Faith in African Lived Christianity

Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies

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Faith in African Lived Christianity

Bridging Anthropological and Theological Perspectives

Edited by

Karen Lauterbach
Mika Vähäkangas

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Foreword

This book comes out of the research project "Looking for Wholeness in an Enchanted World: Healing, Prosperity and Ritual Action in African Charismatic/Pentecostal Churches." At the completion of a long project, one realizes that the list of organizations and people without whom it would not have been realized is very long. We want to extend our thankfulness to all who have helped and supported us on the way and name here only a few.

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The contributors to this volume are researchers of the project, participants in the concluding conference of the project that took place in Lund in March 2016, as well as colleagues otherwise related to the project such as members of the advisory board. The conference was financially supported by the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, RJ) for which we are thoroughly thankful. Additional support was received from Lund Mission Society and in the form of teacher exchange attached to the conference from the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities (Vitterhetsakademien). Additionally, the IT-department of the faculties has generously supported us in creating websites (not least for the conference with fancy administrational functions) and posters (thank you, Mr. Marcus Lecaros!).

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Notes on Contributors

Elias Kifon Bongmba
holds the Harry and Hazel Chavanne Chair in Christian Theology and is Professor of Religion at Rice University. He is President of the African Association for the Study of Religions. He is the author of *The Dialectics of Transformation in Africa* (Palgrave, 2006), which won the Frantz Fanon Prize from the Caribbean Philosophical Association. He holds an Honorary Doctorate in the Faculty of Theology at Lund University.

Stian Sørlie Eriksen
works as Assistant Professor and programme director of Intercultural and Religious Studies at the Faculty of Theology, Diaconal and Leadership Studies at VID Specialized University in Stavanger, Norway. His research interests are in particular related to religion and migration, global Pentecostalism and mission studies. He is currently in process of completing his PhD thesis in theology and religion with a project on mission and migrant churches in Norway.

Rune Flikke
is Associate Professor and Head of Department at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo. He has extensive research experience from African Independent Churches in Durban, South Africa. He has been involved in several research projects sponsored by The Research Council of Norway. Flikke has recently started working with resource management and nature conservation with a focus on issues of religious rituals, wellbeing, nature conservation, alien species, and conceptions of changing landscapes in South Africa. In 2019 he will start working on an RCN sponsored project on the global dissemination of salmonids.

Lotta Gammelin
is a PhD Candidate in Global Christianity and Interreligious Relations at Lund University. Her main research interests are intersections of gender and religion, especially in African contexts. Her PhD project is an ethnographic study of a charismatic, locally founded, church in Mbeya, Tanzania, focusing on healing and gender.

Elina Hankela
is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religion Studies at the University of Johannesburg where she, among other things, teaches liberation theologies

and qualitative research methods. Besides liberation theologies and ethnography as a method in studying and teaching theology and religion, her research interests include understanding xenophobia, charity and other social justice related questions, in particular, in the context of urban South Africa. She is the author of the award-winning book *Ubuntu, Migration and Ministry* (Brill, 2014), based on her PhD dissertation.

Niels Kastfelt
is an Associate Professor in the Department of Church History and the Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen. He is the author of *Kulturmøde i Nigeria* (Gad, 1981) and *Religion and Politics in Nigeria. A Study in Middle Belt Christianity* (B Tauris & Co Ltd, 1994) and the editor of *Scriptural Politics. The Bible and the Koran as Political Models in the Middle East and Africa* (Hurst & Co Ltd., 2003) and *Religion and African Civil Wars* (Palgrave, 2005).

Karen Lauterbach
is Associate Professor at the Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen. Her research has focused on charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity in Africa with a particular focus on Ghana and Uganda. She has worked on the career trajectories of young pastors and analyzed how becoming a pastor is a way of social becoming. Her research has also focused on displacement and religion in the context of Congolese refugee churches in Kampala, Uganda. She is the author of the monograph *Christianity, Wealth and Spiritual Power in Ghana* (Palgrave, 2017).

Ingrid Løland
is a PhD Candidate and Research Fellow at the Centre for Mission and Global Studies, VID Specialized University, Stavanger. She is currently working on a project focusing on Syrian refugees in Norway, looking at the intersection between migration, religion and identity discourses in a conflict-induced Syrian refugee context.

Isabel Mukonyora
is Professor in Religious Studies at Western Kentucky University. She teaches a wide ranging number of courses starting with an Introduction of World Religions, Christian Theology, Global Christianity and women and the environment. She takes part in collaborative research activities on Christianity in Africa and others concerned with grounding knowledge about Christianity in world experiencing climate change. Her current book project looks at African ideas for developing a global theology for what has clearly become an era for both Global Christianity and global warming.

Hans Olsson
is a Marie Curie Fellow at the Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen. His work in Tanzania and Zanzibar over the past ten years has produced, among others, the monographs *The Politics of Interfaith Institutions in Contemporary Tanzania* (Swedish Science Press, 2011) and *Jesus for Zanzibar: Narratives of Pentecostal (Non-)Belonging, Islam, and Nation* (Brill, 2019), which is based on his PhD dissertation.

Martina Prosén
is a Ph.D. Candidate in Global Christianity and Interreligious Relations at Lund University, Sweden and part of the research project Looking for Wholeness. Her research focuses on worship as a ritual phenomenon in two charismatic churches in Nairobi, Kenya. She has a long history of living in different parts of Africa.

Joel Robbins
is Sigrid Rausing Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. He has worked extensively on the development of the anthropology of Christianity and he is author of the award-winning book, *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society* (University of California Press, 2004). He is currently completing a book on the relationship between anthropology and theology that is based on the Stanton Lectures, delivered at the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge in 2018.

Galia Sabar
serves as the President of Ruppin Academic Center in Israel since 2016. Formerly, she was the Head of African Studies at Tel Aviv University. For the past 30 years her research has focused on the history and religious manifestation of Ethiopian Jews, the relation between church and state in Kenya, socio-political aspects of HIV\AIDS prevention education in Africa, life experiences of African labour migrants and asylum seekers in Israel and the complex phenomena of return migration of undocumented African migrants. She received the "unsung heroes of compassion award" from the Dalai Lama for translating her scientific work into social activism in 2009.

Tomas Sundnes Drønen
is Professor of Global Studies and Religion at VID Specialized University (former School of Mission and Theology), Stavanger, Norway. He is currently Dean at the Faculty of Theology, Diaconia, and Leadership Studies. Drønen has worked and conducted fieldwork in Cameroon for several years, and he has authored

many publications on globalization, religion and development, migration and religious change in Africa including *Communication and Conversion in Northern Cameroon* (Brill, 2009), *Pentecostalism, Globalisation and Islam in Northern Cameroon* (Brill, 2013).

Carl Sundberg
obtained his D.Th. in Mission Studies at Lund University, Sweden, in 2000. In 1979 he was ordained a pastor of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden and in 1989 he was consecrated as a missionary to the Congos. Sundberg has spent 12 years in the Republic of Congo and he is currently working as a lecturer at the Protestant University of Brazzaville, teaching contextual theology and African theology.

Mika Vähäkangas
is Professor in Mission Studies and Ecumenics at Lund University, Sweden , and Research Fellow at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He has directed several projects related to African Christianity, including Looking for Wholeness in an Enchanted World: Healing Prosperity and Ritual Action in African Charismatic/Pentecostal Churches. He has been a lecturer at Makumira University College of Tumaini University, Tanzania, as well as Helsinki University, Finland, and president of the International Association for Mission Studies.

Frans Wijsen
is Professor of Religious Studies and Mission Studies and Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands. He conducted fieldwork in Tanzania from 1984 till 1988. From 1995 till 2004 he was visiting professor at Duta Wacana Christian University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and from 2004 till 2007 at Tangaza College, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya. Since 2011 he has been Honorary Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. His main research interest is the discursive study of Islam and Muslim-Christian relations from a dialogical self-theory perspective.

CHAPTER 1

Faith in African Lived Christianity – Bridging Anthropological and Theological Perspectives: Introduction

Mika Vähäkangas and Karen Lauterbach

What is the role of faith in African lived Christianity and what roles do faith and religious experiences play in the ways that people understand and explain social realities in Africa? This book discusses these two overarching questions, particularly their relatedness, by bringing theology and anthropology into dialogue in the study of African Christianity. Studying the significance and transformation of Christianity in Africa calls for an understanding of faith that is sensitive to the local context in which faith is lived and experienced. By overcoming the historic dividing line between theology and anthropology in the study of African Christianity, the book seeks to build interpretative bridges between African enchanted worldviews and analytical concepts often founded in Western academic traditions. In this way, the book does not question people's faith or try to understand why they have faith.[1] It takes faith as the starting point and explores how this influences people's engagement with the world. The book contributes to an emerging literature that combines analysis of religious experience and faith with analysis of how religion feeds into social ideas and practices.

The study of faith in African lived Christianity requires an open and broad interdisciplinary approach. African Christians often locate themselves in an interreligious field in which African pre-Christian traditions as well as Islam co-exist with Christianity. This locus of religious plurality is at times perceived as a field of tension, not only between religious traditions, but also within the world of African Christianity. There is ongoing negotiation and competition between the values and truth-claims in these contexts which are not only a matter of different and competing traditions; it is also a matter of how one reads the world through a religious lens and how social reality informs religious ideas and values.

1 See the contribution by Tanya Luhrmann in Brian Howell et al., "Faith in Anthropology: A Symposium on Timothy Larsen's The Slain God," *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34, no. 2 (2016): 140–152.

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Historically there has not been much dialogue between anthropology and theology as classical academic disciplines. This might seem surprising as both focus on the experiences of human beings by studying traditions, rituals, ideas, faith, and artefacts. Despite these similarities, however, there are fundamental differences between them, which, as Davies points out, relate in particular to whether or not the existence of God can be assumed.[2] In the past, many theologians saw anthropology as irrelevant, dealing as it did with exotic cultures which had little or no pertinence to academic theological study. Western Christian theology was about studying biblical texts and the history of Christianity and had little interest in the experiences of believers themselves. Theologians' lack of dialogue with anthropology was also due to Christianity's not being perceived as a topic worthy of study by many early (and later) anthropologists. This antagonism, however, reveals an indirect influence of theology on anthropology: it is not only what you agree with but also what you reject that defines your agenda. For example, both E.B. Tylor and James Frazer had conservative Christian family backgrounds, and their academic agenda was partly defined by rejection of that.[3]

Prior to the Second World War, a major exception in the almost active ignorance of foreign cultures that characterized theology were mission scholars, who were often enlightened and attracted by anthropological studies of the foreign places in which they were working. Ethnographic approaches to studying the mission fields were especially popular among the missionaries. However, this love was relatively one-sided because the quintessential classical anthropologist despised the missionaries as much as he was dependent on them, as the missionaries provided much of the empirical data on which he relied. The missionaries belonged to the same group of functionaries as the colonialists, who were destroying authentic cultures around the world by imposing Western values and structures. Yet, at the same time, missionaries were frequently present and familiar with local vernaculars on the anthropologists' arrival in destinations of interest, and therefore very useful for the latter's work. It is telling, however, that missionaries and churches are hardly visible in classical anthropology, even in cases where they obviously had presence and effect. Christian mission was written out of anthropology, and mission scholars studying it, traditionally in a rather confessional and uncritical manner, were not potential academic partners. However, among British anthropologists, those with personal Christian (often Roman Catholic) conviction, especially

2 Douglas Davies, *Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2002).

3 Timothy Larsen, *The Slain God: Anthropologists and the Christian Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

E.E. Evans-Pritchard, would differ from this pattern and portray missionaries in their works.[4]

Moreover, anthropological studies of Christianity in Africa had a focus on the Africanization of missionary forms of Christianity and studied mostly African Independent Churches. This focus highlights a culturalist interpretation of Christianity in Africa in which the cultural adaptation of Christianity is privileged, and the role of Christian missionaries downplayed. The French anthropologist and sociologist, George Balandier, for instance, wrote on Messianic movements in French Congo such as Kimbanguism.[5] Another, more recent, example of anthropological work on Christianity in Africa is Jean-Pierre Dozon's work on prophetism, again focusing on syncretic aspects of African Christianity.[6] As Harris and Maxwell point out, the scholarly focus on prophets and leaders of the African Independent Churches echoes a focus on African political leaders who fought for independence and symbolized resistance to Western dominance.[7]

Subsequently, applied anthropology was used both in the spheres of colonial administration and Christian missions, which meant that dialogue increased between the two disciplines. Missiology, which was at the time a purely confessional discipline, used anthropology in a rather instrumental way to serve its interests, and was embraced both by Catholics[8] and Evangelicals. Much of the Evangelical research in missiological anthropology revolved around the journal *Practical Anthropology*[9] and places like Wheaton College (Illinois) and Fuller Seminary (California). Colonial administrators found anthropology a useful tool with which to gain a more solid grip on the local populations by knowing them better, while in missiological anthropology the goal was often to get to know the cultures in order to be more efficient at converting people. Anthropologists naturally viewed this as a usurpation of

4 *Ibid.*, 103–105, 129.

5 George Balandier, "Messianismes et Nationalismes en Afrique Noire," *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 14 (1953): 41–65.

6 Jean-Pierre Dozon, *La cause des prophètes: politique et religion en Afrique contemporaine* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).

7 Patrick Harris and David Maxwell, "Introduction: The Spiritual in the Secular," in *The Spiritual in the Secular: Missionaries and Knowledge about Africa* eds. Patrick Harris and David Maxwell (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 2.

8 One of the most extensive Catholic missiological anthropologies is provided by Louis Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

9 Darell Whiteman, "One Significant Solution: How Anthropology Became the Number One Study for Evangelical Missionaries, Part II: Anthropology and Mission: The Incarnational Connection," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21, no. 2 (2004): 79–80.

anthropological tools in the service of goals and values diametrically opposed to the basic values of the discipline. In the same way, the work and influence of missionaries has been largely ignored in Africanist historiography as missionaries were seen as cultural imperialists who should not be the focus of scholarly attention.[10] In practice, however, the borders between theology and anthropology were not fully water-tight because there were colonial administrators and missionaries who engaged in ethnographic work out of fascination with the local cultures, while there were anthropologists fully trained in the discipline joining the ranks of colonial administrations.

Since the pre-Second World War period, much has happened. Overt colonial structures have been dismantled, and Christian mission is carried out increasingly by local actors or by missionaries coming from non-Western countries. Anthropologists have, to a greater degree, acknowledged the existence of Christianity as part of their field of study, and the emergence of the anthropology of Christianity as a better-defined branch of the discipline has further enhanced this focus and has strengthened theoretical debates in the field. Meanwhile, some mission scholars have begun to critique and distance themselves from the Western missionary heritage, and that research is carried out increasingly by scholars from the Global South.[11] There are also signs that theology as a discipline is gradually waking up to the major shift of gravity of Christianity from the West to the Global South. It is no longer only the mission scholars among theologians who recognize and cherish the variety of cultures and interpretations of Christianity. All this has prepared the ground for a beneficial interchange between anthropology and theology.

The development of the anthropology of Christianity and its subsequent growth led some anthropologists to consider the advantages of a closer dialogue with theology. At the same time though, the perceived differences in basic values and goals were a concern. Theology probably appears a more unified discipline from the outside than theologians themselves consider the case. The values and goals depend largely on the way the Bible is approached, and there the variation is great: from fundamentalism to strictly rationalistic, historical-critical approaches or consciously pluralist readings. Anthropologists of Christianity began their studies with a heavy emphasis on Charismatic and Pentecostal Christianities in the Global South, which inevitably affected

10 Harris and Maxwell, "Introduction."

11 E.g. Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1992); Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008); Veikko Munyika, *A Holistic Soteriology in an African Context* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2004).

their views on theology, too. When Christianity and ways of theologizing that were most familiar to these anthropologists were non-Western forms of Charismatic Christianity, even theology in general appeared in stark contrast to Western Enlightenment ideals. As Western academic theology, especially in its liberal form, has been in dialogue with the Enlightenment since its very beginning, it is often in radical discontinuity with the charismatic currents of approaches in the Global South.

In this volume, we consider Christian theology to be any meaning-making of Christian faith. The implication of this is, in practice, that theology can be both academic and ecclesiastic, the latter partly being at the grass-roots. In all cases the meaning-making happens in relation to Christian traditions. This relation can be affirmative or critical and even lead to complete rejection of the central tenets of Christian faith. Inasmuch as the rejection is specifically of Christian faith, even that belongs to the sphere of Christian theology due to its affiliation with the Christian traditions. What makes theology academic is its critical, self-critical and open-ended nature combined with methodological stringency. Academic theology differs from the rest of the academic study of African Christianity in the sense that it engages with the object of study in two inclusive manners. On the one hand, the agenda of the studied theology is respected and the focus is on the contents of the meaning-making rather than on the social circumstances or external ways of interpreting the faith. The analysis happens as if inside the studied thought world (system immanence). On the other hand, a theologian can be a marginal insider in a way differing from the anthropologist. She can relate to the meaning-making of the studied community with her personal meaning-making and enter in a dialogue which can sometimes be critical. In spite of this seemingly neat distinction between theology and other approaches to religion, theology and other approaches to religion are not as distinguishable in practice. This is partly due to the increasing realization among theologians studying African Christianity, among others, that theological meaning-making is not exclusively cerebral. This insight is strongest among majority world theologians.[12] This has led theologians to adopt various empirical approaches to lived religion in addition to the previously dominant textual approaches. Another reason for this decreasing

12 Emma Wild-Wood, "Afterword: Relocating Unity and Theology in the Study of World Christianity," in eds. Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell and Emma Wild-Wood *Relocating World Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 338–339.

rift between theology and the rest of study of religion is that there are streams in other disciplines that assume approaches resembling theology.[13]

In this volume, following the insight that meaning-making of Christian faith is not only a cerebral matter, and in addition that even much of cerebral meaning-making happens in the ritual practice, we see theology larger than only systematic or philosophical theology. That is one of the reasons for deciding to approach the relationship between theology and anthropology through lived religion.

Generally speaking, the more liberal and pluralistic a theologian is, the less interested she is in Christian expansion and thereby in World Christianity as a field of study. This probably stems from two factors. A liberal theologian finds less in common with Christianity in the Global South than a conservative theologian and in theology one tends to be pulled to study the same rather than the other, in contrast to classical anthropology. Additionally, all research is related to the ideological positions of the researchers in different ways. In theology, this connection is often very direct and visible. The theological liberal-conservative tug of war is basically about how to relate the Bible and the Enlightenment. The liberal theological way of reading the Bible through the Enlightenment does not find much resonance in the Global South, while conservative Western theologians seek allies there, often glossing over the differences between Western conservative theologies and Southern interpretations of Christianity. This encourages a wide but not very profound study of the Christianities of the Global South in order to find support while ignoring the differences. Thus, liberal theologians who are more likely to be closest to the anthropologists' basic values are, on average, those least interested in the anthropologists' fields of study.

Anthropology does not only provide theologians with ethnographic tools with which to embark on empirical approaches to studying Christianity, but also with theoretical insights onto particular cultural themes and a well-developed discussion on how to deal with data from foreign cultures in a manner that respects human, cultural, and religious plurality. Theology, in its turn, can provide anthropologists with detailed insights about the history and development of different religious ideas and the interconnections between them, how Christians perceive their religious identity, and how to engage with the existential dimensions of religion. Explorations of mutually beneficial

13 See for instance Jorge N. Ferrer and Jacob H. Sherman, "Introduction," in *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* eds. Jorge N. Ferrer and Jacob H. Sherman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), 1–80; *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (2013) 24/3 was a special issue dedicated to theology in anthropology.

cooperation between the two disciplines are not completely novel. Anthropologists with Christian conviction led to the emergence of the first wave of deeper interchange between anthropology and theology. One dimension of it occurred within anthropological works in which Christian theology was used as a point of comparison or to help in clarification, like in Evans-Pritchard's *Nuer Religion*.[14] Another marginal connection between the disciplines occurred through anthropologists' comparative endeavors, which sometimes included Christian cultures.[15] The most substantial connection, however, took place when a few anthropologists, most notably Mary Douglas, contributed directly to theological research. In the case of Douglas, the most obvious contribution was in Biblical Studies.[16]

Because of the long and oftentimes troubled relationship between the disciplines, there have not been interdisciplinary joint ventures of a larger scale. Today, there seem to be possibilities to move in that direction for several reasons. In theology, the Christian confessional approach is no longer the only norm; rather, there is a range of new approaches including interreligious, comparative, empirical, and postfoundational theologies, among others. Thus, the anthropological tendency towards cultural relativism is not such anathema for all theologians as it used to be. At the same time, the ideological outlook of anthropology has become more accommodating to faith-based approaches. Thus, both disciplines have opened up ideologically, making it easier to find common ground.

In Britain, there are a number of scholars and platforms bringing these two fields together. Martin D. Stringer, for example, could be described as a theologically informed anthropologist who has studied Christianity from an anthropological perspective. He differs from the majority of anthropologists of Christianity in the sense that he has been studying it in his own cultural context. Durham University has created a center where these two fields meet: the Durham professor, Douglas Davies, started as an anthropologist of religion, later entering the field of theology, and the two disciplines merge in his career and publications.[17] Mathew Guest continues that tradition; while Durham also hosts the Network for Ecclesiology and Ethnography led by Pete Ward. In all of the above, the emphasis has largely been on Western forms of Christianity and

14 E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); Larsen, *The Slain God*, 107–109.

15 Larsen, *The Slain God*.

16 Mary Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); see Larsen, *The Slain God*, 150–160.

17 See for instance Davies, *Anthropology.*

hence has not taken into account how Christianity evolves and shapes the ways in which people perceive their social environments elsewhere in the world.

Some research on global Pentecostalism has taken an interdisciplinary approach that combines theological and anthropological elements, such as the work of Allan Anderson and Jan-Åke Alvarsson.[18] In their global outlook, the approach of such scholars resonates with this book's transcultural emphasis. The aim of the present volume, however, is to make the dialogue between anthropology and theology a central point to be reflected on and related to by all the authors in their respective chapters. This means that we do not only focus on theology and anthropology in the field of Pentecostalism, but take a wider approach to religion, including discussion of the ways a broader, enchanted worldview informs how people relate to the world and hence to religious categories and authorities.

This book is one of the results of more than a decade of Nordic Africanist cooperation between theology and anthropology, often taking shape in different projects like that led by Mika Vähäkangas, "Construction of African Christian Identity as a Dialogue between the Local and Global" (University of Helsinki, 2008–2011); the NOS-HS workshop series "Interpreting African Christianity: Anthropology and Theology in Dialogue" (2009–2010); "Looking for Wholeness in an Enchanted World: Healing, Prosperity and Ritual Action in African Charismatic/Pentecostal Churches" (Lund University, 2012–2018); and the Tomas Sundnes Drønen-led NOS-HS workshop series, "Religion and Development: Nordic Perspectives on Involvement in Africa" (VID University 2010–2013). All those contributing to this book have been involved in this cooperation in various ways. This Nordic Africanist cooperation has also spilled over to several doctoral dissertations being co-supervised across the disciplinary divide. Unlike the British crossovers in theology and anthropology, the Nordic version has concentrated on the study of African Christianity. This means that the focus has most often been on intercultural and inter-religious encounters and the emergence of different hybridities.

The aim of this book is to explore cross-pollination between anthropology and theology in the study of African lived Christianity. The ambition is to bring the two disciplines into dialogue in order to accentuate the ways in which they can enrich each other and, when integrated in specific studies, bring forth a profound understanding of African lived Christianity. It consists of three parts,

18 These scholars are linked to the GloPent network, which is a European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism committed to studying global Pentecostalism from an interdisciplinary perspective. See https://www.glopent.net/.

the first of which deals with positionality in the study of African Christianity. Previous exchanges between anthropology and theology have proved that the researcher's position vis-à-vis the studied phenomenon – as well as her background culture and values – often finds itself the focus of the debate between these disciplines. This part will be followed by one that explores methods and approaches which attempt to build bridges between the disciplines or are located between them. Finally, the third part contains a selection of different cases in which anthropology and theology meet in the research of African lived Christianity.

Many of the chapters were presented at Lund University at the "African Lived Christianity – Faith, Ritual and Power" conference organized in March 2016 by the above-mentioned "Looking for Wholeness in an Enchanted World" project funded by the Swedish Research Council, Lund University Faculties of Humanities and Theology, and the Lund Mission Society. Joel Robbins' contribution was first presented as his inaugural lecture when being awarded an honorary doctorate at Lund University's Faculty of Theology in May 2016. His chapter deals directly with the relationship between anthropology and theology, addressing how new developments in both, namely the anthropology of Christianity and the world Christianity approach in theology, have opened up new possibilities of rapprochement and cooperation. Robbins' chapter ends with deliberations on the nature of positionality in these disciplines.

Frans Wijsen continues with a concrete case of debate on positionality in the study of African religions by analyzing the conversations that have taken place between different factions in the African Association for the Study of Religions. This is followed by Elina Hankela's chapter, which brings into the picture the multi-layered power relations found in empirical research endeavors wherein the researcher comes from a privileged background to study the underprivileged. Hankela positions herself staunchly in liberation theological traditions and represents, therefore, a research tradition with clear and open positionality and an agenda of change, both in academia and the researched communities. Part 1 closes with another deliberation on positionality by Galia Sabar who has researched both Christians and Jews in Africa. She ponders her varying positions as a researcher and a religiously active person in situations where her religious belonging, privileged background, and the blurring of religious boundaries make the terrain difficult to navigate.

Part 2 is opened by Karen Lauterbach, who discusses how anthropology and theology can enter into fruitful dialogue in the study of wealth and fakery in African charismatic Christianity. She argues that such a dialogue permits the researcher to move beyond studying the prosperity gospel as script, rather seeing it as an ideological and intellectual frontier in which the boundaries of

what is considered legitimate wealth are contested and re-shaped. This is followed by Mika Vähäkangas' formulation of a theological methodology that makes use of ethnographical data in addition to the more traditional theological texts. This discussion draws on data from the study of the Kimbanguist church and suggests that resulting theological work of this nature would be able to communicate in both directions – theology and anthropology. Martina Prosén moves in a similar direction when exploring how Pentecostal praise and worship can empirically be studied as theology. Her methodological discussion is based on fieldwork in Nairobi churches. Niels Kastfelt's contribution offers a novel methodological approach to the study of the history of African Christianity in which he analyzes the soundscape of a Nigerian early 20th century village in order to interpret the relationship between traditional religion and Christianity. Part 2 concludes with Elias Bongmba's work that develops political theology for Africa in the conjuncture of the social sciences and theology.

Part 3 opens with a chapter by Stian Sørlie Eriksen, Tomas Sundnes Drønen, and Ingrid Løland. Their focus lies on studying identity construction among migrant African Christians in Norway at the nexus of multiple locations and identities. The topic of the tensions and fusions of identities is very common in the study of African Christianity, and Hans Olsson continues with that by analyzing the Pentecostals' relationship to Islam and politics in Zanzibar, Tanzania. Zanzibar Pentecostals are also largely a migrant community with origins in mainland Tanzania. Isabel Mukonyora takes us further into African Christian spirituality with political, social, and ecological repercussions by discussing Vapostori of Masowe's theological debates in which (post)colonialism, gender, and ecology are deeply intertwined. Rune Flikke's study, which follows, presents an analysis of faith in the African Instituted Church (AIC) wherein anthropology and theology play significant roles, offering the possibilities of a detailed interpretation of Zulu Zionist pneumatology. Here, healing and dealing with the spirit world are at the center of ritual activities. Continuing in the field of the AICs, Lotta Gammelin studies the role of gender in the narratives of illness and healing in Prophet Mpanji's church in Southern Tanzania. Here, an almost exclusively female clientele is being healed by the male prophet, leading to complex power relations of mutual dependency. Part 3 and the book conclude with Carl Sundberg's description of the difficulties produced in the ministry of the therapeutical centers of the Evangelical Church of Congo (Brazzaville) by generational change. Here, a healing activity combining African traditional herbalist elements with Christian ideas results in a ministry akin to many AICs but taking place in a historic reformed church.

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PART 1

Normativity and Positionality in Anthropology and Theology

CHAPTER 2

World Christianity and the Reorganization of Disciplines: On the Emerging Dialogue between Anthropology and Theology

Joel Robbins

What are the prospects for a dialogue between anthropology and theology?[1] The stress on dialogue is important here. Surely there have already been many theologians who have read anthropological works and put them to use for their own purposes, and in recent years a few anthropologists have begun, at least tentatively, to do the same with theology. But this is not what I mean by dialogue in the present context. What we mostly have now is more a matter of scholars finding some new means to help them reach ends they have long held. I have, for example, sometimes found myself disappointed when reading works in which theologians enthusiastically take up ethnography as a method for studying their own home communities, often enough their own churches, and count that as an engagement with my discipline. Too often, they want to use ethnography to document things they already knew were present in the situations they studied – such as that the voices of some members of their communities are not routinely heard by others, or that religious practice is fundamental to religious life and thought. It is not that these are not important findings; they just are not the kind of findings that theologians particularly need anthropology in order to produce. And more than this, they are not the kinds of findings that anthropologists have generally, at least until recently, wanted their fieldwork to generate – the kinds of findings one had not even guessed were out there in the world when one started out on one's research.[2] These are findings like the fact that, in many societies of the South Pacific, people insist that they cannot ever have any idea of what other people are

1 A slightly shorter version of this chapter was published in 2018 in the book *Theologically Engaged Anthropology*, edited by Derrick Lemons and published by Oxford University Press. I thank Dr. Lemons and Oxford University Press for permission to publish a lightly expanded version here.

2 John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi, "The Fieldwork Encounter, Experience, and the Making of Truth: An Introduction," in *Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth*, eds. J. Borneman and A. Hammoudi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 1–24.

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thinking and consistently act accordingly;[3] or that there exists a group of people who are very attached to, and deeply moved by, a ceremony in which dancers sing all night about their hosts' recently deceased relatives until the hosts burn them severely and repeatedly with resin soaked torches, forcing them to stop;[4] or that some women who take up "sex-work" in Papua New Guinea do so not for the small amounts of cash they sometimes earn but to protest the fact that their fathers and brothers have given up pursuing traditional bridewealth payments from the men they marry.[5] Without the motive of finding out surprising things like this about ways of living one never imagined, ethnography may retain some of its strengths as a method, but not as a specifically anthropological one. So, when theologians tell me that what they love about anthropology is ethnography, I am often inclined to point out that this is like telling us you love us for our money – for the means we can provide to reach ends we have no part in defining. I am sure that some anthropological uses of theological ideas look this way to theologians as well. In personal terms, this instrumentally defined love is not the kind of love people look for, and in intellectual terms, it is not the right starting point for the kind of dialogue I am hopeful might grow up between theology and anthropology.

The kind of dialogue I am looking for is one that would in some ways, perhaps surprising ways, transform each discipline; that would make some contribution to expanding each discipline's sense of its ends, and not just to augmenting its means of attaining them. This type of interdisciplinary encounter has happened for anthropology before. The dialogue with linguistics that produced anthropological structuralism, for example, fundamentally redefined the kinds of meaningful orders anthropologists aimed to discover in social life. A more recent encounter with the discipline of history upended our sense of the basic temporal nature of the things we study. And notably, anthropology has rung some changes in some branches of linguistic and historical research as well, so the dialogue has been two-way. Even at my, as yet, rudimentary state of knowledge, it seems safe to say that theology has over the centuries had a number of these kinds of goal-post moving encounters with philosophy, where both disciplines have been deeply shaped by the other. Is there a chance to develop this kind of conversation between anthropology and theology now? That is the question I would like to raise here.

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3 Joel Robbins, "On Not Knowing Other Minds: Confession, Intention, and Linguistic Exchange in a Papua New Guinea Commnuity." *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2008): 421–429.

4 Edward L. Schieffelin, *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976).

5 Holly Wardlow, *Wayward Women: Sexuality and Agency in a New Guinea Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

In exploring possible answers to this question, I am going to pursue two avenues of investigation. The first briefly reviews recent changes in both disciplines and suggests that these changes bring them to a point where in fact their paths are ready to cross. The change in anthropology I want to consider is the unexpectedly rapid rise of what is called the anthropology of Christianity. The change in theology and religious studies is the recent advent and rapid mainstreaming of the notion of "global" or "world" Christianity. Why did these changes occur? What new kinds of thinking have they afforded? And crucially for my concerns in this paper, how might they open theology and anthropology to new kinds of encounters with one another?

The second avenue I want to go down looks at one kind of Christianity that I think anthropologists and theologians alike find it difficult to grapple with – this is the prosperity gospel, in which believers are convinced that God wants health and wealth for them in this world, and they overwhelmingly stress these themes in their worship. Scholars in the Western academy, at least, tend to find this kind of Christianity hard to assimilate to their more general understandings of the faith, or at least to their favorite understandings. My wager is that a closer look at how this kind of Christianity trips up both theologians and anthropologists may reveal places where both disciplines would be open to help from each other, the provision of which might lay the basis for the kind of transformative dialogue I am calling for here. With this outline in place, let me begin by looking at how anthropologists came to study the Christian faith and theologians began to think about something they have come to call "world Christianity."

1 Anthropology Discovers Christianity, Theology Discovers the World

In discussing the rise of the anthropology of Christianity and the advent of the notion of world Christianity, it is worth noting at the outset that both happened around the same time – starting from the second half of the 1990s. They were, as far as I can tell, independent developments. But I think it is true that both were responses to some of the same changes in the world, and for this reason the basis for claiming they might be relevant to one another has been there from the start. Let me first offer brief accounts of how the anthropology of Christianity and the idea of world Christianity came about, and then I will return to issue of their shared origins in our changing world.

If you were to discover the extensive literature that anthropologists have produced about Christianity by 2019, you could be forgiven for imagining that they had been avidly studying Christian groups for a long time. But if you

looked a little more closely, you would discover that this first impression is misleading. You only have to go back 20 years, to the mid-1990s, to find the discipline of anthropology looking radically different. At that time, there were some excellent ethnographic studies of Christianity around, particularly from the hands of scholars working in Africa, and even a couple of edited volumes on the subject published in hard to find editions. But there was nothing like the outpouring of work one finds today and, more importantly, there was no sense of a shared anthropological project to which research on Christians around the world could contribute.[6] Africanists wrote about Christianity assuming they spoke to their Africanist colleagues; Mediterraneanists wrote for Mediterraneanists and so on.

It was in conscious opposition to this status quo that a group of younger scholars began, near the turn of the millennium, to argue that given how many Christians there are in the world, anthropologists really ought to be studying Christianity more regularly, and, as importantly, that they ought to do so in conversation with one another, working to develop a distinctively anthropological approach to Christianity and turning their findings to use in helping to make novel theoretical claims of relevance to the whole discipline. Some theoretically generative themes quickly fell into place, turning around questions like the extent to which Christian conversion among previously non-Christian populations tends to foster unusually radical cultural change; the frequency with which Christianity leads people to explore new forms of individualism that move them in "modernizing" directions; whether one of Christianity's most profound effects is a fundamental transformation of people's notions of language; and if Christianity is invariably a religion focused on transcendence.[7] All of these topics and more have been at the center of vigorous debates, and anthropologists have quickly joined them on the basis of studies from all over the world, from Eastern Europe to Latin America, from the South Pacific to Asia, from North America to Africa. Currently, the anthropology of Christianity is well established as one of the major trends in the 21st-century discipline.

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6 For reviews of some current work that reflects the development of this kind of shared project around the study of a number of topics in the study of Christianity see Joel Robbins, "Transcendence and the Anthropology of Christianity: Language, Change, and Individualism" (Edward Westermarck Memorial Lecture, October 2011), *Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 37, no. 2 (2012): 5–23; Joel Robbins, "The Anthropology of Christianity: Unity, Diversity, New Directions" (An Introduction to Supplement 10), *Current Anthropology* 55 (S10) (2014): S157–S171.

7 Robbins, "Transcendence."

A natural first question to ask, in light of how quickly the anthropology of Christianity has grown, was why it was so late to get off the ground.[8] Many answers have been proposed to this question, of which I will only mention one today. From the outset anthropology defined itself as the study of "other" cultures, and Christianity was, for many anthropologists, at the very center of the cultures from which they came. If we add to this the fact that many anthropologists initially turn to the study of other cultures because they are at least gently alienated from their own, or deeply reflexive about it, then it is clear that for them Christianity is not the kind of thing they want to study. It is little wonder, then, that Christianity became something like a taboo topic for the discipline – what Susan Harding[9] memorably called a "repugnant cultural other" for a crowd that otherwise prided itself on it radical openness to different ways of life.

Given this and other strong impediments to the development of an anthropology of Christianity, a second question to ask is why it took off when it did. There are many approaches to this question too, but most of them turn around the issue of whether it was changes in anthropology as a discipline that made the rise of the anthropology of Christianity possible, or whether it was changes in the world anthropologists study.[10] In this case, saying it was both is not a cop out. On the side of changes internal to anthropology, one has to note that the advent of the anthropology of Christianity came right on the heels of a period of intense disciplinary questioning of the epistemological, political, and ethical difficulties that attend studying the "other." In the wake of decolonization and the wave of postcolonial thought that followed, along with the rapid turn to identity politics throughout the West, by the 1980s "speaking for others" or even "about" them became deeply problematic, and anthropologists quickly began to critically scrutinize and dismantle their self-understanding as practitioners of a discipline that defined itself primarily as a science of otherness. The anthropological turn to the study of Christianity thus arose just as the otherness test for suitability as an anthropological object – the very test that Christianity had always failed to pass – had been discarded.

So, anthropology had been changing from within for a while by mid-1990s, but at the same time this internal ferment was taking place, many of the paradigmatically "other" places in the world that past anthropologists had tended

8 Robbins, "The Anthropology of Christianity."

9 Susan Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other," *Social Research* 58, no. 2 (1991): 373–393.

10 Bronwen Douglas, "From Invisible Christians to Gothic Theatre: The Romance of the Millennial in Melanesian Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 42, no.1 (2001): 615–650.

to study were also changing in ways that helped push for the development of an anthropology of Christianity. One key development at this time was the explosive growth of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity. What I will henceforth simply call Pentecostal Christianity for ease of expression is that strand of the faith in which believers hold that the gifts of the Holy Spirit – gifts such as speaking in tongues, healing, prophesying, and delivering the afflicted from spiritual bondage – are potentially available to everyone to be used in ways that affect earthly life. Having come into existence only in the early 1900s, by the first decade of the current century credible estimates suggest Pentecostalism has 500 million adherents, representing a quarter of the world's total Christian population.[11] From the 1960s onward, much of this growth has occurred in the traditional anthropological stomping grounds of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the South Pacific. All of a sudden, anthropologists were finding Pentecostals everywhere they went. And as a form of the faith with a very active public ritual presence, and one that insists on the relevance of religion for all aspects of life, anthropologists who encountered Pentecostalism in the course of their research were unable to ignore it easily. It is little surprise then that much of the early work in the anthropology of Christianity took up Pentecostalism, insisting that ethnography had to reflect its centrality in the lives of those who converted to it. Indeed, the early anthropology of Christianity was often criticized for being too heavily focused on Pentecostalism.[12] That problem has abated – there are now large and growing anthropological literatures on most kinds of Christianity – but it is fair to say that the global growth of Pentecostalism had a lot to do with the initial anthropological turn to studying Christianity more generally by, as it were, forcing the issue on many anthropologists who, like myself, might have gone to the field imagining they were going to study something else.

Having brought up Pentecostalism's dramatic growth throughout the second half of the 20th century, this is a good point at which to turn to the second scholarly development I want to chart, for the construction of the notion of "world" or "global" Christianity is also in part a response to this phenomenon. The terms "world Christianity" and "global Christianity" trip so easily off the tongue today, and there is so much institutional support for their use in the form of courses, named chairs, conferences and publications of all sorts that

11 Katherine Attanasi, "The Plurality of Prosperity Theologies and Pentecostalism," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. K. Attanasi and A. Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 2.

12 Brian Howell, "Practical Belief and the Localization of Christianity: Pentecostal and Denominational Christianity in Global/Local Perspective," *Religion* 33, no. 3 (2003): 233–248.

deploy them, that it is easy to forget that as features of common parlance they are no older than the anthropology of Christianity.[13] And of course, they are not mere terminological innovations, for they index the development of what Mark Shaw calls "both a perspective and a discipline."[14]

In his contribution to a new Baker Academic book series entitled *Turning South: Christian Scholars in an Age of World Christianity*, the historian of Christianity Mark Noll[15] elegantly narrates how he grew up during the 1950s and early 1960s in a Baptist household in the Midwest of the United States that featured a world map in the dining room dotted with pins marking the locations in which missionaries that their church supported were working. Yet this choice of household decoration did not, he goes on to note, lead him to consider "how important the world as a whole actually was for the history of Christianity." It was only during the 1990s that he made a shift to recognizing the existence of a world Christianity that was not an exclusive product of the West and its traditions, and only in 2000 that he began regularly teaching courses in this subject.[16] He then goes on to note that "Changes even in the short span of years since 2000 indicate how very rapidly 'world Christianity' has become…an extraordinarily active venue for research, interpretation, controversy, and discussion."[17] Like many others, Noll credits a few scholars, all theologians and/or historians of mission like Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Dana Robert, with being out ahead of himself and others in recognizing that something novel enough to deserve a new coinage like "world Christianity" had come into being at increasing speed over the course of the latter part of the 20th century. But as a genuine academic trend, he confirms that the wide scholarly embrace and development of this notion is only about 20 years old, its first great breakthrough into wider consciousness marked by the great academic and popular success of Philip Jenkins' highly accessible 2002 book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* and the widely read digest of it that featured in the popular US magazine *The Atlantic*.

For the many scholars who have come to embrace the idea of world Christianity, the resulting change in their view of things amounts to something like a Kuhnian paradigm shift. When one sees the world through the lens of what the

13 See Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

14 Mark Shaw, "Robert Wuthnow and World Christianity: A Response to Boundless Faith." *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 36 no. 4 (2012): 179.

15 Mark A. Noll, *From Every Tribe and Nation: A Historian's Discovery of the Global Christian Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 2.

