (God’s family) where ‘there is room’ for them.

They will always call on each other, and say come! there is room for us here. People feel comfortable when they have been accepted ... they feel that they are part of the congregation (27th April 2015).

However, contrary to this understanding of the church, other sentiments demonstrate that migrants do not view themselves as full members of the local church. The church is (in)visible as it is not clear who belongs to local congregations because local South Africans are not comfortable worshipping with people from other nations, hence they slowly drift out of the communities that are receiving foreign migrants and change places of worship. This is demonstrated in the views expressed by one of the local leaders below:

Even black South Africans who used to come every sun we have noticed that some of them they are not as regular and that might be speaking to change of worship styles or the kind of influence the Cameroonians have on how we should be worshipping (27th April 2015).

The fact that migrants speak of the church as an institution and do not see themselves as a church, reflects confusion in their understating of the ecclesial community called church. They expect to be hosted, and do not see themselves as hosts. Locals who are viewed as hosts by the foreign migrants are themselves not ready to play that role. Consequently, it is not clear who or what constitutes the church. This is contrary to the teaching that migrants belong to

the universal family of God, and should find a home among other Christians. Being a regional and transnational community of believers gives the UPCSa a unique missional identity, and presents an opportunity for each community of faith within each nation to offer hospitality to each other. Through the church, all forms of boundaries are crossed as humanity view itself in the image of God (Imago Dei) and they can come together across borders to share the word of God (Verbum Dei) as they take part in the mission of God (Missio Dei). This understanding of the church is consistent with its mission and ecclesial identity as it draws people together towards the vision of the 'Kingdom of God' where they feel welcomed and treated with love and dignity as one of the leaders pointed out during the interviews.

Discussion

Given the hostility and growing intolerance directed toward migrants, the presence of migrants and refugees in our communities constitutes a challenge to Christian mission and points to the need for development of new models of 'neighbourhood' built on dialogue and hospitality. It is in this regard that notable efforts to understand the role of spirituality in the lives of refugees and migrants from the African perspective need to be commended. Orobator (2005:164) raised a question; '[w]hat is the Church on a continent where 20 million people live in exile?' Orobator (2005) confirmed that refugees have a widely held view of the church which portrays 'refugeeness' as a test of faith. The church should be concerned with the presence of unwelcome strangers in any community in which it engages in mission because the Judeo-Christian faith is informed by scriptural perspectives of treating strangers with hospitality. Therefore, any authentic Christian theological reflection should address all forms of ethnic and national divisions and promote diversity. Stephen Bevans (2008:89) views the church 'as a community with and of migrants' and suggests that the community that is called church must be located within the wider context of God's action and plan for humanity. This implies that the church is a community of pilgrims; people who are on a 'God directed journey' and as such, a community that understands and identifies with the migrants and refugees in the face of hostility and threats to life.

Hostility towards African migrants can be addressed through improved visibility of the church, and the integration of migrants into local congregations and communities. According to Kapuscinski (2005),

remains of market places, of ports, of places where there were agoras and sanctuaries, of where the seats of old universities and academies are still visible, and of where there remain vestiges of such trade routes as the Silk road, the Amber Route and the Trans-Saharan caravan route, give evidence of different human encounters scattered across the planet as proof of successful cooperation during cross-cultural encounters ... the 'other' stopped being a synonym of foreignness and hostility.

The significant observation that Kapuscinski makes is that people had three choices when encountered with the 'Other': (1) they could choose war; (2) they could build a wall around themselves, or alternatively, (3) they could enter into an enriching dialogue with one another. As I have already pointed out, not all South Africans are hostile towards African migrants, my research indicated that some locals were tolerant and positively engaged migrants in dialogue. Participants in this study underscored the need for the church to get involved in addressing the challenge of migration located outside of the church, citing the fact that migration is not just a challenge for the church but also for the communities.

The survival strategies of refugees observed by Orobator (2005) in East Africa are reminiscent of the reality among migrants in Johannesburg. There are migrants who have persevered in the faith in the midst of trials and tribulations, there are those who have abandoned the faith, and there some who have discovered God as their only help and comfort in exile. These revelations challenge us to think differently about the identity and mission of the church through an informed understanding of these challenges and their implications. For example, if the World Communion of Reformed Churches understands mission as the crossing of all borders that separate people from God, from one another, and from creation, it is only by crossing borders that reconciliation through Christ becomes a reality (WCRC 2010). This definition of mission takes people moving across borders seriously and according to this document, '[t]he missional church is transformational and exists for the transformation of the community that it serves, through the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit' (WCRC 2010:164).

The findings of this study also indicate that there are contradictions between what the church teaches and what members of the church practice. This has deep theological and missional implications for the church as it points

to inconsistency and incompetency. The presence of migrants exposes the missional weaknesses of the selected congregations and in particular, their understanding of the church and the role of the local church in the context of migration. The fact that many South Africans tend to move out of the communities and congregations that African migrants move into, is weakening the response of the local church in addressing the needs of migrants. In this regard, the model developed by Sacks (2009) may be helpful in the face of the multiple challenges presented by contemporary human mobility.

The newcomers [will] still occasionally seem strange. They [will] speak and act and dress differently than the locals. But those long sessions of working together have had their effect. The locals [will] know [that] the newcomers are serious, committed, dedicated. They have their own ways, but they have also learned the ways of the people of the town, and they have worked out ... a friendship Making something together breaks down walls of suspicion and misunderstanding ... that is society as the home we build together (Sacks 2009:123)

The fact that the South African law recognizes that migrants with permanent residence can own property should be a clear reminder that some migrants will remain in the country more or less permanently. In their search for recognition and human dignity in the highly competitive environment of Johannesburg, their experiences reflect the missio-ecclesial implications of the experience of migration in urban spaces. Dealing with these contemporary challenges of migration will require an alternative vision ‘from below’, where the voice of migrants forms the basis for missional praxis through which South Africans should not view themselves as hosts, but rather embrace African migrants as partners who can equally contribute to the development of the church and society.

Concluding Remarks

This article drew on the themes which emerged out of my PhD study- church as hostile, host or home- to highlight the experiences of African migrants in Johannesburg. I employed a model developed by Jonathan Sacks (2009) to advocate engagement which places emphasis on the experience of migration

as the centre for transformational theological reflection. As such I have argued that there is a need for South African communities and local churches in Johannesburg to avoid hostility towards migrants and desist from regarding themselves as hosts and rather, engage migrants as mutual partners. In so doing, I contend that such transformation will require appreciating the agency and contributions of migrants in the development of South African communities as well as deeper examination of how these encounters can enrich theological, ecclesial and missional reflections.

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Contestations of Self and Other in Researching Religion, Gender and Health among Migrant Women

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Abstract

This essay is a critical reflexive account of contestations over power and ethics related to getting ethical approval for a study on sexual and reproductive choices among migrant women in pentecostal congregations in South Africa. We found that despite the feminist method and theory that undergirded the proposed study, the University Ethics Committee regarded the researcher's insider position as an obstacle to scholarly inquiry. Notwithstanding the marginal position of religion and theology in humanities and the social sciences (McCutcheon 2003), we found that a number of issues related to procedural ethics and power emerged as obstacles in the research, seemingly because the project was to be conducted by a migrant woman of colour. We contend that it is not uncommon that women, and black women researchers in particular, are required to demonstrate competency as if they are imposters or space invaders to the academic culture (Ahmed 2012; Mirza 2015). Similarly, where similar proposals using, for example, mixed methods and emic approaches might be welcomed as methodological innovation, our experience has been that insider/ indigenous methodologies are too easily dismissed as incompetence, or as being provisional and lacking substance (Smith 2006; Burgess-Proctor 2015). We propose to review a particular case study to show how ethical approval and governance processes intended as scientific gatekeeping, can serve to undermine the emergence of local and gendered ways of knowing and being. Thus in this article we argue that ethic committees' biases result in (a) privileging positivist knowledge schemas over indigenous and feminist approaches; and (b) entrench particular gendered and racialised

ideas about the emic researcher; and (c) in this case, re-inscribe narrow paternalistic ideas about migrant social worlds, agency, and self-fashioning. It is our intention to map the pedagogical trajectories and tensions that were sparked by the ethical issues faced by us as scholars of colour, and finally we will show how we sought to navigate these obstacles, as researcher and supervisor.

Keywords: Research Ethics, Power, Gender, Race, Migration.

Introduction

This article focuses on contestations over ethics and power in a research project that explored the role of faith and migration in relation to African Christian women's sexual and reproductive health rights. The contestation emerged out of the differing epistemological and ethical positions of the university's ethics committee and that of the researcher and her supervisor. In this project I – Delipher – was the researcher and Federico was my supervisor. In the research project we discuss here I focused on an African Pentecostal church in a provincial city with a high number of migrants, and the research project formed part of a National Research Foundation funded initiative on Religion and Migration in Postcolonial Africa. This initiative set out to do a series of empirical studies on migration and religion in Southern Africa. The overall aims of the project were to examine the different ways that migrants deployed religion and faith in the migratory process, and secondly, to consider and understand how migration changes people's religion institutions, beliefs and practices. The interest in studying migrant women's experiences was motivated by two key factors. Firstly, as a migrant woman, I sought to do research that was concerned with the lived experience of migrant women in SA. Secondly, as a pastor's wife, located in the Christian pentecostal tradition, I was also very aware of the challenges that women face in terms of their bodily rights, and sexual and reproductive rights in particular. Through this study I was able to marry these two interests. The central research question was: *How do migrant women's faith influence their sexual reproductive and health choices?*

However, in order to proceed with the empirical study that included interviews with six migrant women, I needed to get ethical approval. In order to get ethical approval, I needed to satisfy the University's Research Ethics

Committee requirement that the privacy, safety, social standing and general welfare of project participants would be protected, and that the risk to participants would be attended to with respect to their physical, psychological, social and economic wellbeing (Levine 1988). My supervisor and I would soon come to agree with Goodyear-Smith, Lobb, Davies, Nachson and Seelau who have argued that ‘the determination of potential risk is neither obvious nor intuitive, and is open to interpretation by ethics committees according to their assessment of the context’ (2002:5). Likewise, Amanda Burgess-Proctor (2015) has noted that the safeguards that feminist researchers are often expected to comply with to ensure that participants are protected, may actually result in the disempowerment of the participants. She concludes that these two aims need not be mutually exclusive. It is in this regard that we hope to illustrate below how the university’s ethics committee’s assumptions about migrant women as particularly vulnerable, prejudiced their assessment of risk, both in terms of the participants and the researcher.

According to Asamoah-Gyadu (2010) Pentecostal Christians are among the most transnational among Christian religious migrants, and Anderson (2006) goes further to assert that Pentecostalism fulfils a felt need in the religious market in Africa and the African diaspora. In particular, the theological teaching in these churches are strongly oriented towards social and bodily piety, through abstaining from things like ‘smoking, alcohol, gambling, watching commercial films, swearing, to avoid non-marital sexual relationships’ (Brodwin 2003:5). Yet, despite the strict moral ethics in the Pentecostal tradition, they provide a strong sense of belonging which has resulted in high representation of migrants in Pentecostal congregations (Nunez 2014). While scholars such as Adogame (2008) have shown that Pentecostal teachings can also offer mobility and autonomy to women in the transnational spaces, these churches by and large harbour tensions between theological and biomedical discourses over bodily autonomy of its members. In the research proposal, I suggested that African Pentecostal churches generally hold very strict moral positions about women’s sexualities through privileging fertility and reducing the status of women without children (Yebei 2000). Thus my study sought to explore how migrant women who subscribe to Pentecostalism, mediated their sexual and reproductive health choices.

As we embarked on this research project as student and supervisor, we shared a clear understanding that in studying migrant women’s experiences, we would take account of their experiences in ways that were empowering. We

endeavoured to continually reflect on our respective positions as a migrant woman researcher and a South African man with varying degrees of privilege and power, despite our proximity to the research participants. We discussed at length the literature cited above as well as my position as a migrant woman researcher in a middle class, South African University within a white European scholarly tradition. In this regard we found Heidi Mirza's remarks about black women in the academy useful in resisting the force of inherited tradition. She writes of black women in the academy:

In their space on the margin, with their quiet and subversive acts of care and 'other ways of knowing', these women operate within, between, under and alongside the mainstream educational and labor market structures, subverting, renaming and reclaiming opportunities ... through the transformative pedagogy of 'raising the race' (Mirza 2015:8).

In this way we agreed that my emic position was an asset to the development and execution of the research project, because I am a sexually active, married black migrant woman, who was also located within the African Pentecostal religious tradition (although in a different congregation). I believed that as a migrant woman I was well placed to enjoy the trust of the participants and to be an empathetic ally. Further, having experienced the challenges of migration myself, I enjoyed the recognition and trust of my peers both insofar as they expected me to understand their faith position, and keep their confidence. It has not been irregular for me to enjoy the confidence of fellow migrant women and help them find relief through solidarity and counselling.

A Complex Intersection: Gender, Migration, Religion and Health

A number of studies have shown that migrant women consistently encounter barriers to social security and health services (Foley 2005; Scheppers, van Dongen, Dekker, Geertzen & Dekker 2006), and the reasons that are often cited for limited access are; (a) migrants' lack of health insurance; and (b) their inability to speak the local language which prevents them from communicating adequately with their physician. For example, a South African study in 2005 by Perberdy and Dinat (2005) confirmed that migrants are less inclined to visit public hospitals and outpatient clinics, but that when they do, and despite

struggles to get access to services, migrant women seek family planning at a higher rate (44%) than their South African counterparts (29%). In addition to the structural barriers that migrant women face in accessing health services, we hypothesised that religion and culture added a further layer of negotiations that migrant women must navigate. This was informed by the fact that while African cultural traditions tend to privilege fertility and encourage child-bearing, Pentecostalism assign decisions about family-planning to the husband, coupled with discourses of submission from women.

In my approach to the church leadership, I was careful not to offend my prospective hosts because we knew that Pentecostal churches would be suspicious that I – a university trained religion scholar – might want to ‘liberate’ women away from their Pentecostal faith. Thus I spent several months reassuring and convincing the church leadership that I was committed to upholding the social standing of the church and that I would not undermine their teaching. We were acutely aware that both Pentecostal churches and African patriarchies privilege women’s fertility and reproduction (Yeatman & Trinitapoli 2008; Agadjanian & Yabiku 2014). While negotiating access to the church as research site, I tried to remain aware of, and sensitive to Pentecostal churches’ largely conservative attitude towards family planning – which is often equated with abortion, and thus the taking of life (Burchardt 2011). Despite these theological anxieties, it took several meetings with the church leadership in late 2015 before I was finally granted permission by the church to conduct the research. The church agreed that interviews could be conducted at the church’s service centre, although this was not compulsory.

From among the members of the congregation, I planned to interview six migrant women between 20 and 45 years of age, presumed to be sexually active, and who had been active members of the church. The women I eventually interviewed were from Ghana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and had been active members of this church for more than one year. Of the six migrant women one was married, one was divorced for two years, while another was going through divorce at the time of the interview. Of the remaining three, two were engaged and one was single. The selection criteria and context of the study reflected the focus of the study – narratives of sexual and reproductive choices among religious migrant women. Similarly, the interview guide was structured to examine three broad areas: the first four questions focussed on the migratory experiences of the women, the next four questions related to the migrant women’s access of health care facilities in South Africa, and the final

three questions addressed the role of religion in mediating sexual and reproductive choices for themselves, or with their partners.

Thus in formulating my research question and negotiating access to the research field, I was careful not to challenge the Pentecostal church's seeming silencing of women's sexual and reproductive rights, nor to advocate feminist critiques of women's positions in their churches. The sensitive relationship to the church (as research site) emerged as one layer of precarity, while my determination to overcome the marginalization of black women's lived experience in academic research was another, and finally the precarity of being a black migrant woman researcher who is made to feel out of place in South Africa and the academy in general. Getting the approval of the church had loomed large over this study, and thus their approval and support of this study was a significant milestone for me. We presumed that the study would enjoy similar approval from the University Ethics Committee, since the research proposal focused on understanding the everyday lived experience of black women with respect to mediating, and accessing services for sexual and reproductive rights and choices. We proceeded to complete the research proposal and rigorously discussed the ethical consideration related to my positionality. We also sought to pay attention to avoiding triggers, such as intimate partner violence, by focusing on participant's agency in personal histories about sexual and reproductive health.

Contestations over Ethics and Patronage in Researching Gender and Migration

While we recognised that as researchers, we put various measures in place to minimize the negative impact of our research on the women targeted in this study, we also spent time thinking through and interrogating the assumptions of innocence and universality of ethical principles generally applied in research such as autonomy, non- maleficence, justice and beneficence, privacy and justice. The history of ethics in research is concerned with regulating relations of power between the researcher and the participants, all the while informed by ideas about who is doing research, where, and about whom. While unequal relations of power existed between the migrant women participants and myself as a university-based researcher, because I was also an insider, both as a Pentecostal and as a migrant, we realized that traditional assumptions about power and ethics would not apply in the same manner. In fact, we considered

my proximity in status and life experience to that of the participants a valuable asset for establishing rapport and trust in the research process.