16 Noll, *From Every Tribe*, 110.

17 *Ibid.*, 113.

sociologist Robert Wuthnow[18] in fact calls the "Global Christianity paradigm," several phenomena and claims move from the periphery to the center of one's concerns. First, there is the fact that in statistical terms, the greatest recent growth of Christianity, driven in important respects by the same growth of Pentecostalism that has captured anthropological attention, has not been in its traditional strongholds of Europe, North America, and their settler colonies, but rather in what adherents call the Global South. As Robert[19] summarizes this point, in terms that have been oft repeated, "The typical late twentieth-century Christian was no longer a white man, but a Latin American or African woman." Second there is the way that patterns of missionization are changing, with more and more missionaries moving from the South to the South and from the South to the North, sometimes with the kind of spectacular results the Nigerian Sunday Adelaja has had in founding what was at one time the largest church in Eastern Europe[20] or the Brazilian Universal Church of the Kingdom of God has had in spreading throughout the world since its founding in 1977.[21] And finally there is the key claim that the influence of "Southern" Christian theology and practice will more and more come to shape the future of Christianity, with Western traditions having to accept their less dominant role. Recent struggles over sexuality in the Anglican communion are often taken as indicative of the kinds of global interactions likely to shape Christianity in the future, and the impressive "Pentecostalization" that has led worship at many Northern churches to at least sometimes come to resemble the kind of worship that is so prevalent in other parts of the world is another. To speak of world or global Christianity, then, has come to mean seeing the trends I mention as crucial to the contemporary faith – a view of the faith that sees it as global not just in its reach, but in the factors driving its development.

Whenever a major new paradigm or research program emerges, disciplinary space gets rearranged. Students find themselves interested in new topics, funding and hiring priorities shift, new journals take off. What I have wanted to suggest thus far is that theology and the broader study of Christianity has lately

18 Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith.*

19 Dana L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945." *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 24, no. 2 (2000): 50.

20 Nimi Wariboko, "Pentecostal Paradigms of National Economic Prosperity in Africa," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, ed. Attanasi and A. Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 51.

21 Eloy H. Nolivos, "Capitalism and Pentecostalism in Latin America: Trajectories of Prosperity and Development." In *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. K. Attanasi and A. Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 98.

undergone a space-shifting change of this kind to accommodate "world Christianity" during just the period that anthropology has undergone a similar one with the growing disciplinary interest in Christianity. Both fields are thus in some transition. What I now want to consider is how the upheavals both disciplines have experienced might bring them to the kind of transformative dialogue I called for at the outset of this chapter.

2 On the Dialogue between Anthropology and Theology

In this second part of my discussion, my tone will shift. I feel confident about the histories of recent disciplinary transformation I have just recounted, but the anthropology-theology dialogue itself is so new that there are no settled positions I can report. So instead of reviewing firm findings or proven approaches to putting anthropology and theology productively to work together, I will turn to examining an expression of Christianity with which I think scholars in both camps struggle to come to grips. By gathering around a version of the faith about which neither group is given to confident pronouncements, I hope we might discover some ways we can be relevant to one another.

The expression of Christianity I have in mind is the prosperity, health and wealth, or word-faith gospel. Preachers in this tradition exhort their congregants to recognize that God has promised them, indeed through Christ's atonement has contractually obligated himself to provide them with, material plenty and good health on earth. All they need do to claim what is rightfully theirs is believe strongly, tithe regularly, and claim from God, or, as movement jargon has it, positively confess to Him what it is they want and need. It is fitting in the present context that the prosperity gospel developed in part out of the same Pentecostal movement that has done so much to bring both the anthropology of Christianity and the notion of world Christianity into being. And its spectacular growth in many of the same places in which Pentecostalism is expanding has made it a force that scholars working in both fields cannot ignore. At the same time, however, it has often been hard for such scholars to welcome the prosperity gospel into their visions of the Faith, and this no matter how broad such visions have recently become.

Many responses to the prosperity gospel from both quarters have been flatly negative in their evaluations of what many take to be a form of Christianity that preys on the poor and needy, taking the little that believers have in tithes extracted through the cultivation of false hopes of spectacular return.

Pentecostal theologian Robert Bowman,[22] for example, called the prosperity gospel "Pentecostalism at its (near) worst," and Rob Starner,[23] another Pentecostal theologian, defines it as "a sword of division within the ranks of Christendom." Martyn Percy,[24] sociologist and theologian, suggests that the prosperity gospel is more prone than many other strands of Christianity to becoming "'abusive religion.'" In anthropology too, with the brave exception of Simon Coleman's[25] work on a well-known Swedish prosperity church, most of those willing to risk joining the new move to studying Christianity still seemed to find prosperity gospel churches to be a repugnant other, and most have managed to steer clear of them. Of those anthropologists who have taken notice of the prosperity gospel's increasing influence, many follow the Comaroffs[26] in lumping it in with what they call, following Evans-Pritchard, forms of "new magic" such as witchcraft beliefs that hold that witches kill in order to create zombie workforces under their own control. Folded in with such "magical" trends, the prosperity gospel figures as a component of what the Comaroffs[27] call "occult economies," phantasmagoric cultural formations that they argue represent people's failed attempts to understand the complex new neo-liberal global economy they have been forced to join, or try to join, but cannot really comprehend. This approach makes no attempt to reckon with the specificities of the prosperity gospel as an outgrowth of the Christian tradition and as a faith that both leaders and followers are highly committed to seeing as still within its borders.

But even as such frankly negative responses to the prosperity gospel have been influential in both anthropology and theology, there have also recently appeared more sober assessments of this form of faith. What is of interest here is the different shapes these reconsiderations have taken in each discipline, for these differences reveal some unexpected common ground between the two fields even as they also highlight what is one of the most profound differences.

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22 Cited in Glyn J. Ackerley, *Importing Faith: The Effect of American "Word of Faith" Culture on Contemporary English Evangelical Revivalism* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 20.

23 Rob Starner, "Prosperity Theology." In *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, ed. S.M. Burgess (New York: Routledge, 2006), 392.

24 Martyn Percy, "Forward," in *Importing Faith: The Effect of American "Word of Faith" Culture on Contemporary English Evangelical Revivalism,* ed. G.J. Ackerley (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), vii.

25 Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

26 Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony." *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 2 (1999): 279–303.

27 Comaroff and Comaroff, "Occult Economies."

Let me start with anthropology. Amongst themselves anthropologists often joke that one reason they have trouble capturing the attention of a wide public, even on issues about which they clearly have something to say, is that their answer to every question tends to be, "Well, it's complicated."[28] The serious point buried in this self-deprecatory observation is that anthropology at its best looks at how the different parts of a cultural formation are tied together in knots that often are in fact quite intricate; anthropologists insist that when one does so none of the parts appear to be freakish or bluntly "irrational," nor do they evidence the simple ignorance of those who live in light of them. Even the prosperity gospel emerges as susceptible to this treatment. On careful analysis, it usually turns out to be more than merely a confused attempt to construe the neo-liberal world or a sop to people's worst selfish tendencies, standing instead as a cultural phenomenon that fosters meaningful links between the various values by which believer's aim to live their lives.

One of the best examples of this approach to the prosperity gospel is the anthropologist Naomi Haynes'[29] work on the Zambian Copperbelt. By the time Haynes began her fieldwork in 2006, the economic boom times that once characterized Copperbelt life were long over. If not destitute, the people she studied were certainly not well off, and they were much poorer than they or their parents' generation had expected they would be. The economic ground having shifted underneath their feet, one might see these Zambians' turn to prosperity churches, of which there are hundreds in the town Haynes studied, as representing just the kind of desperate grab at a simplistic and faulty framework for understanding the harsh new world they inhabit that some anthropologist would expect them to make. But Haynes' analysis does not follow this line. Instead, she focuses on one of the features of these churches that scholars often find discomfiting – their strongly hierarchical structure that elevates pastors, as models of God-given success and conduits of divine power, high above their flocks – in order to explore their fit with core Zambian concerns. Through careful cultural and historical analysis, Haynes shows that Zambians have always favored the creation of patron-client relationships that connect people across differences in power and resources. To participate in such links is, as they told her, to realize the value of "moving" ahead socially – the value that they find it most important to pursue. In their churches, when they pray for blessings and

28 See Webb Keane, "Self-Interpretation, Agency, and the Objects of Anthropology: Reflections on a Genealogy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (2003): 222–248.

29 Naomi Haynes, "Pentecostalism and the Morality of Money: Prosperity, Inequality, and Religious Sociality on the Zambian Copperbelt," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (2012): 123–139.

breakthroughs, it is this kind of movement they hope to produce. And often they do produce this value in their Christian lives, for the fostering of relations with powerful pastors, and through them with the Holy Spirit and God, constitute success in this endeavor. Prosperity here is not the fulfillment of selfish, neo-liberally informed individual desires for material goods for their own sake, but instead, as Haynes puts it, a relationally expansive kind of advancement that puts Copperbelt prosperity churches at the center of people's efforts to build community during materially difficult times.

Haynes is not alone in finding that prosperity gospel church life is "more complex" than one might expect at first glance. In a recently published article based on fieldwork with emerging prosperity gospel prophets and pastors in urban Ghana, Girish Daswani[30] argues that far from the amoral, neo-liberal profiteers so many imagine these figures to be, the men he worked with are deeply committed to evaluating their own characters and those of the more established Christian leaders with whom they train in ethical terms. Key to their evaluations is an ethical distinction they make between being a "wealthy" Christian and being a "rich" one.[31] Rich pastors and other rich Christians seek fame for their own aggrandizement and material success for their own enjoyment. The wealthy, by contrast, put their fame and their resources in the service of helping others, redistributing what they gain from their religious success. Again, we see that "prosperity" here is not a simple notion, and that the prosperity gospel is not, as those who treat it as a kind of magic tend to imagine, always without ethical import.

One thing that is common to Haynes' and Daswani's work, and to that of many other anthropologists studying the prosperity gospel, is that both authors strive to adopt the generally non-judgmental stance that has, at least until recently, been a hallmark of anthropological writing. Even as they do not pronounce on the value of prosperity churches in relation to some clear standard, they are concerned, as anthropologists always are, to show that the church members that they study do not live less than human lives, devoid of intelligence or social and moral concern. Everyone, as the old relativist saw has it, makes sense in their own terms. Haynes and Daswani show us that this is as true of prosperity gospel followers as it is of anyone else. But the disciplinary centrality of this goal of rendering those we study in complicated, fully human terms can leave anthropologists tongue tied in cases where they worry they cannot reach it. In my experience, this happens very rarely – or when it does,

30 Girish Daswani, "A Prophet but not for Profit: Ethical Value and Character in Ghanaian Pentecostalism," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22 (2015): 108–126.

31 *Ibid.*, 109.

anthropologists abandon the project at hand and news of the failure never reaches the literature. But recently, one anthropologist has found herself in this position vis-à-vis her fieldwork in a prosperity gospel church and has had the courage to write a major anthropological study in spite of the difficulties her situation presents.

Ilana van Wyk carried out ethnographic fieldwork in the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Durban, South Africa. I mentioned the Universal Church earlier. It is widely known as one of the paradigm cases of successful cultural/religious globalization from the South to the South and the North. Since its founding in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1977, the Universal Church has spread to at least 60 countries, and in 2005 it was opening a new church every week in South Africa alone.[32] The Universal Church is solidly in the prosperity tradition, promising followers that their strong faith and generous tithes will result in their substantial enrichment. Like many other prosperity churches, it adds to this a core emphasis on the claim that one reason church-goers sometimes fail to prosper is that they are blocked by demons who hold them down. Much of church practice therefore takes the form of spiritual warfare aimed at "binding" and vanquishing such demons so that members will be free to achieve success.

The book van Wyk[33] wrote on the basis of her fieldwork is entitled *The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa: A Church of Strangers.* For our purposes, the subtitle of the book reveals its core argument. The church in Durban, she shows in great detail, does nothing to build community among its members – there are no small groups, little by way of development projects or charitable good works, and the leadership of the church moves pastors regularly to prevent them becoming too close with those who attend services. More than this, sermons regularly focus on the claim that demons set to block believers' access to God's bounty can deceitfully take the form of people they might find appealing, such as those sitting next to them in the pews. It is not surprising, then, that church members mostly keep to themselves and even the relatively small numbers who attend the church year after year tend to have few relationships with other members. Alongside the isolating talk of demonic omnipresence, demands for tithes and other gifts to the church are constant and sometimes accompanied by threat; one pastor even insisted that "old women who hid money in their bras for the taxi fare home would be killed or maimed en route, while parents who paid school fees instead of tithes would

32 Nolivos, "Capitalism," 98–99; Ilana van Wyk, *The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa: A Church of Strangers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 13.

33 van Wyk, *The Universal Church.*

see their children fail or die."[34] Such tactics are deployed in a context where the gifts many of the very poor congregants give serve to estrange them from their families, who are enraged by the diversion of what little funds are available from pressing household needs. It is hard to escape the suspicion that we are here in the presence of Percy's "abusive religion" – a hard case for the anthropological impulse to dwell on complication and strive to make sense of people's lives in the round.

It is to van Wyk's credit that she acknowledges the difficulty this church presents to her as an anthropologist. In her book, she is open in her dislike of the church, and she has written a searching article in which she counters the often implicit anthropological assumption that liking those whom we study is a crucial part of our method.[35] But it is also telling that in the end van Wyk's anthropological teaching leaves her with few tools for elaborating her unhappiness with the church into a firmly grounded judgment upon it. Instead, that training leads her to conclusions very close to those of Haynes. To quote her at some length:

> While 'unbelievers' [to whom she presented her work] were shocked by the meanness, selfishness and violence that the…[Universal Church] apparently inspired, 'strong' members insisted that this was part of their warrior ethic. I chose to write about this ethic, not to confirm secular suspicions about the…[Church's]…depravity, but to illustrate the depth of their belief and the fundamentally positive social goals to which their behaviour was ultimately directed. Indeed, [Church] members believed that through sacrifices, 'strong' behaviour and steadfastness they could reinstate God's blessings in the lives of their families; theirs was not a 'selfish' faith.[36]

In the end, van Wyk too ends up arguing that those who attend the Universal Church she studies in Durban are not less than full human beings, possessed of intelligence, moral impulses, and social concern. I applaud her for this, and as an anthropologist I would not have wanted her to come to any different conclusions. But it is worth pointing out that her work shows us clearly that when it comes to the matter of critical judgment, the anthropological spade is turned,

34 *Ibid.*, 31.

35 Ilana van Wyk, "Beyond Ethical Imperatives in South African Anthropology: Morally Repugnant and Unlikeable Subjects," *Anthropology Southern Africa* 36, no. 1–2 (2013): 68–79.

36 *Ibid.*, 75.

and this is true even when we manage, as van Wyk has, to convey material that seems to cry out for it. This is, I think, an important point of contrast with theologians who deal with world Christianity.

In fact, I have already quoted some of the harsher judgments theologians have made about the prosperity gospel. What interests me now is the theological reasoning processes that lead them to these judgments, reasoning processes in which anthropologists tend not to engage. How is it, I want to ask in anthropological fashion, that theologians can fit such practices of judgment into their own scholarly lives – lives that make sense, I presume, on their own terms?

An initial observation to make is that in the sources I have examined to date, I am impressed with what I take to be a stance of humility theologians tend to maintain in the judgment process. Even the harsh pronouncements I quoted earlier were made by scholars who had done a lot of work to reach their conclusions. And in most texts I have encountered, the authors are careful to refer to their own limits when it comes to rendering judgment on forms of the Christian faith they do not practice. Several are also keenly aware of the caution theologians living relatively comfortable lives in the global North need to exercise when approaching churches that appeal so strongly to those living far more precarious lives.[37] But theological humility does not go so far as suspending judgment altogether, as one can argue anthropological humility does as a matter of method and sometimes of theory. In the end, theologians are charged with making what Nancy Tanner[38] refers to as "normative theological judgments – judgments about what is authentically Christian" – and it is from this vantage point that they ultimately approach the prosperity gospel.

Within the texts I have consulted, the process of reaching such judgments tends to proceed along one of two lines. Some check the accuracy of the biblical pronouncements of prosperity preachers against other, more widely academically acceptable ways of interpreting the text. The well-known Pentecostal biblical scholar, Gordon Fee,[39] takes this approach, finding prosperity

37 Amos Yong, "A Typology of Prosperity Theology: A Religious Economy of Global Renewal or a Renewal Economics," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. K. Attanasi and A. Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 20–21; see Mika Vähäkangas, "The Prosperity Gospel in the African Diaspora: Unethical Theory or Gospel in Context," *Exchange* 44 (2015): 353–380.

38 Kathryn Tanner, "Theology and Cultural Contest in the University," in *Religious Studies, Theology, and the University: Conflicting Maps, Changing Terrain*, eds. L.E. Cady and D. Brown (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 203.

39 Gordon D. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 9.

interpretations to be "purely subjective and arbitrary."[40] He offers as a case in point a common prosperity understanding of 3 John 2. In the King James Version, this reads, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." If one returns to the Greek and explores the way the language was used at the time this was written, Fee[41] points out that it is clear that this is merely a standard formal greeting, like "I hope all is well with you," and not an assertion that we *should* or that we *have a right* to prosper.

An expanded form of such critiques based in biblical scholarship and hermeneutic criticism checks the prosperity gospel against "traditional Christian teachings" more broadly and finds it wanting.[42] In this form of critique, it is common to note that the roots of the prosperity gospel are not solely Christian, for New Thought and gnostic ideas were also in the mix from the origins of the movement in the United States.[43] Likewise, the prosperity tendency to assert that the Bible is in effect a contract with believers, and that those who pray strongly and tithe regularly obligate God to deliver them blessings, are often classed as magical practices that do not recognize the traditionally normative Christian notions of God's sovereign freedom.[44] This point is tied to another, to which I will return, which is that the prosperity gospel may well have a theological anthropology that is too "high,"[45] defining human beings as capable of too much, and God, correlatively, of too little.

A second line of critical investigation does not set the Prosperity gospel against the measuring stick of the Bible or the Christian tradition, but instead looks more closely at the situations in which followers of the prosperity gospel live their lives, and asks in correlational or contextual terms whether it succeeds in rendering the Christian message meaningful for them in their own circumstances. This work can sometimes make use of anthropological methods and even findings as it aims to capture the "complicated" lives that prosperity believers live. Mika Vähäkangas[46] draws on Haynes' work in this way to

40 See also Starner, "Prosperity Theology," 396.

41 Fee, *The Disease*, 10.

42 Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 103.

43 Ackerley, *Importing Faith*; Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

44 Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9.

45 Bowler, *Blessed*, 31; Vondey, *Pentecostalism*, 101.

46 Vähäkangas, "The Prosperity Gospel."

point out that African migrants in Finland define prosperity in social relational terms in the course of making an argument that traditional African concerns, as much as or even more than neo-liberal ones, are part of the foundations of their faith. But in theological hands, embedding the prosperity gospel in the wider social contexts of which it forms a part are not a substitute for judgment, but a prelude to it. For there is always the possibility for contextualization to go too far, becoming in the cases under consideration what the Pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia[47] calls "a heretical accommodation of the gospel to the larger cult of personal prosperity" that "lacks faithfulness to vital elements of the gospel that might challenge the priorities of capitalist economics" or that similarly takes too accommodating an approach to indigenous cultural concerns it may have come to address. In this spirit, Vähäkangas[48] ends his largely positive contextual account of the migrant churches he studied in Helsinki by acknowledging that, "the unanswered question that we are left with is whether a church whose message is aimed almost exclusively at the successful and socially attractive (and those en route) can really be a church for all." Thus, even when theologians tack closest to anthropologists in their approach to the prosperity gospel, the call to judgment remains to prevent any collapse of disciplinary identities.

3 Conclusion

Having arranged a meeting between anthropology and theology on the globally expansive grounds of the prosperity gospel, I want to bring my discussion to a conclusion by considering what this encounter may tell us about the prospects for a mutually transformative dialogue between the two disciplines. I will focus on two issues around which I think such a dialogue can be productive. One – that of judgment – I have already extensively introduced. The other, having to do with what were for me at least some unforeseen similarities in both disciplines' fundamental views of humanity, I will turn to in closing out my discussion.

The finding that one thing that renders anthropology and theology different from each other is that the practices of judgment are central to theology and almost forbidden in anthropology may seem a bit too obvious to bear even the

47 Frank D. Macchia, "A Call for Careful Discernment: A Theological Response to Prosperity Preaching," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. K. Attanasi and A. Yong (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 232.

48 Vähäkangas, "The Prosperity Gospel," 379.

attention I have already given it. Those who have been through the battles that beset the relationship between religious studies and theology must feel like they have heard some version of this kind of observation before. But the framework of those discussions tends to be set by the notion of normativity – the key question being how can disciplines that are normative and those that are not sit side by side? I have very deliberately avoided that framework by choosing judgment as the axis around which my argument has turned. Granted, normativity and judgment are closely related, but they are not the same. And if it is common now, and not only for postmodernists, to acknowledge that all disciplines are inescapably normative whether they admit it or not, it is an observable feature of academic life that not all disciplines aim at rendering explicit judgments on the objects they study. It is in this respect that theology and anthropology clearly differ.[49]

More than that, to understand anthropology fully, I think it is important to realize that its suspension of judgment does not just follow from worries about how normative commitments can compromise objectivity, but also from the role played by the positive doctrine of relativism, itself once normative in the discipline, in rendering the withholding of judgment a virtuous act. Remember, anthropology is the discipline that once registered an official dissent during the comment period for the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights, expressing concern that the Declaration's focus on the claims of individuals might be culture-bound. It should come as no surprise, then, that for generations anthropologists have been carefully (if often implicitly) trained in how to withhold judgment, leading them to test themselves against all kinds of ethnographic reports that challenge their own normative sensibilities and to learn to bracket those sensibilities in order to work toward figuring out how all groups of people make sense in their own terms. This educational tradition has a lot to do with the discipline's unique place in the intellectual universe. But the emphasis on it has also meant that anthropologists are not well trained in making judgments when they might want to – and in this respect, they have a lot to learn from theology about how to judge with humility on the basis of explicit standards that have been hammered out over long periods of scholarly effort. For reasons I cannot go into here, I think that anthropological relativism is in

49 I was first led to consider judgment as a key topic when thinking about the differences between anthropology and theology by discussions with Patrick McKearney and readings of early versions of his 2016 article, Patrick McKearney, "The Genre of Judgment," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44 (2016): 544–573. I thank him for setting me on this track.

disarray these days. Personally, I hope it will survive in some form. But whether it does or not, its current difficulties suggest that the time is right for anthropologists, more and more interested in rendering frank judgments, to come into dialogue with theologians about the role of judgment in their tradition, and the ways its practice is best cultivated and carried out.

Since I am not a theologian, I find it more awkward to pronounce on what theologians might learn from anthropologists about matters of judgment. But perhaps inverting the argument I just made could indicate one angle of approach. In a sense, I have so far suggested that even if anthropologists do not seek in theology to discover what specific judgments about the world they should make, they can learn from theology about responsible ways of making any kind of judgments at all. Turning this around, theologians might learn from anthropologists about the depth and complexity of the kinds of cultural expressions they are often called upon to judge. Anthropologists of Christianity have by now learned a lot about the very wide range of things Christians around the world value, and the grounds for the judgments these Christians have made. Theologians might take from anthropologists some lessons about how keeping this kind of variation constantly in mind might inform their own ways of judgment.

I could have made this argument about the potential benefits of a dialogue between anthropology and theology about judgment even without discussing the two parties' divergent approaches to the prosperity gospel. But given the challenges this kind of Christianity presents to those in both disciplines, I think that discussion helped to focus some of the issues in play. The other topic that I want to suggest is ripe for consideration between the two fields is one that might not have stood out so clearly without the provocations the prosperity gospel provides. I have already noted that some theologians worry about the very high theological anthropology that underwrites prosperity doctrine. It holds that believers have great power, and that they can assure their own salvation through the cultivation of strong faith. In this scheme, God has little to do beyond meeting his obligations when believers meet theirs. It is the power accorded to human action in this scheme that I think leads some theologians and anthropologists alike to class it as very nearly a form of magic.

Working at the edges of my knowledge for a moment, I am going to guess that there may be relatively few academic theologians who subscribe to a vision of humanity that gives individuals quite so much power of their own and expects that, by themselves, human beings can wholly control their own spiritual and material destinies. And put in just this very general way, one that sets God and salvation aside, I can say with more confidence that anthropologists

are right there with theologians on this point. The philosophical anthropology that underwrites anthropology emphasizes, as Clifford Geertz[50] famously put it, that human beings are incomplete animals. All of them require, as his theoretical framework has it, upbringing in a culture to allow them to make anything of their lives. Other anthropological theorists would stress human dependence on social relations and society more generally where Geertz stresses culture, but all of them come together in the broad belief that individuals are never able to create truly human lives on their own. Anthropology, then, is a discipline founded on a notion of the human lack of self-sufficiency. What human beings on their own lack in various theological traditions is, of course, not quite culture or society, or not only those things, but still, the sense that individuals on their own are not able to reach their greatest potential seems to me a key assumption of theological anthropology as well. It is little wonder, then, that we both tend to recoil from what one theologian calls the "triumphalism," or I might call the "individualist triumphalism," of the prosperity gospel. We share a kindred sense that along with whatever else this kind of faith might get wrong, it misses the ways in which human individuals need more than themselves and their own ambitions and drives to reach their highest development.[51]

So, this matter of human incompleteness is another topic around which anthropologists and theologians might start a mutually transformative conversation. I cannot yet really predict how such a conversation might go, and I have not left space to explore how this theme of human incompleteness and that of judgment might relate to each other. But I hope that taken together they indicate some of the promise of the dialogue these two disciplines, recently shaken out of some longstanding routines and thrown together out of their need to come to grips with a larger world then they formerly reckoned with, might begin to undertake.

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CHAPTER 3

From Objects to Subjects of Religious Studies in Africa: Methodological Agnosticism and Methodological Conversion

Frans Wijsen

In reaction to late nineteenth-century (social) scientific studies of religion as an epiphenomenon of something else, whether structures of society or those of the mind, early twentieth-century phenomenological approaches attempted to study religion as a thing in itself. Due to secularization, among other factors, scholars of religion abandoned the phenomenological approach and its notion of religion as *sui generis* in the early 1970s,[1] and advocated methodological agnosticism, at least in the West. Since then there has been a mostly hidden but sometimes manifest tension between "Western" and "non-Western" approaches, or dominant and peripheral voices in the study of religion, which call for a postcolonial approach.[2] In this chapter I analyze a debate on these issues between members of the African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) which was established at the first Regional Conference in Africa of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), held at Harare in 1992.[3]

Based on the proceedings of this conference, one of the founding fathers of the AASR, Jan Platvoet,[4] wrote a chapter entitled *From Object to Subject* for a volume he co-edited. In this chapter he described and analyzed the shift in the study of religion in Africa from the era in which Africa was the "object" of European historians, anthropologists, and theologians, to the era in which Africa became the "subject" of the study of religion in Africa. Platvoet[5] con-

1 Gavin Flood, *Beyond phenomenology. Rethinking the study of religion* (London, New York: Cassell, 1999), 2–3.

2 *Ibid.*, 230.

3 This chapter elaborates on a debate that I analyzed earlier in Frans Wijsen, "Are Africans Incurably Religious? Discourse Analysis of a Debate, Direction of a Discipline," *Exchange* 46, no. 4 (2017): 370–397. The corpus is the same but the perspective is quite different. Unlike the previous article, in the present chapter I take a position in the debate in view of the topic of this book.

4 Jan Platvoet, "From object to subject. A history of the study of the religions in Africa," in *The study of religions in Africa*, eds. J. Platvoet, J. Cox and J. Olupona (Cambridge: Roots and Branches, 1996), 105–138.

5 *Ibid.*, 129.

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cluded that, "African scholars of African religions are now contributing their part to the worldwide academic study of the religions of humankind in a substantive manner." He immediately added that, "African scholars of African religions need to be in constant touch with that worldwide community in matters of methodology. They need to continue to contribute to, and to participate in, the critical discussion of the matter, motives and methods of the academic study of religions."

Two decades later, Jan Platvoet and his colleague Henk van Rinsum[6] engaged in just such a critical discussion with a Nigerian AASR member, Kehinde Olabimtan.[7] In this contribution I describe and analyze this "critical discussion," focusing on three points: the religious situation in Africa ("secularism" or "religious revival"); the underlying theory of religion ("mechanics" or "substance" of religion) and methodology ("religionist" or "agnostic"); and the view of science ("scientific," i.e., uncommitted, or "theological," i.e., the engaged study of religion). As a method I am inspired by critical discourse analysis as a form of ideology critique,[8] particularly with respect to the mental maps that are drawn upon in the production and the consumption of the discourse.[9]

1 Africa Is No More a Religious Continent than Europe

In their "contestation" of Mbiti's view of religion in Africa, Platvoet and Van Rinsum[10] examine one of John Mbiti's most cited statements, namely that Africans are incurably religious: "its explanation, p'Bitek's opposition to it, and recent evidence against it." According to them the statement was derived from the fact "that religion was not neatly separated from the other domains of society in pre-colonial Africa."[11] But, in Platvoet and Van Rinsum's view, this conclusion is invalid. Mbiti correctly noted that African languages do not have a word for religion and do not separate the sacred and the secular. But, according

6 Jan Platvoet and Henk van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? Confession and contesting an invention," *Exchange* 32, 2 (2003): 123–153; J. Platvoet and H. van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III. A reply to a Rhetorical Response," *Exchange* 37, 2 (2008): 156–173.

7 Kehinde Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II. A response to Jan Platvoet and Henk van Rinsum," *Exchange* 32, 4 (2003): 322–339.

8 Frans Wijsen, "'There are radical Muslims and normal Muslims': an analysis of the discourse on Islamic extremism," *Religion* 43, 1 (2013): 70–88; Frans Wijsen and Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Making religion. Theory and practice in the discursive study of religion* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016).

9 Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 71.

10 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? I," 123.

11 *Ibid.*, 135.

to Platvoet and Van Rinsum,[12] "from the absence of institutional differentiation and conceptual dichotomies in traditional cosmological and religious thought in African pre-colonial societies, one cannot conclude, as did Mbiti, that Africans were 'deeply religious.'"

There is quite some "verifiable historical data" to counter Mbiti's view. "Christianity became a dominant religion in modern Africa," Platvoet and Van Rinsum observe.[13] But, "as a 'classroom religion,' it planted 'seeds of destruction' in itself." These are of two kinds. One is indigenous, the pragmatism of many Christians. The other is imported, namely formal education. Platvoet and Van Rinsum conclude:

> [D]espite the full churches and the enthusiastic drumming and dancing, the number of people in Africa who are religiously indifferent, or inactive, nominal and critical believers seems to exceed by far those that are religiously committed, and those that practice their religion regularly. [Thus] Africa was, is and will basically be no more and no less a religious, and religiously indifferent, continent than Europe.[14]

In his response to Platvoet and Van Rinsum, Olabimtan[15] "attempts to uncover the weaknesses of the argument" by raising a number of critical questions.

> If Africa is growing in secularism, as Platvoet and Van Rinsum argue to subvert the assertion of a deeply religious continent, how did African scholars in the Departments of Religious Studies gravitate away from the 'rationalist climate of unbelief,' in which they were supposedly trained, to a 'religionist' ethos,' as Platvoet and Van Rinsum note by citing the study Shorter and Onyancha[16] on *Secularism in Africa*? [And] … why has the dominant response to the economic and political crises on the continent, from Dakar through Cape Town to Mombasa, been religious, taking religiosity to mean the preponderant recourse to the transcendent as means of securely situating the self in a harsh and unpredictable world?[17]

According to Olabimtan:

12 *Ibid.*, 141.
13 *Ibid.*, 149.
14 *Ibid.*, 150.
15 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 322.
16 Aylward Shorter and Edwin Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa. A Case Study: Nairobi City* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1997).
17 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 334–335.

> The twentieth century presented us with the dismal failure of the enlightenment movement in the two successive World Wars. In the consequent search for meaning beyond the pretensions of this movement, there re-emerged in the West the alternative view to the prevailing irreligion. … This renewed search for meaning found expression in the appreciation of the profundity of human existence and the plausibility of a transcendent reality beyond the mechanistic view that the enlightenment had hitherto espoused.[18]

In their reply to Olabimtan's response on this point, Platvoet and Van Rinsum[19] say that Olabimtan "is entitled to these views." Nonetheless they write that they "find no support [for them] in the history of West European societies in the second half of the 20th century. In them secularization has proceeded at a much faster pace than before 1950. A religious revival of any significant size has not occurred and is unlikely to occur in the coming decades." As evidence of this they say that

> 'the enlightenment' movement has become so powerful in academic theology, Protestant as well as Roman Catholic, in the past half century that, at least in the Netherlands, it has virtually 'de-theologized' Dutch academic Christian theology. Much of it has become indistinguishable from *godsdienstwetenschap*, the neutral, secular, non-privileging study of religions.[20]

Thus, "Olabimtan's exultation at an epistemological revolution in Western scholarship and a significant return to religion" is "disconfirmed by history."[21]

The latter statement, however, and the evidence given, is surprising in that Platvoet and Van Rinsum (2008: 158) start this article by analyzing the cause of the miscommunication between them and Olabimtan, namely the Christian and theological affiliation of the journal *Exchange* which published their first article. They complain that in the University of Utrecht, where the journal is published, "a neutral, non-confessional approach to the study of the religions of humankind was replaced with that of intercultural theology" (Platvoet and Van Rinsum 2003: 158). This is more or less the same situation as the one to which Platvoet and Van Rinsum (2003: 152) refer when they cite Shorter and Onyancha (1997: 19–22) who observed a stronger religious presence in

18 *Ibid.*, 333.
19 Platvoet and van Rinsum,, "Is Africa incurably religious? III," 169.
20 *Ibid.*
21 *Ibid.*

Departments of Religions Studies in Anglophone universities in Africa. This shows that the situation on the ground is much more complex and ambiguous than Platvoet and Van Rinsum's picture shows.

Thus, in terms of the production and the consumption of the discourse (Fairclough 1992: 67), both parties draw upon the book by Shorter and Onyancha (whose name is consistently misspelled in Platvoet and Van Rinsum 2003) on *Secularism in Africa* (1997), cited above, but use it in different ways. Platvoet and Van Rinsum (2003: 150) claim that they cite the study because "research into religious indifference and secularization is virtually a virgin field." They do not refer to numerous small and large-scale empirical studies that existed before the year they published their first article, and definitely before the year 2008 in which they published their second article: studies such as the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, the Gallup Polls, and last but not least the World Values Survey.[22] These polls depend on how religion is defined, translated into operational terms, and measured, issues which are debatable. They nevertheless seem to point in the same direction: to a resurgence of religion in Africa or, at least, to a return of religion to the public domain – or, put differently, to "invisible religion"[23] becoming (more) visible.

Although Platvoet and Van Rinsum[24] admit that Shorter and Onyancha study religious indifference for "normative reasons" rather than from a "neutral perspective," they point out that "they provide us with many useful data." Thus, whereas they first disqualify normative research as biased and prejudiced, they use Shorter and Onyancha's book to enhance their own point of view. Olabimtan, on the other hand, also uses the same book, meanwhile pointing out Platvoet and Van Rinsum's inconsistency. Olabimtan[25] disqualifies Shorter and Onyancha's study, not because it is normative, but because it is too limited to be generalized. For, "how can data collected from a remote, affluent neighborhood of Nairobi be valid for all of Africa?" Platvoet and Van Rinsum, on the other hand, accuse Olabimtan of not presenting data to support his views, yet Olabimtan[26] refers to Philip Jenkins' book on *The Next Christendom*,[27] among others, which contains statistical data on the so-called "world-wide resurgence of religion" showing that the overwhelming majority of Africans say that they

22 Loek Halman et al., *Changing values and beliefs in 85 countries. Trends from the values surveys from 1981 to 2004* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

23 Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible religion. The transformation of symbols in industrial society* (New York, Collier: Macmillan, 1967).

24 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? I," 151.

25 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 334.

26 *Ibid.*, 336.

27 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

are religious and that religion is important in their everyday lives, whatever this means.

Again, in terms of production and consumption of discourse,[28] both parties also refer to p'Bitek's book on *African Religions in Western Scholarship*.[29] Olabimtan[30] asserts that Platvoet and Van Rinsum draw from p'Bitek's position to contest the alleged religiosity of Africa. But, according to him, p'Bitek's study is based on limited data of two groups only and, furthermore, that it harnesses the prejudices of Western scholars of African religions. According to Olabimtan[31] p'Bitek's "Western scientific method of inquiry" is in our time "fast losing ground to a new movement – the postmodern – as the unassailable method of inquiry in the study of cultures."

Platvoet and Van Rinsum[32] dismiss Olabimtan's claim on the formal ground that the postmodern appeared only after p'Bitek's death. They do not say that the methodological battle which Olabimtan refers to as positivism versus postmodern has been going on in the academic study of religion for decades under different labels – empirical versus hermeneutical study of religion, science versus humanities, explanation versus interpretation – and that postmodernism is no longer at the periphery but at the center of religious studies,[33] if one wishes to speak in these terms.

From an empirical point of view, it is striking that Platvoet and Van Rinsum speak in the future tense more than once. "Africa was, is and will basically be no more and no less a religious, and religiously indifferent, continent than Europe,"[34] adding that "a religious revival of any significant size has not occurred and is unlikely to occur in the coming decades."[35] This demonstrates an ideological element in their analysis, an implicit evolutionary theory of religion. In sociology, and even more so in the sociology of religion, it is generally accepted how difficult it is to provide trend scenarios. For example, in the Cold War era, who could have predicted that religion would revive in China and Russia after the collapse of the Berlin War? Scholars who are trained in the social sciences and empirical methods would hesitate to make such massive claims about the future of religion.

28 Fairclough, *Discourse*, 67.

29 Okot p'Bitek, *African religions in Western scholarship* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1970).

30 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 329.

31 *Ibid.*, 327.

32 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III," 168.

33 Flood, *Beyond phenomenology.*

34 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? I," 153.

35 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III," 169.

Platvoet and Van Rinsum refer to p'Bitek's "confession" that he was "neither a Christian nor a pagan" and that he did "not believe in gods or spirits."[36] p'Bitek nevertheless had a Christian funeral and he was buried in the graveyard next to St Philips, the Church of Uganda Cathedral in Gulu. This is not mentioned to show that he was inauthentic but rather that religion is ambiguous, and that human life is more complex than clear-cut categories such as "atheist" versus "religious" suggest.

2 Religions Are Best Understood in Their Extra-religious Contexts

Drawing upon the "invention of tradition" theory,[37] Platvoet and Van Rinsum[38] interpret Mbiti's statement about Africans being notoriously religious as understandable but false: a "post-colonial counter-invention against the pre-colonial and colonial European inventions of Africa as primitive, savage, without a religion, pagan, superstitious, full of witchcraft, witch hunts, sorcery and black magic." Thus, they suggest, Mbiti and others have overemphasized that Africans were deeply religious in a reaction to these "inventions." But, they add, the invention and counter-invention "contain more ideology than fact, being extrapolated from very limited historical data in highly selective and biased ways."[39] They say that "[p]articular historical data on the single indigenous religions, if put into their own extra-religious contexts, point to a much more varied and variable picture."[40]

In his response to Platvoet and Van Rinsum, Olabimtan[41] argues that Platvoet and Van Rinsum only discuss the "mechanics" of religion and not its "substance," along with its "intellectual component" (belief) more than its pragmatic component (ritual). He further suspects[42] that, in criticizing Africa's "religious pragmatism" as if it were not real or authentic religion, Platvoet and Van Rinsum[43] are taking an elitist, intellectualist view of religion, and he

36 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? I," 139.

37 Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. E. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 211–262; Terence. Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition Revisited," in *Legitimacy and State in Twentieth-Century Africa*, eds. T. Ranger and O. Vaughan (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd. 1993), 62–111.

38 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? I," 135.

39 *Ibid.*, 153.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 323.

42 *Ibid.*, 334.

43 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? I," 149.

poses the rhetorical question: "[A]re Platvoet and Van Rinsum saying that Western Christianity is the eternal and immutable norm of the faith of the church?"[44] According to Olabimtan,[45] "[t]he problem is still the unwillingness of the secular Western method of intellectual inquiry to allow the nature of religion to shape the methods of its inquiry."

In their response to Olabimtan, Platvoet and Van Rinsum[46] claim that Olabimtan does not tell them "what the 'mere mechanics' of religion are, and what he regards as the 'substance' of religion," and that "religions should be studied both in their religious function, as (postulated) communication, communion and commerce with 'unseen' worlds, beings and processes, and their numerous non-religious functions in their contexts." They reconfirm that academic scholars can only pursue two kinds of knowledge about religions, historical and ethnographic, along with generalized insights won from their comparative study.[47]

> Being outside the perimeter of the empirical world, or hidden within it in non-observable, non-testable manners, the meta-empirical, and infra/intra-empirical, cannot be made subject of scientific investigation, and so can neither be scientifically verified *nor falsified*.[48]

Thus, the substance of religion cannot dictate the methods of inquiry. Only the functions of religion can be studied in a scientific way.

Whereas Platvoet and Van Rinsum[49] claim that Olabimtan does not explicate what he regards as the substance of religion, in fact he does clarify this by describing religion as "the preponderant recourse to the transcendent" and the "plausibility of a transcendent reality."[50] Indeed, this comes close to what Platvoet and Van Rinsum themselves say when they distinguish "(postulated) communication, communion and commerce with 'unseen' worlds" and their "numerous non-religious functions in their context." But they define the former "(postulated) communication" as religious "function,"[51] not as substance. But what else is "(postulated) communication, communion and commerce with 'unseen' worlds, beings and processes" than substance? Olabimtan

44 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 334.
45 *Ibid.*, 339.
46 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III," 167.
47 *Ibid.*, 163.
48 *Ibid.*
49 *Ibid.*, 167.
50 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 333.
51 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III," 167.

himself distinguishes what religion is, its substance, namely "the preponderant recourse to the transcendent," from what it does, its function, namely "securely situating the self in a harsh and unpredictable world."[52] Platvoet and Van Rinsum's definition of religion moreover shows that, unlike Olabimtan's claim, they not only speak about religion as an intellectual enterprise, but also as practice; religion as "commerce."

It is precisely the relation between subject and object of science which lies at the heart of the modern versus postmodern epistemology.[53] Do scholars accept the correspondence theory of knowledge, in which knowledge is true if the mental representations of reality correspond with the reality itself, assuming there is such reality: a form of essentialism in which religion is perceived as an entity? Or do they assume that the representations of reality contribute to the construction of reality, a conversation type of epistemology: religion as a construct?[54] But here we leave the theory of methods (methodology) to the corresponding views of science.[55] Platvoet and Van Rinsum[56] may be right that there is no "epistemological revolution in Western scholarship," but at least there is a "postmodern turn" which also applies to religious studies.[57]

When Platvoet and Van Rinsum[58] give proof of the irreligiosity and religious indifference of Africans, saying that the people who are religiously indifferent seem to exceed by far those that practice their religion regularly, they do give the impression that, to them, attendance is the most important criterion for measuring religion, and that "pragmatism" is not "real" religion.[59] From studies of secularization in the West which equate sociology of religion with sociology of the Church, Western scholars of religion know how problematic this perspective is. The issue is not how religious people are, but *how* they are religious. In their reaction to Olabimtan's critique, Platvoet and Van Rinsum[60] rightly point to Platvoet's numerous studies in which he has shown that "magic" is a form of religion, as discussed above. But, with regards the way they describe religious pragmatism, Olabimtan seems to have a point.