Thus we explored the following considerations, in addition to the ethical requirements of the university. We took as a starting point Pat Caplan's (2003) four main observations about the relationship between power and ethics. She asserts (a) that ethical consideration must permeate all aspects of a discipline; (b) that all ethics are political; (c) that reflexivity is central; and (d) that ethics include rigorous critique of self and your discipline (Caplan 2003). In foregrounding this research project with the framework advocated by Caplan, we engaged in a continuous self-reflection and critique in relation to the ethical position of the researcher to the participants. We assumed that this widely advocated practice would satisfy the University Ethics Committee, but we under-estimated the extent to which my positionality as migrant woman researcher would become a point of contestation.

This was brought home to us after I had completed the research proposal and found my application for ethical clearance delayed due to some reservations by the committee. This in itself was not irregular, but we noted the committee's particular concern that all migrant women may have experienced sexual abuse and/or have been in dependent relationships. This was notable because of the fact that nowhere in the proposal, including its rationale or selection criteria, did I ever suggest or hint that experiences of trauma or violence would form part of the interview focus. From the deliberations with the University Ethics Committee, which we discuss at length below, we came to understand that migrant women (myself included) were not regarded as autonomous and agentic persons by the ethics committee. The idea of migrant women they seemed to articulate to us was one where we were seen as dependent migrants accompanying family – fathers, brothers and husbands (Hondag-neu-Sotelo 2000; Simone 2000), or presumed to be fleeing “bad patriarchies” located in distant places and in racialised bodies’ (Keskinen, Tuori, Irni & Mulinari 2009: 5). These two ideas of the passive, silent suffering migrant women appeared to then be super-imposed on this research project, by the University Ethics Committee – and thus the committee perpetuated the idea of migrant women as perpetual victims, vulnerable, and particularly deserving of patronage and protection. For me this means that my epistemological stance of asserting migrant women's agency was not acceptable to the University Ethics Committee.

Initial ethical concerns were raised three months after my application for ethical clearance was submitted, but the protracted process that followed

revealed a great deal about the university’s orientation towards black women as researchers. Although the MA programme I was part of was one year in duration, the ordeal with the ethics committee took more than six months. This long duration was quite irregular because, out of eight sociology of religion students, my ethics application took the longest. This although, in our view, my proposal was less contentious than several other projects in my cohort. Some of the other research topics included a doctoral research project on coming-out narratives of atheists as social minorities, and a MA project on the socio-spiritual development of children in migrant households; both these proposals were approved in less than four weeks. Using the limited sample of eight graduate students registered in this programme between 2014 and 2017, we profiled the ethics application and processing time according to race and gender, and found the following:

Degree	Race	Gender	No.	Type of Research	Ethics Approval Period
PhD	African	Male	2	Empirical	Under 3 months
	Asian	Male	1	Empirical	Under 1 month
MA	African	Male	1	Empirical	Under 3 months
	Asian	Male	2	Empirical (1) Non-Empirical (1)	Under 1 month
	White	Female	1	Empirical	Under 1 month
	African	Female	2	Empirical (1) Non-Empirical (1)	Under 3 months More than 6 months

While we recognise that the sample is small and that there are many differences between the ethics applications, the students all received the same empirical training, had the same supervisor and met on a regular basis as a group, where students shared their respective research experiences. Every student in the

cohort was required to include a positionality statement with respect to the phenomenon they set out to interrogate. These cohort meetings provided the site from where the second author (as the main supervisor) noticed differences in processing and approval times of research ethics application. What became evident over this period was that there seemed to be race and gender bias in the processing of applications for ethical clearance. Black African men and women saw their applications take significantly longer than their White and Asian peers. While we had concerns about this anomaly, it was not until we examined the detailed ethics queries directed at me that we began to notice the biases in the University Ethics Committee's reports. This brought to mind Pat Caplan's assertion that 'all ethics are political' as well as other scholars' findings about the inconsistencies and varying judgements dispensed by ethical approval committees (Abbott & Grady 2011; Caulfield 2011). While there are a number of studies such as by Vadeboncoeur, Townsend, Foster and Sheehan (2016) pointing to variations in applying or interpreting rules of ethical governance in research, we primarily seek to show how both universalizing and intuitive ethical rulings serve to frustrate the visibility and recognition of women and indigenous researchers.

With respect to the review of feminist research proposals, Amanda Burgess-Proctor (2015) argues that most ethics committees rely on conventional, positivist approaches, which means that they are generally unfamiliar with the range of methodologies deployed by feminist researchers. It is our opinion that unlike the libertarian approach in research ethics (Dingwall 2008; Hammersley 2009), our university follows a paternalistic approach to research ethics (Garrard & Dawson 2005) insofar as its Ethics Committee appears to see themselves as tasked with protecting the interests of the participants, through making decisions about what constitutes acceptable levels of risk. In this case queries from the committee were dispensed in two phases. Three months after submitting the application we received a communication that asked for clarity on the methodology, specifically: how the women would be recruited and where they would be interviewed. It also asked about translation into the vernacular, despite the fact that the proposal clearly indicated that interviews will be conducted conversational English because the participants are likely to be from very different countries. Lastly, the committee required a more detailed account about the referral service for counseling. While the first two issues were relatively easily resolved, issues around the referral service became a major obstacle to getting ethical approval. From the

initial ethics queries we cite two issues among other that were raised by the committee:

- *How will the PI deal with women who need counselling as a result of 'telling their story'?*
- *Please relook at Question 3.1 (of the protocol) as some of the women may live in vulnerable circumstances and may have / most likely have been traumatized by rape in dependent relationships, etc.*

While the remainder of the queries were procedural, the two cited here highlighted psychological risk and as such we responded accordingly. We set aside our objection with the ethics committee assumptions, and I revised the proposal according to their requirements and incorporated a detailed referral sheet referring participants to the local *LifeLine* Counselling Centre, and offered a rationale. Below we cite from the response letter I sent to the Ethics Committee:

- *I have developed a 'Referral Information Sheet' for women who might require counselling. I recommend LifeLine Counselling Centre (near to the Church) because they are based in the city and because they have dedicated service for migrants (refugee counselling service).*
- *After consultation with my supervisor, we agreed that this research is not focused on women who are likely to have experienced trauma or stressful life circumstance. Distress is not a critical indicator in my sampling criteria nor in the research focus. The research project is based on the understanding that migrants are people who cross borders. This project in part seeks to challenge the idea that all migrants are necessarily victims – and therefore focuses on the everyday, lived experience of migrants. My supervisor and I are in agreement that this research will focus on migrants without any assumption about their circumstances prior to coming to South Africa.*

As a phenomenological study, we felt that the rationale sent to the University Ethics Committee offered an account of the feminist ideological and epistemological orientation of the study, and despite the egalitarian orientation of the study, we nevertheless made sure that risk mitigating measures, such as

anonymity, safety and a dedicated referral services were put in place. We agree that a researcher's indigenous background or the fact that she might hold similar religious beliefs to her participants does not 'authorise carte blanche status in the field' (Jacobs Huey 2002:793), but we believe that it is possible to be a contentious insider, who stands in solidarity and empathy with her participants. This approach is advocated established feminist scholars such as by Fatima Mernissi (1991) and Ivone Gebara (1999). Both Mernissi and Gebara set privileged justice over participant autonomy as they critiqued religious patriarchies and carved out an epistemological space for critical (insider) feminist narratives drawn from the everyday lives of women within their respective traditions. In wrestling with the implications of the ethical query, we came to understand that the University Ethics Committee assumed a protectionist stance in terms of reducing possible harm to the research participants and as such presented a diminished appreciation of justice for and solidarity with the research participants in their ethical review. Despite drawing on Lanita Jacobs-Huey's work, where she asserts that 'all scholars, particularly native ones, must diligently strive to negotiate legitimacy in the field' (2002:793), we remained anxious about the tensions between the committee's support for a feminist project giving voice to women's lived experience, and their apparent disapproval of a religious insider, migrant women as principal investigator (PI) for this study. Thus the contestation over the referral service not only revealed an ideological tension with the committee over the view of migrant women as victims but it also exposed anxieties about my capabilities as a feminist researcher.

Since my research was primarily located within a Black Feminist framework, it took as a starting point the interlocking nature of oppression (Collins 1991) and thus I took for granted that black female researcher and the black female participant potentially have a closer relation in as far as it relates race, class, gender and ethnicity. Thus our skepticism about the Ethics Committee's view of migrant women was significantly informed by (a) the ideological orientation of the research project – to excavate the agentic aspects of migrant women's everyday lives; and (b) my lived experience as a black migrant woman in South Africa. Collins notes that in negotiating credibility between the researcher and the research participant that relies on 'interlocking nature of oppression' (1991:41) could enhance or frustrate the research efforts and thus a high level of critical self-reflectivity is required. Therefore, Jacobs-Huey and Collins (2002) caution researchers against simply relying on

assumed similarities with research participants. In this regard the work of Joy Owen (2005) and Diane Wolfe (1996) discuss the issue of power and ethics in the research relationship, especially in feminist research where there are presumed similarities in terms of social standing and vulnerabilities. Wolfe (1996) insists that inequality persist because the researcher is able to leave the field, and Owen (2005) recognises her national or native status as significantly more powerful than the positions of the non-native refugee women in her study. While these and other studies in power and ethics in the research field proved helpful as I developed an tools for self-reflexive engagement, few were helpful as a basis to address the issue raised by the ethics committee.

We became aware that as an African pentecostal feminist scholar, who by making assertions that migrant women do not necessarily ‘live in vulnerable circumstances and may have/ most likely have been traumatized by rape in dependent relationships’ nor that ‘telling their story’ necessarily involve sexual or physical violence - I was pushing back against an entire discipline of assumptions about my insider position, the agency-versus-vulnerability of migrant women. Finally, I felt the weight of the expectation that I should conform to the disciplinary/ knowledge regimes regarding data collection. In this my knowledge and lived experience was not only irrelevant but an obstacle to good research practice. Having attended to the Ethics Committee’s queries, we were surprised to find that, when a further three months later, instead of being satisfied with the changes made the ethics application was again denied (now six months since the first submission). The basis for the reservations were stated as follows:

- *Referral Service for Counselling: It is suggested that an independent psychologist / counsellor be present during the data generation process to protect participants from trauma which could be triggered by the incidents that they are required to recall. Participants could find the process of seeking counselling difficult, inconvenient and expensive, i.e. telephone and transport costs, taking leave from work etc. Can this option be considered?*
- *Location of Interviews: if Faith Based Organisations ‘further interfere with and prescribe women’s sexual and reproductive health choices’ (pg3), then the church might not be a ‘safe place’ as per the PI’s declaration / perception. Please can this be relooked at.*

This response was unexpected but not entirely surprising. It was unsurprising because the committee maintained their line of argument and asserted a paternalistic and protectionist approach to ethical governance (Vadeboncoeur, Townsend, Foster & Sheehan 2016). What was unexpected was the elevated levels of oversight, such as the committee insisting that ‘an independent psychologist / counselor be present during the data generation process to protect participants’. This provoked three critical concerns for us: (1) that the committee assumed that the presence of a therapeutic observer would moderate the interaction; (2) that the researcher lacked the competence to empathise and be sensitive to migrant women’s lived experiences; and (3) that the researcher lacked the academic competence to assess affect during interview, terminate meetings and make referrals for further counselling. Further, we found that the reasons provided for including a therapeutic counsellor in the interview process disregarded the referral process that had been put in place, and likewise, they disregarded that fact that sourcing the service of an independent therapist or counsellor would be prohibitively expensive, especially for a migrant-researcher. It was difficult not to regard the recommendations as punitive or infantilizing. Thus following lengthy discussions, my supervisor and I drafted a joint response and sent it the University Ethics Committee:

There is no indication or suggestion in the proposal, or the interview schedule that these women are in any way traumatised by their public health experiences. These are imagined factors inserted by the committee. As a Christian migrant woman myself, I know intimately what these women experience and it is a prejudice to assume that we are all raped and traumatised. The women I intend to interview are just normal women who have migrated to South Africa.

All the women to be interviewed live and work locally (in the city centre) and will not need to travel to the interview. As with any situation of interviews, I will negotiate a suitable time for me to meet with each participant at a time that suits them – for example, during their lunch break.

Finally, after discussing with my supervisor, we both feel that apart from the fact that there is no evidence or suggestion of trauma, the presence of a psychologist / counsellor during the data generation process is problematic: (a) it is likely to be more intimidating for the

women to have two people present during the interviews; (b) it creates a context where these women are imagined as victims only and in need of rescue or protection, (c) this undermines me as a researcher (a black, migrant women researcher) in that it assumes that I might not manage the issue that will come up during the interview.

It is our view that the referral services and information that has been put in place is sufficient – especially considering the fact that it is just down the road from where most of the women live and work.

The ethics committee failed to engage with our argument and merely submitted the following response two days after we had sent the letter above: *‘Please can the Referral Service for Counselling be revised as the response given was not accepted’*. This sparked a week of exhaustive deliberation over the required referral conditions, during which time I demonstrated to the Ethics Committee that we could not find an independent therapist or counsellor who would agree to be present in the room during interviews (*pro bono*), nor could we secure a similar service from either Lifeline counsellors or the Child and Family Centre therapists at the university. The University Ethics Committee finally conceded that I had made every effort, and then agreed that the initial referral service provided would suffice, and ethical clearance was finally granted more than six months after the initial application was submitted.

As young woman researcher of colour, this process left me devastated and frustrated in that not only had my research project been misinterpreted by the ethics committee but I also felt undermined and incompetent. Having clearly argued and presented a rationale for a feminist research project where my own positionality and proximity to the social worlds of the research participants were regarded as an asset, we struggled to see how in its deliberations the ethics committee seemed to re-present my positionality as a migrant women researcher as an obstacle to doing good research. The University Ethics Committee’s politicization and infantilization of migrant women impeded on their ability to assess and review the research proposal on its own merit. Drawing from Patricia Hill Collins’ ‘politics of containment’, Mirza goes on to argue that women of colour are ‘watched and unraced’, that results in ‘black scholars feeling “out of place” in white institutions of higher learning at great emotional and psychological costs to the bearer of that difference’ (Mirza 2015:5).

Discussion: Empowering Methodologies

We found that apart from the alienating institutional culture - where women of colour have been imagined either as sexualised, vulnerable subjects deserving of patronage – as elaborated in the work of scholars such as Collins (1998), Mirza (2015) and Ahmed (2012), the traditionally positivist ethics committee emerges as an institutional forum that further frustrates feminist research projects. The many presumptions about the research proposal I submitted shows how post-positivist or postcolonial feminist and race critical data production methods are placed at odds with protectionist ethics review committees. In our experience, the committee presumed that *telling their stories* about mediating sexual and reproductive choices between faith and family would trigger traumatic experiences for migrant women, and that *telling their stories* required additional therapeutic safeguards during the interview process. This latter requirement relies on the problematic idea of migrant women as vulnerable and subjects of traumatic histories – potentially reinscribing this idea on the researcher or the research participants.

With increasing critiques of conventional research ethics, especially research on women's lived experience, the social sciences has seen the development of unique feminist methodologies (Kirsch 1999). Most of these debates occurred in the western academy, where feminist researchers sought recognition and space for both a revision of epistemology and methodological practice. During the late 1990s debates in research ethics saw justice and rights discourses, being replaced with or increasingly incorporating feminist ethics of care and solidarity (Ruddick 1996; Edwards & Mauthner 2012). In our deliberations with the University Ethics Committee we sought to move beyond the justice-vs-solidarity binary, and found that despite the fact that we shared a commitment to reducing the harm to the research participants, our approaches different in our strategies for achieving our goal. While the (positivist) University Ethics Committee emphasised the enforcement of protocols and safeguards, the research proposal was intentionally designed to reduce the power-differential between the researcher and the participants, as well as to empower the migrant women participants as co-producers of knowledge (Jansen & Rae Davis 1998). From the work of Campbell, Greeson and Fehler-Cabral (2010), Harding and Norberg (2005), Irwin (2006) we see how feminist methodologies endorse more democratic approaches, emphasizing care, compassion, solidarity, and collaboration between researchers and partici-

pants. Although we found that the University Ethics Committee's objections brought on a crisis of confidence – they challenged our epistemological stance that migrant women are not necessarily victims – we were able to defend a methodology defined by ethics of solidarity, empowerment and the social justice.

In the end I was able to complete interviews with six African migrant women, in locations of their choosing (two at their places of work and four preferred to do their interviews at the church). The data production phase proved wonderfully rewarding and while it demanded rigorous self-reflexivity, I concluded that the opinions offered by the participants were significantly influenced by our shared positionalities and experiences as migrant women in South Africa, as well as our being religious women mediating our sexual and reproductive choices in the light of their Pentecostal faith. To this end we, as the authors, decided to cite participants' observations that support this conclusion. With respect to accessing social security, and public health services in particular, one participant Zodwa (anonymised) said:

It's not easy. If you don't have ID especially the times they find that you are a foreigner, they treat you different. It's just not easy... it's like they look at you as another human being, you are more like they don't consider you as a human being but you are more like a stranger to them. So it's not easy.