52 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 335.

53 Flood, *Beyond phenomenology*, 150.

54 Jonathan Smith, *Imagining Religion, from Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

55 C. Du Toit, "The restoration of subjectivity in science, rationality and knowledge systems as a precondition for scientific integrity," in *The Impact of Knowledge Systems on Human Development in Africa,* ed. C. Du Toit (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2007), 70–75.

56 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III," 169.

57 Russell McCutcheon, *Studying religion. An introduction* (London – Oakville: Equinox, 2007).

58 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? I," 150.

59 *Ibid*., 149.

60 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III," 165–166.

3 There Is No Science but Empirical Science

In criticizing Mbiti's counter-invention and ideology, Platvoet and Van Rinsum note that

> [o]nly by means of historical studies of single 'traditional' African societies can one establish whether 'religion' did pervade them deeply, or superficially, or not at all, or in variable ways, or in some other manner. Any view, maximal or minimal, must be founded on verifiable historical data, if academic status is claimed for it.[61]

According to Olabimtan,[62] Platvoet and Van Rinsum give substance to "p'Bitek's atheistic position" and by doing so "they demonstrate their allegiance to the old, secularist school." But, in Olabimtan's view, this "so-called scientific method of inquiry no longer holds the ace in investigating societies. It is a demystified notion that what is unscientific is not real."[63] As we have seen already, according to Olabimtan[64] "the two major wars of the twentieth century … signify a [violent] turning point in the intellectual history of the modern world" and "the dominance of the scientific approach may have seen the best of its days prior to [this]."[65] The "turning point" made possible a "renewal of a view that has always existed in the West but dominated by an irreligious perspective fostered by the enlightenment movement," namely a religionist view of "scholars of religion who take seriously the proposition of inherent transcendence in religion," in Europe as well as elsewhere.[66]

In their reply to this, Platvoet and Van Rinsum[67] argue that their position is not atheistic but agnostic, and that "methodological agnosticism" has become the leading position between the warring camps of positivism and religionism during the past half century in the academic study of religions. Moreover, they assert, theirs is no longer solely a European stance in that a number of leading scholars in the world share the conviction that they must teach this model to their successors.[68] According to them there is no science but empirical

61 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? I," 142–143.
62 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 333.
63 *Ibid.*
64 *Ibid.,* 328.
65 *Ibid.,* 338.
66 *Ibid.,* 333.
67 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III," 162.
68 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III," 165.

science,[69] repeating that meta-empirical postulations cannot be verified or falsified and thus are unscientific.[70]

This is an ideological statement in the sense that it naturalizes a contingent reality. Religious studies are conducted from at least two views of science with corresponding knowledge interests – contextual and hermeneutic, explanatory or interpretative – and the latter "may be not less objective in its approach than the self-acclaimed scientific approach."[71] Moreover, the argument that a number of leading scholars in the world share the conviction that they must teach this model to their successors can be reversed: a number of leading scholars in the world share the conviction that they must teach an alternative model to their successors, a more constructivist model.

Whereas Olabimtan[72] says that "the landscape of academic study of religions of Africa" is not "a monolith," and "there are many perspectives" and regular shifts to "another perspective," Platvoet and Van Rinsum[73] recognize only one form of science. They say that, "there is no other" science than "empirical science." This is scientific investigation that can be verified or falsified: historical, ethnographic, and comparative. They fix the meaning of the word "science" to its use in the Anglo-Saxon world, where science is always "exact science." This is not the meaning of the word in the original German term *Religionswissenschaft* where science includes the humanities. In Germany, religious studies as a discipline is closer to cultural studies,[74] including cultural anthropology, which operates at the boundary of science and humanities, interpretation and explanation. Platvoet and Van Rinsum,[75] however, claim that "any view … must be founded on verifiable historical data if academic status is claimed for it."

But, what is "verifiable historical data"? Is this data supposed to show how the past really was, in harmony with Von Ranke's ideal of objective history? And does this signify that knowledge which is not founded on "historical verifiable data" is not academic? The discourse is framed in a specific vocabulary, "falsification" and "verification," taken from only one view of science, the neopositivistic view. This is what Olabimtan[76] refers to as a "claim of science to truth."

69 *Ibid.,* 162.
70 *Ibid.,* 163.
71 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 338.
72 *Ibid.,* 327.
73 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III," 162.
74 Hans Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft. Gegenstände und begriffe* (München: Neck, 2003).
75 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? I," 143.
76 Olabimtan, "Is Africa incurably religious? II," 328.

4 Conclusion and Discussion

By making use of insights developed in critical discourse analysis as a form of ideology critique, it became apparent to me that the accusation that Platvoet and Van Rinsum make of Mbiti's work, namely that it contains "more ideology than fact," also applies to their own scholarship. I immediately add that this is nothing to worry about. Unlike Platvoet and Van Rinsum, who adhere to the notion of neutral and objective science, I am convinced that (social) science is always ideological to a certain extent. Drawing on Bourdieu,[77] this is not a problem as long as scholars remain self-reflexive and critical of their perspectives.

Going back to Jan Platvoet's chapter on the proceedings of the Harare conference with which I started, this is the heart of the matter. Platvoet[78] observes that, "African scholars of African religions are now contributing their part to the worldwide academic study of the religions of humankind in a substantive manner." But they "need to be in constant touch with that worldwide community in matters of methodology" if they are to produce "better and more 'objective' knowledge" (note that objective is put between inverted commas showing that Platvoet was aware of the complexity of objectivity in science). This is knowledge which can be accepted as "valid" by the "global scientific community" which is or ought to be a "democratic community of organized skepticism."[79]

But this is exactly the point raised by the above analysis. How democratic is this global scientific community? According to many non-Western members of the International Association of the History of Religions (IAHR), and its daughter organization, the African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR), these professional societies are still dominated by Western scholars who have a background in Christian liberal theology. There seems to be a universality claim for the principle of methodological agnosticism which is not very helpful in non-Western and non-Christian contexts.[80] Platvoet and Van Rinsum[81] confuse "religious" with "privileging" scholarship, "objective" with "disengaged," and they equate being normative with being prejudiced, which is not necessarily

77 Pierre Bourdieu, *In other words. Essays towards reflexive sociology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

78 Platvoet, "From object to subject,"129.

79 *Ibid.*, 130.

80 Zainal Bagir and Irwan Abdullah, "The development and role of religious studies. Some Indonesian reflections," in *Islamic Studies and Islamic Education in Contemporary Southeast Asia*, eds. K. Bustamam-Ahmad and P. Jory (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Ilmuwan, 2011), 69.

81 Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? I"; Platvoet and van Rinsum, "Is Africa incurably religious? III."

the case. As various Centers for Religious Studies in both non-Western and Western worlds show, one can be religiously engaged without privileging one religion above another.[82]

At the Harare conference, James Cox,[83] who is also a founding father of the AASR, argued that the scholar of African religion must develop a capacity "to see as a believer sees." Cox[84] made a plea for a "methodological conversion," which is not the same as "confessional conversion." Methodological conversion draws on Wittgenstein's analysis of language games. "It does require a form of *epochè*, but rather than endeavoring to bracket out all of one's preconceived academic and personal convictions, it suggests that one can hold differing and even contradictory presuppositions at the same time."[85] Not only their objects of study, but scholars of religion themselves are polyphonic, and the ambiguity in p'Bitek's work to which I referred above is an example of this. I find this a relevant and legitimate principle in the academic study of religion, not as a replacement for, but as an alternative to, methodological agnosticism.

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CHAPTER 4

Liberationist Conversion and Ethnography in the Decolonial Moment: a Finnish Theologian/Ethicist Reflects in South Africa

Elina Hankela

1 Introduction

As ethnography has become more popular among theologians, scholars have begun a discussion on what it means to do ethnography specifically as a theologian.[1] Even though empirical theology has been an important aspect of practical theology since the 1990s, some argue that empirical research in theology continues to be methodologically dependent on the social sciences, and urge theologians to think of qualitative research, including theological ethnography, as more than collecting data using social science methods and reflecting on it theologically.[2] This chapter joins this collective effort to think about ethnography as a method in theology.

The "ethnography and (Christian)[3] theology" conversation to date is largely centered in North America and Europe, as the references to some of the leading scholars on the topic above and the contributors in some of the recent edited volumes indicate.[4] This conversation also resonates with anthropologists' growing interest in, and engagement with, the relationship between

1 See Christian Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology: Exploring the Social Context of God's Work in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Pete Ward (ed.), *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012); Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen (eds.), *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2011).

2 Eileen Campbell-Reed and Christian Scharen, "Ethnography on Holy Ground: How Qualitative Interviewing is Practical Theological Work," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, 2 (2013): 232–259. See also Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology*; Jennie Barnsley, "Grounded Theology: Adopting and Adapting Qualitative Research Methods for Feminist Theological Enquiry," *Feminist Theology* 24, 2 (2016): 109–124; Pete Ward, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography with Humility," *Studia Theologica – Nordic Journal of Theology*, 2016. DOI:10.1080/0039338X.2016.1204363.

3 In this chapter I focus on the Christian theological conversation, and draw in particular on liberation theology; in the future, engaging sources from other religious traditions and religious studies would enrich the conversation.

4 Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology*; Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography*.

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anthropology and theology and the anthropology of Christianity in the Western academia.[5] Conversely, there is little engagement with the recent wave of writing on ethnography by theologians from Africa.[6] Therefore, when reading this discourse and participating in the craft in South Africa – as a white Finnish[7] theologian – the Western inclination of the conversation raises critical questions. Why is it largely Western theologians who are interested in the ethnography conversation? For a Western ethnographer in Africa, besides being questions of research politics more broadly, such questions also relate to the everyday negotiating of one's own positionality: bringing one's white body and Western academic categories into the context of conducting and writing research in/on Africa is not a disinterested enterprise.

In the meanwhile, in the South African academia, which is my immediate context, the quest of decolonizing knowledge and academia as a whole has in the recent years been particularly audible and visible in the context of the fallist movement, a student-led movement directed against the elitism, inaccessibility, and Western foundations and practices of universities.[8] In 2015 and 2016 student protests called for free education and the decolonization of institutions of higher education and curricula. Simultaneously and together with the students outsourced cleaning and security personnel at universities protested for decent salaries and working conditions. The conversation on decolonialization continues in South African universities to date. In the context of

5 See Philip Fountain and Sin Wen Lau, "Anthropological theologies: Engagements and encounters," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 24 (2013): 227–234; Joel Robbins, "Anthropology and theology: An awkward relationship?" *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, 2 (2006): 285–294.

6 I do not imply that African theologians do not use or discuss qualitative research methods (see e.g. the article by Nadar cited in this chapter). Rather I here refer to the specific conversation on ethnography and theology.

7 The questions I ask stem primarily from my experience as a white person in South Africa, and my reflection likely resonates with white colleagues from different national backgrounds. However, it is also important to note my being Finnish because, one, my being a foreigner in South Africa and, two, my upbringing in a Finnish family, albeit in various countries, impacts on how I ask the questions. Yet I do not enter in any depth in a comparative discussion on the (in)significance of the potential differences between myself and, say, a white South African colleague on the questions at hand. Furthermore, my social class position as a member of the middle-classes naturally impacts on how whiteness manifests in my life, something I share with many, even if not all, white people in the country.

8 See, for instance, Francis Nyamnjoh, *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa* (Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2016); Sarah Godsell, "#WitsFeesMustFall Op-Ed: On Violent Protest and Solidarity" in *Daily Maverick* on 19.10.2015, http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-10-19-witsfeesmustfall-op-ed-on-violent-protest-and-solidarity/#.WCrAP-3dh10s, accessed 22.11.2016.

this decolonial moment, besides thinking of the Western inclination of the current theological conversation on ethnography, a white theologian using anthropological methods is drawn to think of the harmful and racist historical roles played by both theology and anthropology on the continent.[9]

Within this broader context, in this chapter I address the ethics and practice of theological ethnography from a liberationist[10] perspective. I do this from the particular position of a Finnish theologian/ethicist in South Africa who is motivated by wanting to imagine theological ethnography as part of the decolonizing process in and beyond academia, rather than seeing theology or theological ethnography as either neutral or anti-decolonization. For someone who comes to ethnographic practice from outside anthropology, my choice of this method is first and foremost epistemological. In line with the spirit of the liberationist break with mainstream Western theologies of the 1970s,[11] ethnography has the potential to equip a researcher to diverge from totalizing or universalizing theories into appreciating how the phenomena at the heart of the liberationist agenda take shape – and change shape – in particular contexts and in relation to particular praxis.[12] As I have also explicated elsewhere, I am motivated to think about ethnography as a method for liberation theologies

9 Various scholars in different fields have written about the role of Christianity and/or anthropology in the actualization of the project of colonialism and the making of the racist modern/colonial world. See, for instance, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "AAR Centennial Roundtable: Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, 3 (2014): 636–665; Musa Dube, "Introduction: The Scramble for Africa as the Biblical Scramble for Africa: Postcolonial Perspectives," in *Postcolonial Perspectives In African Biblical Interpretations*, eds. Musa Dube, Andrew Mbuvi and Dora Mbuwayesango (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 1–26; Ramon Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, 1 (2011); Mogobe Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books, 2002); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999); Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958).

10 Here I refer to liberation theologians and scholars in other fields who draw from the method in liberation theologies, such as Paul Farmer, who is quoted in the text.

11 EATWOT, "Final Statement: Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, August 5–12, 1976," in The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside of History: Papers from the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, Dar es Salaam, August 5–12, 1976, eds. Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978), 259–271.

12 See Allain Cerwonka and Liisa Malkki, *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), loc 229.

because this method at best provides access to understanding and bringing to the center the experiences of those who are in the margins of power, even if it also has the potential to serve a West-centered orientalist project.[13]

The aim of this chapter is to continue this conversation by employing the notion of conversion to engage the practice of ethnography in the context of (South) Africa, particularly when practiced by a white Finnish scholar. The notion of conversion, liberation-theologically understood, provides a locus for thinking of what is required from liberationist ethnography (i.e., ethnography that is informed by liberation theologies, which in turn are defined by the liberationist method[14]) if it is to be part of reimagining knowledge and the world in the decolonial moment. While the recent decolonial discourse does not present a model that is radically different from the liberationist model itself, it is engaged with here because it draws particular attention to what conversion would mean in relation to academia, methodology, and theory. Moreover, writing in the context of South Africa, where race remains a key marker of marginalization, race is the main category in the reflection on conversion in this chapter. Besides being deeply interwoven with other forms of marginalization,[15] be it based on class, gender, orientation, or nationality, race is also a critical topic in itself in the current public debate[16] and a central category in the fallist discourse that inspires some of the discussion in this chapter.

The particular themes addressed through the lens of conversion arise from my fieldwork experiences. I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork as a theologian/ethicist in the context of different communities in urban South Africa intermittently since 2009. The research context that most profoundly informs my thinking of ethnography in this chapter is that of a church in inner-city Johannesburg where I spent much of year 2009 as a doctoral student,[17] and my subsequent (research and other) engagement with people I got to know then. I am still in contact with some of the people whom I encountered in 2009 and

13 Elina Hankela, "Ethnographic Research through a Liberationist Lens: Ethical Reflections on Fieldwork," *Missionalia* 43, 2 (2015): 195–217.

14 For a brief synopsis of my reading of the liberationist method see Hankela 2015.

15 See Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn, "Introduction: Under Construction," in *Under Construction: "Race" and Identity in South Africa Today*, eds. Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn (Sandton: Heinemann, 2004), 6.

16 See, for instance, Tinyiko Maluleke, "Racism is So Much More than Words," in *Mail & Guardian* on 15.1.2016, http://mg.co.za/article/2016-01-14-racism-is-so-much-more-than-words, accessed 22.11.2016; Jacques Rousseau, "Hate Speech, Hurtful Speech, Chris Haart and Penny Sparrow," in *Mail & Guardian* on 6.1.2016, http://mg.co.za/article/2016-01-06-hate-speech-hurtful-speech-chris-hart-and-penny-sparrow, accessed 22.11.2016.

17 Elina Hankela, *Ubuntu, Migration and Ministry: Being Human in a Johannesburg Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

several young Zimbabwean migrants I met at the time participated in my more recent project on migrant belonging.[18] Our encounters highlight the ways in which race is linked with socio-economic inequality and xenophobia in the South African context.

2 Conversion: Turning Towards, Turning Away

In the context of Christianity, conversion can be understood to refer to a turn towards God and/or towards the goals and lifestyle that the Christian community attaches to being Christian, or a turn from one faith or religion to another.[19] As is clear from this definition, the content of conversion depends on context and the theology adhered to. For instance, much of the nineteenth and twentieth-century missionary movement in Africa defined conversion to Christianity as closely connected to conversion to so-called Western "civilization."[20] Conversely, in liberationist thinking, the "preferential option for the poor"[21] (from here on referred to as the preferential option) defines God as taking sides with the oppressed, and ethics can thus be understood as Christians doing the same. Consequently, the preferential option also defines the meaning of conversion. In delineating the notion of conversion, I draw especially on Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez' 1984 book, *Drinking from Our Own Wells*.[22] According to Gutiérrez, the preferential option demands solidarity with the marginalized,

18 See Hankela, "Ethnographic Research."

19 For definitions of conversion see e.g. W.R.F. Browning, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Second edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); John Bowker, *The Conscise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

20 See, for instance, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 198–251.

21 The notion of the preferential option for the poor was coined among Catholic liberation theologians in Latin America in the 1970s (Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), xxvi). It is important to note that "the poor" is understood to refer, not only to the materially poor, but to the various categories of marginalization, (see, for instance, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Daniel G. Groody, "Introduction," in *The Preferential Option for the Poor beyond Theology*, eds. Daniel Groody and Gustavo Gutiérrez (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 2).

22 I recognize the possible problems in choosing a Latin American theologian as the key source when writing in the context of South Africa, even if he is the "father of liberation theology" and even if my choice is informed by Gutiérrez' long-term living and working with poor communities.

and solidarity requires ongoing conversion.[23] The choice of the term "option" emphasizes "the freedom and commitment expressed in a decision,"[24] and thus this freedom is also extended to conversion: it is something to which you choose to commit. The process of conversion denotes an epistemological turning towards something, and away from something else,[25] and in Gutiérrez' text the standpoint of marginalized groups is adopted as the primary place from which to understand God, the neighbor, the church, and society. Risking being simplistic, one can say that, in theological terms, God – but also the norms upon which a more just society can be built – can be encountered in marginalized places and with marginalized people. The turn towards the marginalized, and the consequent concern about structures that hamper human dignity, is a spiritual process.[26] While for a theologian it is thus the place to seek God (of justice), for an ethicist it is the place to seek the way of justice. The engagement with, and bringing to the center of, the underside of privilege are, in other words, results of a normative position.

Moreover, conversion is a social process that takes place in time and place, a process defined by context. It implies "a certain integration" into the world of the marginalized and "bonds of real friendship." Solidarity takes place "not with 'the poor' in the abstract but with human beings of flesh and bone" with whom one relates as one's equals, and with an understanding of broader structural inequality.[27] The importance of such everyday engagement is reflected in South African practical theologian Olehile Buffel's critique of the detachment of theologians from communities and his emphasis on the importance of such a community relationship for Black theology of liberation.[28] American medical

23 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 106.

24 Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* xxvi.

25 J.N.J. (Klippies) Kritzinger emphasizes the two directions of conversion in this work. He has written about "conversion as consisting of two movements: the turning away from what is wrong and a turning towards a new possibility" in the context of whiteness in South Africa (Cobus Van Wyngaard, "White theology in dialogue with Black Theology: Exploring the contribution of Klippies Kritzinger," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, 1 (2016), 4). Kritzinger has also written about the conversion of the researcher as an aspect the praxis cycle (J.N.J. Klippies Kritzinger, "Nurturing Missional Integrity." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of American Society of Missiology, Techny, Illinois, June 18–20, 15).

26 Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells,* 95, 102–104.

27 *Ibid.*, 104.

28 Olehile Buffel, "Black Theology and the Black Masses: The Need of an Organic Relationship between Black Theology and the Black Masses," *Scriptura* 105 (2010): 470–480.

anthropologist and doctor, Paul Farmer,[29] reflects on Gutiérrez' understanding of conversion and writes that when working in Haiti, rural Haitians became "part of my own conversion, informing my medical practice but also my understanding of both suffering and responses to it."[30] Relationships and life convert. However, in the context of ethnographic research one must remain clear that it is not the responsibility of the marginalized person or community to convert the privileged for the sake of the latter's becoming a better person; liberationist conversion instead is connected to true solidarity and social transformation.

Lastly, "(i)f conversion is a process, rooted in time and place and in social change, it stands to reason that our claims of causality about it should be modest and subject to revision."[31] The direction of conversion cannot be decided in advance. Instead of the marginalized being the target of a converting mission or theological ethnography, they – both the conditions in which they live and their thinking[32] – are to be at the center of defining the direction of conversion and, since conversion is not an end in itself, the subsequent transformation in the world, including academia. This raises important questions when thinking about ethnography: is it possible to turn away from a setup where the academic observer ultimately has the power to name and claim, or "the epistemological privilege of the observer,"[33] towards a place where the interlocutor truly is the chief definer of our collective story?

The liberationist discourse has to some extent been divided between emphases on redistribution and recognition, though these two sides also overlap. When thinking of conversion, the two sides of justice produce different ways of thinking about the limits to conversion: the politics of recognition draws more attention to the social location of the researcher.[34] It appears that some South African Black theologians have been more cautious about the process of conversion across the race (and related class) boundary than Gutiérrez in his

29 Paul Farmer, "Conversion in the time of Cholera: A Reflection on Structural Violence and Social Change," in *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez*, eds. M. Griffin and J. Weiss Block (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013), 95–145.

30 *Ibid*., 102.

31 *Ibid*., 103.

32 See Gerald West's argument on different liberationist positions on whether interlocutors' knowledge (thinking) of their context and the Bible should or should not be central to liberationist analysis: Gerald West, "Locating 'Contextual Bible Study' within biblical liberation hermeneutics and intercultural biblical hermeneutics," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 70, no1 (2014). http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2641.

33 Pierre Bordieu, The Logic of Practice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 14, cited in Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology*, loc. 1, 140.

34 Hankela, "Ethnographic Research," 203–204.

discussion of conversion primarily in a class context.[35] Yet a liberationist demarcation of the marginalized as the interlocutors requires some crossing over, although that could take many forms. American Black theologian, James Cone, underlines the importance of personal relations if a white person is to grasp race when he observes that Reinhold "Niehbuhr made no effort to engage in dialogue with black religious leaders and scholars or to develop friendship with black people with whom he could learn about race as he did with Jews."[36] In Cone's view, Niebuhr "lacked the 'heart to feel' [black suffering] as his own" and, therefore, "although he wrote many essays about race … the problem of race was never one of his central theological and political concerns."[37] Such friendships, across different social/symbolic boundaries, should also sensitize one to think of liberationist conversion as a difficult, and at times at a personal level painful, process: questions concerning whether or not, and how, research across race/other boundaries should be done need to be re-asked in changing contexts.

3 The Decolonial Moment as the Context of Conversion

Besides relationships, the theories that inform one's ethnography – and one's conversion – naturally make a difference in the research process and its outcomes. Decolonial thought, which emphasizes the need to identify locations and people that lack epistemic power, is one of the discourses that can inform liberationist ethnography today in the same way in which other theories have informed liberationists of other eras. The recent academic decolonial debate, which is anchored in the notions of decoloniality and coloniality/modernity, is largely led by Latin American scholars, including Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, Ramon Grosfoguel and Nelson Maldonado-Torres,[38] but there are also scholars participating in this particular discourse in South Africa, such as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni. While in this chapter I draw particularly from this decolonial school, it is important to note that the quest for, and theorizing of, decolonization itself is not limited to this discourse, and nor do these thinkers stand outside the history of the broader debates – quite the contrary. Rather, intellectuals from different theoretical positions and disciplines, from both

35 *Ibid.*, 201–205.

36 Jamen Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013), 52.

37 *Ibid.*, 41.

38 One also needs to ask whether drawing on the American – whether North or Latin American – scholars' thought applied to ethnography in South Africa is another colonizing moment.

academic and literary spaces, have engaged with the ideas and realities of colonization and decolonization for decades, with a strong African contribution from across the continent by the likes of Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo, Steve Bantu Biko, Allan Boesak, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ali Mazrui, Achille Mbembe, Kwame Nkrumah, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Mogobe Ramose.

The choice of decolonial thought as a dialogue partner in this chapter, is based on the fact that in the wave of the fallist movement decolonial thought and rhetoric is gaining ground in South Africa in an intensifying way, seemingly contributing to a redefining of the struggle against economic and racial exclusion by the born-free generation.[39] Moreover, in search of liberationist ethnography at this point in time, I appreciate the focus of the decolonial critique on the universalizing West-centered nature of academic institutions, curricula, and methodologies: decolonial thought challenges the liberationist *as a scholar* as it focuses attention on academia and the decolonization of knowledge.[40]

According to the decolonial discourse, the modern/colonial world order, the world as we know it today, rests on a geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge[41] that privilege Western Man[42] and turn spaces outside the sphere of

39 See for instance Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "The Emergence and Trajectories of Struggles for an 'African University': The Case of Unfinished Business of African Epistemic Decolonisation," *Kronos* 43 (2017), 51–77. The decolonial emphasis is also impacting on some sections of the theological scholarship: for instance, the 2017 theme of the conference of the Society for Practical Theology in South Africa was on decolonising practical theology. It is also noteworthy that Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Ramon Grosfoguel have active links to South African academia.

40 Since the postcolonial discourse has had a clear impact in South African academia, maybe most visibly through the work of Cameroonian-born philosopher Achille Mbembe, I wish to make it explicit that my choice of decolonial thought as a dialogue partner here is not "instead of" postcolonial thought. Rather, the space and the scope of this chapter do not allow for a comparison of these two schools (see, for instance, Gurminder K. Bhambra, "Postcolonial and Decolonial Reconstructions," *Connected Sociologies* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014): 117–140). On decolonial thinkers on postcolonialism see, for instance, Marzagora, "The Humanism of Reconstruction"; Joe Drexler-Dreis, "Interview: Nelson Maldonado-Torres," *Newsletter CLT* 9 (2014): 9–12; Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Why Decoloniality in the 21st Century?," *The Thinker: The Journal of Progressive Thought* 48 (2013): 15.

41 Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de Liberación,* (Mexico City: Edicol, 1977), (English: *Philosophy of Liberation*, Orbis, 1985) and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) respectively in Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing."

42 Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing," 5–6. In the context of South African academia see, for instance, Tinyiko Maluleke and Sarojini Nadar, "Alien Fraudsters in the White Academy: Agency in Gendered Colour," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 120 (2004): 5–17.

Western Man into "wastelands"[43] in which the imperialism that created them fronts as the remedy. According to the modern/colonial logic, the bodies in these wastelands become "shells" and "shadows"[44] that are filled with knowledge from elsewhere. In the academy, the work of a small group of now dead Western men, produced in particular historical settings, continues to comprise the canon in the humanities and social sciences around the world.[45] Hence Botswanan biblical scholar Musa Dube may lament: "I confess I have taken a full baptism and I am still drowning in the Eurocentric epistemologies, although not without a struggle."[46]

A key quest of decolonial thinkers is for a reimagining of the geo- and body-politics of knowledge, power, and being, of which I will concentrate on knowledge here, while acknowledging that the three are related, and a call for "democratisation of knowledge, de-hegemonisation of knowledge, de-westernisation of knowledge, and de-Europeanisation of knowledge."[47] While "the Westernized university" is a "Uni-versity" shaped largely around a single geographic experience, decolonial thinkers and movements dream of a "Decolonial Pluri-versity" that serves the whole world.[48] Such decolonization would mean, according to Martinique-born psychologist Frantz Fanon, "the creation of a new symbolic and material order that takes the full spectrum of human history, its achievements and its failures, into view."[49]

Therefore, in the current unequal circumstances that privilege the West, academia is called to take seriously those who think "from and with subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies"[50] instead of thinking *about* those spaces and bodies. This call includes privileging intellectual and theoretical contributions from the Global South, or from the "underside of

43 Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing of the Mind* (Nairobi: Eat African Educational Publishers / Suffolk: James Currey / Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986), 3.

44 Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Northlands: Picador Africa, 2004), 30–31.

45 Ramon Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, XI, issue 1 (2013): 74. See also Dube, "Introduction"; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "The Topology of Being and the Geopolitics of Knowledge," *City* 8, 1 (2004): 29–56.

46 Dube, "Introduction," 18.

47 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Why Decoloniality," 15.

48 Grosfoguel, "Structure of Knowledge," 89. See also Ramose, *African Philosophy*, 3–4.

49 Fanon interpreted by Maldonado-Torres, "Topology of Being," 36.

50 Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing," 4.

modernity,"[51] as a means of imagining a different genealogy of knowledge.[52] To emphasize this point, Puerto Rican sociologist Ramon Grosfoguel makes a difference between social location, a notion used by many critical scholars, and epistemic location, the latter being the location from which one *thinks*: an oppressed person may still think like those in dominant positions.[53] As an ethnographer I also read this as a call for actual tangible engagement with the spaces, bodies, and minds in the "wastelands": not as someone who observes, names, and reports on the "other," but someone who engages with human beings and then writes from the position of seeking justice.

Instead of contributing towards the decolonial ideal of a pluriversity, certain hubs of area studies hardly seem to break the boundaries of the Westernized university: theory often comes from and is (re)produced in the North while the subjects are in the South.[54] A European ethnographer in Africa should indeed pause to consider the implications of Nigerian intellectual Wole Soyinka's writing on the fictionalizing of Africa: "Africa remains the monumental fiction of European creativity."[55] However, the question of one's role in the fiction industry is not simply a question for the European by birth. Soyinka proceeds to discuss "neo-fictioning," that is, the role of post-independence African leaders in fictionalizing their own people as part of acquiring power.[56] The latter, albeit in the context of national politics, underlines the importance of unpacking the implications of coloniality:[57] simply being from Africa does not mean that one speaks from Africa.

As in the birth of liberation theologies, in decolonial thought epistemology is again/still at the heart of the critique of the West-centered world order. The binaries in these debates might appear simplistic, especially for those of us who have drunk from hybrid wells, but from the perspective of liberationist and decolonial discourses they provide useful points for anchoring the

51 Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, Atlantic Highland, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996.

52 See Drexler-Dreis, "Interview."

53 Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing," 6.

54 *Ibid.*, 3.

55 Wole Soyinka, *Of Africa* (London: Yale University Press, 2012), 45.

56 *Ibid.*, 47–52.

57 Coloniality refers to the legacy of colonialism. It refers to the flip side of modernity, to the existing Euro/America-centered power structures that define knowledge production, social relations, and so on that emerge(d) as a product of modern discourses, see, for instance Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being," *Cultural Studies* 21, 2–3 (2007), 240–270.

struggle.[58] Moreover, in my reading, the decolonial bias towards "other" knowledges and epistemologies clearly resonates with the liberationist preferential option. Yet while the bias of the latter is the founding element in liberationist thinking in an unequal world, Gutierrez emphasizes the need for its conscious pairing with the notion of the universality of God's love.[59] From a methodological perspective such a pairing creates a fruitful tension between a radical bias and an appreciation of diversity. This aspiration is similar to the positive tension between the decolonial call for a pluriverse/ity and the privileging of subaltern positions.

With this in mind, I now move onto ethnographic practice: How does one go about converting to the standpoint of the marginalized? How does one make that the place to understand and to learn to see the world anew? I approach liberationist conversion in particular through the demand to write "from" and "with," recently re-articulated by the decolonial school of thought. Moreover, someone may ask what, if anything, makes my approach "theological." In reading the following reflection one should thus bear in mind that my aim is not to identify characteristics that are exclusive to theological ethnography, but rather to understand ethnography in the light of the liberationist notion of conversion and, related to it, that of the preferential option. In other words, the following four sections address questions important to doing ethnography as a liberationist – particularly as a white researcher in the context of what can be called the decolonial moment in South Africa.

4 Converting to Theory from – Not on – Africa

For me, the researcher, the relationships with the interlocutors and spending time in the spaces they live in means that I change. It is an ethnographic given that the field changes us;[60] however, it is by no means a given that this change is liberationist in nature. British sociologist and critical scholar of race and migration, Claire Alexander, notes that ethnography has perhaps been "one of the most critically self-reflective" ways of writing, but also that, "there has been

58 See Sara Marzagora, "The Humanism of Reconstruction: African Intellectuals, Decolonial Critical Theory and the Opposition to the "Posts" (Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, Postcolonialism)," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, 2 (2016): 174.

59 Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* xxvi.

60 James Bielo, "Introduction: Writing Religion." In *Missionary Impositions: Conversion, Resistance, and other Challenges to Objectivity in Religious Ethnography*, eds. Hillary Crane and Deana Weibel, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 9.

no engagement with the contours of race in the research process."[61] Self-reflexivity in itself is not necessarily critical of social structures and systems, such critique being a key aspect of liberation theologies; contemporary urban ethnography, for instance, has been criticized for constituting "depoliticized moral tales."[62] Without the support of system-critical thought, the ethnographer's conversion towards marginalized places can easily be a turn towards pacifying sympathy or orientalist self-elevation camouflaged in the jargon of cultural relativism,[63] rather than justice. In other words, choosing to think with marginalized people in the field, but not with those scholars who imagine a different just world and write from marginalized positions within the academia, easily plays into the epistemic imperial agenda of a geographic and body-political data/theory division which Grosfoguel claims characterizes some area studies.

Thus, the first question in regard to the politics of one's ethnographic work arises before one enters the field. Who are the colleagues one thinks with? Kenyan theologian John Mbiti's coinage of an African understanding of personhood then works as a methodological key: "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am"[64] is an aphorism that urges a researcher to think of the academic relationships in which one grows and becomes as a scholar and a person. Who informs the theoretical baggage that one carries into the field and weaves into one's writing?[65] Whose writing does one take seriously enough to engage and challenge? I would not suggest totally discarding the "canon" of the humanities and social sciences. But ethnographers should at the least read the canon, including the Western theological canon, differently, and do this with scholars from other epistemic locations, like postcolonial Biblical scholars have done with the Bible.[66]

If wanting to break away from the imperialist position, which Grosfoguel attributes to certain area studies, when studying African Christianities, the European theologian-ethnographer – like anyone writing on Africa – needs to

61 Claire Alexander, "Introduction: Mapping the issues," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, 3 (2006): 399.

62 Loic Wacquant, "Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography," *American Journal of Sociology* 107, 6 (2002): 1468–1532, quoted in Alexander, "Introduction," 401.

63 See Kwame Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 13–17 on anthropology and relativism.

64 John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Second edition, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1990), 106.

65 See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 10.

66 See, for instance, Dube, "Introduction."

turn in particular, though not exclusively,[67] to African scholars in search of theory. (Thus, one must also question why I draw on Gustavo Gutiérrez from Peru or decolonial thinkers from the Americas in this chapter while writing in South Africa.) The question of what qualifies as theory from Africa complicates this aspect of conversion. The liberationist and decolonial emphases on the impact of experience on one's faith and thinking highlights the necessity of engaging insiders to the geographic, social, and cultural context. Should one then read scholars merely born in Africa, or those who also work in Africa? African scholars who critique Eurocentrism generally, or those who critique it from a particular theoretical perspective? I believe that policing the authenticity of someone's Africanness is not my task as an outsider, nor would it be constructive for the cause. From a liberationist perspective that takes different forms of inequality seriously it is rather important, for a European scholar, to discern manifestations of Western bias in the writing on Africa and to actively and critically engage a variety of system-critical views that in some way speak *from* Africa. Although not in relation to ethnography, such a turn to theory from Africa can be detected in the work of a white South African theologian Klippies Kritzinger, who since the 1980s has actively engaged South African Black theologians and the Black Consciousness movement.[68] Kritzinger's work is also an example of the implications of converting: his personal conversion is further channeled, for instance, into thinking about the requirement of the white church to convert.[69]

Yet a conversion towards theory from the South, or from Africa in particular, cannot be undertaken without careful consideration. In his 2002 book, South African philosopher Mogobe Ramose warns against the eagerness of "the former beneficiaries of apartheid," white people and especially in his context white South Africans, to become authorities in African philosophy at this point

67 Comaroff and Comaroff's (see Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving towards Africa* (London: Routledge, 2016)) appeal to engage theory from the South resonates with the decolonial aim to create a pluriversity with multiple voices. In this book, "we might move beyond the north-south binary, to lay bare the larger dialectical processes that have produced and sustain it." The way of getting there is via "reflection on the contemporary order of things approached from a primarily African vantage, one, as it turns out, that is full of surprises and counterintuitives, one that invites us to see familiar things in different ways" (loc 65).

68 See, for instance, J.N.J. (Klippies) Kritzinger, "Liberating Whiteness: Engaging with the Anti-racist Dialectics of Steve Biko," in *The Legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko: Theological Challenges*, ed. Cornel W du Toit, 89–113 (Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, 2008); J.N.J. (Klippies) Kritzinger, *Black Theology: A Challenge to Mission* (Pretoria: UNISA, dissertation, 1988).

69 Van Wyngaard, "White theology in dialogue."

in time when it serves their interests, "and in that way resurrect the myth that 'man is a rational animal' was not spoken of the African."[70] This calls a white researcher to pause: how does one engage African scholars as authorities and critically engage in the conversation from one's social and epistemic location without using white privilege to (attempt to) overtake the conversation?[71] Indeed, in my doctoral thesis,[72] I opted for the ubuntu discourse as the theoretical framework. I wanted to find a theoretical frame from the context in which the church I studied was located. Yet, with hindsight, because of the politics of writing on ubuntu in South Africa today referenced by Ramose above, I might now have opted for a different theoretical framework, or at least discussed my positionality in relation to the choice more thoroughly and critically. Overall, the how-question calls for serious engagement, because retreating back into the safe haven of Western thought is not a solution if the decolonization of knowledge is the aim.

The second perspective in regard to academic politics relates to *where* one thinks about Africa, which is, of course, not separate from whom one thinks with. For myself, being part of local academia in South Africa has been critical for the (unfinished) conversion of my perspectives.[73] Had I not spent time in local universities, I suspect that I would not, for instance, have come to understand the multiple ways in which race and white privilege function in these spaces. This insight also converts me to see the same issues in the context of my research, and hopefully makes my research and writing more relevant to the process of liberation in and outside academia.

5 Converting from My White Body

Along with choosing the theorists one thinks with, another mechanism of consciously positioning oneself in a liberationist space is to aim to write explicitly from one's body. South African Biblical scholar, Sarojini Nadar, encourages this kind of researcher visibility, which has long been central, for instance, to the African feminist scholarship that she represents: "So instead of a white researcher claiming 'not to see colour' in a research project with predominantly black participants, in narrative research the ways in which the researcher and

70 Ramose, *African Philosophy,* 4.
71 See Maluleke and Nadar, "Alien Fraudsters."
72 Hankela, *Ubuntu.*
73 See also Hankela, *Ubuntu,* 8.

the participants 'see colour' are brought into dialogue."[74] In theological terms this is another way of taking seriously the particularity point emphasized by liberation theologies. For a white – regardless of nationality – ethnographer working on/in South Africa, the white frame of one's own experience can be an instrument,[75] in the field and/or in writing, to either hide and solidify white privilege or to highlight and critique the body-politics of modernity/coloniality that are premised on race as the organizing principle.[76]

Writing or listening sympathetically[77] in itself is thus not sufficient in the context of liberationist ethnography in (South) Africa, especially if the researcher is white or in other ways privileged by the system. In an interview, Mary, an interlocutor who lived in inner-city Johannesburg, was talking about how members of a particular congregation responded to xenophobic attacks in the city by extending support to poor migrants. She made a difference between what she called "sympathy" and "help." The provided support "did help some of the people that are looking for help. Because it also depends whether are you looking for help or are you looking for sympathy." For Mary, those who sought "help" did not want to be "spoon-fed." Similarly, from a liberationist perspective, sympathetic writing about the difficulties in the lives of marginalized people that does not aim to expose structural injustice could be seen as amounting to handouts. On the contrary, exposing the discontinuity between the experiences of oneself and one's interlocutors can be an act of solidarity – or "help" – if it reaches towards just transformation through exposing social inequality.[78]

Therefore, even when turning towards engaging with other voices, one does not leave one's body behind. Because of the things that mark my body and the privilege that comes with it, my choosing a decolonial liberationist position would mean that I must attempt to use my body to imagine a different world. If I am to ignore or hide my white frame of reference in the context of engaging black interlocutors, I believe I will easily turn into writing "about them," or about the "native people" as Nadar[79] comments on some white Western

74 Sarojini Nadar, "'Stories are Data with Soul' – Lessons from Black Feminist Epistemology," *Agenda* 28, 1 (2014): 23.

75 See Bielo, "Introduction," 3.

76 See Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Decoloniality as the Future of Africa," *History Compass* 13, 10 (2015): 488.

77 Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology,* loc 604.

78 See Susan Abraham, *Identity, Ethics and Nonviolence in Postcolonial Theory: A Rahnerian Theological Assessment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 113, on Gayatri Spivak, rescue missions and discontinuity.

79 Nadar, "Stories," 23.

anthropology. When attempting to "put a human face on what is called a body of knowledge"[80] in the context of a white researcher and black interlocutors, both faces must be accounted for. The liberationist aim is then not to understand "black/poor things" or "black/poor problems" in order for them to be solved. Rather, the aim is to understand and challenge social and economic inequality, and this understanding can take shape in the encounter between my social and epistemic location and, for instance, in my recent project, the social and epistemic location of young, black, low-income Zimbabwean migrants. The importance of such encounters is that if I as a white and middle-class academic want to be part of a liberationist movement towards a different decolonial world, I have to reach outside the privileges of my world to learn about systemic inequalities from the other side. Yet I then also have to be careful not to slip from thinking *with* to turning the gaze to myself and away from the interlocutors.

Furthermore, as already noted, engaging one's own whiteness is not restricted to academic spaces/writing. In the field, thinking from my body has meant conversations, comments and also jokes about race. If I am genuine about thinking from my body with others and making my racial privilege visible, there are no color-blind breaks available; my white presence can hopefully also provide material for black interlocutors to think about (in)justice. For instance, we discussed the interlocutors' experiences of being called *amakwerekwere* (a derogatory name used for black African immigrants in South Africa) in a focus group with five young Zimbabweans in Soweto. During the session we, for instance discussed the differences, but also similarities, in the usage of the term *kwerekwere* and the term *umlungu* (a white person) that people in certain places call me. In such conversations the difference in our racialized experiences are highlighted: we might all be foreigners, but I am white and middle-class, and that defines my daily experience. As Richie put this: "if someone is saying *umlungu* … they are happy, because even the faces like they are expressing the happiness … But now when they say *kwerekwere* … You can see even the tone. Even the face, it's like: I'm insulting." (The group did add that calling white people *amabhunu*, a word used to refer to Afrikaans-speaking farmers, would in their view be derogatory.) On the other hand, such conversations also provide a space to talk and listen across the race line, in both directions, at the personal level, and result in creative unanticipated conversations. During the session the group also listened to and commented on my negative experiences of having been called *umlungu* and at the end of it Richie said he had "learnt

80 Obioma Nnaemeka, "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29, 2 (2003): 363.

something in this group today … when we had this discussion just now, when, about *umlungu* and *kwerekwere*"; he continued to reflect on how, in the context of discussing xenophobia, "we all said, like I have a name – don't call me by other names. Don't call me Mugabe, don't call me *kwerekwere* or a group of people," and therefore it should also apply to how they treat members of other groups of people, even when the used name is generally not used in a derogatory sense. After explaining the fundamental differences between the two names, as quoted above, Richie here reflects on the point of convergence in individual experiences of exclusion based on our discussion. Such conversations may have the *potential* to imagine transformation from another place – if they are not turned to support an individualistic privilege-blind discourse.

6 The Converting Potential of Life

In my experience, interviews, participant observation, and what I here call "living in relationships" complement one another as tools of dialogue – and of liberationist conversion. Interviews provide a space for the interlocutor to define the world verbally; participant observation provides a systematic method to learn to see what is happening around one, as well as a mirror of the content of interviews; living aware in relationships is akin to what Gutiérrez denotes by "a certain integration."[81] It refers to the space on the blurry line between research and relationships, research and life as a whole. While interviews and field notes are important and temporally defined aspects of ethnographic work, living in relationships that extend beyond the finalization of a given research project, participating in the social practice of being a community, has been invaluable for my converting.

An example of living in relationships is that as I type the first draft of this chapter in a coffee shop, I am simultaneously communicating with a friend – who has also been my interlocutor – about her difficult financial situation. It also refers to the fact that as I work on this chapter, I receive a message that another friend – also an interlocutor in two different research projects – has been taken to hospital and re-organize my work schedule to go and see him. In a liberationist context, living in relationships is about choosing to enter a world in which vulnerability is a norm – without a defined exit moment in mind – and will inevitably also touch the researcher,[82] even if always differently from the ways in which it defines the life conditions of the interlocutors.

81 Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*.

82 Thanks to Reggie Nel for our conversation on this issue.

In this sense, Gutiérrez' emphasis on integrating into the world of the poor pushes one to think of ethnography as relational life rather than as a period in life, something that the origins of the liberationist method in communities of faith and as a pastoral approach also reflect. The emphasis on research taking place in mutual relationships between human beings further resonates with German anthropologist Johannes Fabian's critique of the ways in which anthropology created and represented its object as the "other" that existed in a time different from "ours."[83] Farmer further critiques such distance creation in a liberationist context: "in times and places where books are usually written and read, it is important that we resist looking away from social suffering and pretending that the world's poorest *do* live in a country of their own."[84] Fabian and Farmer's observations on distance support my reading of the relation between relationships and ethnography through a liberationist lens. The idea of living in relationships takes the principle of living in the same world and time as a starting point, and then calls for more reflection on the nature of the ongoing sharing of life – with the motivation of being part of making a just future for all. Farmer's work as a clinician *and* researcher reflects such sharing as it does not begin or end with research, as does the work of many liberationist theologians in local faith communities.

Living in relationships adds a layer of *feeling* the world to the layer of listening to stories about the world, and directly informs one's writing. One of the moments of my conversion to understanding a world in which many of my interlocutors lived took place soon after my laptop had been stolen at the church where I was doing fieldwork.[85] Lots of people witnessed the theft. No one stopped the person who took it. Having been at the church for some time, I could easily think of good reasons for the lack of intervention. Some time passed and I had returned to the church after taking a debriefing break, a distance that I could afford unlike many others in that context. I was sitting on the floor in a corridor when two teenagers came and sat on either side of me. They had heard what had happened, and said they were sorry. Then one of them, Tinashe, empathetically noted: "It's part of life." While at the theoretical level I knew that losing one's material possessions was part of life both at the church and on the streets surrounding it, I (still) did not *know* this life. Over the years I have returned to this moment. This is not "a part of life" that is easy to

83 Fabian, *Time and the Other.*

84 Paul Farmer, "Conversion in the time of Cholera: A Reflection on Structural Violence and Social Change," in *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez*, edited by M. Griffin and J. Weiss Block, 95–145 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013), 135.

85 Also reported in Hankela, *Ubuntu*, 32–33.

comprehend from my epistemic location. Moreover, I am still at times in touch with Tinashe and, through the on-going nature of our encounter, these kinds of moments are also reinterpreted through new layers of the relationship. So, when I code interviews and think of my research questions, these experiences are one influence directing my thinking process. I do not think that such shifting of my perspective to the better understand and feel through another experience – or the rules of another social order – would have been possible without long-term relationships with my interlocutors that transcended research. I do not think that I would have come to think of social justice or to read theorists in ways that I have (and I surely have not arrived yet) if it were not for this sharing of life. There is nothing special about such relationships to the liberationist method in general, other than perhaps the combination of living together and systematically using ethnographic methods that I believe can strengthen liberationist work. Yet it is worth reflecting on, as this is the space to think *with*.

Importantly though, living in relationships does not have impact on one's epistemic location changing. I still think from my white and middle-class body. However, relationships with people from another epistemic location do impact on my thinking – in a similar way as, for instance, my reading in liberation theologies or decolonial thought. In that sense the epistemic location is not static or absolutely predefined by the social location of the thinking and feeling subject; but nothing will ever provide me access to thinking from the epistemic location of a young, black, low-income Zimbabwean migrant. Neither does the notion of living in relationships allow one to condone an idealisation of poverty by pretending that a professional academic shares the life conditions of the interlocutors: I, for instance, do not; I drive to the suburbs and sleep behind burglar doors.

In discussing the power of life to convert, the focus has been on the conversion of the researcher. Yet the question of what research gives to, or takes from, the interlocutors is no less important from a liberationist perspective. While the community, its thinking and realities, defines conversion, ethnographic practice can also provide the members of the community places of conversion: places to think and rethink their ideological/religious/political positions or to process their life stories.[86] The idea of the interlocutors' conversion (say towards the dogma of liberationist ethics) also presents critical questions concerning research as a way of colonization. As these questions require more attention than that provided by one section of a chapter, I leave them for the future.

86 See Hankela, "Ethnographic Research," 207–210; Nadar, "Stories," 24–25.

7 Conversion in a Mixed Community

These relationships have taught me that in order to convert to a liberationist position, one does not have to engage with a conscientized – in the Freirean sense – community of liberationists. Even if not every marginalized person is conscientized to think from the place of being black/poor/female/LGTBI,[87] the marginalized nevertheless think from a social location defined by their blackness/socioeconomic position/gender/orientation, and that is the place one needs to engage to learn to know differently, and in particular to understand, inequality. My converting has by no means been restricted to conversations and encounters with only the liberationists-at-heart, or self-identified decolonialists, and I find it vital for system-critical scholars not to predetermine the limits to liberationist knowledge or predetermine who may carry, provide, or embody it. Such predetermination would lead to straightjacketing the marginalized person with a higher knowledge of "true" liberation, or, in other words, to claim that knowledge must fit the liberationist frame predefined by oneself.[88]

Yet, as a liberationist scholar, I do listen to interlocutors' stories – like every other story in the world – from a particular normative position.[89] Thus one begins by acknowledging one's own "faith," and its implications for responding to the views of the interlocutor. But as long as it is not a position of "knowing better," but rather one that is open to dialogue and one that acknowledges that conversion to new knowing may take place where the two horizons fuse, in the Gadamerian sense, this does not need to undermine the interlocutor's knowing. Ghanaian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye's explanation of how other people's thoughts from other contexts are approached in African women's theology illustrates such dialogue:

> Other people's thoughts and arguments become stimulants, and not points of argument aimed at establishing what is definitive. Rather, the approach is that of dialogue as women aim at affirmations, continued questioning of tradition in view of contemporary challenges…[90]

87 Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ," in *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez*, eds. M. Griffin and J. Weiss Block (Orbis, Maryknoll, 2013), 147–159; Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing"; Biko, *I Write*; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

88 Hankela, "Ethnographic Research," 206; see also Freire, *Pedagogy,* 90.

89 See Hankela, "Ethnographic Research," 206–207.

90 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 11.

I then bring my liberationist thinking into the dialogue, not as a superior knowing but as the place where I begin to question. Sometimes the dialogue begins during the conversation with the interlocutor; at other times it emerges in one's study, between an interview transcription and literature.

For instance, I had already known Richie for a long time when I interviewed him formally. In the interview, talking of the jobs that he did to fund his studies, he said he did not want to describe the "illegal" aspects of one of them. Having a hunch from our previous informal conversations about the nature of what he called illegal, I suspect that I would have instead primarily seen such aspects of this given job as a product of the oppressive and biased, or in other ways "illegal," nature of the framework within which the society functions. Richie's choosing to mention but not elaborate on the "illegal" matters in a recorded interview is telling about what is entailed in conversion to listening to, feeling, and conversing with a person who has a different lived experience. It is not a process of simply being told the incontrovertible "truth" by a given marginalized group of people (e.g., I can disagree with Richie about whether what he thinks is illegal, really should be singled out as illegal in a broader framework), but rather one of learning how, for instance, Richie understands and negotiates his marginalized epistemic and social location through both adapting to an unequal social order and constructing parallel social orders within which to live. And then I, the researcher, think about his understandings and negotiations in relation to the other truths of, for instance, liberationist scholars.[91]

8 Concluding Thoughts

If being and becoming human is a relational process, the researcher is part and parcel of either the actualization or the exploitation of the humanity of others. Indeed, because of the potential of research to do either, hard questions of research ethics and practice become fundamental. This is even more pronounced in the context of race and – closely related to race – class. Is sufficient conversion even possible in the context of a white, middle-class, Finnish researcher writing on the experience of low-income black communities and persons in South Africa when one takes into consideration the prevalent geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge? Is liberationist conversion – and the liberationist personal politics of the researcher – enough to stop theological ethnography on Africa from succumbing to the age-old racist tendency of fictionalizing the

91 See Hankela, "Ethnographic Research," 206–207; see also Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South,* loc 53, on "grounded theory."

continent and her people? While the particular questions I ask rise from my positionality, liberationist scholars from other social/epistemic locations, even those that are closer to that of their interlocutors, need to consider similar questions to remain true to the preferential option and on-going conversion.

From the perspective of the preferential option, holistic transformation (economic, political, social, spiritual), or decolonization, is a key measure of liberationist ethnography. For Gutiérrez the preferential option for the marginalized requires solidarity, and solidarity requires conversion. For a privileged academic this cannot happen without crossing over symbolic and/or social boundaries – whether this happens in the field, in terms of theoretical choices, or in friendships. Gutiérrez speaks of "a certain integration" into the world of the marginalized as a critical aspect of a conversion process, and indeed such "integration" as an aspect of research has been one of my converters, even if I prefer to speak of "living in relationships." Long-term relationships, which are not (solely) defined by research, can, one hopes, allow space for real solidarity to emerge, as also implied by Cone above. Yet although the on-going conversion of the privileged researcher might be necessary for her or his being part of a liberationist movement, the researcher's conversion is not the aim of liberationist ethnography: such a conclusion would make a mockery of the preferential option. But if the liberationist movement towards just transformation is the aim, in/through faculties of theology, liberationist ethnography could be a method that promotes that movement.

With this in mind, one must constantly check one's motivation for, and ways of doing, research across social/symbolic boundaries in order not to slip into using the marginalized person as a means of boosting one's career or feeling good about one's politics or solidifying the racist world order: What drives my commitment to this context? Do I manage to reverse unjust power relations through my research in any way? Do my research and writing aim for "the creation of a new symbolic and material order that takes the full spectrum of human history, its achievements and its failures, into view"?[92] One would then consider both the impact of one's work on academic/societal/ecclesial transformation and, on the other hand, the impact of the research process on the lives of the interlocutors. The nature of relational living emphasizes the fact that the researcher is a responsible human being in relation to the interlocutors – not only in relation to posing a challenge to structures – and vice versa.[93]

If the direction of conversion, and thus the direction of transformation, ought to be defined by the living conditions and thinking of a particular group of marginalized people, one needs to think about the particular context of one's

92 Maldonado-Torres, "The Topology of Being," 36.

93 See also Hankela, "Ethnographic Research," 206.

research carefully: Is the crossing of social/symbolic boundaries suggested by Gutiérrez' understanding of conversion fruitful in South Africa today? What would it look like in Johannesburg? Can a research project – of a Finnish researcher in the context of a Zimbabwean community – be designed in a way that it becomes a space of reimagining power relations and existing ideas of knowledge instead of solidifying them? Again, these questions remain open for me as the role of self-reflexivity here is not to make oneself feel good but to push the boundaries.

Since the self-understanding generated by liberationist ethnography stems from being part of reimagining the world, one cannot convert in relation to the field and then retreat back into being content in a hipsterdom of liberal scholars. Conversion that is limited to the field does not break away from a geopolitics of knowledge according to which theory comes from the North. In practice, the researcher is responsible for taking the conversion into teaching and academic conversations. Indeed, the decolonial call to decenter Europe in academia also speaks to the liberationist discourse itself, and, for instance, challenges the heavy use of European thought in the writing of some liberationist thinkers.

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CHAPTER 5

Re-thinking the Study of Religion: Lessons from Field Studies of Religions in Africa and the African Diaspora

Galia Sabar

Three stories, recorded from my field notes, comprise this chapter. These encounters provide insights into how I formulated my work with, and study of religion among, different societies from the African continent. The first occurred in the early 1980s in Ethiopia, when I was studying Ethiopian Jews at the beginning of my academic training. The second took place in the late 1980s, when I was about to begin my PhD fieldwork in Kenya, and the third in Israel with African Christian labor migrants, nearly 20 years later.

For 30 years, I have studied Judaism, Christianity, and local religions, mainly through an anthropological and qualitative lens, in Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, South Sudan, Rwanda, Cameroon, and Eritrea. The three encounters served as milestones during these years, forcing me to critically reflect on my understanding of the belief systems I was studying, more specifically to re-think the relations between anthropology and religion, theory and praxis, researchers' identities and informants' identities, research missions and daily practicalities.

In this chapter, I discuss some major challenges I have faced over the years. Two main issues have kept appearing: (1) Can researchers such as myself, who belong, or are seen as belonging, to specific groups/identities study others who are, or who are seen as, different? And (2) How close is my understanding of the religions I studied, of their manifestations and meaning to the people who believe in these religions, and to those of other researchers? My starting point was that there are more commonalities than differences when conducting fieldwork anywhere in the world, and that the "right" combination of knowledge, research tools, curiosity, empathy, sensitivity, humility, and reflexivity would enable me to conduct scientifically-grounded research, even when the gaps appeared enormous between me and the people I was researching.

While writing this chapter, I kept hearing Talal Asad's[1] critique of anthropological work, in general, and anthropology that deals with other people's

1 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Talal Asad, *Formation of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

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religion, in particular. His warning against the overarching false Westernization of our analysis of religion, including accepted dichotomies between religious and secular spheres, forced me to look for religion in different, unconventional spaces. Unfortunately, when I started my academic career, these voices resonated less in my studies. The more I worked, I listened for religion in melodies and sounds that went beyond accepted academic norms and, at the same time, looked for collisions between "the secular" and "the religious." I constantly asked myself: What was I seeing? Why is this being done this way? And what are its meanings?

Since I always used the qualitative paradigm, the underlying principle was that there is always a multiplicity of understandings, and this is the best way to comprehend life situations. However, I wondered how distant my understandings of people's religiosity were from theirs. Obviously, other related issues arose, such as my position as a researcher in the field, my own religious identity, my choice of interviewees, the power relations between us, and more. Below I elaborate on the dilemmas I faced and the ways I handled them by referring to my own research and relevant academic literature.

1 Encounter # 1: A Jew amongst Jews?

My first visit to the African continent was in 1983, when I was 20 years old, when I escorted North American Jewish leaders to Ethiopia. For the next two years, I entered Ethiopia a dozen times. I toured the entire country, but mainly remained in the north, where most Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israel) lived. At the time, Ethiopia was under the dictatorship of Mengistu Halie Mariam. Millions were suffering from severe famine and violence due to the horrific civil war.[2] Israel, supported by Canada and the US, was relentlessly and secretly trying to assist local Ethiopian Jews in coming to Israel.[3] For months, I escorted many

2 Edmond J. Keller, "Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 4 (1992): 609–624.

3 Lisa Anteby-Yemini, "Promised Lands, Imagined Homelands: Ethiopian Jews Immigration to Israel," in *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return,* ed. Andreas Stefansson and Fran Markowitz (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 146 64; Abraham Edga, *A Journey Towards the Dream* (Edga Publishing, 2000); Uri Rada, *From Ethiopia Via Sudan to Mt. Herzel: The Tragedy of "Operation Moses" and the Struggle for Commemoration* (Ot Lamophet Publication, 2005).

groups that were studying the situation of the local Jews as part of their support for the clandestine rescue operations.

We visited dozens of Beta Israel villages, talking to people about their daily lives, their religion, life in Israel, and their dreams of coming to Jerusalem and Zion. We participated in religious prayers, and in celebrations of the Shabbat and other holy days. We also visited houses and businesses run by Jews and distributed information and funds for their clandestine journey to Israel via Sudan. Over time, I established good relations with some people whom I often visited, and was given letters to family members who had left to come to Jerusalem. Each visit was emotionally loaded, and filled with moments in which I knew and felt that what I was told was only part of the story, and that my understanding was partial, if not altogether wrong. Every visit enabled me to expand my knowledge base, and at the same time made me realize that so many things remained incomprehensible to me. Questions about their kind of Judaism kept arising. Was it more Jewish or more Ethiopian? More Jewish or more Christian? What were their relations with their non-Jewish neighbors? I mainly reflected on my frames of reference for "Judaism" when observing Beta Israel.

In my diary, I wrote:

> Tadda Village, Northern Ethiopia, February, 1983.
>
> We left Gondar at 5am. The road was bumpy. Three times we were stopped by police…I think one of the barracks belonged to the liberation forces…We were well prepared with a cover story. We showed the humanitarian equipment we had…they let us continue…The destination was Tadda. We heard that most of the young men and women had left for Sudan and the remaining people were old and in great misery…Tadda looked like a deserted village…The fields were dry. No one was working, walking…somebody told me that the moment Beta Israel people left their homes, the local Christians came in, so the village is mixed now… Beta Israel Jews and local Christians…after some time…we began seeing some elders and kids…a young boy came over to me and told me that one woman wants to talk with me…I was taken into her hut. It was dark and smoky. She had a baby in her arms…there was practically nothing in the hut…She…told me that her entire family had left for Yerusalem…[Jerusalem in Amharinya] and I asked her why she had remained. She said she could not go since she was pregnant and sick. She cried. I cried…I had a feeling she was trying to say more, but I was not able to understand. She asked me to pray with her. I told her to pray and that I would repeat what she said. I asked: "Where is East? Where is Yerusalem?""Why?" she said.

> I said because we [Jews] always need to face Yerusalem when praying… She said: "Why? Yerusalem is here" [pointing to her heart]…The prayers were in Amharinya; I could catch a few words, here and there. Every time she said Yerusalem and Zion, I smiled…I repeated these words. I could see she was happy…Every few minutes she made the sign of the cross on her chest. I was surprised. I felt uncomfortable and didn't want to ask her why she was doing that. At one point, the baby cried…She said he was hungry…She cried and gave him to me…I tried to sing to him, to stop his crying…After some time, he fell asleep…in my arms…she looked at me and said: "Take him…with you to Zion, to Yerusalem, I'm sick, I will not make it…they will not bring me to Yerusalem…You are from Yerusalem," she said…"you are my sister…I have faith in you; I have faith in God…With you he will be safe."

She repeated this to me and I could not stop crying. Two young Jewish women crying and praying together, yet there was a huge gulf between us. I had a stable home and a supportive family; I had no child to feed; I was safe. Moreover, there were additional elements beyond economic and family differences that separated us. While we were connected by our Jewish religion, she prayed in a way that I, and the Jews I knew, did not (crossing herself). While I felt connected to her, as one young Jewish woman to another, I felt that our religious identity and understandings of it were very different. During the hours there I kept thinking about her, about the way she prayed, about her request to take her son. I asked myself: How can she even suggest this to me? How could she trust me? Was it because I was white, or Jewish from Jerusalem? What is she not telling me about the reasons she was left behind. Was she that desperate? Or, alternatively, optimistic and full of trust? Before departing, we hugged and prayed together.

This visit remained ingrained in my soul. It made me constantly reflect about life, the power of faith, and diversity. I realized that although I knew about the Beta Israel history and their journey to Israel, and at least officially we shared the same religion, I had very few tools to comprehend this reality, let alone know what and how to be or behave. Based on the personal relations I made during my fieldwork, I began constructing a wave of informants among the Beta Israel in Israel. They helped me reread my notes from the field trips in Ethiopia.

Years later, I focused my research on African Independent Churches, in Israel, built by West African labor migrants. In 2004, when I visited one Pentecostal church, I met an Ethiopian woman. I asked her when and how she came to Israel, and she said: "In 1984…My family is Jewish, so we came." "But you are

here in the church," I said, thinking to myself, she came as a Jew and here she is praying in a church. And she smiled. At the time, I did not pay much attention to this. Nearly a decade later, I returned to this encounter and began a new study about the Beta Israel and the religious world of Judaism in Ethiopia and Israel.

My early research focused on their situation in Ethiopia, under Mengistu, and on their struggles with the rabbinical institutions in Israel over questions concerning their Judaism and unique religiosity.[4] Obviously, the latter topic also dealt with issues of race and ethnicity.

While there have been many studies of different aspects of the Beta Israel, little has been written on those who immigrated as Jews, but were practicing something else. Hardly anybody spoke about these people, and when one heard about them, it would usually be in the form of a rumor or a well-kept secret. In 2013 I began studying these Ethiopian migrants who came due to their Jewish heritage, but opted to practice Christianity in Israel. They did this in spite of vocal antagonism from the rabbinical and other Beta Israel institutions. After reading Talal Asad's seminal work on secularization,[5] I realized that in my work in the 1980s in Ethiopia, I had questioned my analytical categories, and frames of reference and comparison. Moreover, I realized that, regardless of my intensive and lengthy fieldwork, my academic training, and the keen will to learn, doubts would always remain concerning the relevance of my conceptions, questions, and understandings as they were less flexible than the realities I was studying.

Below I shed light on this unique phenomenon of Christian Jews in Israel. I begin with a short history of Jews in Ethiopia and then elaborate on those who are now practicing (Pentecostal) Christianity in Israel. To the best of my knowledge, there are very few articles on this group, mainly by Don Seeman.[6]

4 Galia Sabar-Friedman, "The History of Beta-Israel," in *Saga of Aliyah: The Jews of Ethiopia: Aspects of their Linguistic and Educational Absorption*, eds. H. Polani and V. Nezer (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1990); Galia Sabar-Friedman and Yossi Friedman, "Changes amongst Ethiopian Jews 1974–1983," *Peamim* 33 (1987): 128–139.

5 Asad, *Formation.*

6 Don Seeman, "The Question of Kinship: Bodies and Narratives in the Beta Israel-European Encounter (1860–1920)," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30, no. 1 (2000): 86–120; Don Seeman, "Agency, Bureaucracy and Religious Conversion: Ethiopian "Felashmura" Immigrants in Israel," in *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, eds. A. Buckser & S. Glazier (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing House, 2003); Don Seeman, *One People, One Blood: Ethiopian Israelis and the Return to Judaism* (New Jersey, MD: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

2 Religious and Historical Notes on the Beta Israel and Falash Mura (Converted Jews)

The controversy about the origin of Black Jews in Ethiopia remains unresolved. Modern scholars of Ethiopian history and Ethiopian Jews propose two conflicting hypotheses. The first claims that they are descendants of ancient Jewish origin (from Yemen or Egypt).[7] The second postulates the ethno-genesis of the Beta Israel as occurring between the 14th and 16th centuries, from a sect of Ethiopian Christians who adopted Biblical Old Testament practices, and came to identify as Jews.[8] However, many historians agree that because of their close proximity to Ethiopian Christians, the borders between the two religions were frequently blurred and crossed.[9]

In the mid-19th century, following missionary activities, between 1,500 and 2,000 Beta Israel Jews converted to Christianity.[10] Over the years, the number of converts grew, and today they are known as "Falash Mura."[11] Protestant missionaries' activities in Ethiopia brought the existence of Black Jews to the West's attention. As a result, during the late 19th to early 20th century, several European rabbis recognized the Jewishness of the Beta Israel community, establishing several Jewish schools in Ethiopia.[12]

2.1 *Migrating to Israel*

While a few Beta Israel came to Israel between 1948 and the 1970s, most came after 1973, following Israeli Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's proclamation that the Beta Israel were descendants of the ten lost tribes – hence, Jews. This led to Israel's official recognition of the Beta Israel as Jews who are entitled, under

7 Michael Corinaldi, *Jewish Identity – The Case of Ethiopian Jewry* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1998); I. Ephraim, *The Falasha: Black Jews of Ethiopia* (New Orleans: Dillard University Scholar, 1974); Shalom Sharon, *From Sinai to Ethiopia* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Sefarim, 2012).

8 Steven Kaplan and Chaim Rosen, "Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *The American Jewish Year Book* 94 (1994): 59–109; Simon Messing, *The story to the Falashas: black Jews of Ethiopia* (Brooklyn, NY: Balshar Printing, 1982); Hagar Salamon, *The Hyena People: Ethiopian Jews in Christian Ethiopia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1999).

9 Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel* (*Falasha*) *in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* (New York: NYU Press, 1995).

10 *Ibid.*, 127–128.

11 Daniel Friedman, "The case of the Falas Mura," in *The Beta Israel in Ethiopia and Israel*, eds. Tudor Parfitt and E.T. Semi, (Survey: Curzon Press, 1998), 70–80; Seeman, *One People*.

12 Wolf Leslau, *Falasha Anthology* (Yale University Press, 1951); Messing, *The story to the Falashas*; Salamon, The Hyena People.

the Law of Return, to migrate to Israel and gain immediate citizenship[13]. Ethiopian Jews began their journey to Israel, formally assisted by the Israeli government. However, in spite of the official recognition, Israel's Chief Rabbinate required them to undergo Jewish conversions, to remove any doubt concerning their Jewish status. This demand caused pain and anger among the Beta Israel.[14]

Under Mengistu Haile Mariam's despotic regime, the Beta Israel's zeal to relocate to Israel had to overcome an official ban on Ethiopians' exiting Ethiopia. Hence, from 1979, Beta Israel migration was carried out secretly, via Sudan. By 1984, approximately 10,000 came to Israel with the active assistance of Israeli agents. The unexpected halt of these missions, in April 1984, left thousands of Beta Israel stranded in Sudan or en route. Following Mengistu's downfall, approximately 15,000 Beta Israel were brought by the State of Israel directly from Ethiopia to Israel.

At the end of 1991, the Israeli government declared the mission to rescue Ethiopian Jews complete. Nevertheless, thousands of Ethiopians began arriving in Addis Ababa declaring themselves to be Jewish converts to Christianity – Falash Mura – and asking to immigrate to Israel. Hence, in 1992, Falash Mura with relatives in Israel began migrating. The Falash Mura's plea instigated a fierce debate in Israel tied to the potential limits of costly social, political, and economic forms of solidarity with people whose Jewishness was in question.[15] Were the descendants of apostates still Jews, and how was the state to relate to them? Was their professed "penitence" necessary or efficacious, and how could it be measured in terms meaningful to state bureaucracy?

Following local and international pressure, the Israeli government allowed the Falash Mura to migrate to Israel. They were required to complete a "Return to Judaism" program as part of the process of gaining recognition as Jews in Israel.[16] While the government hoped that admitting these Falash Mura would bring the migration from Ethiopia to an end, new waves continued to arrive in Addis Ababa demanding to join their families in Israel and restrictions were imposed on the number allowed to do so. Hence, since 2003, approximately 300 Falash Mura arrive in Israel every month after a conversion process is carried out in Addis Ababa. All gain Israeli citizenship upon arrival. In 2018, the

13 The Law of Return (1950) entitles all Jews in the world to immigrate to Israel. The Law of Citizenship (1950) grants them automatic citizenship upon arrival. Non-Jews, however, have almost no legal avenues to citizenship or even to official temporary resident status.

14 Anteby-Yemini, "Promised Lands"; Kaplan and Rosen, "Ethiopian Jews."

15 Don Seeman, "Coffee and the Moral Order: Ethiopian Jews and Pentecostals Against Culture," *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 4 (2015): 734–748.

16 Seeman, *One people*.

number of Ethiopians in Israel – including those who migrated and those born in Israel – was estimated at 150,000.

2.2 *Ethiopian Religious Life in Israel: Jews versus "Pentecostal Jews"*

Most of the Beta Israel who migrated to Israel before 1992 kept a rather religious Jewish way of life, including sending their children to religious Jewish schools. Most Falash Mura, for fear of being cast out from the Beta Israel communities or denied civil rights they were entitled to as Jews, also kept a rather strict Jewish life. However, a small minority opted to practice a form of religious life termed "Pentecostal Judaism," or Beta Israel (Ethiopian) Pentecostalism.[17] From a theological perspective, this group practices a unique amalgam of Ethiopian Pentecostalism and Messianic Judaism.

Among these Ethiopian Pentecostal Jews, we identified two groups: people who came in the 1980s and early 1990s, and people who came in the Falash Mura waves of migration in the 2000s. The first cohort was culturally fluent, economically secure, and self-confident in claiming their place as Israelis. The second was socially and economically marginalized in Israel. Notwithstanding these differences, all of them practiced the major Jewish rites of passage, for instance, male baby circumcision, alongside participation in Pentecostal church services. Since, in Judaism, circumcision is framed as the entrance of a child into the "covenant of Abraham" and is considered a paradigmatic performance of Jewish religious and social connectivity, the fact that the Ethiopian Pentecostal Jews perform it is a testimony to their bricolage religious identity. Seeman claims that these individuals do not perceive this bricolage as posing any internal conflict; they do not see themselves as having left Judaism, but rather as mediating their Judaism through Christ.[18]

Obviously, their theological perspective is rejected by *all* Jewish leaders, and they became outcasts in the eyes of the Ethiopian Jewish leaders. The Pentecostal Jews were seen as opportunists who put the Jewishness of the entire Beta Israel community into doubt, hence threatening the community. As a result, the Beta Israel Pentecostals and the Falash Mura Pentecostals, rather than seeking public recognition as a separate religious community, opted to keep a very low profile.

17 Galia Sabar, "Challenging religious borders: The case of Ethiopian Jewish Pentecostal and Olumba Olumba," in *Contemporary Alternative Spirituality in Israel*, eds. Shai Feraro and James R. Lewis (London: Palgrave Macmillan Education, 2016), 12–23; Seeman, *One people*; Seeman, "Coffee and the Moral Order."

18 Seeman, *One people*.

Ethiopian Pentecostals formed two groups in terms of forms of worship. The first established small prayer fellowships, meeting in members' homes and celebrating life cycle events together. Their central prayer event was on Saturday mornings, like their Jewish relatives. The elders came to pray dressed in the traditional Ethiopian white attire. Men and women would sit separately, following codes of acceptable conduct in Ethiopia in Jewish and Christian communities. Prayers were conducted in Amharinya and Tigrinya, and the prayer books were in Geez, the ancient sacred language of Ethiopia. Religious texts from both the Old and the New Testament were used. Some of these prayer fellowships became formalized, hence renting spaces for their religious practice. One such church is the Eben Ezra Church in Southern Tel Aviv that has a membership of both Beta Israel Pentecostals and Ethiopian undocumented migrant laborers. Membership in the church has grown in the last decade; today it is estimated that they have 200–300 members. Over the years, Eben Ezra, as well as similar churches, also developed sporadic relations with local and American Messianic Jewish groups.[19]

The second group consisted of those who joined existing African Pentecostal churches, mainly in and around Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Some joined churches established by West African labor migrants and some joined those established later by Eritrean asylum seekers. All the churches accepted these newcomers' theology, which emphasized their Judaism, claiming it was mediated through Christ. Hence, the Ethiopians were seen as a blessed addition to their congregations and were presented to their members as an expansion of the work of Christ in the Holy Land.

Many of the Beta Israel Pentecostals celebrated Jewish-Israeli holidays together with other Beta Israel, not seeing anything unusual in this combination. When studying these Ethiopian Jewish-Pentecostals, I re-visited my field notes where I had recorded the young Jewish woman's prayer in Ethiopia that included making the sign of the cross, and my short encounter with an Ethiopian woman in an African Pentecostal Church in Tel Aviv in the early 2000s, who told me she came in the 1980s since her family is Jewish. Both saw my questions about their religious identity and praxis as irrelevant. This was especially clear of the woman living in Israel. Since her male children were circumcised, her children attend Israeli-Jewish schools, she celebrates Jewish/Israeli holidays, and her children enlist in the Israeli Defense Forces – she (and others like her) are in a unique position in the Israeli-Jewish world. For her the fact that she simultaneously celebrated Judaism and Christianity was a clear and coherent version of this world and not conflictual in any way.

19 Sabar, "Challenging religious borders."

During my research, I followed the basic rule of "do no harm," explicitly discussed by anthropologists,[20] being extremely careful not to be seen as threatening these Ethiopians' legal Israeli status, based on their Jewish identity. Unlike the openness that characterized my original research with Jewish-Ethiopian informants, the ability to collect reliable data for this new study was limited. In spite of my wide net of informants, this was probably the most difficult research I have undertaken, since I knew that if my publication was read by some state officials, it might be used against Ethiopian migrants' plea for Israeli inclusion and citizenship, which was based on their Jewishness. Therefore, following Seeman,[21] I emphasized that many Beta Israel who migrated to Israel did not compartmentalize religion, ethnicity, or national identity, because for them, each identity is highly contingent upon the others, in ways that render such distinctions artificial. Indeed, they all came from Ethiopia to Israel, and became Israeli citizens, and the Pentecostals considered themselves part of the Jewish world, but in a unique Christian way. Although there are only approximately 1,000 Beta Israel Pentecostals their numbers are growing. As I have illustrated, the challenge they pose to the State, to Jewish identity, to Pentecostalism and, moreover, to the study of religious boundaries and categorization, lies in the realm of ideas and cultural and religious taxonomies.

3 Encounter # 2 – Rethinking Borders between Church and Politics, between Theology and Praxis, and between Researcher and Researched

The second encounter happened in 1987 in Nairobi, Kenya. I was a PhD student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. My research focused on the relationship between Church and State in Kenya, from the late 1950s till the early 1980s. After reading everything available at the time in Israel and in other university libraries in the West, I went to Kenya to conduct fieldwork that would include visiting churches, interviewing people, and working in local archives. Although I knew no local researcher in person, I had learned about Dr. B.E.[22], a lecturer of theology at the University of Nairobi and a leading figure in the Catholic

20 Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Parts Unknown: Undercover Ethnography of the Organs-Trafficking Underworld," *Ethnography* 5, no. 1 (2004): 29–73; Elizabeth Wood, "Field Research," in *The Handbook of Comparative Politics*, eds. C. Boix and S. Stokes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 123–129.

21 Seeman, "Coffee and the Moral Order."

22 Since I did not ask permission to include her name, I will refer to her by her initials.

Church. I wrote her a letter introducing myself and asked if we could meet. I got a warm invitation to come. I was so happy. I asked her if she wanted something from the Holy Land, from Jerusalem, assuming that since she was a devout Catholic, she would ask for Holy Water or anointment oil. She said that her five-year-old son John loves to paint and that it was really hard to get good colors in Kenya. I packed my suitcase with crayons and flew to Nairobi.

I called Dr. B.E. and she kindly invited me to her house for dinner. I was warmly greeted by her and her son. After a few minutes, she excused herself so she could finish cooking, and left me with her son. I joyfully opened the colors I had brought for him and we engaged in painting. I noticed that dinner was set for four people. After some time, Dr. B.E. invited us to the table, but one person was missing. I asked: "Are we waiting for your husband?" She looked at me and said: "I'm an unmarried mother." I felt embarrassed and stupid. After a few minutes of silence, Judith, introduced to me as a relative who helps in the house, joined us for dinner. Dr. B.E. and I became friends; she not only opened research doors for me, but also taught me much about Kenyan churches and Kenyan politics. However, her reply: "I'm an unmarried mother," taught me more about Kenyan Catholicism than any academic source I read before or after. I realized that there are numerous types of Christianity and Catholicism and other forms of religious pluralism about which I was not aware, and that I needed to be open to learning about them if I wanted my research to make sense. My first visit to Kenya lasted one month.

A year later, I returned with my family, living there for almost five years, during my doctoral and post-doctoral work. My research, based on written sources, oral testimonies, and participant observation, focused on the Anglican Church and aimed to map and understand the complex relationship between Church and State. This, I thought, would be possible through identifying and analyzing the vast terrain of activities in which the churches were involved that were conducted beyond the church, that is, in education, economics, and welfare. Based on Western notions of separation between Church and State, between religious and secular realms, I assumed that the diverse church activities enabled them to expand their influence and to shape politics, although officially churches were not involved in politics.

The late 1980s were very turbulent years in Kenya. The struggles for multiparty elections, human rights, and democratization involved, among other elements, trade unions, church leaders, and women's groups. However, these activities were illegal, and their participants were accused of seditious actions by President Moi and his party, KANU. At times, churches were one of the few venues in which people could discuss politics with relative safety, as political gatherings could be disguised as religious activities. The atmosphere in Kenya

was a mixture of hope – on the side of the protestors – and suspicion and violence – on the side of the president and his supporters.

As a foreign researcher, I had to obtain clearance for my research from the Office of the President. Since my topic was clearly sensitive, I knew my request would be denied and could jeopardize my husband's work permit and our stay in the country. Moreover, I knew that if I openly discussed my research, I might endanger Kenyans who talked to me, since they could be labeled as conspiring with foreigners. As a result, I talked about my research in more religious and general terms. As a Jew, from Jerusalem, I stressed my keen interest in the local manifestations of Christian religious life. I asked the clerics, and laymen and women that I met, to tell me about their church, its activities, and its role in their lives. After a few months, I asked to join their prayers and any other church-related activities to which they agreed to invite me.

Being a practicing Reform Jew, I was well acquainted with religious rituals within the "House of God." I regularly attended prayers, women's league meetings, Bible classes, vocational training, Sunday school, and all the activities to which I was invited. After I introduced myself, almost every conversation started with the question: "Are you Christian?" "No," I would say. "So what are you?" "I'm Jewish." Some knew; others were not sure, so the next question would usually be: "Do you believe in Christ?" "No," I would say, but immediately add, "but I believe in God." From there the conversations developed in different ways, usually ending with a smile and a sentence expressing the joy they would feel if I accepted Christ. I tried to avoid debates over the differences between Judaism and Christianity, rather emphasizing the similarities and the idea that believers share many common things. However, there were times where my negative reply concerning accepting Christ would upset people and I had to be creative in order to overcome the differences between us.

Slowly, in a similar manner to the steps Agar[23] describes in *The Professional Stranger*, people became used to my presence, to my different, and yet similar, religious affiliation. Hence, my request to access church archives, and speak with people connected to the church was seen as natural in my learning process. Since church seemed to be everywhere – in schools, in clinics, in the field, in the market – I could conduct my research anywhere, while my cover story protected me and my informants, making it possible to continue. Yet, from an ethical standpoint, I was not completely honest with the people I was researching. This issue, sometimes referred to as the "informing dilemma," is extensively

23 Michael Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography* (London: Academic Press, 1996).

discussed in the literature. However, as England[24] and Arendell[25] conclude, there is no clear rule as to how much, and about what, researchers should inform their informants. Each one makes his/her own choices about what to share. Expressing my keen interest and knowledge in local manifestations of Christianity, and participating in religious ceremonies and other church-related activities, enabled me to become an "outsider trusted with inside knowledge."[26]

I traveled the country, and spoke with hundreds of people, mostly women. Some became part of my life; they invited me to their homes and to meet their families and I invited them to my home and to meet mine. For over a year, I made daily visits to several churches, actively participating in religious celebrations of all types. Nearly a year was devoted to reading church documents kept in local rural churches and in the central archives in Nairobi. I read hundreds of church minutes, diocesan reports, and any other written texts I could find. I learned the history and theology of the churches, their financial status, relations with other local churches, and with "mother churches" in Europe. I read religious texts handed out by local clerics, followed TV and radio sermons delivered by leading clerics, and followed the heated debate between state officials and church leaders over contested political issues.

After learning that the clerics from the Central Province were vocally criticizing political policies, I focused my fieldwork in that geographical area. For months I had asked, indirectly and politely, for permission to take part in meetings organized by women in one of the Central Province's Dioceses. I learned that under the guise of Bible reading meetings, heated – unlicensed – political debates were being conducted and that at some of those meetings, members of the illegal political opposition were present. All my requests were ignored/indirectly rejected.

One day, due to a misunderstanding at home, I had to take my two young children with me to the "field," to the church in Mt. Kenya. Their presence aroused a joy that I had not experienced before. My request that one young woman watch them while I attended a Bible class was immediately fulfilled with a big smile. At the end of that meeting, while joining the other mothers with my own children for tea, the long-awaited invitation came through. One of them said that since I had trusted them with my children, this proved that

24 Kim V.L. England, "Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality and Feminist Research," *The Professional Geographer* 46, no. 1 (1994): 80–89.