Similarly, when another participant was asked how she mediated her Pentecostal church's teaching about sex and her own sexual and reproductive choices, Kwekhu (anonymised), a 26-year old single woman noted:

About sex before marriage, they teach a lot about sex before marriage but I am a human being, I have some sexual desires so I had to sleep with somebody soon or later. This sex before marriage it doesn't really work for me.

The pentecostal church teaches sexual abstinence and discourages church members, and migrant women in particular, from the opportunity to explore other available forms of family planning. It is clear that Zodwa, like other migrants, her general experience is being treated as 'other' human or strangers by the society – yet all the while asserting their dignity. Similarly, Kwekhu also

asserts her humanness with respect to not being a machine but a woman with feeling and desires. Ultimately, what is evident from the intimate and frank tone of these responses is the participants' degree of comfort, safety and self-expression (agency). We agree that these findings were enabled as a result of the researcher's affinity with, proximity to the lived experience of the Zodwa and Khethu. In addition to the rich data collected during the research process, we were also struck by the high degree of safety that participants felt. This is evident from Khethu's confession that she does not adhere to the sexual abstinence taught by her Pentecostal church, and thus her sense of comfort to express illicit views can be understood in terms of the researcher's empathy, vulnerability and solidarity born out of the feminist methodology employed in this study. In the final analysis, the research project progressed as I had imagined and so through privileging women's lived experiences, the reduced power-differential between myself and the participants, I was able to, firstly, *apply feminist research principles throughout the project* and secondly, in this case I was able to *privilege the agency and self-representation of migrant women*.

Conclusion

While this research proposal and subsequent study sought to find out whether, or how faith and migrant status influence women's sexual and reproductive health choices, this article focussed on the ideological objections I faced in seeking ethical approval for my study. Despite asserting the focus of the study, as researcher and supervisor, we had to repeatedly justify the feminist rationale of the project insofar as it flattened power relations between the researcher and the participants, and its recognition of migrant women as agentic and self-determining persons. As a researcher, I faced a great deal of frustration and humiliation for having to constantly having to prove my ability as a scholar. As supervisor, the second author grew to appreciate the particular ways that women of colour are patronised as being out of place in the university and being fixed as post-traumatic victim of some possible past violence. We both came to appreciate that beyond the alienating institutional culture of higher education, research procedures, protocols and ethics governance structures also serve to regulate women and black people's access to and legitimacy in the academy.

This article is not a critique of our particular university, not an indictment of the University Ethics Committee, but rather an attempt to

highlight processes through which particular, and often patriarchal, knowledge regimes are enforced by ethics governance bodies, as if they are universally applicable. In our examination of the ethics committee's queries, we noted not only the infantilization of black women researchers as novice researchers, but also the representation of migrant women as perpetual victims, thus sustaining regimes of patronage that regulate black women's access and mobility in the academy. Further, it reinforces ideas about women of colour and migrant women as necessarily belonging to vulnerable research populations. It was our position that, if we conceded the epistemological and feminist methodological orientation of the research proposal due to the demands of the ethics committee, this would have result in loss of migrant women's perspectives regarding sexual and reproductive choices among African Pentecostal migrants. It would also have further delayed methodological innovation that emerges from feminist, race-critical, migrant-centred research. Finally, we came to recognise the particular ways that black women researchers' pedagogies and methodologies of empowerment and solidarity are excessively scrutinized in the name of good science.

Finally, what we have set out to highlight in this article is the need to problematise the ethics of University Ethics Committee insofar as the inherited epistemological traditions are not ideologically neutral. Further, with the changes in methodological practices over recent decades – especially with the development of feminist and indigenous research methodologies, ethics committee protocols have to similarly evolve to review less positivist research proposals. Having established that traditional positivist approaches are not universally applicable and such review processes do not apply adequately to research projects characterised by social justice – whether in pursuit of race, class and gender equity or sexual diversity. It is our contention that ethics committees must similarly apply principles of reflexivity with respect to its own inherited and institutional positionality. Such reflexivity of ethics and power inherent in review processes might not only facilitate the development and recognition of innovative research methods, but also reduce the alienating assumptions about black women researchers, as well as the migrant communities we research.

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Decolonial Counter-conducts? Traces of Decentering Migrant Ecclesiologies

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Abstract

Decolonialisation concerns theology. As long as theology is preoccupied with engaging or explaining the other, it is not a decolonial project. As such this article makes a connection to Walter Mignolo's claim that the researcher as much as the subject needs to be interrogated as part of the research in order to disrupt the subject/ object binary of colonial knowledge traditions. The main part of the article presents three narratives from the life of Nisha, a refugee woman from the DRC living in a South African township. The narratives also involve a researcher – I, the professor – and the pastor and gatekeeper that introduced Nisha to me. In all of the narratives, the two traditional subjects (professor and pastor) are decentered. Nisha makes money trading from a small kiosk, and she invites the two men to a meal at her township house. She walks the pastor and the professor through the neighborhood where she lives. Building on Michel Foucault's theories of counter-conducts, the article argues that the three decentering narratives present Nisha's everyday practices as counter-conducts and the two men as the decentered others. The article argues that such a decentering performs traces of a decolonialising theology. God is the one that lets hierarchy decenter in order to open spaces of others.

Keywords: Counter-conducts, decoloniality, ecclesiology, migration, pastoral power

Introduction

This article will discuss how everyday migrant practices present surprising traces of a decolonial ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is a field that entails scholarly discussion of what the church is and what it might be. While one might think

one knows what church is, this article insists that we do not know. If there is no element of surprise, then we are probably not engaged in discussion of *what church is* or what it might be. Accordingly, what is needed is a discourse where church may be discovered in surprising places and in unexpected contexts. The element of surprise is not new in Protestant/Lutheran theology, but what is new in this article is that the surprise is a key characteristic of an ecclesiology that one could label as decolonial.

The basic argument is that an unexpected or surprising ecclesiology needs to start from below. Here there are practices that are not merely relevant to the field, but that are also decisive when exploring what ecclesiology is. In this, one needs to *sense* the surprise, which can only be made manifest in encounters. This attitude of starting from below, however, belongs to a broader movement. Based on a substantial critique of church and religion, Walter Mignolo (2011) has developed what he calls a decolonial approach.

The decolonial is an explicit resistance to colonial hegemony in modernity. The decolonial entails a perspective from below, as well as a focus on practices, the indigenous, the local, and the everyday, especially in the Southern contexts. Mignolo calls the decolonial ‘border thinking’ (Mignolo 2011), signaling the epistemological shift that develops when bodies, spaces, and the local are points of departure for thinking. Instead of the post-colonial, an invention of French philosophy, the decolonial is centered on resistance. This is a different discourse; the discourse Foucault called subjugated knowledge (Mignolo 2011). This is why location and context are as decisive as the concepts themselves. Mignolo draws on the French linguist Emile Benveniste and his distinction between enunciation and the enounced. Enunciation includes the subject speaker in the meaning process of the enounced (Mignolo 2011). The local and the embodied receive significant epistemological priority in this interpretative process.

The intention in this article is to introduce a theological connection to Mignolos’s concept of ‘thinking with’. Referring to the Ecuadorian historian Arturo Escobar, Mignolo and Walsh write:

First, Escobar made a case for the ‘flesh and blood’ of decolonial struggles; of the need for potential work within what he termed ‘the modernity/ coloniality research program. Here Escobar referred to the work that directly engages ‘colonial differences and border thinking from the ground up’ (Escobar in Mignolo & Walsh 2018:27).

Such a shift entails a rethinking of how and with whom we think (and understand) theory, and a recognition of the convergence of local histories, knowledges, and political praxis. As I have argued above, it also entails moving from a posture of ‘studying about’ to ‘thinking with’. This latter move necessarily demands ‘the enunciation of the researcher herself or himself, and making visible his or her presence in his thinking’ (Mignolo & Walsh 2018:28). The challenge in this article is to examine what this decolonial approach might mean for theology, especially in relation to ecclesiology. Mignolo and Walsh do not express any expectation of churches or of theology. For them, churches represent one of the main pillars of the colonial. Their focus, rather, is the local everyday praxis of living by those who live the colonial difference. In this regard they note that we proceed as

engaged intellectuals still learning to unlearn in order to relearn; to challenge our own histories, herstories, privileges, and limitations ... [thus] decoloniality means thinking, doing, sharing, and collaborating with people in different parts of the globe engaged in similar paths, people striving – as both of us are – in their own local histories confronting global designs (Mignolo & Walsh 2018:245).

In my view, this is a position that can offer a valuable contribution to theology, and ecclesiology. One important goal of Protestant theology is to look for the unexpected. If we follow Mignolo and Walsh, the unexpected is out there, it is located in the epistemological shift to ‘border thinking’. Therefore, I will start with three short stories from the life of Nisha – woman I encountered while conducting fieldwork in South Africa (Wyller 2018; 2019).

The Nisha Narratives

In most South African cities, there are a significant numbers of refugees from neighboring African countries such as Malawi, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While tourists might not notice them, locals do. Many of these migrants own barbershops, cafes, or other small businesses. A testimony to hostilities, many locales call these migrants ‘makwerekwere’ (foreigners).

This article will outline and deconstruct three narratives from the life of one such migrant, Nisha, to illustrate how ‘border thinking’ informs and

shapes theology. Nisha is a recently widowed 34 year old refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Today she lives with her four children in a township in a medium-sized South African city. In this township, the majority of families are Zulu, and natives of this part of the country. In general Zulu's do not speak Swahili and Nisha does not speak their language – isiZulu – either. In addition to a generally hostile attitude towards 'foreigners' language problems makes everyday connections between many migrants and locals difficult. For Nisha every day starts at 4.00 a.m. when she rises to light the fire and start cooking for her family. She sends three of her four children to school, leaving the smallest with family that lives nearby. She then goes off to buy fruits and sweets that she sells in a small kiosk, known locally as a *spaza*. When her husband was still alive, he worked in a small barbershop situated on the same street corner where Nisha now works.

Nisha is an evangelical Christian, but in her present exile in South Africa, she spends most of her energy participating in a refugee ministry, focused on Swahili/French speaking people from countries such as the DRC, Burundi, and Rwanda. 'The ministry encourages you to survive' Nisha said to me, underlining that the people she meets in church have become like family to her. The refugee ministry is led by a resourceful and very experienced pastor – Yannick – who facilitates Nisha's every day participation in the church.

During the week pastor Yannick attends to social issues that concern migrants and he invites them to Congolese, ecumenical services in a local church building on Sunday afternoons. The service takes place in the afternoon, so that the migrants, should they choose to do so, can attend the morning services of the local churches in their own denomination. The ecumenical afternoon service attends also to ethnic and cultural aspects of life. It follows a regular structured liturgy of a word of welcome, local music and singing, sermons, testimonies and prayers, offerings, and general practical information. After the service, biscuits and mineral water is served in the church room. In this way, the service is similar to mainline Protestant services in South Africa. However, the clothing, language and music are not the same, and contribute to maintaining a strong and particular cultural identity. This seems also seems to be one of the main goals of the service.

In the church services drums are played throughout, while women wearing their various traditional attire carry small children on their backs. I imagine that for those who attend, it may feels as though they are in the DRC for that short period of time. This is a cultural and life-world experience,

located within a church context. On Sundays the church emphasises cultural belonging, although on weekdays the situation is different. During the week, refugees of different national and cultural origins are thrown into a South-African cultural and social context. They gather in small groups, standing on the street corners selling their goods such as sweets, fruit and mobile phone covers to passers by. These migrants can be found all over most South-African cities, and they are an integral part of the inner city sensibilities, always there, making money from trading or running small businesses.

I was introduced to Nisha by pastor Yannick while I was living in the area and wanted to meet and speak with people living as refugees in South Africa. Having done research on irregular migration in Europe, my intention was to collect refugee experiences that could lead to elaborations on church/refugee relations in this part of Africa. The initial interest was tied to the way in which ministries such as the one led by Pastor Yannick impacted on or enhanced the everyday life of refugees. As such I went into the first meeting with Nisha with the rather traditional expectation of getting access to ‘interesting material.’ Pastor Yannick is himself a refugee, having come to South Africa from one of the countries neighboring the DRC. Having settled in this medium-sized South African town, he has spent several years building his ministry, with support and connections from abroad, especially from the US.

My first meeting with Nisha took place at one of the Sunday services. Nisha was among those attending, and she stood out as she sang with a strong and emotive voice. I asked pastor Yannick if he could arrange for me to meet Nisha at her house and conduct some tape-recorded interviews with her. I still have the tapes from these interviews, but after several meetings over three years, I am convinced that the most important information from Nisha’s life does not come from the interviews, but from my direct encounters with her and her everyday life. The three narratives I recount below are intended to introduce some of these encounters and offer glimpses of why an embodied everyday might be theologically much more relevant and significant than tape-recorded interviews.

Narrative One: Selling

Nisha makes her living selling goods from a kiosk to the locals passing by. The kiosk space is also where she lives – it is her social life. People pass by and some make purchases, some with friendly hellos, others more skeptical. The

kiosk is on a street corner where other refugees live, meaning that she is also somewhat protected.

The kiosk project emerged from pastor Yannick's relation to a European aid organisation and the micro credit system built by that organisation. Pastor Yannick lent some money to Nisha, which she used to start the kiosk. When the kids come home from school, they often gather around the kiosk, while other family members pass by chatting. While the space offers a social space for refugees, there are also non-Swahili speaking locals who buy from the kiosk. When they arrive the small talk is reduced, and customers point at the fruits or the sweets they wish to buy. Nisha wraps the goods in a plastic bag and receives the money before handing over the bag. These transactions with locals are quick, while those with other refugees and their families are more lengthy, and resemble a gathering of friends where the selling is less important than the encountering.

The space is hot and dusty. There is a small roof above the kiosk that Nisha can sit under when the heat becomes too much. This is a way of life that provides a living, but it also seems to be contributing to social life and encounters with family, neighbors, and friends. The selling is at the centre of Nisha's everyday; it is her main activity between morning and mid-afternoon. Originally, the kiosk was supported by the church established micro-credit, yet when pastor Y and I visit the kiosk we make sure to not to come too close and interrupt or disturb the trading. Nisha never says, but she seems to appreciate that we stay in the background. This is her social life, not ours. The ministry and the pastor are facilitators, but Nisha is the kiosk subject. It is her skin that sweats in the heat; it is her relations that are developed during the many small encounters at the kiosk.

Narrative Two: Eating

Fascinated by her role in the Sunday service and in the everyday interactions at the street corner kiosk, I decided to deepen my engagement with Nisha, recognising her as a significant representative of refugee life in South Africa. Pastor Yannick acted as a gatekeeper or sponsor for me, and together we went to visit Nisha in her township house on the outskirts of the city. We first met for an interview in early 2016.

Townships in South Africa tend to be crowded areas, full of neighbors, dogs, kids and small businesses. As a white European researcher I am the

outsider, and I feel almost like an alien as I meet with Nisha. Nisha is in her living room surrounded by her youngest kids and her neighbor, all sitting in the redskin sofa. The room we are in is separated from the other rooms with a type of colorful curtain. On the left wall there is a TV, and on the other sofa sits the pastor – Yannick – and the professor – I. The interview lasted for about 90 minutes.

Nevertheless, it is not the interview I remember, it is the meal that followed the interview. The meal was a gift from Nisha to Pastor Yannick and myself after the interview was done. As I turned off the recorder, and was just about to leave, Nisha asked: ‘Maybe you would like to eat before leaving?’ In that moment I considered everything from research ethics to theories of gifts that I had read, as well as orientalist reports of how township food is unhealthy for fragile Whites. Yet in less than a second, I replied with a firm and polite confirmation; I would be delighted to eat.

Hence we proceeded to eat a Congolese fish dish, while talking about nice things, sharing stories and showing photos of family and life. This was, in my memory today, the most exceptional and significant moment of my whole visit. Nisha narrated that she, and her neighbor, had been preparing the meal from very early morning, something she had not said when I first entered her house. What I remember the most is the smell of the fish dish, the intense red color of the tomato sauce, the large bowl of rice, and the intimate space and embodied engagement when Nisha shared the food between all of us. I also remember clearly the emotional relief following the formal 90 minute interview, the character of the Swahili voices (for me an unfamiliarly ‘thin’ phonetic), and the visibilities (colors, nature peering in from the outside, women breastfeeding on the sofa) and most of all; being united in a new and unexpected community through the meal offered to us by Nisha. In that moment there was no doubt, Nisha was in charge, she took the lead, and the professor and the pastor were guests and strangers. The hierarchy from the interview was turned upside down. It was a different hierarchy, constituted by senses and emotions.

Narrative Three: Walking

The third Nisha narrative is the most recent, it is from early 2018 when I made one more visit to the South African town, and meet with pastor Yannick and Nisha. Like the other narratives, this is also a narrative about senses and being

sensed as the core of an intentionality relation. While the subject is still Nisha, the focus of this narrative is on walking, rather than eating.