25 Terry Arendell, "Reflections on the Researcher-Researched Relationship: A woman Interviewing Men," *Qualitative Sociology* 20, no. 3 (1997): 341–368.

26 Sandra Meike Bucerius, "Becoming a 'trusted outsider,'" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 42, no. 6 (2013): 690–721.

I was not only interested in their religious life and belief system, but truly had an open heart to learn about their daily realities, their inner thoughts, and their emotions. "Our Christianity is not only about what the Bishop says," one of them said to me, adding:

> It's not just those papers he gives out before the sermon. It is much more…how the church takes care of us as people, how it takes care of our children…How it looks into the future and wants it to be better for us, *wananchi* [common men and women in Kiswahili]…When Bishop speaks about Nabot, Achaab, and the vineyard, we all know who are the corrupt leaders he is thinking of…when he criticizes what is going on in Kenya, he speaks from the Bible…God is everywhere, even in politics.
>
> J. KIMATHI, Mt. Kenya East, June, 1989

The act of bringing my children enabled the women to trust me, to invite me to those secret meetings, to help me better understand things that were going on in deeper layers of existence. I trusted them with my children and they trusted me with their precious assets. Bringing my children to the field was not the outcome of an ethical position or an ideological stand; it was a technical issue. However, unconsciously, it was the result of a basic trust that had developed and had enormous academic and personal ramifications for me. At that moment, I gained the trust of my informants.

Many anthropologists, among them Abramovitz[27] and Geertz,[28] point to that elusive moment of acceptance, that unclear moment when the outsider gains credit that enables him/her to enter the informants' previously blocked physical and emotional areas. Bringing my children into the field became a frequent event, creating a new arena of shared motherhood. That act, not described in any qualitative methodologies' textbook, was a turning point in my research. Re-reading my notes from the field, I realized that bringing my children into the field was an act of breaking the boundaries between the professional and the personal. This, in turn, enabled the church women to break the boundaries between "religious activities" and "political activities," and let me enter the expanded terrain of religion.

27 Henry Abramovitz, "Funeral in Jerusalem: An Anthropological point of View," in *Israel – Local Anthropology*, eds. O. Abohav et al. (Tel Aviv: Cherikover Publishers: 1988), 181–196.

28 Clifford Gertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist As Author* (Stanford University Press, 1990.)

Several feminist researchers have stressed that women researchers should not blur their gender-related identities, including their motherhood, but rather use them, even celebrate them within fieldwork.[29] This position challenges the idea of professional neutrality. They assert that when both men and women, anywhere, are visited by researchers, they are always aware of the researcher's gender. Since both researchers and participants are well aware of gender issues, why should we try to disguise/ignore them? Therefore, exposing parts of the researchers' identity should enhance trust and intimacy, so crucial for fieldwork. Acts of openness have also brought about negative responses, however, such as those painfully reported by Davis[30] who met with anger from women whom she revisited years after researching them, since they perceived her decision not to marry or have children as making her less of a person.

As I studied the significance of belief systems for the believers, the newly exposed venues opened new doors of understanding. I read the religious texts delivered in the sermons in new ways, and I believe that these new readings were closer to the ways local church members comprehended the texts. I eventually published several articles and one book on the multi-dimensional role of the Anglican Church in Kenyan politics and society, discussing how the church was able to penetrate the political arena and challenge accepted boundaries between private and public spheres, between politics and religion.[31]

In 2009, I returned to the religious texts produced by the leading Anglican clergyman, Bishop Dr. David Gitari, centering my analysis on them. For months I re-read his sermons, posing Talal Asad's question offered at the end of *Genealogies of Religion*:[32] "Must our critical ethnographies of other traditions in modern nation-states adopt the categories offered by liberal theory? Or can they contribute to the formulation of very different political futures in which other traditions can thrive?" Dissatisfied with attempts to refine "liberal theory,"

29 Arendell, "Reflections"; Pnina Mutzafi-Haller, "You have an Authentic Voice: Anthropological Research and the Politics of Representation," *Teoriyah U'bikoret* 11 (1997): 81–99.

30 Dona L. Davis, "Unintended Consequences: My myth of 'The Return' in Anthropological Fieldwork," in When They Read What We Write: The politics of Ethnography, ed. C.B. Brettell, 27–37 (Westport, CN – London: Bergin and Garvey, 1996).

31 Galia Sabar-Friedman "'Politics' and 'Power' in the Kenyan Public Discourse: Recent Events," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 29, no. 3 (1995): 429–453; Galia Sabar-Friedman, "The Power of The Familiar: Everyday Practice in the Anglican Church of Kenya," *Church and State* 38 (1996): 377–397; Galia Sabar-Friedman, "Church and State in Kenya, 1986–1992: The Churches' Involvement in the 'Game of Change'," *African Affairs* 96, no. 382 (1997): 25–52; Galia Sabar, *Church , State, and Society in Kenya; From Mediation to Opposition, 1963–1993* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

32 Asad, *Formation,* 306.

and secularism, Asad[33] hoped to cultivate different political futures with his work. According to him, Western liberalism does not have the resources to address contemporary social needs, especially when it comes to matters of pluralism, including in religious, cultural, and political spheres.

In my analysis of Gitari's work, I found similar modes of thought. Unlike those who claimed that modernity and democracy cannot go hand in hand with religiosity, or who positioned religiosity vis-à-vis secularism and claimed that the first is the mandate of the Church and celebrated within the private sphere and the latter is the mandate of the State and practiced in the public sphere, Gitari[34] argued that the quest for modernity has different modalities. The call for democracy can have several manifestations and all can be advocated and constructed by devoted believers, religious leaders, and lay members alike, in different spaces of life.

Interestingly, Gitari, in his sermons, mainly accused the local Kenyan political leadership of adopting this narrow dichotomy understanding of politics versus religion, of public versus private space. Well aware of the political circumstances and narrow personal interest that led the Kenyan regime to adopt this dichotomy, Bishop Gitari called for a re-thinking of these boundaries. His call – echoed by other Kenyan and African intellectuals like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o[35] and Achille Mbembe[36] – should be understood not only as part of a local struggle for change, but also as part of a larger struggle to de-colonize the minds of his own people.

I tried to avoid constructing the Christianity I was learning and rituals I was observing as realms of merely symbolic activity, unrelated to the instrumental behavior of everyday life, including politics. Hence, the religious discourses I found and analyzed were a mixture of those normatively considered to be religious, that is, sermons, Bible reading, and the actual doings – considered secular – of the church, as part of the religious realm. The analysis was undertaken within the political-social context of Kenya and the post-colonial paradigm. This enabled me to claim that, in Kenya, some of the churches not only assumed leading political roles through a wide range of activities within public and private domains and offered innovative readings of biblical episodes, but also constructed a new language. This language was embedded in biblical

33 Asad, *Formation.*

34 David Gitari, *Let The Bishop Speak* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1988); David Gitari, "A Christian Perspective on Nation Building," *EFAC Bulletin* 47 (1996): 19–23; David Gitari, *In Season and Out of Season: Sermons to a Nation* (Oxford: Regnum, 1996).

35 Ngugi Wa Thiongo, *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature.* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational, 1986).

36 Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Oakland: California University Press, 2001).

metaphors, myths, and miracles, as well as within the history of resistance and modernity, one that was both religious and secular. It used the accepted divisions while being neither this nor that. It was new and innovative.

4 Encounter # 3: A White Jewish Citizen among Black, Christian, Illegal Migrant Workers in Israel

The third encounter happened in 2000, while studying churches in Tel Aviv built and run by West African Christian labor migrants. In 1997 I began research on undocumented African labor migrants in Israel, a new phenomenon at the time. My research concentrated on the social and political organizations these migrants had created for themselves and by themselves, focusing on the dozens of African Initiated Churches (AICs) they created in the "Holy Land." For three years, I sat in hundreds of religious sermons, ceremonies, and participated in personal and community celebrations including naming and dedication parties, weddings, and funerals. I was invited to special sessions dedicated to personal testimonies and spiritual healing. I interviewed hundreds of men and women, and had a good network of informants, some of whom became personal friends.

I made my way into the realm of local African migrants, and in particular, to their religious world, by chance. In August 1997, when walking in southern Tel Aviv, I noticed that the woman walking next to me was singing a gospel song to herself. She had an incredible voice. I stopped and said to her: "You have a great voice." She smiled and thanked me. "Where do you sing?" "In the church." I asked: "In Jaffa?" (where all the official established churches were located). She smiled and said no. "So where?" She pointed to a nearby building and said: "Here I sing." And I said: "Where?" "In our church." I said: "What? There is a church here? I thought that there were only small factories and warehouses." "You are invited to come on Saturday and hear me sing," she replied. I came. She was surprised and happy as were the other members of her church. This was the beginning of nearly two decades of research on African migration to Israel, a journey that started in the religious realm. Over time, I became involved with Israeli NGOS that assisted migrants in need. The combination of coming through the invitation of a choir member and the fact that I was a local human-rights activist made my entry into the field relatively easy.

Here in Israel, I had to learn about a new Christian arena, outside of the mainstream Christianity of the Holy Land, that had established churches such as the Church of Pentecost, and other, newer ones, like the Resurrection and Living Bread Ministry International, the Charismatic Catholic Church of Tel

Aviv, and even a branch of the Nigerian-based Olumba Olumba, considered by all – except its members – as a cult that worshipped Satan. Almost all the services included singing and dancing, personal testimonies, preaching, and offerings. Some included the casting out of demons, others engaged in healing procedures. All churches were led by men, though women made up the vast majority of their members. All clerics were locally trained and, except for one church that had a professional full-time pastor, all had clerics who worked as cleaners during the day and put on their clerical gowns during church services. For me, this was a new world of plurality, innovation, flexibility, and adaptability.

Following Bourdieu,[37] Geertz,[38] and Horton,[39] who explored the origins of large cultural constructs – such as religion, race, or nationality – through studying what people do and think in their everyday lives, I too tried to engage in similar work through an intimate ongoing field study that lasted over a decade. I read hundreds of documents produced by church leaders and members of the different churches, participated in countless community and personal gatherings and celebrations, and interviewed hundreds of believers and churchgoers, as well as others.

I studied the Christian faith of my informants within the wider sociopolitical context of Israel. This period was marked by its strict laws and regulations regarding non-Jewish migration, deportation processes, two wars, and economic crises. The fact that the churches served as enclaves of sanity and islands of dignity and self-respect was evident to me.

4.1 *Daily Realities of Labor Migrants in Israel*

African labor migrants began arriving in Israel in the late 1980s, becoming part of a larger group of international migrant workers in Israel. However, unlike most of the others, none of the Africans had work permits, and were illegally in the country.[40] Nevertheless, within a short time, they managed to build for themselves, and by themselves, an elaborate network of organizations that catered to their social, economic, emotional, religious, and political lives. Living

37 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 2005), 241–258.

38 Clifford Gertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books Publishing House, 1973).

39 Paul B. Horton and Gerald R. Leslie, *The Sociology of Social Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

40 Galia Sabar, "African Christianity in the Jewish State: Adaptation, Accommodation and Legitimisation of Migrant Workers' Churches: 1990–2003," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34, no. 4 (2004): 407–437.

as undocumented laborers, who were also black and Christian, within a predominately white and Jewish society, positioned them as the "ultimate other." And still, in spite of the difficulties embedded in such an existence, their cultural life was rich, their economic situation was relatively good, and their religious arena was vibrant and met their Christian needs in the Holy Land.

When I began my research on African migrants in Israel, most studies focused on push and pull factors of migration and issues related to their il/legal status.[41] After years of researching African Christianities within Africa, I thought that what was happening in Israel, in the heart of Tel Aviv, was amazing. Within a few years, these Africans established over 60 churches. My first question addressed why they did not attend existing churches and, after that, dozens of others arose.

Day after day, I knocked on the doors of old warehouses in the rundown areas of Tel Aviv, trying to see what was going on there. Who are the people who come to these places and transform them into Houses of God? Within a short time, I was able to map this new African Christian arena. Some of the churches had a handful of members; others had several hundreds. All, however, rented halls, established a band and a choir, and offered Bible classes, women's meetings, and other social and welfare services. Most migrants came to one of the churches at least once a week; most of them came more often. Keeping up the church was an expensive endeavor, since all expenses were covered by the members. To the best of my knowledge, hardly any church received external funding; on the contrary, many of them supported churches back home. Clearly, the members were emotionally, socially, and financially committed to this project. Once again, I understood the power of religious organizations as institutions that have the monopoly over faith, and offer hope in times of need and despair that are embedded in the ongoing experience of being an undocumented labor migrant.

The Christianity practiced by Africans in Israel was not a new invention, but it was flexible and sensitive to its members' needs, as well as to local and international circumstances. This flexibility enabled the churches to flourish within a generally tolerant, but nonetheless alien and restrictive climate; to make themselves available and attractive to members of different national, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds and to a younger membership than was usual in

41 Ronit Bar-Tzuri, "Foreign workers in Israel," in *The World of Work in an Era of Economic Change*, ed. R. Nathanson (Tel Aviv: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 1996), 13–34; Adriana Kemp, Rebecca Raijma, Julia Resnik, and Silvina Schammah Gesser, "Contesting the Limits of Political Participation: Latinos and Black African Migrant Workers in Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000): 94–119.

Africa; and to address the needs and concerns of the African migrant community that the mainstream churches ignored. It enabled them to provide a place where Africans felt comfortable among other Africans and could seek personal salvation and express their African-ness in all of its diversity: in music, rites, and language, in dress and behavior, and in the style and content of their worship.

During my first years of research, I attended three to four church-related activities every week, including the main church service on Saturday (the main day of worship, so people would not lose a day of work), weekday prayers, Bible classes, choir rehearsals, mother's group meetings, and so on. On weekdays, church activities started around 8 in the evening so that people could join after work. At times, these activities ended far past midnight and I knew that most participants had to wake up early to go to work.

I asked Rosie, one of the church leaders, how many times she came to church. "Many…Three, maybe four times." "Where do you get the energy to come so many times?" I asked.

> …I live in a small room, I share the apartment with four other ladies. Every day I clean houses, I go from one dirty place to another…I go on the side of the streets; I try not to attract any attention. I come home dead tired… But if it's Sunday, we have a Women's League meeting, if it's Tuesday I have choir rehearsal…I collect my little energy and go. You know why? Because here I belong. This is mine. Here I pray and get the power to go on…I work, I save, I send back home. They need me…Here in church everybody knows my name, my full name. Some know my family; they know who I am and what I am…For them I'm not just Rosie the house cleaner.
>
> FIELD DIARY Tel Aviv 2001

Rosie's words reflected the importance of focusing on everyday practices and, at the same time, looking *everywhere* for different manifestations of their belief system: that is, in their work places, private spheres, and in their dreams, sense of worthiness, and aspirations. This raised crucial dilemmas concerning the boundaries and the power relations between me, the researcher, and the researched people. On the one hand, all my informants were illegal in Israel. Hence, letting me into their churches, homes, and gathering places could have been seen as a potential threat. Moreover, I was an Israeli citizen and could have been perceived as part of the mechanisms that prevented them from gaining legal status. The fact that they let me in was a testimony to my status as a trustworthy person that would not put them into jeopardy. Within the wider

Israeli context I was local and legal, and they were outsiders and illegal. However, within the research context they had the upper hand since they had the information I wanted and it was their goodwill and cooperation that made the study possible. From the beginning of this research, I introduced myself and the purpose of my study. I tried to create a more balanced relationship in which I would learn from them, and in return, do my best to assist them in their daily encounters with Israeli authorities. Hence, for years I acted as a mediator and translator, as a social activist advocating their rights.

After some time, some of the people I studied became close to me and my family. We visited one another in our homes; I went to their churches and celebrations and they came to mine. The Reform Synagogue in Tel Aviv, where I am an active member, became a hub for inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue between African labor migrants and Israelis. Our house became a place for church community meetings and, at times, a safe zone for members in need.

Following Silverman[42] and Wooffitt and Widdicombe,[43] to name but a few who stress the advantages embedded in flexible boundaries between the researcher and his/her researched people, I realized that this mode of conduct was one of my main assets in the field. It enabled me to become not only better informed, but less of a stranger and more of an empathic participant. Lerum[44] claims that emotional involvement in anthropological research is essential for creating a wide, informed, and critical base of knowledge. Obviously, emotional involvement has its drawbacks, as Clark-Kazak[45] points out, especially when the people one studies are marginalized and, perhaps, even illegals. The ethical danger lies in the researcher's denial of the existing inherent power differences. Several feminist qualitative methodology researchers and others offer tools to minimize these differences and better understand the information gathered mainly by being aware of the gaps, talking openly about them with the interviewees, and constantly applying critical analysis tools and reflexivity.[46]

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42 David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook* (London: Sage, 2000).

43 Robin Wooffitt and Sue Widdicombe, "Interaction in Interviews," in *Talking and Interaction in Social Research Methods*, eds. P. Drew, G. Raymond and D. Weinberg (London: SAGE, 2006), 28–49.

44 Kari Lerum, "Subjects of Desire: Academic Armor, Intimate Ethnography and the Production of Intimate Knowledge," *Qualitative Inquiry* 7, no. 4 (2001): 481.

45 Christina Clark-Kazak, "Research as 'Social Work' in Kampala? Managing Expectations, Compensation and Relationships in Research with Unassisted, Urban refugees from the DRC," in *Emotional and Ethical Challenges for Field Research in Africa: The Story Behind the Findings*, eds. S. Thomson, A. Ansoms and J. Murison (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006), 96–102.

46 Ruth Behar, "Introduction: Out of Exile," in *Women Writing Culture*, eds. R. Behar and D.A. Gordon (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), 1–29;

However, I continued having doubts about the accuracy of my understandings. At times, I gave some key informants some of my notes to read and comment on.

In my research, I was constantly trying to figure out what types of churches were built in Israel, and what type of Christianity was being performed. I invested much energy in mapping the churches, trying to put them into the "correct" theological categories. While it was easy to say what they were not, within the world of AICs what were they? I used both Anderson's typology[47] and Pobee's classification[48] as my guidelines. Originally, I identified three types of churches within African Initiated Christianity:[49] African-Ethiopian churches, Prophet Healing churches (also called Spiritual or Zionist churches), and New Pentecostal churches (sometimes called Charismatic churches). I found that, as in Africa and in other African diasporas, the distinctions between the churches in Israel were not always clear, and some churches did not quite fit any single category.

However, the more I observed and asked, the less I was sure that this typology was accurate, or even relevant. In my diary, I wrote:

> Resurrection and Living Bread Ministries International, Tel Aviv, May 4th, 2000.
>
> Morning service. 9:30 am. About 30 people. 20 women. 7 children. Pastor Ampadou is in charge. The choir started with only 5 people, 2 singers. Easy entry into the session. Two Philippine women joined. I don't know them. They seem to know some people… Singing started… Anna was clearly in pain…She is crying all the time…Members are constantly surrounding her…The music is loud…People are in trance…Anna is spinning fast, she is getting into a trance….3 men and 1 woman are always around

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Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. N.K Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication: 2000); I. Dey, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A User-Friendly Guide for Social Scientists* (London: Routledge, 1993); Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006); Lisa Weems, "Unsettling Politics, Locating Ethics: Representations of Reciprocity in Postpositivist Inquiry," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 5 (2006): 994–1011.

47 Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Africa World Press, 2001)

48 John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Abingdon Press, 1979).

49 The older terms "African Independent Church" and "African Indigenous Church" have been replaced with "African Initiated Church" or "African Instituted Church," all using the familiar acronym "AIC", (see Anderson, *African Reformation*; Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*).

> her…She is speaking in tongues…. She is sitting on the floor; her hands are holding her head; she is shouting. Her eyes are closed…the music is very loud…most people have their eyes closed and are praying. Pastor Ampadou is speaking in tongues too (I think)…. He is now raising his hands… calling people to sit down. Anna is calming down… Her friend is helping her rise up…now she is being called by Pastor. She is going. (He's speaking a mixture of Twi and English)… talking about demons in her body. "Tell them to go out, out, out," he is shouting… Pastor: "Your family is calling on you to send them more and more money, they don't know that there is no work here, there is war…Tell them to stop this"…All are shouting… Anna is crying. The pastor is standing near her and shouting: "Out, out, out." I asked Elizabeth to explain. She told me that Anna's family has used witchcraft against her because she is not sending money…I asked her to tell me more about it and she refused.

This sermon/prayer meeting was one among many that combined political issues raised during the sermon, trance phenomena, music sequences, healing time, and casting out of demons. I often saw similar events, but also participated in others that were very different in Pentecostal churches. Like New Pentecostal churches worldwide, especially those in Africa, they emphasized the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit and were concerned primarily with the experience of the Holy Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts. They acknowledged the existence of witches and spirits (ancestral spirits, evil spirits, etc.), part of the traditional African belief system, while classifying them as demonic.

While talking with clergy, I asked for reading materials about their church and about the theological grounds for their work. I kept asking: What kind of church is this? To which line of Christianity do you belong? Is it the same as back home…? Why do you do this and not that? I was totally confused. In an article[50] I wrote:

> Most of the interviewees termed their church "Pentecostal" while maintaining that its theological affiliation was immaterial. Downplaying dogma, they emphasized narrative theology and proclaimed a pragmatic gospel that addressed practical concerns like sickness, poverty, unemployment, and loneliness. Healing and deliverance were key concepts and practices. The Gospel of Prosperity, which views wealth and material success as signs of God's love, was both preached and believed.

50 Sabar, "African Christianity," 419.

I remained dissatisfied with my understandings. When I heard that a prominent bishop of one of the churches I was studying was coming to Israel, I asked to meet him. The bishop agreed. I invited him and leaders of the church in Israel to my home, and they happily accepted the invitation. Following some general questions about his church, its global spread, and his thoughts about the situation of his flock in Israel, I went into theology and typology. I asked many questions that had to do with who does what and why within his church. What theological school do they follow? Eventually the bishop banged his hand on the table, looked at me and said: "Galia stop these questions…we don't read theology, we don't write theology. We sing theology, we do theology." At that moment, I realized (again) that so much of my formal training and theological understandings were insufficient, and that this sentence had wisdom and accuracy that went far beyond anything I had encountered before. For me, this encounter was a crucial moment of understanding.

5 Concluding Thoughts

These three encounters may seem to have little in common; they occurred at different times, in different places, religions, social and legal settings, and political contexts. Yet, notwithstanding the importance of specificity and singularity embodied in each encounter, all of them attest to the centrality of religion and religious organizations in people's lives and to the importance of methodologies chosen for the research. My studies attest to the fact that a range of African Christianities and Judaisms is played out in Israel and in Africa, and that normative definitions of these religious practices do not cover the wide variety of such practices and beliefs. They exemplify how religious organizations fulfill a combination of spiritual and practical needs, serve as loci of warmth and friendship, and engage in a variety of activities within the social, economic, educational, and political spheres. The cases I presented show how the different religious manifestations occupy a particularly significant place in the lives of the believers, for it is through their faith and in their religious-based organizations that they seek and find the legitimacy they were denied in their country's political/public sphere. In all cases, inherent conflicts and tensions were highlighted as well as the ability of believers to manage these conflicts and integrate them into their daily lives.

Notwithstanding the particularities of each case, in those of the Ethiopian Jewish-Pentecostals and the African Christian labor migrants, faith and religiously related activities function not as avenues to public legitimacy, but as

their main space for belonging and worthiness, within the experiential context of uprootedness, displacement, and marginality. In the case of the Anglicans in Kenya, the church enables its members to fight for freedom within a coercive political system.

In all cases, the role of religion was vastly augmented because the people I studied had few alternative anchors of belonging and sources of social, economic, and political support. In all three cases, the religious institutions were careful not to make direct claims challenging the local political institutions, norms, or laws. All of them – except for the Anglican Church during some incidents – kept a low profile and avoided public disputes.

All the cases presented cultivate new understanding of politics through religion and vice versa. As Asad[51] clearly showed, Western liberalism – within which most academic research is carried out – does not have the resources to address contemporary social needs, especially when it comes to matters of religious pluralism. In addition, my analysis attests to a complex reality where religion not only assumes leading political roles through a wide range of activities in public and private domains, and offers innovative readings of religious texts, but also constructs a new language: one that is embedded in biblical metaphors, rituals, myths and miracles, as well as within the history of resistance and modernity, and one that is both religious and secular. It uses the accepted divisions while being neither this nor that. It is new and innovative.

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51 Asad, *Formation.*

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PART 2

Methods and Approaches: From Anthropology to Theology and Back

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CHAPTER 6

Fakery and Wealth in African Charismatic Christianity: Moving beyond the Prosperity Gospel as Script

Karen Lauterbach

1 Introduction

The prosperity gospel – the promise of abundant wealth as a sign of God's blessing – is one of the most prominent features of charismatic Christianity in Africa, and also one of the most contested. In many of the popular charismatic mega-churches in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda, pastors preach the health and wealth gospel; they promise material wealth to congregants as a sign of God's blessing and at the same time strongly encourage church members to give generously in church. Many prosperity pastors are themselves illustrations of what they preach, living in big houses and driving luxury cars; some even have private jets. People flock to the prosperity churches in search of health and wealth,[1] yet the prosperity gospel is also contested terrain. There are numerous cases of charismatic pastors being accused of fraud and criminal activities. Moreover, charismatic pastors are criticized by leaders of other Christian denominations as being fake or for representing an unethical and misunderstood form of Christianity.[2] The above depiction and criticism of the prosperity gospel – appearing both in public and academic debates – touch upon a perceived irreconcilability between Christian faith and the idea of giving to God with the expectation of receiving a return (a blessing). Such a reading furthermore prioritizes an understanding of the prosperity gospel as a coherent

1 Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London, Hurst & Company 2004); Ebenezer Obadare, "'Raising righteous billionaires': The prosperity gospel reconsidered," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1–8.

2 Ilana van Wyk, *The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa: A Church of Strangers* (Cambridge University Press 2014); Karen Lauterbach, *Christianity, Wealth, and Spiritual Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2017), 77–82. See also "The prosperity gospel makes a mockery of Christianity," The Guardian, 29 May 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2013/may/29/prosperity-gospel-mockery-christianity (accessed 9 December 2017) as an example of how African prosperity gospel is discussed in the media.

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system of thought – or as script – and thereby excludes other moral principles of giving and receiving in a given religious context that may exist.

In many ways scholarship on the prosperity gospel in Africa mirrors similar positions. One strand of the theological literature sees the prosperity gospel as bad and misunderstood theology mainly because it links faith with material and this-worldly success, thereby promoting an understanding of people's relationship with God to be about receiving from God rather than serving God. The prosperity gospel is further criticized for being consumer-oriented and materialistic, and hence more in conjunction with secular, market-driven ideology than Christian theology.[3] Other theologian scholars, such as Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong, view the prosperity gospel through a more positive lens and highlight, for instance, the prosperity gospel's contribution to different aspects of the economic field.[4]

Some of the social science literature on charismatic Christianity in Africa takes a critical stance towards the prosperity gospel, in particular with regard to what this strand of Christianity can produce in terms of social equality and democratization. One argument promoted by Paul Gifford is that the teachings of the prosperity gospel hinder development in Africa, as they take away individual responsibility and ignore the role of social structures when explaining poverty and unequal access to material wealth.[5] In addition, there is an expanding literature that analyses the prosperity gospel from an anthropological perspective. Common to many of these studies is that they seek to understand the attractiveness of the prosperity gospel from the point of view of church members, pastors, and other actors. In this, they employ a relativist approach that tries to avoid moral condemnation of the preachers and practitioners of the prosperity gospel and read the situation in a culturally and contextually informed way.[6] Nevertheless, these studies at times have a more im-

3 Milmon Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005); Mika Vähäkangas, "The Prosperity Gospel in the African Diaspora: Unethical Theology or Gospel in Context?," *Exchange* 44 (2015): 353–380.

4 Amos Yong, "A typology of prosperity theology: A religious economy of the global renewal or a renewal economics?," in *Pentecostalism and prosperity: The socioeconomics of the global charismatic movement*, eds. Katherine Attansi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 15–33. For further debate see also Andreas Heuser, "Charting African Prosperity Gospel economies," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1–9.

5 Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development, and Modernity in Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015); Obadare, "Raising."

6 Girish Daswani, "A prophet but not for profit: ethical value and character in Ghanaian Pentecostalism," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22, no. 1 (2016): 108–126; Naomi Haynes, "Pentecostalism and the morality of money: prosperity, inequality, and religious

plicit moral bearing in the sense that they seek to explain, for instance, why people spend amply in church if they lack food and medicine, hence implying that this is irrational.

Despite the different analytical approaches taken by various scholarly disciplines, most perceive and analyze the prosperity gospel as script. By this, I mean that they understand the prosperity gospel as a coherent system of religious thought, or as prosperity theology or ideology. It is common, for instance, to locate the roots and hence the basic principles of the prosperity gospel in American versions of Pentecostalism that emerged in the 1940s and 1950s. Many refer to American preachers and evangelists such as Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Oral Roberts, and T.L. Osborn when tracing its origins.[7] The ideological content of the prosperity gospel is then described in relation to this history and viewed *grosso modo* as a coherent system of thought that has been transplanted from one place to another, one which is static and timeless. This has analytical implications. By foregrounding an idea of the prosperity gospel as a system of thought, the analyses "see" this system rather than other parallel ideas of giving and receiving that involve the spiritual realm and that might or might not be located in a Christian context. The point is that despite analytical efforts to contextualize the prosperity gospel, there is a strong tendency in the literature to perceive the prosperity gospel as a collection of preset principles, rather than to attempt to dismantle the underlying principles of giving and receiving that might be located inside as well as outside of the charismatic Christian setting. Such an analytical dismantling is particularly relevant with respect to one of the main tropes in the literature, namely, the forms of wealth that are morally acceptable and legitimate in religious settings in Africa. Therefore, I propose that focusing more broadly on how people understand and practice giving and receiving in church is more illuminating than a focus on how and why the prosperity gospel is attractive in African contexts. Instead of taking the prosperity gospel as the analytical focus, I suggest that studying different modalities of exchange provides a broader understanding of

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sociality on the Zambian Copperbelt," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18, no. 1 (2012): 123–139; Martin Lindhardt, "More than just money: The faith gospel and occult economies in contemporary Tanzania," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 13, no. 1 (2009): 41–67; Ilana Van Wyk, *The Universal*. See also Joel Robbins's chapter for a more comprehensive discussion of this approach.

7 Paul Gifford, "The complex provenance of some elements of African Pentecostal theology," in *Between Babel and Pentecost*, eds. André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 62–79; Heuser, "Charting"; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics. Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

what is considered legitimate and what is considered dubious or fake in the charismatic Christian context and beyond.

This chapter offers a critical reading of the literature on the prosperity gospel and argues that, by approaching the prosperity gospel as a bounded and unified system of religious thought, there is a risk of ignoring how some of its basic mechanisms reflect similar mechanisms within other religious traditions or in society more widely. One way of avoiding this is to maintain a focus on modalities of exchange, which, as an analytical perspective, offers a broader reading of the moralities around wealth in religious fields.[8]

2 The Prosperity Gospel as Moral Concern

In a recent publication, Simon Coleman discusses prosperity Christianity with a focus on the resonances between this religious ideology and ideas associated with the "free market."[9] The discussion relates in particular to the role of risk and uncertainty in the relationship between the prosperity ideology and the market and seeks to question established oppositions such as gift versus commodity, mutuality versus self-interest, and altruism versus greed. Coleman uses the prosperity gospel as a lens to discuss the ascetic assumptions that lie behind perceptions of the prosperity gospel as immoral.[10]

I seek to draw parallel lines with discussions of what is perceived as illegitimate and legitimate wealth in charismatic Christian settings, thereby discussing broader moralities of wealth and relationships of exchange. I find the prosperity gospel a useful entry point into these discussions because its rhetoric, practices, and underlying values spark debate. In other words, I propose studying the prosperity gospel as a way to analyze broader moral ideas around fakery and wealth, rather than seeing the prosperity gospel as a script to which people adhere. This provides insight into the relationships between religion, wealth, and morality that are about more than the prosperity gospel in a dogmatic sense. Thus, I approach prosperity as relationships of exchange that take place in recent being" and open religious fields (such as charismatic Christianity), and as relationships in which the boundaries of what is considered legitimate and illegitimate prosperity (and ways of acquiring it)

8 Frederick Klaits, "Asking in Time," in *The Request and the Gift in Religious and Humanitarian Endeavors*, ed. Frederick Klaits (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1–24.

9 Simon Coleman, "Morality, Markets, and the Gospel of Prosperity," in *Religion and the Morality of the Market*, eds. Daromir Rudnyckuj and Filippo Osella (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 50–71.

10 *Ibid*., 55.

are contested and reshaped. I follow Coleman in seeing "prosperity discourse as a site of practice" where common assumptions and ideas about religion, wealth, and relationships of exchange can be examined.[11]

When particular ideas or practices of the prosperity gospel are contested and seen as fakery or abuse, it is the accusations and contestations in themselves that are interesting to study because they shed light on how ideas and practices of wealth are changing in society. It is particularly stimulating to study the relationship between prosperity and fakery in the religious field because "issues of right and wrong become muddled when alleged supernatural forces and subjective hopes and expectations enter the equation," as Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist has pointed out.[12] Studying the ambiguous relationship between wealth and religion is an entry point into moral discussions of legitimate and illegitimate wealth more generally. Moreover, taking this perspective when studying the prosperity gospel can bring new insights to perceptions of the affinities between charismatic Christianity and broader social conjunctures. Ultimately, these insights add to our understanding of why the prosperity gospel in African charismatic Christianity is so prominent and yet contested at the same time, in a way that does not see concurrent prominence and contestation as a contradiction in itself.

A dialogue between anthropology and theology can be fruitful in this analytical work. Both disciplines, or, rather, sub-disciplines within their broader disciplines, invite us to take religious values, experiences, and ideas seriously. Both disciplines offer conceptual frameworks that reach outside the boundaries of the prosperity gospel as script. Anthropology provides an analytical language with which to understand relationships of exchange, gift-giving, and reciprocity. This scholarly field draws in particular on Marcel Mauss' classical work on gift-giving, and giving as a moral act and source of morality. Building on Mauss' framework, Frederick Klaits posits the act of asking as similar to that of giving and argues that, "the moral qualities of giving and asking, expressed through words, objects, and texts, contribute to the ways in which persons are valued and devalued."[13] As a way of conceptualizing the obligations that asking and giving confer, Klaits identifies (drawing on David Graeber in this) a number of modalities of exchange that each signify different sources of obligation, influence on personal value, and the nature of trust. The economic modalities are "baseline communism," "free gift," "exchange," and "hierarchy," and differ,

11 *Ibid.*, 62.

12 Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist, "Introduction," in *Minority Religions and Fraud: In Good Faith*, ed. Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 2.

13 Klaits, "Asking," 2.

briefly put, with regard to the moralities around asking and giving. Baseline communism, for instance, builds on the moral principle of sharing, in which "one's rights to resources depend on one's willingness to share."[14] Within the free gift modality of exchange, gifts are given without a perceived obligation to return and asking is generally absent or disguised. In the hierarchy modality, exchange takes place between persons in different positions in a hierarchy, such as between church leaders and members, and the exchange often reinforces these positions. Drawing on this conceptual language in the study of how wealth is legitimized and delegitimized in charismatic Christianity allows us to interpret the language of the prosperity gospel in a broader and more dissected manner. Giving in church can be linked to expectations of being successful in this world in different ways, and not all are necessarily related to the problem of having a commodified approach to Christianity, as referred to above.

Likewise, there are branches of theology that go beyond a systematic approach, and focus on how religious ideas are formulated and practiced at the ordinary level. By including both official/intellectual discourses and religious thinking by church members and other lay people, this approach offers a frame with which we can analyze religious thinking at an academic and an ordinary level. A focus on ordinary theology serves to supplement the existing focus on official doctrine in studies of the prosperity gospel in African religious settings. Ordinary theology sheds light on theological ideas and thoughts expressed by those who participate in religious communities and activities, but who are not normally considered religious experts.[15] According to Jeff Astley, ordinary theology is, moreover, ordinary in the sense that it reflects the everyday life experiences of people and, drawing on Edward Farley, he argues that it represents "wisdom proper to the life of the believer."[16] Ordinary theology, one could say, is similar to anthropological studies of Christianity in its focus on empirical-descriptive aspects of theology and religious practice. This is helpful for the purpose of this chapter as it permits to have a focus on the moralities of giving and receiving in church as they are formulated and enacted both by church leaders and members. These moralities are not implemented from above and do not travel via American evangelists; rather, they are formulated

14 *Ibid*., 7.

15 Jeff Astley, "The Analysis, Investigation and Application of Ordinary Theology," in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, eds. Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 1–9.

16 Edward Farley, 1983: 35, cited in Astley, "The Analysis," 2.

in the encounter between religious discourse and other discourses that relate to moralities of giving and receiving.

Combining the two approaches is fruitful in the sense that a focus on ordinary theology places a stronger emphasis on religious ideas and thinking manifested at an everyday (ordinary) level that is often not part of anthropological and sociological studies of the prosperity gospel. In the same vein, Joel Robbins calls for "critically studying the theologies we find in the field."[17] This enables the inclusion of theological engagements and ideas that are not part of academic theology, but that represent debates and reflections on religious ideas that are connected to everyday life and are part of the ordinary. This is, moreover, a way of taking religion seriously as part of everyday life, not only as practice or belief, but as intellectual engagement. A focus on ordinary theology in combination with an anthropological insistence on religion in context allows for an analysis of the prosperity gospel as an ideological and intellectual frontier where ideas and practices of wealth are contested and debated.

3 The Script

Claiming this-worldly success and seeing material riches as a sign of God's blessing are central features of the prosperity gospel. This is enacted through ritual practices such as the giving of offerings and tithes, and pastors preaching and praying about the blessings. The fundamental idea of the prosperity gospel is illustrated by the "sowing and reaping" metaphor, which implies that church members must sow tithes and offerings in church in order to reap a harvest of wealth and success. Believers of charismatic Christianity are seen as having a biblical right to enjoy riches and prosperity. The principle of giving and receiving (sowing and reaping) is the rationale behind receiving the blessings of God: the more one gives in church the more one receives from God.[18] Pastors teach church members how to give freely and spontaneously. This principle builds on the unique relation between man and God – you give as an individual person and God gives back to you as an individual. As Andreas Heuser has pointed out, the prosperity gospel, and the theology of "seed faith," links faith and action: "it is practical theology, so to speak, with a strong call to enactment."[19]

17 Joel Robbins, "Afterword: Let's keep it awkward: Anthropology, theology, and otherness," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 24, no. 3 (2013): 330.

18 On the theological background of this principle, see Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*.

19 Heuser, "Charting," 3.

What members give in church is perceived as something they give to God, which means that giving to the church or the pastor is the same as giving to God.

Although the prosperity gospel builds on the idea of faith as the starting point for receiving blessings, some scholars have argued that the language used to explain the principles of giving and receiving is often an economic one, underpinned by assumptions of calculated return. Giving is talked about as an investment and receiving as the fruits one harvests from that investment.[20] This is linked to how the appeal and attractiveness of charismatic Christianity is explained, namely, that people come to church to seek success in life – such as in business, marriage, education, in getting a visa, and travel – and to achieve social mobility.[21] The strong focus on success and prosperity is, in other words, understood to make charismatic churches attractive and as being in consonance with people's aspirations for a modern life. There is, therefore, a close link between the religious message and the everydayness of peoples' lives.

This economic reading of the prosperity gospel is also reflected in scholarly debates that connect the prominence of the prosperity gospel to the emergence of millennial capitalism and neo-liberalism. The much-cited work of the Comaroffs reads the prosperity gospel and the rise of occult economies as a new protestant ethic: a response to a new spirit of capitalism wherein spiritual rewards are bestowed instantly and take the form of material wealth.[22] This frame of explanation highlights the irrational and the occult as responses to life conditions marked by lack, loss, and disempowerment, as well as to forces of global capitalism. It moreover sees religion and religious services as commodities and therefore promotes a market analogy (for instance seeing religion as a reflection of a market model, and paying tithes or offerings as investments). In relation to the purpose of this chapter, the different ways of reading the relationship between religion and wealth are relevant, because they reveal some of the underlying ontological premises on which they build. Filippo

20 On religion and investment, see Karen Lauterbach, "Religious Entrepreneurs in Ghana," in *Cultural Entrepreneurship in Africa*, eds. Ute Röschenthaler and Dorothea Schultz (Routledge, 2016), 19–36.

21 Asonzeh F-K. Ukah, "Those who trade with God never lose: The economics of Pentecostal activism in Nigeria," in *Christianity and social change in Africa: Essays in honor of J.D.Y. Peel*, ed. Toyin Falola (Durham, Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 253–274.

22 Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Second comings: neo-Protestant ethics and millennial capitalism in Africa, and elsewhere," in *2000 Years and Beyond: Faith, Identity and the 'Common Era'*, ed. Paul Gifford (London: Routledge, 2003), 106–126. For a discussion of analyzing the prosperity gospel as protestant ethic see also Birgit Meyer, "Pentecostalism and Neo-Liberal Capitalism: Faith, Prosperity and Vision in African Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 20, no. 2 (2007): 5–28.

Osella and Daromir Rudnyckyj, for instance, make the point that the Comaroffs' analysis of charismatic Christianity, as a response to millennial capitalism, fosters an ethic of new consumerism and individualism, and that this rests on a particular idea of the relationship between religion and the market as separate categories. Therefore, "in their account new forms of religiosity are eventually reduced to instances of false consciousness."[23] The analysis of the Comaroffs (and others) represents a certain implicit moral stance on the relationship between religion and wealth, and, more broadly, on the relationship between the modern and the religious. In this way, discussions of fakery and morality in relation to wealth and religion take place at many different levels, and are not only about the prosperity gospel as a religious set of ideas or theology, but also about how the modern and relationships of exchange are perceived contextually and historically.

4 Beyond the Prosperity Gospel as Script

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the prosperity gospel is both a contested and an attractive aspect of charismatic Christianity in Africa. Some of the controversies touch upon whether the insistence on giving plentifully in church is a way of exploiting and abusing the poor, in particular if people are given empty promises of material blessings.[24] Such controversies reflect two overall understandings of the relationship between wealth and religion. First, the prosperity gospel provokes reaction and debate as it challenges the understanding that the market or capitalism is secular and therefore inherently different from religion and religious values. Second, it penetrates the core of what is considered Christian ethics (mainly in Western protestant Christianity) in which giving is considered a disinterested act and abundant wealth is seen as contradicting Christian values.[25] Therefore, from these perspectives, encouraging people who have little to give money in church is perceived as immoral.