One year after the meal described above, I was again invited to visit Nisha's township house. Again I interviewed her, for more than 90 minutes, and again there were smells like the first time. The room however, was different as Nisha had moved into another room since the last time I saw her. After we completed the interview I asked Nisha; could we go for a walk through the township neighborhood? What I did not know was that this was Nisha's first walk through the township since her husband died. A few months before this narrated walk, her husband, also a refugee from the DRC died suddenly died from a brain stroke – several weeks after he was assaulted and beaten by Zulu neighbors. The area is known for hostility to African migrants and has a high incidence of xenophobia.

Like during the meal, pastor Yannick and I walk with Nisha and are directed by her. However, this time, it is more challenging to determine who among us is the stranger; me the foreign white professor, or her the widowed migrant woman. The sensory experience connects us, of course, yet, the experience of being disconnected stays in the walk. It was Nisha who decided where to walk, the pace, as well as whom we should visit. Nisha appeared to enjoy meeting neighbors and friends, and she did not notice us falling behind, in fact, she seemed uninterested in us. Nisha, on her walk, reconquered the space, while the pastor and the professor were left behind. Nisha lead this walk of reconnecting, of hugging her DRC neighbor, who upon seeing Nisha approach ran to her house to prepare it before the friend (and the pastor and the professor) visited. Inside the house, we shared the smells and all the sounds and voices of friendly talking. Nevertheless, by pastor Yannick and myself always trailing behind Nisha, walking two or more steps behind, it was as if there was a movement of disconnection taking place.

The pastor and the professor are invited in but kept at an 'intimate' distance so that they can witness but not determine or direct the rhythm of the walk. We are kept at a distance, but in that distance, we are not unnoticed. We, and especially I as the white professor, are aliens in this context, noticeable for sure, also because we are behind Nisha the whole time. The walk is Nisha's agency walk, where she pushes the pastor and the professor to the margins as strangers, almost into the abyss of being aliens once again. Once again, the sensory is at the centre; the dust, the heat, the sweating of the skin, and cries of joy welcoming Nisha as she walks in front.

Discussion

In the tradition of the decolonial, the everyday and the practices of ordinary people have been given strong significance. The question is, however, whether Nisha's everyday agency has a theological or ecclesiological significance. This is a demanding and important question. On the one hand, there is no doubt that all three stories narrate practices in a context of ministry, church and Christianity. Pastor Yannick facilitates them all; the participants belong to a community of evangelical believers and refugees among whom God has authority. On the other hand, the selling, the eating, and the walking represent a move away from both ministry, church and Christianity. Here Nisha (and her refugee friends) strengthen their agency, while the minister and the professor decrease in significance. This is what the narratives communicate.

In the following discussion the focus is on whether decentering represent traces of a decolonial theology, merely through the decentering of the minister and the professor of theology. The element of surprise is too often is neglected in empirical studies of church and theology, and perhaps one of the biggest surprises is to understand and discover how decentering and disrupting implies a lot more than a mere fading away. The first step is to look more closely at aspects of three narratives. The first is the related to space.

a. Selling as Decentering

Jennifer Greenburg (2010) has discussed spatial practices among Congolese migrants in Johannesburg. Her point of departure is what she calls 'the spatial politics of xenophobia,' referring to the spate of xenophobic violence in 2008. For Greenburg the implicit politics of xenophobia is spatial:

The violence and cultural racism to which migrants are subjected, combined with volatile housing conditions, has the effect of continually displacing migrants within the city (2010:67).

The reason for this displacement is that racist aggression makes it impossible for migrants to stay in one place for an extended period. They are not safe in any one place. Moving therefore becomes a permanent trajectory for refugee people.

Migrant trajectories within the city point to the production of a new relationship between race and space through which the violent racism

to which migrants are subjected at the same time as they are forced to remain constantly on the move (Greenburg 2010:67).

Following other migration scholars, Greenburg points to the significance of Pentecostal churches for the refugee population in South Africa. On the one hand, the spatial politics of xenophobia reduces spatial belonging and forces migrants to remain on the move, never settling permanently. On the other hand, religion takes people back to space. Her research shows that,

Pentecostal churches are some of the most important sites at which urban space is being reconfigured The church is one of the everyday practices that produce migrants' spatial and racial experiences of the city (Greenburg 2010:78).

The selling narrative I outlined above disturbs Greenburg's interpretation from the side of church. Greenburg takes the church space for granted and sees it as a space that enhances the social life and the security of the migrants. The Nisha narrative, however, opens a new discussion of what church is. Pastor Yannick is undoubtedly the church leader for Nisha. He is also the facilitator of her kiosk business, providing her with the necessary microcredit. Nevertheless, both the pastor and the professor remain distant in the trading process. It is Nisha's business, the business is not a practice that succeeds because the ministry is behind it.

Like suggested by Adogame (2010) and Settler (2018), writing about similar contexts, the kiosk space is a subculture of relations, where stories are shared and challenges are addressed. Reconfiguring space is a phenomenon that gives agency; agency happens because refugee women, locals, neighbors, family and kids relate and connect. My focus here is: Yes, this is a reconfiguration, but what is reconfigured the most is the church itself. Nisha takes the lead; the pastor is at a distance. Greenburg, Adogame and Settler make important arguments when pointing to reconfiguration in a township context. Ministries and churches are unwittingly involved in trading and exchange, and as such breed new spaces of subcultural power. However, if the analysis is too occupied with this type of spatial change, we will lose sight of how practices of selling open new perspectives on what church is. Church might be something more, and it might be different, from what mere observation can tell us.

The narrative of selling might seem like a very trivial and orientalist ethnographic report from my visit to the strangers. Nevertheless, the narrative is more than trivial and to call it orientalist is only part of the story. It moves beyond both the trivial and the orientalist. It is a narrative about the church facilitating and decentering, and it is about an agency that is conditioned by embodied interconnectivities. The methodological challenge is that it is not possible to just ‘report’ from third space, from the heterotopias, the reporting itself leads to the orientalism. Merely reporting misses the third space and in a sense even rejects it. This is one aspect of the needed methodological reflection noted in the first part of this article. Mignolo (2011) underlines that ‘border thinking’ implies to ‘reflect with’ people and that such a reflection requires one to be open about the researcher’s own role and – in this selling narrative – how the researcher is kept at a distance when selling is the main activity.

b. Eating as Decentered Sharing

The meal experience reveals that, when the researcher reflects on her or his role as part of the third space, a new and decisive level of interpretation opens up. In the following section, I make connections to the work of Sara Ahmed, although other phenomenologists might also be relevant to the discussion. Ahmed (2000) criticises Levinas as belonging to a tradition that ‘fetishises’ the other. For Levinas the other is unreachable, different, and therefore unable to be connected to. Of course, we all know that Levinas takes an ethical position absolutely opposite to that of the othering. However, the tendency to essentialise others is part of the same trajectory. We effectively disconnect from them.

The point is that such othering, according to Ahmed (2000), can be avoided if we include a consideration of the social encounter; the touch, the smell, and the voice, the sensibilities that we cannot but recognise. Ahmed, therefore, distinguishes between being an alien and being a stranger. An alien is someone that we do not sense. The alien is outside and cannot be sensed or be made sense of. The stranger is different. The stranger does not belong to my neighborhood or my family, still the stranger is a person I sense, as in someone I detect through my senses. The senses connect persons, even if the other is outside my tribe.

The decisive aspect of the meal narrative is that the other was not Nisha, it was I, the white professor/researcher. The meal made him a stranger,

but not an alien. The meal sensibilities, the seemingly everyday trivialities of eating are also significant in how people are sensibly connected. Just sitting in the township living room increased the sensible transformation from alien to stranger, but the meal confirmed it by being the sensible core event in the whole meeting.

This analysis, then, explains and interprets why Nisha is defined as *sharing*. It is a sharing of senses and because of that a sharing that connects and at the same time disturbs the subject/object hierarchy. The meal narrative, then, is part of the decolonial process, introduced by Mignolo. The epistemological disobedience is initiated when the meal is the reflective starting point. Choosing the meal as the starting point implies that this form of sharing also gives epistemological priority to the senses and to the emotions connected to them. Moreover, this means that Nisha is a first rank epistemic contributor.

c. Walking as Decentered Agency

When Nisha walked through the township where she lived one morning in early 2018, the smells, colors, and heat were the same as every day. However, at the same time, nothing was everyday about this walk. It was a new everyday, it was Nisha's first walk through the township since her husband died. Nisha's dramatic refugee journey (which included many years in different violent refugee camps in Tanzania) eventually brought her to South Africa where she settled down. A few months before the 2018 walk her husband, also a refugee from the DRC, died suddenly from a brain stroke. The family suspects that the husband's stroke was provoked by an assault some weeks before when he was beaten by hostile Zulu neighbors.

That specific day, Nisha did not walk alone, yet, she was in the lead. The Swahili-speaking pastor, and the researcher narrating this story, walked with her. The Swahili pastor was the facilitator of the meeting, but in the walk was second in line. Nisha leads, the pastor and the professor follow. This everyday belongs to Nisha.

There is no altar and no other classical ecclesial signs in the Nisha walk, but there is an obvious joy of encountering. Before the walk, there were months of isolation since her husband passed away, but on the walk Nisha reconquers the space. On this walk we are, in a way, decentered from both church and traditional hierarchies of power. Roles are inverted, gender, power

and spirituality are not in someone's specific property. It is a disruption and a decentering of what used to be called theological discourse and of what used to be conceptualised as church. The fundament is that Nisha takes the lead and performs agency in the midst of the sensory everyday walk. This significant agency, walking two steps ahead of the pastor and the professor, embodies traces of a decentering ecclesiology. Nisha is the one who sets and keeps the rhythm and the pace; she is the one who determines what her co-walkers should see. Through that walk, she constructs a script that initiate traces of the decolonial. Moreover, these traces have ecclesiological implications. Freedom walk; nothing but that is what the church ought to do.

Translated into the phenomenology of Sara Ahmed, the walking narrative differs from the eating narrative, in one significant way. The decentering, the walking two steps behind, alienates the ecclesial power-people. The invitation to lunch inverts roles, yet recognises the sensory connections so that the power-people participate as recognised strangers, not as aliens. In the walking narrative, the disruption is more significant. There is still a connection between Nisha and the two others, but the two become increasingly alienated from her. The pastor and the professor belong to the same space, but are located further towards the margins than they were in the eating narrative.

These three short Nisha narratives are attempts at providing a way to restart theology. The selling narrative focuses on the exchange and trading that puts Nisha in charge. The meal is about taking part in a subculture of sharing, of sensory experiences, and of a reversal of roles. Finally, the walking embodies a new power structure between the three walking figures, Nisha, pastor Yannick and I – the white professor. All three narratives point in the same direction, wherein the involvement of the researcher is a necessity for restarting a reflective decolonial theology. Involving here means focusing on the everyday of refugees and locals, and letting this involvement be the epistemic priority. This could mean that theology can give important contributions to decolonial thinking, resulting in a decolonial move in theology itself.

Decentering Ecclesiology as Counter-conduct

Epistemological violence is one of the more serious diseases in contemporary, critical research. While no one wishes to do it, a lot of us still do. This is also true for theology, not least because it wishes to do more than just well, to help more than many, and to improve societies to be better than anyone else. The

challenge is that theology was Michel Foucault's main source when he analysed and interpreted pastoral power (Foucault 1982). Theology and religious discourse are archetypical performances of what epistemological violence is in the discipline; the power hidden behind good intentions, and the lack of space for critical resistance.

Nevertheless, we tend to forget that it was Foucault himself who also came up with an exit from the pastoral power-trap. Foucault is famous for his almost deterministic analysis of power discourse and power practices. Still, he also offered traces for a possible resistance. There is not only pastoral power; there are also counter-conducts (Foucault 2007; Sander, Villadsen & Wyller 2016). What is interesting is that Foucault located the origin of counter-conducts in what he called millenarian contexts, that is religious practices located in late medieval mysticism and eschatological thinking. In other words, the idea that theology can contribute to counter-conducts comes from Foucault himself.

Nisha's selling, eating, and walking are as far from millenarian, late medieval mysticism as possible. Nevertheless, the three narratives narrate a decentering practice that embodies and visualises what the ecclesial surprise might be; an inversion of roles, a sharing of sensory experiences, and the epistemic priority of the vulnerable and their agency. This is the start of a theology less obvious than the one in the eschatological universe where Foucault saw the origin of counter-conducts. However, it is still the (theological) author (of this article) that discovers this new origin. If there is a mysticism or a transcending religiosity in the messages of the narratives, it is in the decentering traces of an ecclesiology of the everyday, and the spatial phenomena of the everyday. The religion of the counter-conduct disrupts traditional religious discourses. Here, new agents and more risky Gods develop. The theological surprise is that there are still practices and messages that set people free. The setting free is the miracle; the church, the ministry, and the professor facilitate, but in the end they disappear and Nisha appears as the subject.

In Foucault's view, classical pastoral power developed within the medieval monasteries where the abbot leader was in total control of the well being of his monks. Fundamentally based on the power to save the souls of his humble suppressors, the abbot also had the power to facilitate the material parts of their life, housing, the regulation of the day, duties and relation to the life outside the monastic walls (Sander *et al.* 2016; see also Foucault 1982:782).

It is well known that Foucault claimed that the classical pastoral power

became transferred into more modern, and seemingly less monastic, welfare state. Foucault (1994) labeled this governmentality, which for him was the secularised version of pastoral power. The welfare regime also had the power to give sense, and to control the ‘soul’ of its users. At the same time, the welfare state provided people with sufficient material goods, subsidies, accommodation, economic support etc.

The surprising element in the narratives, as I have interpreted them, is that the traditional Foucauldian pastoral power seems to be the content of all three. At least until one re-examines them; all three narratives presuppose pastor Yannick and the white professor as the two persons in charge. As the agents of traditional pastoral power, they enhance the life of Nisha; the pastor provided her with microcredit and spiritual support during services and other religious practices in his ministry.

What is interesting here is that if one only uses classical methods of observation, what is discovered is classical pastoral power. This does not help us discover the activities of resilience; selling, eating, walking. Within this classical method of observation Nisha is the object of pastoral power, yet she uses it to protect and build her family. Hence, there are traces of agency and resilience within classical pastoral power observation methodology that are waiting to be discovered through surprise.

Nevertheless, what is most striking are the reflections that develop when the decolonial gaze is activated. All three narratives invite us into power ruptures and ecclesial disobedience. The selling, the eating, and the walking are three embodied practices that disrupt. However, they are, at the same time, three embodied practices that restart a different epistemic enunciation. Given the presupposition that ecclesia is the surprise when God reveals the unexpected and gives people the right to have their own agency, these narratives belong to the discovery of that (decolonial) epistemology.

Therefore, theology, given that it becomes an interpretation of the everyday, can discover a late modern decentering counter-conduct. It is, like Foucault thought, still located in theological traditions, but the traditions and perspectives differ from those Foucault analysed. Foucault collected his material in accepted sources of (eschatological and mystical) theology. The decolonial departs from theological traditions, and therefore trading, eating and walking are possible starting points, not the conclusion, nor the governmentality of pastoral power. Linking counter-conducts with the genuine interest of the decolonial, is an opening for a theology of the decolonial. In a

recent book Mignolo and Walsh (2018:27) refer to the Ecuadorian Escobar; ‘Similarly ... it is to recall Arturo Escobar’s argument made over a decade ago about ‘the need to take seriously the epistemic force of local histories and to think theory from the political praxis of subaltern groups’. For Mignolo and Walsh these stories are part of an unheard story. The stories that Mignolo and Walsh present are, however, not stories like Nisha’s. They went to more obviously resistant contexts to collect and reflect. Yet, in the context of theology, there are stories, and narratives, like those of Nisha. Theology becomes important and challenging when it walks with and reflects on what the embodied participation might mean – theologically.

Decentering Counter-conducts and Traces of a Decolonial Theology

The three narratives above could be interpreted as three unexpected late modern, counter-conducts. There is the (ecclesiologically decentered) counter-conduct of vulnerable respatialisation, the counter-conduct of vulnerable sharing, and the counter-conduct of vulnerable agency. The decentering is what unifies the three narratives. Nisha walks and senses the township; she touches the skin of her fellow migrant neighbors as well as the skin of some of her Zulu neighbours. The reception, the entanglement of earth, smells, expectations and colors, with the pastor two steps behind, make this walk theologically significant. It is a ‘liberation theology’ that liberates by resigning, and that encourages by recognising that black bodies matter. This happens when one shares a meal, walks the walk and is near the selling. The involved researcher and decolonial reflection belong together. The theology of counter-conduct embodied in Nisha’s walk is when the researcher senses that Nisha takes the lead and builds ecclesiology. Through this the power structures of the colonial church are almost dissolved. It is Nisha in her sensory and sensible relations to the earth, smells and humans that mark the start of a theological counter-conduct beyond modernity. And the counter-conduct dissolves the ecclesial moment.

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