Some years back, I had a conversation with a Ghanaian female pastor who argued in a different way. She was of the view that pastors should not ask for too much money in church, but at the same time argued that pastors should

23 Filippo Osella and Daromir Rudnyckyj, "Introduction: Assembling Market and Religious Moralities," in *Religion and the Morality of the Market*, eds. Daromir Rudnyckuj and Filippo Osella (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 6.

24 See Lauterbach, *Christianity*, Chapter 3 for a discussion of this in the Ghanaian context.

25 See also Simon Coleman, "Between Faith and Fraudulence? Sincerity and Sacrifice in Prosperity Christianity," in *Minority Religions and Fraud. In Good Faith*, ed. Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 73–89.

not prevent church members from receiving the blessings of God. She saw "sowing seeds in church" as a necessary form of giving, and if this was prevented it would hinder churchgoers from receiving God's blessings, but also from being mature Christians.[26] Her argumentation was that sowing was not only about receiving material blessings, but also had the aim of being able to grow as a religious person. In this account, there is necessarily a distinction between giving from a self-interested and a disinterested perspective. Moreover, the pastor made a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate ways of collecting funds in church, to which I return below. This example shows that the moralities connected with giving and receiving in a religious setting do not necessarily follow the same rationalities, and that in some instances giving in church can be about more than securing a material return.

Another line of criticism expressed in discussions of the prosperity gospel centers around the problem of deception. The argument is that if people have been promised God's blessings (in the shape of a new car or a visa, for example) in church, and they do not receive these objects, a reaction of distrust and feelings of being deceived must follow, and eventually they will leave the church. This is, however, a highly utilitarian way of perceiving how people relate to wealth in religious settings. The question is whether we can take for granted that the items promised and wished for, are expected to materialize. Promises of material wealth can also symbolize hope and an idea of possibility. As Lindhardt has pointed out, "the Faith gospel provides ways of dealing with the moral and perceived dangerous aspects of wealth and accumulation,"[27] and therefore does not necessarily symbolize a relation of exchange in a literal sense. The prosperity gospel with its strong focus on wealth can also be understood as a field in which the boundaries of what is legitimate and illegitimate wealth are pushed and redefined, as mentioned above. We cannot assume that what is perceived by some as failed promises are perceived in a similar manner by others, or that failed prophecy only leads to dissolution. Moreover, discrepancies between what a pastor preaches and promises and what a church member experiences and receives is not automatically read as failure or fakery. There are many historical examples of the contrary, such as very specific promises of the second coming of Christ or the destruction of the world.[28]

In a similar vein, Johannes Fabian draws attention to "confusions" in some of the terms we use when analyzing charismatic Christianity and warns against

26 Interview with pastor, 3 December 2014, Kumasi, Ghana..

27 Lindhardt, "More than just," 42.

28 See Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riechen and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).

blending analytical concepts with self-designated terms: "I don't think we should narrow down the meaning of charismatic to a self-designation of one manifestation of neo-pentecostalism."[29] He argues that charisma as an analytical concept is broader than what lies within the term charismatic as it is used when describing charismatic Christianity. I think the same argument is valid when we talk about prosperity; prosperity can be used as a broader analytical concept and should not be confined to what lies in the prosperity gospel script. As an analytical category, prosperity draws from a broader pool of theoretical ideas on relationships and modalities of exchange, for instance. The importance of being aware of such distinctions in the use of terms such as charismatic, religion, and prosperity is, according to Fabian, linked to the crucial insight that concrete religious acts or messages also relate to abstract ideas. This is of relevance when discussing how to analyze and make sense of the prosperity gospel. Fabian writes:

> On the level of intellectual content, a charismatic leader attracts followers, not because of specific skills he or she has, or because of goods he promises, but because every specific "miracle" he performs serves a universal message … Healing is directed against universal suffering, divination is about uncertainty as a general state, not just about a given case.[30]

This broader way of approaching the use of such concepts echoes Lindhardt's point, mentioned above, that the prosperity gospel is a way of handling the uncertainties associated with accumulating wealth. As such, the prosperity gospel is not only about the concrete acts of "sowing and reaping" or of offering in church and receiving wealth as a sign of God's blessing. Giving in church is also a way to deal with the relationship between human and God, and with moral questions concerned with giving and receiving in a religious field. Fabian sees a tension in charismatic Christianity between delivering messages at the universal level and at the same time representing a commodified form of religion, and asks whether this commodification will influence the ability to tackle moral questions at a more abstract level. This is a relevant but difficult question to debate in general terms but, as I discuss below, charismatic Christianity and the prosperity gospel do not necessarily represent a commodified form of religion that does not allow room for dealing with moral questions. The debates around wealth and fakery that are prominent in charismatic

29 Johannes Fabian, *Talk about Prayer: An Ethnographic Commentary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 18.

30 *Ibid*., 21.

Christianity are good examples of this, and it might be that the idea of a commodified form of religion lies more in the script than in the enactments and negotiations of charismatic Christianity.

As discussed above, the literature on charismatic Christianity has, to a wide extent, approached the prosperity gospel as a coherent system of thought or as an ideal type. Andreas Heuser, among others, argues that the prosperity gospel as a theological message in a distilled form is always adapted and translated in different contexts, but this acknowledgement of cultural adaptation does not transcend beyond the message (or script) itself.[31] We often do not learn much about how the universal or moral messages that are also part of the prosperity gospel are embedded in different cultural and historical settings and resonate with the moral concerns in these contexts.

Another way in which the prosperity gospel is approached as a single message is in attempts to quantify its reach. Heuser, for instance, refers to a Pew study that shows that fifty percent of African Christians "believe in the Prosperity Gospel – that God will grant wealth and good health to people who have enough faith."[32] It is of course important to have a solid idea of the prominence and spread of the prosperity gospel, but it is worth reflecting more on what it means when someone says he or she believes in it and to what extent it is perceived as a single message. More particularly, it is important to dig into how believers understand the relations of exchange between themselves and God, as such relationships might reflect ideas of giving and receiving in a religious context that do not necessarily stem from charismatic Christianity itself. Rather than only talking about a "Pentecostalisation of African religious landscapes"[33] it is also necessary to pay attention to how other religious traditions and moral ideas are reflected in the prosperity gospel.

In addition, when analyzing the relationship between the prosperity gospel and processes of social, political, and economic change it is problematic not to unpack the prosperity gospel as a singular theological message.[34] This line of analysis presupposes that there is such a thing as a shared understanding and acceptance of the prosperity gospel and that this theology shapes people's actions and moral values. Yet there is little analytical space to capture how the prosperity gospel is interpreted in the lives and practices of people. When Heuser, for instance, argues that "unparalleled in African postcolonial history a single theological imagery evolved as a potential motivational porter of social

31 Heuser, "Charting."

32 Pew Forum 2010, cited in Heuser, "Charting," 2.

33 *Ibid*., 2.

34 See for instance Yong, "A typology."

transformation,"[35] we do not delve much into how ideas of giving and receiving in a religious context shape social change. In sum, by seeing the prosperity gospel as a single theological imagery – or as script – we fail to see how ideas of giving and receiving are present in other parts of society and how these ideas resonate with those promoted in the prosperity gospel. Or, in the words of Max Weber, "the manner in which ideas become effective forces in history."[36]

By removing the emphasis on the prosperity gospel as a single message, it is possible to get a better sense of the broader mechanisms that the theological metaphor of sowing and reaping represents. To what extent is giving and receiving in this religious field something particular to it, and to what extent a reflection of broader mechanisms found elsewhere in a given society? When Heuser writes that, "In its core, Prosperity Gospel theologizes on the interplay between faith and action; it is practical theology, so to speak, with a strong call to enactment,"[37] one could argue that faith in action, or faith as action, is a common trait of many religious fields in different African contexts. Various authors have pointed out that religion in African contexts is often much more about practice and everyday life than about faith as an inner state. J.D.Y. Peel, for instance, has discussed how everyday routines and practices are part of the Yoruba understanding of religion.[38] Therefore, it is also relevant to interpret the prosperity gospel in relation to, and as reflecting, practices of giving and receiving in wider religious fields. Approaching the prosperity gospel as script somehow reflects a tendency in the literature on religion in Africa to view religious worldviews (or cosmologies) as coherent systems of ideas, juxtaposing, for instance, Christian worldviews and traditional religious worldviews. These categorizations allow for comparison and for tracing change and continuity, but they also reiterate these worldviews as stable and timeless and reduce our ability to see values and practices that cross the boundaries of these categories. In other words, the prosperity gospel can be analyzed as reflecting current debates on legitimate and illegitimate ways of accumulating wealth, debates that are not new to these societies, but to which the prosperity gospel adds a new way of articulating such tensions.

35 Heuser, "Charting," 2.

36 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, [1930] 2001), 48.

37 Heuser, "Charting," 3.

38 J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000).

5 Religion, Wealth, and Fakery

The prosperity gospel as a field of contestations over the accumulation of wealth is often linked to accusations of fakery and fraud. Fakery touches upon the legitimacy of the accumulated wealth as well as the intentions of a religious leader or provider of religious services. In many African contexts, accusations of fakery in the religious field are about how wealth is accumulated and redistributed, and fakery and exploitation are issues that are often discussed in relation to the prosperity gospel. Prosperity churches are accused of exploiting the poor, their pastors are accused of being fake pastors, and they are seen as hindering social development. One among many examples is an interview with a renowned and high-ranking Methodist minister in Ghana in which he publicly accused charismatic pastors of "exploiting the poor" in a national newspaper. The minister highlighted in particular that these churches extract money from their poor members and described them as a, now late, "machinery for money making" that do not provide any form of social services in return. Moreover, he complained that pastors of the charismatic churches are self-ordained (implying they have not been through formal theological training at a seminary), and hence that they are fake pastors.[39] In this example, it appears that fakeness is related to not contributing to social well-being more broadly and not pursuing formal and recognized career paths.

Martin Lindhardt points out that with the pluralization and commercialization of Christianity in Africa has come greater suspicion of fraud.[40] He also argues that this does not imply that the accumulation of wealth in a religious setting is morally contested in itself. It is rather that when "Charismatic ministry in too obvious ways becomes a business venture and when adherents or consumers fail to see the material fruits of spiritual assistance," accusations of fraud and fakery appear.[41] In pointing this out, Lindhardt also argues that it is not the connection between religion and wealth that is problematic in itself but, rather, more subtle distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate ways of accumulating wealth in charismatic churches. He highlights religious services as a way to earn money per se and deception as two key moral concerns.

39 *The Daily Dispatch*, 7 September 2005. See also Lauterbach, *Christianity*, 65.

40 Martin Lindhardt, "Miracle Makers and Money Takers: Healers, Prosperity Preachers and Fraud in Contemporary Tanzania," in *Minority Religions and Fraud. In Good Faith*, ed. Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 153.

41 *Ibid*., 154.

The above observations suggest analyzing the prosperity gospel in terms of modalities of exchange in order to capture the different norms and criteria that are being drawn upon in ethical considerations of what is legitimate or illegitimate: for instance, in assessing providers of religious services as either fake or genuine. In my work on charismatic Christianity in Ghana, I have discussed wealth as a topic that is central to discussions of fakeness.[42] An important debate and tension is about whether one accumulates for the community or whether one accumulates for oneself. Historically, chiefs and big men were expected to accumulate wealth and to display this wealth publicly, but they were at the same time responsible for the well-being of the community. This tension is reflected in the comments and accusations of the Methodist minister mentioned above. He uses the argument that pastors exploit the poor, asserting that they do not provide social services, and implying that they do not look after the well-being of their communities.[43] As, historically, this was a way in which chiefs and other people of power achieved status and legitimacy, such an accusation touches not only upon the material contribution and redistribution of pastors, but also more fundamentally on their legitimacy as religious leaders. Consequently, I argue that charismatic pastors preaching about wealth and prosperity can be perceived as navigating the tension between accumulating for oneself or for the community. This tension between communality and individuality is an embedded part of Akan social thought, as noted by Kwame Gyekye.[44] Therefore, charismatic pastors must balance this tension when seeking to become recognized as legitimate pastors, and can be accused of being fake if they accumulate mainly for individual consumption. Indeed, many charismatic pastors in Ghana are concerned about the well-being of their community and at the same time preach the prosperity gospel, and we see the notions of sowing and reaping being mixed with a modality of exchange that is based on the moral values of communal well-being.[45]

A related aspect concerns the ways in which pastors accumulate wealth. Often church members would accuse young pastors who got rich too quickly of

42 Lauterbach, *Christianity.*

43 T.C. McCaskie writes about a criticism of charismatic pastors in Ghana provided by a traditional priest using a similar argument of charismatic pastors posing a threat to the social cohesion of society because they seek wealth for themselves. T.C. McCaskie, "*Akwantemfi*—'In mid-journey': An Asante shrine today and its clients," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 38, no. 1 (2008): 1–24.

44 Kwame Gyekye, *An essay on African philosophical thought. The Akan conceptual scheme* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

45 Karen Lauterbach, *Christianity*; T.C. McCaskie, "Accumulation: Wealth and belief in Asante history: II," *Africa* 56, no. 1 (1986): 3–23.

being fake pastors, as they were not accumulating according to morally accepted norms.[46] Ideas of fast wealth are, moreover, related to fakery as it is often thought that this kind of wealth is accumulated by using evil spiritual forces. One church member offered the following explanation:

> For these fake ones [pastors], they get rich overnight. God is a miracle worker, not a sorcerer … The genuine men of God struggle before they become successful. The fake ones become successful at once without struggle. They go for charms to be able to look into the future and past to impress people.[47]

This comment indicates that the moral compass used when assessing who is genuine and who is fake is not related to who promotes the prosperity gospel or not, or who promotes a commodified version of Christianity, but, rather, to how one has accumulated wealth and, in particular, what kinds of spiritual power have been used in this process. We are dealing with a modality of exchange that touches upon more universal messages of tabooed forms of wealth and especially the dubiousness related to becoming rich too fast. This debate also relates to Fabian's discussion of the possible tension between a commodified form of Christianity and Christianity's reflection of universal messages mentioned above. However, as I have not identified a pure form of commodified Christianity in my work, I would propose that there is also room to deal with universal messages and questions in Ghanaian charismatic Christianity. As the ideology of the prosperity gospel does not appear in a distilled form, ways of dealing with the accumulation of wealth in charismatic Christianity include broader moral concerns.

Fakery is also very much associated with pastors selling religious services, such as prayers, anointing oil, and holy water. Wealth achieved in this way is seen by many as illegitimate wealth. Fast money and the selling of religious services is associated with greed, which has long been a reason for church disputes and the discrediting of pastors (including prior to the rise of charismatic Christianity in the 1980s). This points to an important link between moral values and a pastor's actions. In order to become recognized as a legitimate pastor, one has to act in a morally acceptable and truthful way and, most importantly, what one says and what one does must correspond. Girish Daswani argues along the same lines when observing that the public commentary on pastors is about more than whether they are fake or real, but also "speaks of

46 See also Lindhardt, "More than just."

47 Interview with church member, 11 December 2014, Kumasi, Ghana.

the virtue or the character of the charismatic prophet, where ethical value is assessed around the criteria for judging the worth of one's actions."[48] The importance here is on how a pastor acts, and not so much on whether or not the pastor encourages church members to give generously in church. One church member explained: "Some of the pastors sell anointing oil. However, when a pastor tells you to bring anointing oil for him to bless it for you, I do not see anything wrong with it. But if he tells you to buy it from him before he prays over it, then it is bad."[49] The distinction between what is morally acceptable and what is not, and hence judged as genuine or fake, is based on whether a person gives freely to a pastor or whether money is extracted through selling religious services. The same church member said, "If you know the word of God, you will not let the pastor force you to give, but you would give freely from the heart." Giving in this sense is more than sowing in order to receive a return. It is also about showing gratitude and respect to a pastor or to God, which does not preclude the giver receiving God's blessing in return. There is a fine balance between giving to pastors and the church as a form of offering and paying for a religious service. The former is seen as legitimate and the latter as illegitimate and hence a sign of fakery.

From another perspective, one Ghanaian charismatic pastor talked about the danger of wealth polluting the personality or psychology of those who are successful:

> Sometimes, prosperity gets into the head of people. When people begin to do well in ministry, it has its effects. However, if you allow privileges to dictate to you then you begin to think highly of yourself. In spite of all wealth, one must remain simple and humble. When you do that it helps you.[50]

In this extract, the pastor indicates that all pastors experience the risk of being influenced and dictated to by wealth, which affects how you are perceived by others. The perceived danger here is not richness in itself, or being a rich pastor; rather, the issue of concern is how one handles privilege, and how it influences one's moral comportment.

These debates and controversies connected to payment for religious services are related to the moral questions of exploitation, failed promises, and deception referred to above. But how much do we know about church members'

48 Girish Daswani, "A prophet," 110.

49 Interview with church member, 9 December 2014, Kumasi, Ghana.

50 Interview with pastor, 4 December 2014, Kumasi, Ghana.

own understanding of giving and receiving in church? Do they see themselves as exploited if they are asked to pay in church and do not receive God's blessings? Or if they pay a fee for a deliverance session and are not freed of their problem? Do they see themselves as being victims of fraud, or do they question the spiritual power of a pastor and the unlimited love of God? These questions do not have settled answers and, as I have shown through the above analysis, they need to be addressed in a contextually and historically informed way. In southern Ghana, power has historically brought money, and money has brought power.[51] Being a rich pastor is therefore not in itself controversial, but one could argue that the emergence of charismatic Christianity has sparked debate around the relationship between wealth and religion, and the moral boundaries of this field, which, for instance, entails moving away from the more ascetic stance taken by many mission churches. On one occasion, when discussing these issues with a pastor, he shared the following reflections with me:

> Should people pay money before they are attended to, like a medical doctor at the hospital? Is the priest enjoined to do same? Is he forcing the people to do that? But healing is not procured, but a free gift, and if you procure healing then it's not biblical. I don't know the type of realm we can put that.[52]

The questions were many, and he did not have definite answers. This pastor was not against offering in church or church members giving money to their pastors. He was of the view that if a pastor has a talent and uses it well, he should and would become rich. There are many instances of pastors and church members having debates about the parameters within which giving and receiving money in church should take place. This indicates that how people relate to and practice forms of exchange in religious settings are not influenced by one set of ideas or ideology, such as the prosperity gospel. As discussed throughout this chapter, people (both church members and pastors) draw on several moralities and modalities of exchange when giving and receiving in church.

Moreover, and as pointed out by Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, in the Ghanaian context prosperity is not only understood as material richness, but is also about enjoying "benefits [such] as forgiveness of sins, healing, redemption of

51 T.C. McCaskie, *State and society in pre-colonial Asante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

52 Interview with pastor, 5 December 2016, Kumasi, Ghana.

our lives from destruction and crowning us with tender mercies."[53] This indicates that, in this context, the prosperity gospel is not solely about material riches; rather, the term prosperity has a wider meaning that includes both material and non-material blessings.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has engaged in a critical discussion of the prosperity gospel as a single theological message or as a script. It has pointed to the analytical limitations of the adoption of such an approach as it marginalizes and renders invisible other moralities of exchange that co-exist and overlap with the prosperity gospel. I have argued that if we approach the study of material and symbolic wealth in African charismatic Christianity differently, with more emphasis on historical and contextual perspectives, we reach a different and perhaps more nuanced understanding of the role of wealth in this form of Christianity. This can be done by drawing on concepts that lie outside of the prosperity gospel itself; in this way, we separate the object of analysis from the analytical lens. I have argued that different modalities of exchange are in play that involve a broad understanding of wealth and prosperity, and also the meanings that are ascribed to giving and receiving in church. The fundamental principle of sowing and reaping is in one way unique to charismatic Christianity, but it also represents a more fundamental mechanism of giving and receiving which is present in a number of religious settings. I argue for an analysis of wealth in charismatic Christianity in Africa that does not perceive giving and receiving only as an investment in economic terms or as *a priori* incompatible with Christianity. I have suggested studying wealth in charismatic Christianity through the idiom of fakery in order to understand how and when giving and receiving in church is thought of as illegitimate and legitimate. The point is that this does not only and always follow the basic principles of the prosperity theology, but rather involves a range of different moralities placed within and outside this particular Christian setting. Combining an anthropologically inspired analysis with a focus on ordinary theology is fruitful for such a task, because it allows us to see modalities of exchange beyond the script, and yet have an openness to (everyday) theological thinking and religious reasoning.

53 J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics,* 202.

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CHAPTER 7

How to Respect the Religious Quasi-Other? Methodological Considerations in Studying the Kimbanguist Doctrine of Incarnation

Mika Vähäkangas

This chapter outlines a methodology for theologically analyzing and assessing predominantly oral non-Western theologies. First, the two major existing approaches are deliberated upon, namely, the (cultural/social) anthropology of Christianity and ecumenical (systematic) theology.[1] After exploring the pros and cons of both, a brief background of the Kimbanguist Church is presented, which serves as the case for reflecting upon methodological considerations. This is followed by an attempt to integrate the useful elements of both anthropology and theology. The whole exercise is conducted with the ecumenical theological agenda in mind, and therefore does not propose any value judgment on theological and anthropological or ethnographical approaches as such.

The Kimbanguist doctrine of incarnation is used as the concrete material for methodological deliberations because of its critical situation at the moment of writing – the Kimbanguist Church is very close to becoming the first church ever to have its membership in the World Council of Churches (WCC) discontinued on doctrinal grounds. Furthermore, it is a leading African Instituted Church with a rich oral theological tradition and deep involvement in the Kongo cultural heritage.

1 We Need New Approaches in the Theological Study of World Christianities

I stand in the green and white garmented crowd in the square formed by the residence of the head of the Kimbanguist Church (*chef spirituel*), Simon Kimbangu's mausoleum, the huge temple, and a couple of other buildings, in

1 Ecumenics is the activity of promoting unity between Christian churches. Ecumenical theology is an academic discipline which studies ecumenics on the one hand and churches on the other, with the aim of providing analyses for the use of the stakeholders in ecumenics. Systematic theology is a discipline that deals with the doctrinal and philosophical aspects of theology. In this chapter, ecumenical theology is approached as a systematic theological discipline thereby ignoring, e.g., its historical dimension, which comes close to church history.

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the holy city of Nkamba, the New Jerusalem, in the Lower Congo. The crowd chants meditatively, "Ozali Nzambe, ozali Nzambe," (you are God) and if I have earlier had doubts about how to interpret these kinds of expressions of Kimbanguist piety, it now seems clear that the words are addressed to Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, the head of the church. However, the exact implication of these words and their interpretation in terms of the official Kimbanguist position remains unclear to me.[2]

There is plenty that is very familiar to any Christian in the life and worship of the Kimbanguists: the Lord's Prayer, Trinitarian formulations, frequent use of the Bible, and so forth. Additionally, Kimbanguist theology subscribes to all major Christian doctrines like the Trinity, the incarnation of the Logos in Jesus of Nazareth, and Jesus' atoning death, thus creating a salient starting point for a researcher, such as myself, with a systematic theological background.[3] However, the familiar always comes with a twist of particularly Kimbanguist interpretation and there is none of the feeling of being located between two worlds, Africa and the West, so common in many mainline and Pentecostal African churches. Kimbanguism belongs strongly to the Congolese world. Thus, religiously, the Kimbanguists are not really "us" from the point of view of mainline Protestantism but neither can they be properly counted as the "other."[4] Therefore, I regard them, as well as many other African Instituted Churches with their own strong theological emphases, as "quasi-other," belonging either in- or outside Christianity depending on the observer and the criteria used.[5] At the same time, from the cultural point of view, the Kimbanguist Church is very deeply rooted in the Congolese soil, meaning that the Hellenic-Western way of theologizing is not the most natural.[6] In the majority of the historic Christian churches, the early so-called ecumenical (that is, general or common to all)

2 Field workdiary Nkamba 9th July 2015, 3. Additionally, when believers from Eastern Congo asked the chef spirituel to end the war in the region, this impression was further strengthened.

3 See *Le catéchisme kimbanguiste* (Châtenay-Malabry, France: Éditions Entraide Kimbanguiste, 2003).

4 Kimbanguists themselves typically describe Congolese Christianity as threefold: Catholic, Protestant, and Kimbanguist, thus distancing themselves from Protestantism. Joseph Mangoyo, *La relecture du kimbanguisme : A travers les définitions* (Brazzaville: Département de la Presse et Information, 2009), 88 §674. See, for instance, Joseph Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire du kimbanguisme*. Editions Kimbanguistes: Châteney-Malabry, 2003, 282. This view was adopted de facto by Mobutu's government in 1971. Susan Asch, *L'Église du Prophète Kimbangu: De ses origines à son rôle actuel au Zaïre.* (Paris: Karthala, 1983), 101.

5 On the porousness of borders of Christianity, see Mika Vähäkangas, "Mission Studies, Syncretism and the Limits of Christianity during the Time of the Heretical Imperative," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 98, 1 (2010): 12–13.

6 I interpret the statements that Kimbanguism is rather faith than theology (e.g. Mangoyo, *La relecture du kimbanguisme,* 42 §299, 43 §307, 107 §826, 109 §844) as pointing to this, academic

councils of especially Nicaea (A.D. 325), Constantinople (A.D. 381), and Chalcedon (A.D. 451) became normative. In them, the core Christian teachings like the Incarnation and Trinity were authoritatively formulated with the help of Greek language and philosophy. The council positions were naturally not accepted by all – they were summoned because there were differing opinions – and in each case some of the minority opinion ended outside of the newly formulated doctrinal orthodoxy.

The Kimbanguist Church was admitted to the WCC in 1969 after a thorough scrutiny that included plenty of doctrinal consideration. Membership in the WCC has been and still is very important for Kimbanguists both in terms of identity and theology.[7] Today, due to the increasingly clear differences between the Kimbanguist doctrine of incarnation and the positions generally held in the WCC member churches, the Kimbanguists' position in the organization has become precarious.[8] The doctrine of incarnation can be considered the cornerstone of Christianity; without a doctrine that considers Jesus of Nazareth as the God incarnate, Christianity may not have developed separately from Judaism, and there would not have been any need to develop specifically Christian doctrines like the Trinity which attempts to weld monotheism together with the idea of incarnation. Thus there is an ongoing discussion whether the Kimbanguists should be allowed to continue in the WCC on doctrinal grounds.[9] Whatever the fate of the Kimbanguist Church in the WCC, one may hope that the deliberations of both parties – the Kimbanguists and those who want to expel them from the WCC – will be built on functioning communication.

In ecumenical systematic theological debates one tends to rely very strongly on written documentation even if much of the discussion happens orally; any meaningful result should usually be reflected in writing, too. This dialogue also begins from the premise that one has common ground from which to begin the construction of consensus: values, doctrines, and the Bible. Traditionally, the mode of such interdenominational disputes (later referred to as dialogues)

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theology having been introduced to the church largely through ecumenical contacts. See also Diangienda Kuntima *L'histoire du kimbanguisme*, 256–257.

7 See Asch, *L'Église*, 56, 62–68; Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire du kimbanguisme,* 311 and his description about the WCC application process, 207–211 and Broggi's interpretation of the same process, Joshua D. Broggi, *Diversity in the Structure of Christian Reasoning: Interpretation, Disagreement, and World Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 67–70.

8 Broggi, *Diversity*, 25–26. As a part of the process, a Swiss theologian, Dr. Martin, was sent by the WCC for a fact-finding trip. She eventually became Kimbanguist and wrote a well-known general introduction to Kimbanguism. Marie-Louise Martin, *Kirche ohne Weisse: Simon Kimbangu und seine Millionenkirche in Kongo* (Basel: Reinhardt, 1971).

9 E-mail from Daniel Buda to the author, 2016-06-14.

was that one attempted to convince the other party of one's position. This approach has, however, been challenged by receptive ecumenism in which the starting-point lies in learning from the other party.[10]

However, in both cases, the starting point is the common ground. In the traditional approach, a critical challenge towards the discussion partner represented a way of recognizing the partner as more or less equal in the dialogue even if one considered one's own position somewhat superior. During the time of colonialism, when encountering "pagans," only a few missionaries would bother to engage them in dialogue, thereby excluding them. In receptive ecumenism the equality between the partners is even more pronounced. In systematic theological debates proposing a challenge or critique can thus be seen as a form of inclusion through recognizing common ground, and also as an expression of equality. This inclusion presupposes, however, a common language and a common conceptual universe. This does not self-evidently seem to be the case with the Kimbanguists and the rest of the players in the ecumenical movement. Theological vocabulary, albeit similar in appearance, would not necessarily be similarly understood in the Kimbanguist and Hellenic-Western theologies. Therefore, the usefulness of the traditional, or even the receptive, ecumenical approach is questionable, as the potential common ground looks like quicksand.[11]

The role of judgment in ecumenical systematic theological debates as described above is based on a normative approach where each of the participants in the debate considers the tradition (s)he represents as the most convincing and thereby most true. Were it not so, the person would, logically-speaking, change her or his affiliation. Yet the normative critical position easily leads to a prejudiced approach where the discussion partner that does not share the same vocabulary as "we" (in the sense of the community of the analyst) is directly labeled as heterodox even before understanding what s/he is attempting to express. A classic example of this is the Western labeling of Oriental churches as monophysitic, a position that was held for many centuries and has only recently been rectified through careful analysis of, for example, the Ethiopian Tewhado Church theology.[12] Even though a totally unbiased

10 Paul D. Murray, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

11 For more on this see Mika Vähäkangas, "Interreligious and Interchurch Debates: Open Questions for the 21st Century," in *Den Blick weiten: Wenn Ökumene den Religionen begegnet: Tagungsbericht der 17. Wissenschaftlichen Konsultation der Societas Oecumenica,* eds. Andrew Pierce and Oliver Schuegraf (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2014), 51–67.

12 See Aielé Tekle-Haymanot, *La dottrina della chiesa etiopica dissidente sull'unione ipostatica* (Pont. Roma: Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1956).

approach is not possible, having judgment as both the starting-point and the result runs a high risk of failing to understand the studied theology on its own premises. Thus, traditionally, systematic theology tends to be a very ethnocentric enterprise where one's own position – in academic studies usually Western mainline Christian – is the yardstick of true Christianity, that is, the truth. This is less than helpful in encountering (potential) Christianities whose common ground with Western traditions is debatable and even at best an object of careful analysis.

Another alternative in ecumenical theology is to approach the normative role or judgment in a system immanent manner. This means that the researcher does her or his best to enter the thought world of the other that is being studied. In that case, critical analysis arises from the premises of the studied theological system. Is it internally coherent? Does it perform what it promises? This system immanent approach is a much more fruitful starting point when dealing with the quasi-other. However, due to the fact that theologians generally have exercised this within the confines of the Hellenic-Western thought patterns, the outcome is not necessarily much more understanding vis-à-vis churches of the majority world. Nonetheless, this approach facilitates the postponement of theological judgment or criticism proposed in this chapter.

While systematic theology builds the notion of inclusion and equality on mutually challenging dialogue, and criticism on the basis of common ground, classical anthropological approaches to inclusion and equality have traditionally built on difference. Unlike systematic theology, anthropology usually builds primarily on unwritten sources. The credo of anthropology could be said to be radical openness to the other, meaning that researchers are willing to try and understand even such cultural phenomena as are unintelligible or even unacceptable in their home cultures. The task of the anthropologist is to interpret those phenomena and make them understandable in Western academia, in the sense of explaining both their background and meaning.[13] As a result, challenge and criticism do not ideally belong in the anthropological toolkit. However, because analysis and theorizing are part of the Western academic sphere, this results in a divided or double reality. In the field, the researcher attempts to be radically open, sharing the everyday life of the community studied. However, when a good part of the anthropological exercise deals with creating theoretical insights about being human in our cultures and social settings, it is natural that this dimension of the anthropological endeavor cannot be inclusive in relation to most of the communities studied. The academic world where this part of the process takes place is beyond the reach of

13 See Joel Robbins' chapter in this book.

the communities studied, both linguistically and culturally, and oftentimes also physically. From the theologian's perspective, there is also a danger that an abyss may open up between the studied culture and the resulting theorizing that takes place in the academic world. Thus, while there is a high degree of openness and relative equality during anthropological fieldwork, this cannot cover the whole research process. From the ecumenical studies point of view this looks as if, during fieldwork, one acts as if there is openness and equality, while in terms of results, these values may yield to the power of Western Enlightenment epistemology and plausibility patterns that reign supreme in the Western academia, in spite of many anthropologists' brave attempts to subvert them.[14] While anthropological radical openness is an asset in gaining understanding of deeply rooted Kimbanguist ritual and thinking, it lacks the means to make that understanding meet with the ecumenical partners' theologies and is thus not inclusive enough for ecumenical theological purposes. It needs to be noted that the anthropological toolkit may well be quite sufficient for anthropologists whose agenda is different from that of ecumenical theologians.

Arising from the ecumenical situation, there is a need to consider how best to approach the Kimbanguist doctrine of incarnation (i.e., that Simon Kimbangu, his sons, and the present chef spirituel, his grandson, are divine incarnations) in order to facilitate a meaningful and equal dialogue between the Kimbanguists and their ecumenical partners. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to develop a methodology for studying the Kimbanguist doctrine of incarnation that would render results facilitating meaningful ecumenical theological dialogue between confessional boundaries, a goal of ecumenical theology. This is best achieved through combining anthropological and ecumenical theological insights by postponement of theological judgment, thereby creating a two-step process. First, Kimbanguist theology is approached with the radical openness gleaned from anthropology, with theological analysis and discernment following thereafter. Kimbanguist theological partners are involved in both steps. In the process of attempting to understand and interpret Kimbanguist doctrine, Kimbanguist theologians, both formally trained and laypersons,[15] play an active part in exposing the content of their faith and in serving as discussion partners in assessing the validity of my interpretation of

14 On varying plausibility patterns see Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 110–121.

15 Here, a theologian is understood to be any person who attempts to formulate his or her faith in a consistent and critical manner irrespective of whether (s)he has received any formal theological training. Any reflective believer can thus be counted as a theologian,

their faith. This interpretation is a form of intercultural translation process with the aim of making the Kimbanguist doctrine, embedded as it is in Kongo culture, also intelligible to outsiders. In the second step, the interpretation of Kimbanguist doctrine is exposed to theological scrutiny in the sense of comparing it to major doctrinal trends in Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy. The results of this scrutiny will become a part of theological dialogue between Kimbanguist and other theologians, with the Kimbanguists being invited to comment, correct misjudged conclusions, and defend their position vis-à-vis competing interpretations of Christian faith. The theological scrutiny will not need to be normative in the sense of uttering a verdict on whether Kimbanguist doctrine is right or wrong, or true or false. Those kinds of utterances rather belong to faith communities like churches or the WCC. The task of academic ecumenical theology is only to provide well analyzed theological data, not to draw the doctrinal borders of Christianity.

It needs to be noted that, in the first step, the means of data collection is not the same as in anthropology in spite of the methodological option for radical openness because its aim is to facilitate later theological deliberations. Thus, the focus of what is recorded and observed is different, as is the selection of the informants.

In this chapter, the theological content of the doctrine is touched upon only to the extent it contributes to the development of the methodological agenda. This paper contains methodological considerations belonging to a project on Kimbanguist theology of incarnation. The data of the project consists of published and unpublished Kimbanguist theological texts, participant observation in small Kimbanguist diaspora communities over a decade, as well as fieldwork in Nkamba/Nouveau Jérusalem and Kinshasa in July 2015.

2 Simon Kimbangu and His Church

Simon Kimbangu (born ca. 1889), a former Baptist catechete, began to heal, preach, and prophesy early in 1921, drawing multitudes to his little village of Nkamba in Lower Congo. The Belgian colonial authorities arrested him about six months after the beginning of his ministry and sentenced him to death for high treason, in spite of his not having been involved in politics or armed uprising. Due to international protest, the death sentence was transmuted to life imprisonment. He died in 1951, having spent most of his sentence in a

whereas formal theological education does not necessarily make someone into a theologian even if it contributes to the development of critical theological thought.

solitary cell. The Kimbanguist movement was fiercely persecuted, but the exile of Kimbangu's followers caused it to spread to new parts of Belgian Congo. The Kimbanguist Church was registered in 1959, right before Congolese independence.[16]

The doctrine of the emerging movement was not codified, and there were many views of it, especially with regards the role and nature of Simon Kimbangu.[17] Gradually, however, the movement began to take form as a church in spite of the harsh repression by the colonial authorities. The formulation of official Kimbanguist teachings began with the first Kimbanguist Catechism of 1957 as their expression. In the beginning, Simon Kimbangu was officially considered to be a prophet, this also being reflected in the name of the church, "L'Église de Jésus Christ sur la terre par le prophète Simon Kimbangu." Yet since the very beginning, popular belief has had the tendency to see Simon Kimbangu as more than a prophet and, with the change in church leadership from Simon Kimbangu's first to his second son, there was a gradual development in the church's public position towards seeing Simon Kimbangu as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. The Catechism of 1957 referred to Kimbangu as the Consoler that Jesus had promised (Jn 14: 12–18) but it was clearly stated that he was not God (§19).[18] Nonetheless, teaching about the incarnation of the Holy Spirit in Simon Kimbangu eventually became the teaching of the church, although it was not included in the 1971 version of the Catechism, or in the 2003 version, which is basically a reprint of three earlier doctrinal documents, the 1971 Catechism being one of them. Today, the Kimbanguist teaching of incarnation has expanded into considering the three sons of Simon Kimbangu as incarnations of the three persons of the Trinity, and the present chef spirituel as the reincarnation (*métempsychose*) of Simon Kimbangu, and therefore the continuation

16 On Simon Kimbangu and history of the Kimbanguist Church see, for instance, Werner Ustorf, *Afrikanische Initiative: Das aktive Leiden des Propheten Simon Kimbangu* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1975); Broggi, *Diversity*, 27–56; Martin, *Die Kirche ohne Weisse*; Asch, *L'Église*; Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire du kimbanguisme*.

17 Martin, *Die Kirche*, 235. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire du kimbanguisme*, 172–174 claims that the doctrine was clear from the time of Simon Kimbangu. However, as he describes, the organization of the church was only carried out from 1957 when the persecutions were gradually ceasing, meaning that there was no possibility of formalizing the teaching as doctrine in the absence of church structures.

18 *Le catéchisme kimbanguiste* 1957 §1 & §2: «R: Tata Simon KIMBANGU est l'Envoyé de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ. Q: Comment savons-nous que Tata Simon KIMBANGU est l'Envoyé de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ? R: Jésus-Christ lui-même nous a promis de demander à son Père de nous envoyer un autre Consolateur pour réaliser plus que lui. Lisez Jean 14: 12–18.»

of the incarnation of the Holy Spirit.[19] This is in spite of the fact that, due to not having formulated a new Catechism since 1971, these teachings have not been formally codified in writing. They can, however, partly be found in the church's official website (that is, at the moment, under reconstruction) and in the ritual life of the church even at its very center, Nkamba. Additionally, these doctrinal topics are dealt with both in writing and in interviews by the leading Kimbanguist theologians, while theological teachers opposing this development were expelled from the Lutendele Kimbanguist theological seminary on the outskirts of Kinshasa – which is today the theological faculty of the church – this leading to a temporary shutdown of the seminar.[20]

3 Some Tools for Analysis

According to Wyatt MacGaffey, the Bakongo live in two different worlds simultaneously: the customary, Kikongo-speaking oral, and the bureaucratic, francophone written.[21] This observation will serve as an analytical cornerstone in the construction of methodological tools to tackle Kimbanguist theology.

The bureaucratic, francophone reality was imported by the colonialists and is a typical Western cultural product. It builds on an Enlightenment scientific worldview and regards the world as manageable through bureaucratic systems. Its rigid logic has developed out of a quite mechanistic understanding of both natural and social realities. Being basically a European construct, this realm communicates easily with Western academic culture. It is also the first layer of Congolese reality that an outside observer encounters and tends to be

19 See Aurélien Mokoko Gampiot, *Kimbanguism: An African Understanding of the Bible* (University Park PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2017), 122–154. Broggi, *Diversity*, 63–67, 71–80.

20 Fieldwork diary Nkamba 9th July 2015, 3. See also Mokoko Gampiot, *Kimbanguism,* 148.150. An example of such theologizing that became unacceptable: Léon Nguapitshi Kayongo, "Aspects and Problems of Present Day Kimbanguism in a Historical Perspective," *Africa Theological Journal* 26, no.1 (2003): 88–101; Léon Nguapitshi Kayongo, "Aspects and Problems of Present Day Kimbanguism in a Historical Perspective, Part 2," *Africa Theological Journal* 27, no. 1 (2004): 50–58. Thus also Broggi, *Diversity*, 81.

21 Wyatt MacGaffey, "Kimbanguism & the Question of Syncretism in Zaïre," in *Religion in Africa: Experience & Expression,* ed. Thomas D. Blakely et al. (London: James Currey, 1994), 247–248. Compare to the three realms in Tanzanian Christian life worlds in Päivi Hasu, *Desire and death: History through ritual practice in Kilimanjaro. Transactions of the Finnish Anthropological Society* (Helsinki: Finnish Anthropological Society, 1999), 41–42, 231–237, 241–245, 359–361; Mika Vähäkangas, "Babu wa Loliondo – Healing the tensions between Tanzanian worlds," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 45, 1 (2015), 23–27.

predominantly written. In the Kimbanguist Church, one often reads the Bible in French but the rest of ritual life takes place mostly in Kikongo or Lingala.

When the language changes from French to Kikongo (or Lingala, too, in the case of the Kimbanguist Church), and the preferred form of communication from written to oral, the whole surrounding cultural world also changes. Kikongo and Lingala are only seldom used for written communication beyond short instructions, pamphlets, or the like. Thus, Kikongo customary reality can mostly be captured in observation and discussions. The cultural plausibility patterns are also profoundly different depending on which sphere one operates in. The way of managing the world in customary terms is no longer predominantly by bureaucratic means but by spiritual power because that world is not interpreted primarily in scientific but in spiritual terms.

Another set of analytical tools needed for the development of methodology are the partly overlapping concepts of folk belief, theology, and doctrine. Here, I use folk belief in the sense of a popular faith content that has not been systematically elaborated and not discussed and approved by a church hierarchy. Most commonly, folk belief is not expressed in written form. Meanwhile, the word theology will be used to denote a non-academic ecclesiastic activity – a critical, self-critical, and systematic elaboration of faith content – and not the academic discipline as such.[22] The task of theology is to make the faith content intelligible and acceptable in the given context. Here, doctrine refers to the theologically expressed faith content of a church, which has been accepted as the correct interpretation of faith, and which serves as the yardstick of heresy and orthodoxy.

The borders of these three are not water-tight. To think theologically, one does not need theological education, and a lay church member's religious thought can well be defined as theology if it contains a critical approach which attempts to see the larger picture of reality and to argue in a credible and intelligible manner. Meanwhile, an academic degree in theology is no guarantee that the educated person's religious thinking would qualify as theology. In most churches, doctrine is very clearly defined. Procedures for approving something as doctrine often exist, and doctrine plays a normative role in terms of defining who is right and who is wrong in theology. Yet there is always a dimension of interpretation in doctrine, meaning that the seemingly clear-cut difference between theological opinions and arguments on the one hand, and theology and doctrine on the other, is not quite so sharp.

22 However, in contexts where faculties of theology are run by churches, as is the case in the DRC, the border between ecclesial and academic theology is very porous. Here the emphasis is on ecclesial theology because I am interested in the formation of doctrine and not in academic debates as such.

In the case of the Kimbanguist Church, the borders between these three categories are particularly porous. Folk belief involves considerable argumentation and numerous attempts to express the Kimbanguist faith in an intelligible and acceptable manner to outsiders, due to the fact that the Kimbanguists tend to be regarded with a high level of suspicion by other Christians; a Kimbanguist believer is constantly on the defense. However, much Kimbanguist oral argumentation (usually taking place in Kikongo or other vernaculars) does not follow the Enlightenment scientific modes of proving one's case but, rather, operates in the customary Kikongo world and argues for the credibility of the Kimbanguist position by reference to miracles or other proofs of spiritual power. Although such argumentation does not necessarily coincide with academic and bureaucratic, francophone reality, I would count some of it as theology in the ecclesial sense inasmuch as it enters into rational argumentation about Kimbanguist faith despite its being framed in the Kongo customary plausibility patterns. This means that in order to qualify as theology, thinking does not need to share the Hellenic-Western theological thought world or Enlightenment plausibility patterns but rather be a systematically, critically, and self-critically argued exposition of the faith content in any cultural sphere. Consequently, not all the written material in French would necessarily fulfill the criteria for being counted as theology due to its lack of critical and self-critical dimensions.

From the point of view of this study, the fact that the Kimbanguist Church predominantly operates orally poses a major challenge in defining its doctrine. If one were to use a minimalistic definition of doctrine as something that is officially and formally adopted by the church in a written form, only the Catechisms, definitely products of the bureaucratic French cultural sphere, would pass as doctrinal statements of the Kimbanguist Church. They shed only a dim light on the Kimbanguist faith, however; furthermore, the fact that the contracts of some Lutendele teachers were discontinued due to their opposition to church teachings that were not in the Catechisms shows that oral forms of doctrine may be normative. Therefore, I need to loosen the definition of doctrine to cover theological positions that are considered normative by the church leadership, no matter whether they are written or oral. Admittedly, this move leaves a large grey zone in which it is not clear whether an idea is a commonly held theological position or doctrine. However, I hope to be able to argue below that this result reflects the Kimbanguist theological and doctrinal scene better than producing clear-cut images that are fantasy.[23]

23 See Martin, *Die Kirche*, 242.

4 How to Collect Theological Data from Interviews?

As noted above, the systematic theological approach tends to engage the partner in critical dialogue whereas an anthropologist tends to minimize her role in the collection of data. It would be quite possible to base theological analysis purely on observation and very open-ended interviews. That would, however, be extremely inefficient time management and also leave a lot of loose ends in argumentation. Additionally, the theological and philosophical quality of the data would probably not be flattering to the Kimbanguist intelligentsia. It is not always the case that you find the sharpest theological minds exactly where you expect to find them. Let us look more closely at the different types of data in this project and the ways of gathering them.

Approaching theology and doctrine in a foreign cultural context is a demanding exercise both in terms of cultural knowledge and research ethics. The possibility of a meaningful theological dialogue presupposes a common ground and a common language, as pointed out above. If the researcher does not know enough about the culture, and especially about the underlying plausibility patterns and logic, it is difficult to create meaningful theological dialogue. In this project's approach, the hypothesis is that every human being is rational and attempts to explain the world to herself in a coherent and logical manner, even though the result might not look like that through the parameters of another culture. Following from this, to label another culture's ideas as gibberish or superstition generally points more to a basic lack of understanding of the culture on the part of the external interpreter than to the nature of the ideas in their culture of origin. Something is gibberish only if it does not make sense in its cultural setting – in the case of the Kimbanguists either the customary Kikongo or the bureaucratic French sphere. This conviction is, of course, very much in line with cultural anthropology whereas academic theology traditionally has tended to be more normatively bound to Hellenistic-based argumentation.

From an ethical point of view, a researcher should always be in search of the truth, no matter whether one believes in the possibility of finding it or not. On the one hand, the search for truth presupposes that, when one thinks one has found it, one will stick to it and argue for it as convincingly as one can. On the other hand, the search also presupposes openness towards change rather than dogmatically clinging to what one holds to be true at a certain time. So, one could maintain that while theology traditionally has emphasized the first point, anthropology's ethical emphasis has presented the second. In data collection, the anthropological position is a better solution.

Ethnographic methods are very good at collecting data on folk beliefs through participatory observation, informal discussions, and semi-structured interviews. In this case, the researcher would naturally focus on cosmological issues, rituals, and the like. When it comes to oral theological and even doctrinal data, however, the situation becomes complicated. How is one to decide where best to find a person capable of theological argumentation? Snowballing is probably the best way forward when sketching theological argumentation while, in terms of doctrine, hints from the church hierarchy would be beneficial. An interviewee who has failed to answer theological questions to his own satisfaction is generally willing to point out someone else whom he considers more able to deal with the matter. Kenyan philosopher Odera Oruka, when developing his philosophy of sagacity in cooperation with traditional sages in the villages, relied on the villagers' opinions in choosing his discussion partners but judged for himself the philosophical quality of his partners.[24] In a like manner, when studying oral theology, snowballing will probably lead you both to persons of great and lesser theological abilities.

As with Odera Oruka's discussions leading to a philosophy of sagacity, theological discussions aiming to gather oral theology challenge the partner to formulate ideas as clearly and succinctly as possible and to explore further the consequences of the chosen arguments. Thus, what would traditionally be called an interviewer is here rather a discussion partner or even sometimes a sort of a devil's advocate who challenges the informant to venture further in argumentation. For many a researcher in the social sciences, this kind of approach would be completely unacceptable because here the researcher is consciously influencing the thought and argumentation of the informant. Yet the very same researchers would usually agree that their manner of interviewing also affects the interviewees. Thus here, instead of attempting to minimize the impact of the interviewer, the researcher discussion partner intentionally directs the discussion in a manner that it produces wider and more profound theological vistas. In this scenario, one needs to be careful not to put words in the partner's mouth but rather to tease out genuine, new theological argumentation.

It is commonly agreed that the researcher always has an influence on the research data due to methodological, topical, and practical choices and, in the case of personal contact, also due to his personality. One may wonder, however, whether this kind of dialogical approach, one which consciously aims at a

24 For the philosophy of sagacity see Odera Oruka, *Sage Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

mutual development of ideas that will change the thinking of both partners, is methodologically sound.

Each research methodology needs to be formulated with the research question and discipline in mind. Thus, what would be sufficient for anthropology may not be so for ecumenics, and what is needed in ecumenics may not be acceptable in anthropology. Ecumenics as a discipline studies ecumenical endeavors and relations between different Christian churches and groups. Even if the goal of ecumenics as a discipline per se is not Christian unity, it tends to reflect the ideal of ecumenics as ecclesial practice, namely improved relations between Christian churches and groups. In a larger view, this goal could also be extended to interreligious relations. In the study of Kimbanguist doctrine, ecclesial ecumenical interest provides the motivating ground for the choice of the research theme, coupled with the fact that the Kimbanguist Church is practically and theoretically a landmark case in the ecumenical movement because no church has ever been rejected from the World Council of Churches once it has been accepted as a member.

In this case, it becomes evident that the goals of understanding the world and changing the world are interwoven. The aim of understanding and interpreting the Kimbanguist doctrine is not only of purely academic interest but also a contribution to the ecumenical debate. At best, this kind of research can provide both parties, the Kimbanguist Church and those churches that are disappointed with its doctrinal developments, a more detailed and balanced picture of the ecumenical situation. Moreover, the WCC will have a more solid basis for judgment and hopefully a deeper understanding of pluralism in Christianity and the processes leading to it. For Kimbanguists, teasing out theological argumentation would equip them to explain and defend their cause.

My role as a researcher becomes crucial here. It is evident that I am not a member of the church studied but, rather, have a relation to the WCC that could be described as one of critical solidarity. My relation to the Kimbanguist Church began as a keen interest in the story of Papa Simon Kimbangu, motivated by my curiosity about African theologies and my Pan-African leanings. Eventually, returning to the Nordic region after service in Tanzania, I came in contact with some small Kimbanguist communities and finally traveled to Nkamba with Swedish Kimbanguists over a decade later. Thus, while having strong sympathy for the partly Congolese nationalist and Pan-Africanist Kimbanguist political agenda, as a child of the Enlightenment I have no way of subscribing to the Kimbanguist religious agenda. In theology, therefore, my goal is to understand and interpret the Kimbanguist doctrine in order to

facilitate meaningful communication between the Kimbanguist and Enlightenment rationalist worlds.

5 Observation as a Source of Theological Analysis

Theology in its philosophical or systematic form is a very logocentric exercise. Therefore, in spite of the issues discussed above, it should not be overly difficult to perceive how an interview can serve as a source of analysis for theology. When one moves over to ritual, where the verbal dimension may play varying roles, the question of whether and how to analyze ritual as a theological source becomes more pointed.

The gap between systematic theological logocentrism and ritual cannot simply be glossed over by resorting to the patristic dictum "*lex orandi, lex credendi*" ("the law of praying is the law of believing"). While it is clear that one needs to see the connection between ritual life and faith content, there is a danger of interpreting this maxim as only referring to the verbal dimensions of ritual. However, the action accompanying the words is what gives them the meaning in ritual. Thus, for example, in spite of the words of institution being the same in the Roman Catholic Eucharist and the Reformed Lord's Table, the way the sacrament is conducted reveals a difference in meaning. "This is my body," is interpreted through transubstantiation in the Catholic, and as metaphorical in the Reformed setting. Additionally, the variation in ritual action reflects the difference in understanding. Thus, the underlying cosmology, the words of the ritual, and its non-verbal acts together comprise an interaction that formulates the meaning of the ritual. The non-verbal action can serve as a key to open the cosmology or theology behind the words.

In addition to ritual action's serving as a helpful tool in interpreting the verbal dimension of the ritual, there are actions that are not accompanied by words or, perhaps, bound to any fixed wordings. In such cases, can those actions be seen as independent sources of theological analysis? Here the question arises of how to theologically analyze the non-verbal. Likewise, in the case of ritual accompanied by a set wording, one may wonder whether some of the ritual's meaning is lost if the non-verbal dimensions are used only to interpret the verbal.

The first obvious requirement of any proper analysis of ritual action is that it needs to be contextual. Thus, for example, the fact that everyone kneels in front of the chef spirituel does not directly point to his divine status as the Holy Spirit's incarnation. While one always kneels in the Kimbanguist Church

when praying, one also kneels in front of highly respected persons who are not perceived as divine according to the church doctrine. Thus, when meeting with the chef spirituel's brother, one kneels even if it became clear in the "bana 26" controversy that not all Simon Kimbangu's offspring should be perceived as God's incarnations.[25] In the Kimbanguist context, not kneeling definitely conveys the message that one does not consider someone divine, yet kneeling does not necessarily point to divine status. This is so also because in the traditional Kongo context, kneeling was a common way of expressing submission in front of a superior.

The second requirement is that the interpretation needs to take the larger ritual picture into account. For example, all Kimbanguist services are concluded with *nsinsani*, a collect. In it, women and men usually compete against each other over who raises more funds. Seen separately, this could be interpreted as an expression of gender segregation but a wider view immediately erases such an idea. Often, the genders do not sit on separate sides of the church, women can be pastors, and while there are, for example, women's associations, most of the associations are open to both genders. Thus, the resulting analysis would need to be nuanced to take into account that whereas genders are not seen as the same or perhaps not even similar yet they are somehow equal.

6 How to Turn the Non-written into Theology?

Once the written, oral, and observational data have been collected, their varying natures as well as differences in their content pose challenges to analysis.

In theological analysis, or close reading, one has traditionally started from the premises that the written data tend to provide a correct representation of the intended meaning of the author in the sense that the author has had the opportunity to ponder what he is writing and to return to the text to edit it. There is also a certain epistemological optimism about the possibility of interpersonal communication. Yet even here, one should not overlook the hermeneutical problems involved in the interpretation of texts. These problems increase in relation to cultural, historical, and contextual differences. I will not deal with questions related to textual interpretation here, however, but

25 On the "bana 26" controversy see Armand Apota Salimba Monga Lisomba, *Histoire de la dissidence au sein de l'Église Kimbanguiste à la lumière de 26=1: Témoignage.* (Kinshasa, 2013). On kneeling in front of the chef spirituel's brother see fieldwork diary Kinshasa 5th July 2015, 3–5.

concentrate on the other types of sources.[26] When the cultural gap is significant, it is imperative to postpone theological judgment even after this close reading in order to gain the fullest possible picture of the studied theology before assessing it.

In interviews, the interviewee generally does not have the opportunity of unlimited time to ponder his answer. In some kinds of research this can be a benefit, especially if attempting to record views that are not only rationally reasoned but also related to emotions and subconscious values. Generally, this is not an aim for theological interviews. However, orality allows for flexibilities that written text does not as readily do. No one speaks using perfect formal grammar, and in speaking one is less bound by its rules which creates space for a wider variety of expression. The non-verbal dimensions of the interview also give hints as to a proper interpretation of the verbal. Likewise, especially in multilingual contexts, it is more natural to blend words or even sentences of different languages. This is not only a way of gaining more freedom of expression but also a clue to the researcher about the linguistic universes where theological thought takes place. As mentioned above, in the case of the Bakongo, the French and Kikongo linguistic universes are quite separate and, among the Kimbanguists, the mélange of vocabularies can reveal quite a bit about what is going on in Kimbanguist theologies.

One way of avoiding somewhat thoughtless theological responses in interviews is to conduct them in focus groups. There, if an idea is unclearly or even erroneously expressed, the peers will correct it. Additionally, the group members will challenge each other to take the argumentation further, thereby facilitating the task of the researcher. The ideas developed in focus groups can also be considered as more representative of the community as they are not only a matter of an outsider challenging a single theologian.

If interviews are a type of source that is created in cooperation between the interviewees and the researcher, in observation the role of the researcher is even greater as it is generally not possible to pose questions clarifying whether an observation is correct, while in interviews it is. One can naturally ask members of the community afterwards about the meaning of an observation but by that time the event has already passed and one can never return to it in exactly the same form. Furthermore, in observation there are usually countless things on which one could focus, while in an individual interview one can concentrate on the interviewee, his answers, and reactions. In a focus group, the situation is more complex and one needs to divide attention between the one

26 On how I see close reading of classics, see Mika Vähäkangas, "Modelling Contextualization in Theology," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 98, 3 (2010): 279–306.

speaking and the reactions of the others. In observation, however, one is faced with a jungle of alternatives and no observation can cover more than a tiny section of the possibilities.

The researcher's creative role in the production of data in observation is not only limited to the more or less conscious choice of what he observes and what glides by unnoticed. The observation itself is molded by the cultural, theological, and personal conditions of the observer and the act of observing cannot be separated from interpretation of what is experienced. Such interpretation suffers from all the complexities of textual interpretation except that while one always can return to the original text (though not back to the first reading of it), one cannot return to the observed event. Additionally, while in the logocentric theological enterprise text – whether written or spoken – is both the (preferred) source and the mode of work, observation is not a text. Although textualized in a fieldwork diary or a description of the event, it is then no longer the observation and even less the event, but rather a doubly distanced (first as an observation which is at the same time an interpretation and secondly as a textualized product of the observation) artifact based on the event.

In being textualized, the resulting artifact has entered the textual realm where theological close reading takes place. Yet it is not the type of text that one would conventionally use in theological analysis and, additionally, analyzing it would lead to a kind of auto-analysis in which the analyzer is at the same time a partial producer of the text. The observations can thus only be used to reconstruct concepts or dimensions of cosmologies by concentrating on the memories or recordings of original verbal and non-verbal expressions. Only seldom can observation bring additional clarity to argumentation or the logic behind the argumentation – that needs to be gleaned from texts and interviews.

7 Analyzing between the Worlds

In this last section, I present what theological analysis of the Kimbanguist doctrine of incarnation might look like, based on texts, interviews, and observation. In this, there is a specific problem with the historical dimension. Written texts, mostly in French, date back about half a century whereas interviews and observation are possible only in present time. Naturally, some of my observations were made a decade earlier but, because my knowledge of Kimbanguist theology, among other abilities, has evolved during this time, I have to treat the different layers of my observation with great care. Thus, I must have missed many theological nuances, yet I have not been able to check from discussions

of that time whether I did so due to researching from behind a veil of ignorance.[27] Another dimension is that what you know, and can be seen to know, influences the manner in which the people disclose issues to you. Thus, basically, I have no trustworthy access to earlier non-textual sources. Access to earlier good quality research would only partly alleviate the problem because the interpretational dimensions of observation are usually not very transparent.[28]

In addition to banking on earlier research, one way of dealing with the lacuna of earlier non-written data is to conduct such a close reading that it tackles the non-written reality behind the texts. This resembles the social historical approaches to biblical texts. Statements and arguments in the texts do not arise from nowhere but are reactions or responses to events, thoughts, and trends in the community creating those texts. Thus, for example, the first Kimbanguist Catechism's clear statement that Simon Kimbangu is not God must be read against the assumption that there must have been people – most probably in the Kimbanguist Church – attributing divine status to Simon Kimbangu.[29] Otherwise the statement would make no sense. When there is no direct textual evidence of this, it means that these ideas were expressed orally. As the language of the texts is predominantly French and one can expect that earlier oral communication would have taken place in vernaculars, it seems that the ideas of incarnation extending to Simon Kimbangu and his offspring were only expressed orally in vernaculars. This would be very much in line with MacGaffey's theory of the two Kongo life spheres.

Thus, when the Kimbanguist Church was officially founded and registered in 1959, the official written doctrine in French began to take form, one which dealt primarily with questions about Kimbangu, leaving the classical Protestant theological questions aside.[30] Eventually, following ferocious accusations of syncretism, classical Protestant theological issues were introduced, pointing

27 In my view, John Rawls' "veil of ignorance" (John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999)) describes a researcher's position in an apt way, even if Rawls used the term in a very different manner. Research process leads one towards increased knowledge of the phenomenon studied, and each step of interpretation opens up further interpretational possibilities. As a result, one is steadily behind a veil that covers what is not known, and if one knew today what one will know tomorrow, one's interpretation would be different. And because observation is a process of interpretation from the very beginning, observation would also be very different.

28 Of course, some dimensions of my interpretation are subconscious and therefore even my own observations are not fully transparent to me.

29 *Le catéchisme kimbanguiste* 1957 §19: «Q: Pourquoi le nom de Tata Simon KIMBANGU est-il mis en avant, est-ce que Tata Simon KIMBANGU serait Dieu? R: Non, Tata Simon KIMBANGU n'est pas Dieu… »

30 Asch, *L'Église*, 108.

out that Kimbanguists actually subscribe to major mainline Christian doctrines, albeit sometimes with modifications. Obviously, there were many contextual Congolese dimensions, especially in the ethical code for the members. However, it seems probable from the church's texts and from Martin that the oral Kikongo and Lingala theology was not fully Protestant even during the Protestantization[31] of the official teaching but, rather, that Simon Kimbangu's divine status, for example, was concurrently being proposed. According to Guy Bernard, the church was consciously playing a double game (Kimbangucentric and Christocentric) in order to balance between its two constituencies of those preferring the African and the Western approaches.[32] It is impossible to judge in hindsight how popular such ideas were because contemporary observers had their agendas (just as any observers any time). Therefore, Martin would probably underestimate such tendencies because of her wish to integrate the Kimbanguist Church into the ecumenical movement. Martin was involved in the World Council of Churches' assessments of the Kimbanguist Church prior its acceptance, having been sent to Congo by the Moravian Church on a fact-finding trip.[33] The result of the process was that the Kimbanguist Church joined the WCC and Martin became the director of their theological institute. It would be in the interest of today's Kimbanguist establishment to consider the state of popular theology as quite the contrary in order to point out that the doctrine of Simon Kimbangu's and his sons' incarnation is not a new invention but has been believed by Kimbanguists from the very beginning. Perhaps the least engaged observer would be the American sociologist Susan Asch who estimated that only the very top hierarchy of the church as well as the theological institute students would have fully bought into the Protestantizing agenda.[34]

31 The first chef spirituel, Diangienda Kuntima, directed the church closer to Protestantism which led to tensions and splintering of the church. Gaston Mwene-Batende, "Le phénomène de dissidence des sectes religieuses d'inspiration kimbanguiste," *Les cahiers du C.E.D.A.F.* 6 (1971): 5. On the Protestantization of the church see Asch, *L'Église*, 113–128. Martin, *Die Kirche*, 203–204 shows her strong tendency to play down the heterodox elements found in the 1957 Catechism in order to pursue her theological agenda.

32 Guy Bernard, "La contestation et les Eglises nationales au Congo," *Revue Canadienne des Etudes africaines* 5, 2 (1971): 148.

33 Asch, *L'Église*, 120–122.

34 *Ibid.*, 147. However, it is not clear how strictly she interpreted the Protestantizing agenda. She points out that almost all believers would believe that the chef spirituel had supernatural powers. This, as such, need not be seen as a major deviation from some, especially charismatic, Protestant movements. Later, she points out how in many Congolese regions, both members and pastors considered Simon Kimbangu as the Holy Spirit (148–179).

Thus, when entering the WCC, the Kimbanguist Church was assessed in the same manner as all the other churches. It was the official written doctrine that counted. In this case it happened to be in French, thereby belonging in a life sphere quite different from that in which the church members lived fully or for the most part. Thus what was accepted in the WCC was the formal church which lived in a reality different from the members.[35] Martin and probably also a number of other representatives of the formal church wished for the official doctrine to prevail. A move in that direction was the establishment of the Lutendele theological seminary outside Kinshasa (which later became the theological faculty of the Simon Kimbangu University). The seminary was supported with literature and teaching staff by the WCC and the Basel Mission (which later became Mission 21).[36]

Today, it is clear that the strategy to keep the Kimbanguist official doctrine close to mainline Protestantism has backfired, and instead of the Protestant French official doctrine turning into the daily oral lived doctrine of the believers, the opposite has been taking place. This process is not yet complete in the sense that there is not yet any Catechism overtly containing the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's incarnation in Simon Kimbangu. However, at the moment it seems that this teaching has become hegemonic, and it is difficult to hear it challenged from within the church. Additionally, the latest Catechism implies the incarnation of the Holy Spirit as Simon Kimbangu by referring to him as the consoler promised by Jesus,[37] and by pointing out that "Papa Simon Kimbangu has existed with God since the beginning."[38]

The analytical task, therefore, becomes one of analyzing how Kikongo and Lingala oral theology has transformed the Kimbanguist doctrine both in terms of process and content. It would appear that an analytical approach in the process would be to compare the oral and written theological sources. Wherever the oral theological sources are in line with the emerging trends in the written theologizing, it is a case of the customary Kikongo realm breaking into the bureaucratic, francophone one. Whenever the written theology is in variance with the lived theology, the difference can be used to shed light on the nature and content of these two spheres.

35 Asch, *L'Église*, 101–179 describes the difference dramatically as "*le Kimbanguisme officiel*" and "*le Kimbanguisme des Kimbanguistes*."

36 Ibid., 124–125; fieldwork diary Lutendele 17th July 2015.

37 Le catéchisme kimbanguiste 2003, 72 §2.

38 Le catéchisme kimbanguiste 2003, 72 §4: "Papa Simon Kimbangu a existé avec Dieu dés le commencement."

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CHAPTER 8

Pentecostal Praise and Worship as a Mode of Theology

Martina Prosén

It is Wednesday evening March 12th 2014 and about twenty people are gathered in CITAM *Woodley*[1] *for what is called Power House.*[2] *Before long another hundred have joined this weekly prayer gathering for the church. As with all services in branches affiliated with Christ is the Answer Ministries, it starts with about half an hour of praise and worship. Some songs are sung in Swahili but, apart from that, English is the common language in this urban, middle-class, Pentecostal church situated in Nairobi, Kenya. The worship team leads the congregation in a well-known worship song sung in charismatic churches worldwide:*

> You deserve the glory and the honor
> Lord, we lift our hands in worship
> As we lift your Holy name.[3]

People raise their hands, encouraged by the song, and some bow their knees before God. This is a time of worship, of adoration, of surrendering to God who is Holy. Soon there will be prayers for specific themes but right now it is time for focusing one's attention on God alone and reminding oneself of who He is. The worship leader erupts into short spoken prayers in between the stanzas, repeating and reinforcing the message of the song: "We worship your name, oh Lord." "You deserve all the glory, all the honor." "Hallelujah! There is no one else like you." Then the same song continues in Swahili as the service proceeds.[4]

1 CITAM Woodley is an abbreviation of the Woodley branch of the Christ is the Answer Ministries, a Pentecostal church consisting of over twenty semi-autonomous branches. See below for a more detailed description.

2 This article was first presented as a paper in the international conference "African Lived Christianity – Faith, Ritual and Power" at Lund University, Sweden, March 2016.

3 Worship set, Woodley 20140312 Power House. Song composed originally in Swedish by Eva Hellmark (*Vi vill ge dig äran*) and English translation by Terry MacAlmon, http://www.music-notes.com/sheetmusic/mtd.asp?ppn=MN0123554 (accessed 2017-02-06).

4 Observation guide, Woodley Power House 20140312. Sound recording, Woodley 20140312 Power House. Field notes, Woodley Power House 6pm 20140312. All field notes, observation

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Long before my fieldwork in Nairobi, Kenya in 2013–2014,[5] I started to ponder the relationship between Pentecostal praise and worship practices and Pentecostal theology. Inspired by such theologians as Robert Schreiter,[6] Steven Land,[7] and Ulrik Josefsson[8] I had found it important to search for theology not only in academic texts but also in (for theologians) unconventional sources such as communal activities, songs, testimonies, and Christian journals. With the help of Daniel Albrecht[9] and others, my eyes were opened to the ritual qualities of *praise and worship* and the central role it has in contemporary charismatic liturgy. I soon started to ask theological and theoretical questions when listening to worship songs or participating in church services in my home church and elsewhere. In heading for the field in Nairobi, my goal was to search for the theology that is expressed in worship as well as the theology that motivates worship. In hearing songs like the one quoted above ("You deserve the glory"), I was thinking about what the song says about God and his character, or what it says about the cosmos and the place of human beings within it. Increasingly, however, I came to think of the songs as not merely *expressing* theology (as if theology was something already given and static), but as also *crafting* theology, constantly re-creating and molding the very faith that they express. I am now convinced that this process takes place not just when the song is composed, but also as the song is sung in a liturgical context. To me, congregational singing is thus a creative activity that both shapes and conveys theological knowledge.[10]

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guides, worship sets, sound recordings, interviews and lyrics referred to in this article are in the author's possession. In the last part of the chapter I describe my fieldwork method and these different categories of collected data.

5 The four months of fieldwork in Nairobi were carried out as part of my PhD project, a qualitative study of two Charismatic churches (CITAM Woodley and Mavuno Church), focusing on theological and ritual aspects of praise and worship. The idea is to combine ethnographic research methods with theological analysis to create a nuanced and rich picture of how praise and worship function within the communal life of these churches. Due to space constrains I have chosen to delimit the discussion in this chapter to CITAM Woodley.

6 Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985).

7 Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2010).

8 Ulrik Josefsson, *Liv och över nog: Den tidiga pingströrelsens spiritualitet,* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma Bokförlag, 2005).

9 Daniel Albrecht, *Rites of the Spirit: A ritual approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

10 Compare Yong who discusses seven possible resonances between "theologizing" and musicking in renewalist/Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition and challenges renewalist theologians to explore this relationship further. Amos Yong, "Conclusion: Improvisation,

In this chapter I outline a theoretical discussion on the nature and methods of theology in order to argue that Pentecostal *praise and worship*[11] is a valid mode of theology – comparable to other theological forms and therefore suitable for theological analysis – and show how an ethnographic approach may help the theologian grapple with this *modus theologici* in his or her research work. In the first section of the chapter, I argue that the interactive and multimodal nature of theology – as well as the charismatization of contemporary Christianity – requires us to search for new methods in theology, suggesting ethnography as a viable choice. In the second section, I illustrate this perspective through my own research, discussing my methodology and the findings of my study. The reader will be presented with a background to the ritual of praise and worship in CITAM Woodley before I briefly explore the theological meanings that my informants attach to the concept of *worship*, as well as some of the theological themes that appear in *worship songs*.

1 Praise and Worship as a Mode of Theology

Before proceeding, I want to draw the reader's attention to the difference in academia between *normative/constructive theology* and *analytic theology,* with normative theology referring to theological reasoning with a confessional base, while analytic theology works within a critical framework, analyzing Christian faith from a secular starting point. In confessional theological schools, and globally speaking, constructive theology dominates the discipline, while in the Swedish university setting analytic theology is most common.

Indigenization, and Inspiration: Theological Reflections on the Sound and Spirit of Global Renewal" (2015) in Monique Ingalls and Amos Yong, eds. *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 279–288.

11 In the charismatic idiom *praise and worship* may refer both to a musical genre (sometimes called just "worship music") and to a related liturgical structure where the church service begins with a continuous string of songs ("worship set") led by band ("worship team"), characterized by a dramaturgic progression from "praise" (communally oriented up-tempo songs) to "worship" (intimate low-tempo songs). See Monique Ingalls, "Introduction: Interconnection, Interface, and Identification in Pentecostal-Charismatic Music and Worship" in *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity,* edited by Monique Ingalls and Amos Yong (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 1–25. In this text the second usage is what interests me, and I will refer to it as *the praise and worship ritual* or *praise and worship* interchangeably, while songs sung during that segment of the church service are called *worship songs.* In addition to this *worship* in charismatic idiom may also refer to the general idea of honoring God, regardless of the means, see below.

However, the distinction might not be as sharp as we would like it to be, as analytic theology depends on other people's normative/constructive theology-making and most constructive theologians work analytically to a large extent. Personally, I try to keep a foot in both camps as I think both approaches are fruitful and can be combined. In this text I am primarily speaking as a Swedish academic theologian analyzing how Pentecostal theology is expressed in praise and worship, but to some extent I am also speaking as a constructive Pentecostal theologian[12] arguing that praise and worship is a valid mode of theology that say something true of God. Assuming that praise and worship can indeed be counted as a form of theology, what then is theology?

1.1 *The Nature of Theology*

The debate over what theology is – that is, the nature of theology – is a classic one within the theological discipline and can be approached in many ways, resulting in different answers. Within systematic theology the question is often discussed under the label *prolegomena* or *preliminaries,* debating whether knowledge of God is even possible and on what grounds.[13] The evangelical theologian Millard J. Erickson defines theology as:

> that discipline which strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily on the Scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life.[14]

To him, the starting-point of theology is the self-revealing God, presupposing both the object of study (God) and the means of knowledge (revelation). As God has made himself known – in Christ, in nature, history, human personality, and in the words and acts preserved in the Bible – knowledge of God is

12 I designate myself a Pentecostal theologian due to my background in, and affiliation with, the Pentecostal movement in Sweden. However, I do not understand the term "Pentecostal" in a narrow sense as someone believing in the "baptism of the Spirit as a second blessing followed by the sign of speaking in tongues," but in a wider sense as someone believing in the triune God and counting on the transformative and regenerative power of the Holy Spirit through the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

13 Alister E. McGrath *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 152–153. "Theology" comes from the Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (word), hence "knowledge of God/discourse on God" (ibid., 142).

14 Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 23.

possible and so also is theology, understood as a worldview or doctrinal system.[15]

Another way to approach the question is a historical one, tracing the different meanings attached to the concept over the centuries. One such attempt has been made by Edward Farley, who says that the term *theology* is "fundamentally ambiguous"[16] as it refers to things of entirely different genres. This ambiguity, he argues, is due to pre-modern understandings of theology as both an actual salvifically oriented knowledge of God (theology as wisdom), and a discipline, a scholarly enterprise (theology as science). When the two ways of understanding theology drifted apart, and yet the same concept continued to be used for both, the present ambiguity of the term arose.[17]

A third perspective is offered by Catholic theologian Robert Schreiter in what he calls "a sociology of theology"[18] which divides theology into four different types or styles. These are: (1) theology as variations on sacred text (commentaries, narratives, sermons, etc.); (2) theology as wisdom (the mystical search for knowledge of self and God); (3) theology as sure knowledge (a systematic, philosophical, and critical discipline); and (4) theology as praxis (a dialectical process of reflection and action aimed at social transformation). The strength of Schreiter's model is that it also discusses the cultural and social conditions under which different types of theology thrive and does not judge any of them as being more or less sophisticated or "real" theology.[19]

The authors behind *Talking About God in Practice. Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*, presents a fourth perspective. They also propose a four-part model, though speak of these as the *four voices of theology*, implying that theology may take different forms (speak with different voices) within the same cultural and historical context. The four voices they identify are: (1) normative theology (Scriptures, creeds, liturgies, official church teaching); (2) formal theology (academic theology, theology of theologians); (3) espoused theology (theology embedded in a group's articulation of its beliefs); and (4) operant theology (theology embedded within the practices of a group).[20] This model has much to offer theologians who work with empirical research

15 Ibid., 34–35.

16 Edward Farley, "Theologia: The history of a concept" in *Readings in Christian Theology,* edited by Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 1.

17 Ibid., 1–3

18 Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies,* 80.

19 Ibid., 80–93.

20 Helen Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice. Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 53–56.

methods, as it presents theology as "properly complex,"[21] neither discounting any of the *four voices* nor yet seeing them as interrelated and interdependent. Practice(s) here counts as a form of theology in any setting, not only where it is oriented towards social transformation (*theology as praxis* in Schreiter's model). This allows us simultaneously to "read theology" in the everyday activities of any faith community, as well as from their official teachings, their sermons, and their narratives, while at the same time acknowledging the academic discipline of theology as something distinct and yet related.

Neither of these models is exhaustive and neither covers everything that theology has been and is understood to be. The point here is rather to show how complex this subject is and that there are good reasons to see theology as more than a critical or intellectual endeavor[22] although historically it has predominantly been just that.

1.2 *In Search of New Methods in Theology*

In his introduction to Christian theology, Professor Alister McGrath describes the discipline of theology from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment as an intellectual reflection on the nature, purposes, and activity of (the Christian) God, and a systematic study of Christian doctrine. Later on, theology developed into an academic discipline analyzing religious belief systems more generally, Christian and others.[23] In both cases, theology was a text-bound activity, done by and for a well-educated male elite – the clergy and academia. The foundational sources for theological reasoning (however their relative importance was debated) were Scripture, tradition, reason/philosophy, and human existential experience.[24] During the latter part of the 20th century, liberation theology paved the way for a major shift in how theology is understood, including the experiences of the poor in their socio-political context as a legitimate source of theology and insisting on praxis as both the starting point and the goal of theological reflection.[25] This gave rise to a whole field of discussion of contextual theology, black theology, and different forms of feminist/womanist theology, and highlighted the situatedness and particularity of all forms of theology. That also led to an opening, at least in theory, for more voices to be

21 Ibid., 53.

22 Compare Mika Vähäkangas, this volume, who distinguishes between folk belief, theology, and doctrine, and sees theology as a critical, self-critical, and systematic elaboration of faith content.

23 McGrath, 141–142.

24 Ibid., 181–232.

25 Ibid., 116–118.

heard in the theological conversation, female voices as well as those of the poor and the oppressed.

In a similar way, I would argue that the current charismatization of Christianity[26] has the potential to generate a new shift in theology where not only the socio-political context but also the communal-spiritual experience is allowed to count as a valid source for theology-making. This widens the "data" from which we create "theory" in theology to include not only Scripture, tradition, reason, and socio-political contexts, but also the communal life of local churches and the spiritual experience of ordinary believers. Again there is a potential for new voices to be heard in theology as the thoughts, experiences, faith – indeed, the theology – of lay Christians is taken into account. This, however, requires us to use new methods in academic theology, apart from the traditional exegetical, hermeneutical, and philosophical methods. As a matter of fact, it requires theologians to start discussing issues of method, data, and theory in a whole new way, rather than just presuming that we know what we are doing and how to do it. Too much of academic theological research is focused on the hands-on work of analyzing and interpreting specific texts, while not many theologians ask themselves the basic methodological questions of how and why things are done in the way they are.

There are exceptions though. One example is the anthology, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, in which a range of authors discuss and exemplify how ethnographic methods can be used when studying the Christian Church, and how data generated by such research can form the basis of theological reasoning and reflection. Based on the idea of the Church as simultaneously theological and social/cultural they argue that ecclesiology must make use of ethnographic methods in order to speak credibly and justly about it. To do so is a way to take seriously the situatedness of the Church as the body of Christ on earth.[27] In his introduction Pete Ward says:

> The turn toward the ethnographic represents a strategic intervention in Christian theology. Methods of research are never neutral. … Whatever the disciplinary field and whatever the particular point at issue, the ethnographic 'voice' focuses attention on *the lived and the local*.[28]

26 Moritz Fischer, "'The Spirit Helps Us in Our Weakness': Charismatization of Worldwide Christianity and the Quest for an Appropriate Pneumatology with Focus on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 20, no. 1 (2011), 95–121.

27 Pete Ward, "Introduction," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 2–5.

28 Ward, "Introduction," 9. Emphasis added.

Why would the charismatization of Christianity generate a shift towards studying lived Christianity? Well, to me it seems to be the most viable way forward, given the character of Pentecostal faith. Theology-making within Pentecostalism (understood here in a wide sense, see Anderson[29]) has from the very outset been what could be designated as "popular," "non-academic," "oral," or "pietistic" theology.[30] Since its inception, Pentecostal theology has been expressed in testimonies, rituals, sermons, songs, devotional literature, magazines, TV and radio programs, and in many other ways, but not until quite recently has it also been formulated in academic literature. So if we as researchers want to investigate Pentecostal theology and do justice to it, we need to look at the former sources rather than academic texts, and learn to use methods that are appropriate. Here ethnography helps us focus our attention on the lived and the local and to do so in an academically credible way. The question is whether theologians will be prepared to take up the task and enter into dialogue with the anthropologists and social scientists who so far dominate the field of Pentecostal studies in Africa. I think this is a crucial issue for the future of theology itself, due to the rapid shift of focus within Christianity from the North to the South and from mainline churches to Pentecostal-Charismatic churches. If theology is to be relevant and plausible within the contemporary church (not only as an academic discipline), and if there is to be any connection between the way we think of the church doctrinally and how life in the local church is actually lived, then theologians need to take the challenge of "the ethnographic turn" seriously, as Pete Ward and his colleagues argue.[31]

In my case this means that I take the communal worship service of two specific churches as my starting point for analyzing the theology of worship (operant and/or espoused). For my PhD project I have observed services and collected lyrics as well as interviewing pastors and worship leaders in order to get close to the meaning and function of praise and worship. But in doing so I have had a distinctly theological interest, wanting to know how theology is created and expressed in and through praise and worship (considered as both songs and as ritual), and how the ritual of praise and worship is motivated theologically by its practitioners. The lived faith (as observed using ethnographic methods) of these two churches in urban Africa thus forms the basis of my

29 Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism. Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9–14.

30 For a discussion of terms see Kenneth J. Archer, *The Gospel Revisited. Towards a Pentecostal Theology of Worship and Witness* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 5–11.

31 Ward, "Introduction," 4–9.

theological enterprise.[32] For this article, however, I have chosen to delimit my analysis to only one of them, CITAM Woodley.

Taking the life of the Church of Christ seriously is, however, not something new in theology. Neither is the use of songs or rituals as a basis for theological reflection. Some of the most important Christological texts – for example, Philippians 2, Hebrew 1, and Revelations 5 – are doxologies that were most probably sung in the early church. No theologian would dream of dismissing them as a basis for theological reflection just because they are songs. The early church was aware of the close connection between worship and theology, as captured in the principle called *lex orandi, lex credendi* (roughly translated by McGrath as "the way you pray determines what you believe"[33]). This shows us that the life of the Church and its rituals, including songs, have always been intimately connected to theology. The new element is that we now turn to contemporary churches and contemporary songs instead of the historical or biblical, and that urges us to search for new methods in theology as well as providing material for continuous reflection on the nature of theology itself.

1.3 *Theology as an On-going Process of Interaction*

So far I have briefly introduced the reader to the theological debate concerning the nature of theology and discussed the need for new research methods in order to match developments in the contemporary Church. In this section I outline my own perspective on how constructive theology-making takes place as a creative and relational activity with many outcomes, seeking both to acknowledge the communal-spiritual experiences of believers as valid sources of theology and to delineate theology itself as a multi-modal and interactive process. Readers familiar with evangelical and/or Pentecostal theology will recognize the basic elements of this perspective, although the model itself is my own reasoning. It should be noted that it does not in any way exclude other models presented above, but, rather, seeks to complement them and spur further reflection.

For me it is fruitful to look at constructive theology-making as an ongoing process of interaction between *text* and *context* and between *relating* and *reflecting*. This process of interaction generates a whole range of different forms or *modes of theology*, all with their specific emphases, and takes place wherever Christian faith is lived, expressed, and reflected upon.

Illustrated in Figure 8.1, the model looks like this:

32 It may be that I thereby, from an anthropological standpoint, become guilty of an "instrumentally defined love" for ethnography (compare Joel Robbins, this volume), but at least it is done with the hope of developing my own discipline in the long run.

33 McGrath, *Christian Theology,* 222.

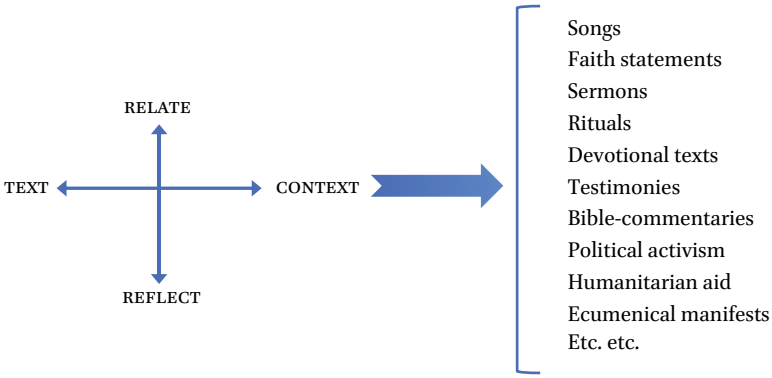

FIGURE 8.1 Theology as process.

The model has two axes and starts with the vertical one, with the self-revealing God at the top, who is in himself relational and seeks to *relate* to his creation. He reveals himself to humanity through nature, history, human personality, and Scripture, but most of all through his Son, Jesus Christ. Responding to God's self-revelation we seek God and start to live in a personal relationship with him. Through the Holy Spirit we are born again, filled with his love and power, and by baptism taken into his Church, the Body of Christ. Living now in this new state, we start to *reflect* on who God is and what implications that has for us as human beings and as an ecclesial community. Then our faith and understanding is deepened and so is our relationship with God and each other. And thus it goes on in a continuous move back and forth between relating and reflecting, and this, I would say, is the embryo of all Christian theology.

More explicit forms of theology arise when the first axis is combined with a second, namely that of *text* and *context*. For as God revealed himself to us, He did so through the Word, Christ, and the written word that centers on him. Therefore words, that is, texts, are central to Christian theology-making, both as sources and as expressions of theology. However, no text can be read and understood apart from its context and no text can be made relevant for new readers unless it also relates to their context. Therefore it is part of theology's task to reflect on the various contexts of biblical texts, as well as on the many texts and contexts of the Church, historical and contemporary. Then a new cycle begins, where the text is understood from its own context as well as from ours and at the same time the text is allowed to speak in and to our context to correct and challenge our way of life.

In my understanding, this ongoing interaction between relating to God and fellow-humans and reflecting on those relationships in the light of both text

and context generates a whole range of different expressions that may all be seen as *valid modes of theology*. Examples include philosophical or devotional texts, oral testimonies, songs, sermons, ecumenical manifests, church statutes, ethical guidelines, creeds, catechisms, political activism, humanitarian work, liturgies, and many other forms of expression. While belonging to different genres, they may still be regarded as outcomes of a communal, creative, and constructive theology-making process. Paraphrasing the well-established term *loci theologici* (theological topics or content categories), I propose that the above examples and many other theological expressions may be viewed as different *modi theologici* (theological modes) in their own right, enabling us to build a theoretical frame for investigating them as theology (and not, for example, as folk belief or religious practices). This has methodological consequences, for if theology is creatively expressed in many different modes, then theology as a discipline (theological research) must work accordingly, finding the most suitable method to examine the theological mode under study.

1.4 *Praise and Worship as a Mode of Theology – Methodological Challenges*

Coming back to my own focus of research I conclude that the ritual of *praise and worship* is a *modus theologicus* comparable to other forms, and therefore suitable for critical theological examination. In fact, my own interest in praise and worship as a field of research began with these sorts of reflections on the nature of theology, coupled with a desire to open it to greater dynamism theoretically and methodologically. When I embarked on my PhD journey I had for long been frustrated by how little of the lived faith of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity is actually spelled out and researched as theology, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa where sociologists and anthropologists are much ahead of theologians in the field. It seemed necessary to find new ways of researching African Pentecostal theology, as so much of it is expressed in genres other than books or even writing. Thinking of the centrality of praise and worship,[34] as

34 The centrality of worship and music has many times been affirmed by scholars writing about global Pentecostalism; see for example: Paul Alexander, *Signs & Wonders: Why Pentecostalism is the World's Fastest Growing Faith* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 17–37, Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism. An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 121–122 and Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism. The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 23–24, 131–141. However, not until very recently has there been a comprehensive introduction to the subject: Monique Ingalls and Amos Yong, eds. *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

well as the importance of rituals[35] for global Pentecostalism in its many forms, this appeared to be a relevant focus of research where an analytic and constructive approach could be combined and an ethnographic method tried. The almost entire lack of qualitative research[36] on Pentecostal rituals of praise and worship in Eastern Africa[37] made it all the more relevant. At the same time though, this also meant I had to struggle with methodological issues.

The first problem was educational. As a theologian I was trained in text-based hermeneutics, historical methods, biblical languages, and philosophical reasoning, and I had not had any training at all in fieldwork methods or anything close to qualitative research of an ethnographic type. I had to learn everything from scratch, reading books by DeWalt and DeWalt,[38] Kvale and Brinkman,[39] Corrine Glesne,[40] and Karen O'Reilly[41] among others. I entered a steep learning curve that got even steeper as I came into the field. The second challenge was that of research design and data collection. How does one work as an ethnographic researcher and a theologian at the same time? Is there a specifically theological way to do ethnography? And is that different from how anthropologists do it? I found it hard to give any clear-cut answer to these questions, as anthropologists work in so many ways, while there are very few theologians providing examples. The emerging dialogue between anthropology and theology may hopefully prove helpful in this regard. However, I do think that Vähäkangas is right in that a very open-ended approach is less suitable for a theological study than a more structured one targeting specific questions and seeking out specific people.[42]

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35 On the role of rituals in Charismatic Christianity see Martin Lindhardt, "Introduction" (2011), in *Practicing the Faith: The Ritual life of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians* by Martin Lindhardt, ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 1–29 and Joel Robbins, "The Obvious Aspects of Pentecostalism: Ritual and Pentecostal Globalization" in the same volume.

36 The one notable exception is Jean Kidula's study of Christian music and rituals (including Pentecostal) among the Longooli in Kenya: Jean Kidula, *Music in Kenyan Christianity: Longooli Religious Song,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

37 For a discussion of Pentecostalism in this region see: Martina Prosén, "Pentecostalism in Eastern Africa" in Bongmba, Elias. *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa,* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 297–316.

38 Kathleen M. DeWalt & Billie R. DeWalt, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002).

39 Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2014).

40 Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (Boston: Pearson, 2011).

41 Karen O'Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods.* (London: Routledge, 2005).

42 Vähäkangas, this volume.

When I came to the field I had a distinct interest in the theology of praise and worship, and I tried to stay as focused as possible on that interest when designing my project. Due to the complexity of my research object (where *worship* can be a theological concept, a ritual, and a music genre), I figured that triangulating data would be more effective for analysis than relying on a single source. I also thought that combining information from two different churches within a common social and geographic area would be better than relying on either one of them alone. My fieldwork method thus consisted of a combination of participant observation in church services (including audio and video recordings), the collection of worship songs, semi-structured interviews, and a demographic survey in each church.[43] My time in the field was very limited, a total of four months divided into three periods, far too brief for an anthropological study but, to my understanding, enough for a theological one.

The third problem was that of analysis: how does one analyze material that is so differentiated, taking its complexity into account and yet retaining one's theological gaze? To be sure the analysis would be colored by the theologian's preference for texts and linguistic and hermeneutical training. At the same time, hopefully, the ethnographic attentiveness to *the lived and the local* would add a distinctly new and intriguing dimension to it. In the following section I present one of the two selected churches in greater detail and discuss some of my results and the process of analysis.

2 Praise and Worship in CITAM Woodley

Before proceeding to a description of the ritual of praise and worship, and discussion of the theology in and of worship, the congregation being studied requires introduction. CITAM Woodley is situated in the Woodley neighborhood in North-Eastern Nairobi, Kenya. The congregation is one of the branches of Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM) that is an umbrella body for several assemblies that together form a church. CITAM has a well-defined governance structure, both within the organization as a whole and within each assembly. A bishop functions as the general overseer and each congregation is led by a senior pastor. As weekly attendance amounts to around 30,000, and the number of assemblies to 18 (including one in the US and one in Namibia),[44] one

43 When referencing the collected data I use the following categories: fieldnotes, observation guides, worship sets, sound recordings, interview transcripts and lyrics, all organized by name and date.

44 http://www.citam.org/, accessed 2017-01-12.

could almost speak of it as a denomination.[45] All branches are English-speaking and target the educated middle class and the international community of Nairobi. The mother church of the branches/assemblies within CITAM is the Nairobi Pentecostal Church (NPC), a local church in central Nairobi, now called CITAM Valley Road. Founded by a missionary from the Pentecostal Assemblies of God in Canada (PAOC) in the 1950s, the church still has a close connection with this denomination, for example in the area of education.[46] CITAM Woodley is known among the branches for its comparatively young membership and for its vital music department. It is also known for its educational role, starting off as a church for the primary school that shares its premises.[47] In 2014 the assembly had a weekly attendance of around 5,000 people, including children and youth.[48]

2.1 *Praise and Worship as Part of the Church Ritual*

Sunday services in CITAM Woodley – and to my knowledge in the other branches as well – all follow the same liturgical pattern, with little variation. Each Sunday they hold three services with a more or less identical program. Looking at it from the outside, the church service appears highly ritualized[49] although the pastors themselves are a bit hesitant to speak of a fixed liturgy, and underline that the response of the congregation makes the three services very different from each other.[50]

The liturgical pattern is as follows: first there is a time of "praise and worship," which usually takes about 25–30 minutes (less in some of the other branches).[51] A group of worship leaders, together with the choir and musicians ("the music team"), leads this segment. Then the person hosting the service appears on the stage (referred to as "the altar") to pray for a few minutes, and sometimes this is followed by another worship song. The host then greets the

45 CITAM does not understand itself as a denomination, but one of the pastors says that they are heading in that direction; interview with Pastor Kimiywe 20130114.

46 Interview with Pastor Kimiywe 20130114.

47 Interview with Pastor Grace 20140131.

48 Interview with Pastor Obara 20140321.

49 Compare Roy Rappaport who defines a ritual as: "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers" in Roy A. Rappaport *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24. See also Catherine Bell *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Roland Grimes *Beginnings in Ritual Studies,* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) for discussions on how to define a ritual/ritual act.

50 Interview with Pastor Obara 20140321. Interview with Pastor Grace 20140131.

51 Interview with Pastor Grace 20140131.

congregation, welcomes newcomers, and encourages everyone to greet each other. After that there is a section in the program that may include various items depending on the day (for example Holy Communion, baby dedication, testimonies, etc.), followed by information on the screens, and a collection, usually accompanied by playback worship music. Before the sermon begins the congregation is presented with a "special song," typically a text-intensive four-part vocal composition performed by the choir. The sermon, which lasts for about an hour, is followed by a time for intercession called "altar call," where people come up front to be prayed for. This segment may last for two to twenty minutes depending on how long the sermon was and whether it is the first or last service of the day. The first and second service cannot take more than two hours in total, while the third service can go on for another half an hour or more if needed. The choir leaves the stage before the sermon in the first and last services while it sits in for the whole service during the second.

The number of songs in each Sunday service varies between five and eight, and many songs are well known in Evangelical and Charismatic churches around the world. The repertoire includes East-African gospel music, 19th century European hymns (some in Swahili versions), Afro-American spirituals, and contemporary global worship songs.[52] I only noticed one song that was composed within the CITAM, the rest stem from other sources. The church has a policy on Swahili songs, saying that each Sunday service should include at least one and a maximum of two, as the church targets both the local people and the international community of Nairobi.[53] In the prayer meeting on Wednesday evenings called "Power House," worship leaders are allowed to include more Swahili songs, something I also observed during my fieldwork.

The worship leaders prepare a document, called a "worship set," listing the songs, including full lyrics, for each Sunday/Wednesday service and put that on Facebook before the Saturday rehearsals. In the worship set there is also information on who will lead the worship, what dress code is expected and, frequently, links to YouTube clips featuring well-known artists singing the chosen songs.[54] The worship sets are followed rather closely, and in my experience there are only minor differences between what is planned and what is

52 Compare Kidula's description of the development of music within the Nairobi Pentecostal Church. See Jean N. Kidula, "Singing the Lord's Song in the Spirit and with Understanding: The Practice of Nairobi Pentecostal Church." in ed. Monique Ingalls & Amos Yong, *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity.* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 133–147.

53 Interview with Pastor Grace 20140131. In my survey I found that nine out of 330 respondents originated outside of Kenya, all of them in other African nations.

54 See, for example, Worship set, Woodley 20140312 Power House.

implemented, which indicates how ritualized praise and worship are in this setting. Only in one or two cases did the actual worship service deviate entirely from the worship set.

2.2 *Theological Motivations for Praise and Worship*

Singing and music clearly has a central place in the liturgical life of the church, but how are *praise and worship* rituals motivated theologically? When I asked my informants, they all started with general discussion about honoring God in every aspect of one's life. This was the most common answer and almost all elaborated on it, church leaders and congregants alike. To them *worship* cannot be separated from life in Christ; it is basically the same thing. Singing is just one possible expression of worship among many, but the most important form of worship is the personal life of the believer. What counts for these Pentecostals is lived faith, that faith becomes tangible, personal, and all encompassing. As many of them phrased it: *worship is a lifestyle*.[55]

When specifically asked about theological motivations for the use of music and singing in the church ritual, informants typically referred to the Old Testament liturgy or the psalms of King David, but also to humans' being created musical, and to the preferences of God, saying that He "loves music."[56] However, the main motivation seems to be that the ritual of praise and worship functions as both *sacrificial*, giving an offering of songs and self to God,[57] and *sacramental*, mediating the presence of God to the congregation in a special way.[58]

2.3 *Analyzing Lyrics in Search of Theology*

Theological deliberations surrounding worship are indeed important and could be discussed further, and yet it is not the only way one can approach the theology of worship in this setting. One can also consider the content of worship songs and the patterns that become manifest when lyrics are analyzed

55 Interview with Pastor Grace 20140131; Interview with Pastor Obara 20140321; Interview with Woodley Music team 20140208; Focus Group, Woodley 20140316.

56 Interview with Pastor Obara 20140321.

57 Compare Jon Bialecki, "Between stewardship and sacrifice: agency and economy in a Southern California Charismatic church," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14, no. 2 (2008), 372–390.

58 See Martina Prosén, "Songs that carry transformation: Pentecostal praise and worship rituals in Nairobi, Kenya," *Mission Studies* 35, no. 2 (2018), 265–285, where I discuss this further.

from a theological perspective.[59] This raises some methodological challenges, as will be discussed below, but first some figures: out of eight[60] observed services, I collected 54 different songs (listed in worship sets and sung in church), which amounts to an average of 6.75 unique songs sung in each service. Only two songs were sung on more than one occasion, pointing to the high level of planning and organization surrounding the church ritual and CITAM's broad musical repertoire. It does not necessarily imply, however, that these songs are all new to the congregation; my impression was rather the opposite. It seemed like the songs were well known in most cases, either because they were taken from the large ecumenical song tradition with which many congregants are familiar, or because they are often played on Christian radio or distributed via other media.[61]

The sheer volume of songs forced me to choose between selecting just a few for in-depth analysis or taking a helicopter perspective and trying to uncover theological patterns in the whole corpus. Both methods raised questions: in the case of the first, which songs to include or exclude and on what criteria; in the case of the second, whether or not these fifty-four songs of disparate origin could be treated as a corpus representing the theology of the church, and on what grounds. Ultimately I chose the second path as I was interested in the overall theological pattern and thought a broader picture would do more justice to the local theology. The difficulty of choosing which songs to analyze when only two of them were ever repeated (if frequency were to be a deciding factor) also affected the choice. The question remained of whether the selected corpus represented local theology.

As a theologian working ethnographically, my focus is on the *lived and the local*. My study does not take into account all the worship songs ever sung in CITAM Woodley, but only those that I observed during church services; neither does it take into account the origin and use of these songs in other settings. Instead, I see the church services as the context that defines the texts/lyrics and makes them what they are theologically. In a similar way as one can speak

59 A third obvious way is to analyze the ritual acts; the use of the body, rhythm and sound, material objects, etc., and look at the theological meaning of those; see Tomas Csordas, "Somatic Modes of Attention," *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 2 (1993): 135–146, but that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

60 I count three services on a single Sunday as one, due to their almost identical programs.

61 In Nairobi I heard Christian music played on buses and in shopping malls, and Christian CDs were available on every corner, not to mention the internet. See also Damaris S. Parsitau, "Then Sings My Soul: Gospel Music as Popular Culture in the Spiritual lives of Kenyan Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 14, no. 1 (2006): 3.

of *Lucan theology* in exegetics, while knowing that much of the Lucan corpus is also present in Matthew and Mark and not original to Luke, one may also speak of a *local Pentecostal theology,* tentatively treating the collected songs as a textual corpus despite their wide use and disparate origins. The key here is the context and the particularity of ethnographic work. These specific songs have been chosen by this particular church (or rather the worship leaders), during a particular time (winter 2013–2014), to serve a specific purpose (honoring God and mediating his presence to the congregation), and, therefore, they represent the theology of this local Pentecostal congregation, at least in some way, and may be analyzed by me as a researcher. Had I come at a different time, I would surely have collected a different set of songs (for example not so many Christmas hymns), and probably come to slightly different conclusions. However, the church setting and the purpose of the ritual would have stayed the same, and I think it is likely that the overall picture would have been similar.

The analyzing process went as follows: I listened to the sound recordings with the lyrics in front of me and made notes, marking, for example, the names used to address God, the human condition of sin, quotes from the Bible, metaphors for salvation, personal pronoun usage, and so on. Then I made charts displaying the outcome in tables to see the overall pattern. Analysis thus focused on the theological content of songs, and not, for example, on linguistic qualities or stylistic form. This distinctly theological interest is, however, consistent not only with my own research interest, but also with the songs themselves and their doxological, liturgical, and sacramental purposes.

2.4 *Theological Patterns in Worship Songs*

Lastly, let me present some intriguing results of my data analysis. The following description is by no means exhaustive, and yet seeks to point out a few characteristic patterns, based on the whole corpus of worship songs collected in CITAM Woodley.

The first theological pattern I would like to highlight has to do with how God is addressed, which may also reveal something of how God is conceived. In the 54 songs I found a total of 58 different names and titles used for God. The by far most common expressions are "Jesus" and "Lord." The title "Lord" with its variations (such as The Lord / Bwana / Jehovah / My Lord / etc.) is used in 50 percent of the songs (27 out of 54), making it the most common expression, closely followed by the name "Jesus" with variations (such as Yesu / King Jesus /Lord Jesus / etc.) that is used in a total of 22 songs. By way of comparison, God is only addressed as "God" (God Almighty / Holy God / The Most High God / etc.) in six songs and as "Father" (Baba / Heavenly Father / etc.) in four. Even more striking is that God is only addressed as "Spirit" (Roho) once, and that is in the

only song displaying a Trinitarian pattern (speaking of God as Jesus, Father, and Spirit in conjunction). A few other songs mention the Father or the Spirit, while in effect addressing Jesus (for example thanking Him for providing "the Holy Ghost"). Although there are 26 different expressions referring exclusively to Jesus (such as Immanuel / Blessed Son / The Lamb / The Bridegroom / etc.), no song uses the combination "Jesus Christ" and only three songs speak of "Christ," possibly indicating a certain distance from mainline church tradition and a corresponding influence from revivalist Protestantism.

The overall pattern in terms of how God is addressed is strikingly Jesus-centered, leaving almost no room for adoration of God as Father, Spirit, or Triune. This does not imply that CITAM Woodley endorses the so-called "Oneness Pentecostalism";[62] they are clearly Trinitarian in their preaching and statements of faith.[63] Nevertheless, the emphasis of this Trinitarian theology seems to be rather on the second person of the Trinity, the Son, than on the third person, the Spirit. Thinking of Pentecostalism and how it is usually described by Pentecostals and (social scientific) researchers alike as defined by an emphasis on the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts,[64] it is quite astonishing. However, the results of my study point in the same direction as that of church historian Ulrik Josefsson in his study of early Swedish Pentecostals. Placing the Pentecostal movement typologically among pietistic forms of Christianity, he says that even though the doctrine of Spirit Baptism is one key to understanding Pentecostalism, its main content is nevertheless Jesus-centered.[65] My results are also in line with the arguments put forward by Pentecostal theologian Kenneth Archer, who sees the Fivefold Gospel (Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, Spirit Baptizer, and coming King) as "the hub" of Pentecostal theology.[66] To me

62 Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 45–51.

63 http://www.citam.org/ (accessed 2017-01-12).

64 See Allan Anderson's discussion of typological, phenomenological, theological, and historical approaches to the definition of Pentecostalism (all in one way or the other relating to charismatic gifts / Holy Spirit) in "Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions" in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods* ed. Anderson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 13–29.

65 "*Även om en av nycklarna till att förstå pentekostalismen ligger i läran om andedopet, är det bärande innehållet Jesuscentrerat. Det är en kristendomstyp som är tydligt präglad av den pietistiska fokuseringen på Jesus.*" Josefsson, *Liv och över nog,* 51.

66 Archer, *The Gospel Revisited,* 14–15. Archer builds on and expands the arguments put forward by Donald Dayton and Ted Peters. See also Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 95–98, who uses the Fivefold Gospel to structure his discussion on Pentecostalism and political theology, arguing that it may serve as a framework that both preserves a distinctly Pentecostal theological self-understanding and honors the pluralistic impulses embedded in Pentecostal experience.

it indicates a close theological link between this urban Kenyan church and classical Pentecostalism in the West, as well as with earlier revivalist movements such as Methodism and Baptism.[67] The link is primarily theological, although diachronic and synchronic links to the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Canada (PAOC) certainly exist as well. Partly it is a matter of perspective. If Pentecostal faith is compared to other (revivalist) Protestant traditions, its *pneumatology* stands out as specific and defining. While if Pentecostal faith is measured by what characterizes it – rather than by what distinguishes it – then *Christology* certainly qualifies as *the* defining feature, judging from my data. It may also be a matter of how to understand "Spirit Baptism" or "life in the Spirit" theologically. Often this is understood as part of the *pneumatology* of Pentecostal theology, that is, the doctrine of the third person, while it may just as well be understood as part of its *soteriology* or even its *Christology*. What I mean is that Pentecostal doctrines concerning Spirit Baptism and spiritual gifts have to do just as much with an understanding of what salvation is (life in the Spirit / life with Jesus) and who the Son is (Spirit-giver), as they have to do with how the Spirit *per se* is perceived. In fact, discussions of the nature of the Spirit (indeed of the nature of God) are rather rare even in academic forms of Pentecostal theology,[68] while discussions of Spirit Baptism and spiritual gifts abound.[69]

Other patterns that stand out clearly from my data are: (1) a personal approach in the communication between God and human (for example the majority of songs use first and second person pronouns in relating to God: I-You or We-You); (2) an emphasis on God / Jesus as unique in nature, power, and position (for example, many songs speak of God / Jesus as "the only one" or "above everything"); (3) a marked dependency on biblical language (for example, many of the metaphors are taken from the Bible and several songs are Scripture verses set to music); and (4) a richness in liturgical functions or genres

67 The link between classical Pentecostalism and 18th-century revivalism has been noted by several scholars, for example Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: origins and developments worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997); Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987); David Bundy, *Visions of Apostolic Mission: Scandinavian Pentecostal Mission to 1935* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2009).

68 But see Amos Yong, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).

69 For example, James D.G. Dunn *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in relation to Pentecostalism today* (Philadelphia: SCM Press Ltd, 2010); Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament church and today* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996); Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

(from doxologies and songs of thanksgiving to proclamations, testimonies, and personal prayers).

From this brief sketch one may conclude that there is a clear focus on *Christology* in praise and worship songs, declaring and proclaiming Christ as unique Lord and Savior. Perhaps this is not very surprising given the centrality of the Fivefold Gospel in Pentecostal theology, although I was not prepared for the high degree of uniformity. There is also a clear focus on the relationship between God/Christ and the believer(s) in these songs, one that has a bearing on *ecclesiology, missiology*, and *soteriology*, and reflects the theological understanding of praise and worship as mediating the relationship between believer and God. That the Holy Spirit is almost entirely absent from praise and worship songs is interesting and shows that we must look beyond a narrow understanding of Pentecostal theology as defined by *pneumatology*. This result can be seen as a direct outcome of using an ethnographic method in theological research, as most literature on Pentecostalism would lead us in a different direction.

3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to present ethnography as a fruitful partner to theology in the study of the lived faith of African Pentecostal believers. Through a theoretical discussion on the nature and methods of theology, as well as a presentation of my own research and some of its challenges, I have tried to show how an ethnographic approach offers a different perspective and provides potentially different insights than an entirely text-based theological approach.

The first section of the chapter argued that the interactive and *multi-modal nature of theology* as well as the charismatization of contemporary Christianity requires theologians to search for new research methods, in addition to those traditionally used. Ethnography was presented as a viable choice, as it allows us to grapple with *the lived and the local* in a scientifically credible way. This part also proposed that the ritual of *praise and worship* can be seen as a *modus theologicus*, among other things, and some of the methodological challenges of doing so were discussed. In the second part I began by presenting a background to CITAM Woodley, in Nairobi, situating the place of *praise and worship* within their church ritual, before proceeding to an analysis of the *theological motivations* of worship and *theological patterns* in worship songs. The results of the latter analysis show that it may be time to reconsider an emphasis on the Holy Spirit or spiritual gifts as the principal defining feature of Pentecostal faith, and

start exploring *Christology* as the central hub of Pentecostal theology. At a minimum the results illustrate how an ethnographic approach may help the theologian gain new knowledge of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Africa, based on the lived faith of a local church.

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CHAPTER 9

The Sounds of the Christians in Northern Nigeria: Notes on an Acoustic History of Bachama Christianity

Niels Kastfelt

1 Introduction

The lived experience of African Christianity is expressed in the endless variety of forms in which biblical and other Christian texts are read, listened to, apprehended, and turned into ritual and social practice. In this chapter I approach the lived Christianity of Africans through one of its important but generally understudied means of communication and expression, that of sound, starting from the simple observation that African Christian practice is not only the result of reading texts but also of listening to sounds. Anybody who has lived in or visited an African community will know that it has its distinct religious soundscape, these days not the least shaped by Pentecostal churches and Islamic reform movements which have transformed the public soundscapes of Africa, and also made them a great deal louder. My focus is not, however, on the contemporary soundscapes of African Christianity but on one of its historical forms, a goal which involves trying to reconstruct what an African Christianity sounded like at the beginning of the twentieth century. The purpose of the chapter is twofold: to reconstruct the sounds of an African Christianity and, methodologically, to illustrate how it may be done.

The Christianity I am discussing is that of the Bachama-speaking community in the Adamawa region of northeastern Nigeria. Missionaries from the Danish branch of the Sudan United Mission first settled in the Bachama town of Numan in 1913 to work among the Bachama and neighboring ethnic groups, and the Bachama community is today predominantly Christian with the Lutheran church as the largest and most significant denomination.[1]

1 For the general history of the Danish Sudan United Mission in Adamawa and of Bachama Christianity see Niels Kastfelt, *Kulturmøde i Nigeria. Mødet mellem Bachamafolket, engelske koloniembedsmænd og Dansk Forenet Sudan* Mission (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1981); Niels Kastfelt, *Religion and Politics in Nigeria. A Study in Middle Belt Christianity* (London: British Academic Press, 1994)*;* Mogens Jensen, *Two Men and Their Mission. Anton Marius Pedersen, Niels Høegh Brønnum and The Danish United Sudan United Mission 1905–1925*, trans. David

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2 Points of Departure

My first point of departure is a conversation I had with an old Bachama Christian, Pastor Obida Mbodwam, in August 1982 in Numan. Pastor Obida was a young boy when the Danish missionaries arrived in Numan in 1913, and I asked what had particularly attracted him to the missionaries and their message. He answered that two things were decisive – that the missionaries composed new songs based on traditional Bachama tunes, and that they talked about eternal life, making it clear that the musical element was the more important.[2] The second point of departure is a remark I have often heard from old Bachama Christians thinking back to the period before the Second World War. They all recalled that when you lived in a Bachama village you could always hear the Christians approaching your village because they were singing the new Christian songs composed to old Bachama tunes. You could recognize the Christians by the sounds of their tunes without necessarily being able to hear the words of their songs.

To these early Bachama Christians their new religion had its distinct sound, one which worked in two ways: it could speak to their minds and emotions and be attractive, and it could convey meaning and be an efficient channel of communication.

3 Historiographical Context: Texts and Sounds in African Christianity

An old and ongoing debate in the study of African Christianity has focused on the relative significance of orality and literacy in its history. For a long time orality was seen as typical of African Christianity, supposedly reflecting the dominantly oral character of many African cultures. For some time, though, there has been a growing interest in African Christian literacy and much exciting work – by Derek Peterson, Thomas Kirsch, Joel Cabrita, and others – has emphasized the substantial production of vernacular texts in African churches in which Africans reflected upon all kinds of theological, spiritual, and cultural

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Clayre (Christiansfeld: Forlaget Savanne, 1997); Margaret Nissen, *An African Church is Born. The Story of the Adamawa and Central Sardauna Provinces in Nigeria* (Viby, J.: Purups Grafiske Hus, 1968); Nicholas Pweddon, *A History of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria* (Numan: The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, 2005); Asriel S.T. Myatafadi, Peter A. Bartimawus, Edward R. Ishaya and Elisabeth Holtegaard (eds.), *A Century of God's Faithfulness (1913–2013): Reflections on the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria* (LCCN) (Numan: The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, 2013).

2 Interview with Pastor Obida Mbodwam, Numan, 31 August 1982.

matters, making these texts supremely valuable material for studying different forms of not just academic but also "popular" theology in Africa.[3]

Interesting and important as this work is – and I am engaged in this kind of work myself – there is also a need to move beyond this primary focus on texts, reading, and writing, and thereby on the sense of sight, and to focus more on sounds and the sense of hearing in the study of African Christianity. Nancy Rose Hunt has suggested that we need to move "beyond seeing as the primary mode of perceiving the past, by being wakeful to other senses and capacities, especially the field of hearing, producing and muffling sound."[4] This call for a sensorial reorientation is linked to the "affective turn" in the humanities and social sciences, which has produced interesting work on the ways in which affect can be embodied "but also be verbalized or penned. It can suffuse a milieu, mark a situation, or stir beings and worlds."[5]

Reflections on the effects of sound have long been part of Christian history, at the least since Augustine who in his *Confessiones* stressed the peculiar power of sound on the human mind and noted how much more fascinated he had been by sound than by smell. To Augustine the power of sound was a theological problem because it proved how often his mind was led astray by his senses.[6] In an African context this view resounded centuries later when Joseph Conrad wrote about the suggestive meaning of Congolese drums – carrying "perhaps

3 See, for instance, Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing. Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of the Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004); Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival. A History of Dissent, ca. 1935–1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Thomas G. Kirsch, *Spirits and Letters. Reading, Writing and Charisma in African Christianity* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008); Joel Cabrita, *Text and Authority in the South African Nazaretha Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For a wider discussion see Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

4 Nancy Rose Hunt, "An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images, and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 224.

5 Nancy Rose Hunt, "Interview with Nancy Rose Hunt," "Acoustic register, tenacious images, and Congolese scenes of rape and repetition: supplementary material" (http://www.culanth.org/articles/106-an-acoustic-register-tenacious-images-and), supplement to *Cultural Anthropology* 23 (2008): 220–253, accessed March 7, 2016; see also Nancy Rose Hunt, "The Affective, the Intellectual, and Gender History," *Journal of African History* 55, no. 3 (2014): 331–345 and her *A Nervous State. Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). For the wider historiographical context see Eiko Ikegami, "Emotions," in *A Concise Companion to History*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 333–353.

6 St. Augustine, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, trans. William Watts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), vol. 2, Book X, chapter XXXIII, 164–169. For the general context see Christopher Page, *The Christian West And its Singers. The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country."[7] The affective power of sound in the form of drums, church bells, or other media was taken up when later generations of historians and anthropologists began to explore the history and culture of sound.[8]

In the historical study of African Christianity sound has not been much explored as a separate subject. Exciting and important work has been done on African Christian hymns although predominantly from a textual point of view.[9] I do not call for a specialized or compartmentalized "affective turn" in the study of African Christianity, but simply want to point out the benefits of an acoustic approach and to suggest that it can lead to new understanding. With Hunt and others I suggest that we transcend seeing as our privileged means of approach and focus more on hearing and sounds in the study of African Christianity, and I shall exemplify this by exploring the sounds of Bachama Christianity and suggesting one way of writing an acoustic history of an early 20th-century African Christianity.

4 The Soundscape of Early Bachama Christianity

The first missionary to arrive in Numan in 1913, Dr. Niels Høegh Brønnum, was a medical doctor who was also interested in language and sound. He wanted to evangelize in the vernacular and soon learnt to speak Bachama and before that Hausa. He wrote his first hymn in Bachama in 1913 or early 1914, using a well-known Bachama tune and basing the words on The Gospel of John, 3:16.[10] In 1915 he published a Bachama translation of St. Mark and later contributed to

7 Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of* Darkness, ed. Robert Kimbrough, third edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 23; cf. James W. Fernandez, "The Sound of Bells in a Christian Country – in Quest of the Historical Schweitzer," *The Massachusetts Review* 5 (1964): 537–562.

8 Influential early work in this field includes Alain Corbin, *Village Bells. Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (London: Papermac, 1999); Steve Feld and Donald Brenneis, "Doing anthropology in sound," *American Anthropologist* 31, no. 4 (2004): 461–474; Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape. Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

9 See for instance Bengt Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); Elizabeth Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God. Umuntu Wasezulwini Nabantu Abahle Bakankulunkulu. Writings from Ibandla lamaNazaretha, a South African Church*, Studies on Religion in Africa XXIV (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Cabrita, *Text and Authority*.

10 Niels Høegh Brønnum, "Den første Salme paa Bachama," *Sudan* 6 (1914): 93. An English translation of the song is provided in Niels Kastfelt, "A Song in Kwa Bwatiye by Dr. N.H. Bronnum," *Linto* 1 (1997): 5.

the first Bachama hymn book.[11] Other missionaries also composed hymns by combining old Bachama tunes with new words, and so did Bachama Christians and their opponents, making songs an important source for studying the historical development of Bachama Christianity and not the least its vernacular idioms, metaphors and sounds.[12]

Niels Høegh Brønnum wrote an early account of the sounds of Numan around 1913 by focusing on Bachama musical instruments. He demonstrated how the sounds of different musical instruments were carriers of meaning and had implications for feelings, emotions, and sensations. He listed, for instance, eleven different drums, which were distinguished by their physical form, by the sound they produced and by the occasions on which they were used. When the war drum, the *hubo duwe*, was beaten all the men immediately left for the chief's compound to get ready for battle. "Everybody knows its sound," Brønnum noted. When the *tyengye* drum was heard in the Bachama village of Bolen women knew they had to stay inside their compounds to avoid being confronted with dangerous spirits wearing wooden masks, which were feared by women who would die if they saw the masks. When the *lyenye* (elephant teeth) horn was blown in the evening its varying sounds could either signal that the Bachama chief was on his way out of his compound to meet his subjects or that he had retired for the night. The lyenye signaled chiefly presence or absence from the public eye. The *pampame,* a two to three meters long metal trumpet, was used to praise the chief when he travelled through Bachamaland with his entourage.[13] These examples suffice to show how the Bachama of Numan and the surrounding villages moved in a soundscape where sound created messages, directions, and emotions which provided the Bachama with a soundmap of social maneuvering.

In order to take the next step and try to reconstruct the soundscape of early Bachama Christianity I ask the same question Robert Darnton asked about the popular songs of 18th-century Paris, "What was the corpus of tunes known to

11 *Lemefeme da Yesu Kristo. Markus* (Shonga: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1915); *Malam-to Dymsye. Bachama Hymn Book* (Minna: The Niger Press, 1925).

12 See Kastfelt, *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*, 144–152; Niels Kastfelt, "Afrikanske sange," *Teol-information* 14 (1996): 11–16; Niels Kastfelt, "Songs and Sleeping Sickness in a Nigerian Village," in (*Genklange*). *Essays om kunst og kristendom tilegnet Nils Holger Petersen på 70-årsdagen*, eds. Kristoffer Garne and Lars Nørgaard (Copenhagen: The Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen, 2016), 176–182.

13 Niels H. Brønnum, *Folkeliv i Sudan, I, Bachamastammens Historie, Sprog, Levemaade og Kultur* (Struer: M. Christensens Bogtrykkeri, 1923), 149–153.

ordinary Parisians in the mid-eighteenth century?"[14] And we can argue with Darnton that the tunes known to the people of a culture are a shared "repertoire of tunes, which is peculiar to their culture and which they carry around in their heads" as part of a collective memory which could be powerfully renewed by giving new words to old tunes.[15] This was what Bachama Christians and Danish missionaries – like many other Christians throughout Africa – did when they composed hymns by giving new words to old tunes as a means of evangelizing and of religious debate.[16]

We must, then, ask the following questions: Which tunes were available to Bachama Christians? Which tunes did they choose? Why did they choose as they did? And what were the consequences of their choices?

5 Categories of Bachama Tunes in the Early 20th Century

In order to answer these questions, I first map the categories of tunes which were available to the Bachama in the 1910s and onwards. The Bachama had different categories of songs which each had their own characteristic tunes.[17] Most Bachama would easily recognize them and know which category they belonged to. Each category of songs could include a number of tunes which were all so similar that Bachama could distinguish them from the tunes of other categories. When Bachama heard a song, therefore, they were able to identify the category to which it belonged, and the tune and its perception would produce particular intellectual and affective connotations in the listeners. The perception of the sound of the tunes itself was able to determine or direct the meaning of the words, because by hearing the sound of a song Bachama knew the category which provided the framework for understanding its words.

The main categories of Bachama songs were:

14 Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police. Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 169.

15 Darnton, *Poetry and the Police*, 169.

16 Kastfelt, "Songs and Sleeping Sickness in a Nigerian Village."

17 This survey has been made, not least, on the basis of twenty-eight years of conversations with Dr. Nicholas Pweddon, beginning in 1981 and ending with Dr. Pweddon's death in 2009. Especially important for the present discussion was a conversation in Jos on October 4, 1994. The list is probably incomplete and more types of tunes could possibly be added to the list. See also Nicholas N. Pweddon, "Dyemshi Bondiha: Bachama Praise Songs from Sondo to Rakuma Pwakono," unpublished paper (Madison: University of Wisconsin, Department of African Languages and Literature, 1973).

Dyemshi bwepüle: songs of the followers of spirit worship, that is, the songs especially sung during the main annual festival, the *vönön*, in the village of Farei at the beginning of the rainy season.

Dyemshi bosoune / dyemshi jiboshe: songs of the *jiboshe*, people who could transform themselves into something else.

Dyemshi wuro ome: songs for hunting dances, also known as *dyemshi ome*, songs for hunting. This consisted of two types: songs sung when Bachama chased a prey, and songs which were sung when the hunting was over and the hunters celebrated that the prey had been killed and brought home.

Dyemshi dawe: cutting songs or dancing songs. This also included *dyemshi kala—ade*, shooting tree songs.

Dyemshi weshibore: wrestling songs.

Dyemshi mbange: dancing songs.

Dyemshi sunga: sword songs.

Dyemshi fwakato: songs of falling, songs sung during a ritual dance performed by women where they took turns in falling backwards and letting themselves be gripped by the other women.

Dyemshi daha: songs of abuse. This also included the *dyemshi bagoha*, "indirect" songs of abuse where the singers abused a person indirectly without naming his or her name.

Dyemshi wajalle: royal dance songs. These also included songs of ridicule and were sung and danced by members of one of the royal clans, the *zomye*. The singers ridiculed each other in a humorous and satirical way. They were close to the *dyemshi ngbangta*, which were songs of ridicule sung by singers from the village of Dong.

Dyemshi kaduwe: songs used by members of a particular ward in the village of Lamurde when cutting grass for the horse of the Bachama chief. The songs were sung under the leadership of a *kpadwe* and could be abusive about anybody, including the chief himself.

Dyemshi mune: war songs or "songs of men" which were usually sung by one person but which could also be sung by rotating groups of age-mates.

Dyemshi hauto: work or farm songs, literally "hoeing songs." They included two sub-categories: the *dyemshi daukade*, songs of cutting trees, which were sung when cutting down a big tree used for making a canoe, and *dyemshi sare*, running songs, which were sung when Bachama men were on a hunting expedition.

Dyemshi bondiha: songs of praise.

Dyemshi lagarato: songs of grinding corn which were sung by women early in the morning.

Dyemshi tuto: songs of mourning which also included the category *dyemshi gübawe.*

This list of songs and tunes comprises a total of 24 highly specialized categories and sub-categories. The songs could transmit the message that a specific activity was taking place (e.g. hunters returning home, the cutting of grass), and they could transmit emotions (e.g. of abuse or mourning). The songs, then, combined three affective dimensions: the acoustic (the sound of the tunes), the verbal (the words of the songs), and the bodily (through the performance of the songs). Together, they formed an acoustic register through which meanings and emotions could be transmitted with a high degree of affective variation, nuance, and precision, and in this way they formed a pool of acoustic idioms which were used by both Bachama Christians and their opponents. They could transmit precise messages and emotions through sound and this was also taken up by the Bachama Christians.

6 The Song of "the Deaf One"

I shall illustrate an affective and acoustic approach to Bachama Christianity with two examples. The first is the song of "the deaf one,"[18] *nzo gbinge*, which was one of the many names of the greatest Bachama spirit, or *püle*, Nzeanzo. The name implied that Nzeanzo was so powerful and superior that he did not have to listen to others if he did not want to.[19] Each year the Bachama performed their most important ritual, the vönön, in the village of Farei outside Numan.[20] The song was sung for Nzeanzo by a group of women, the *jibwepüle* (those who follow the spirits), and as they sang their song specifically for Nzeanzo they were also known as the *duwe da Nzeanzo* (the horses of Nzeanzo). The song therefore belonged to the category of *dyemshi jibwepüle* (songs of those who follow the spirits and who sing to Nzeanzo during the vönön ritual). They sang the following song:

18 Cf. Kastfelt, "Afrikanske sange."

19 Interview with Dr. Nicholas Pweddon, Numan, 20 October 1994.

20 On Nzeanzo and the *vönön* festival see Phillips Stevens, Jr., "The Bachama and Their Neighbors: Non-Kin Joking Relationships in Adamawa, Northeastern Nigeria" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1973), 268–284; Niels H. Brønnum, *Under Dæmoners Aag. Bachamafolkets Religion og Overtro* (Copenhagen: O. Lohse, 1926), 11–56; Damien Bitrus Asodati, *The Mysteries of Nzeanzo and the Vunon Festival of Fare* (Wukari: Amune Press, n.d. [1990]).

1.
Myadupori, hunko kwai nzo gbinge
kadon mya po jigu
ndabo kango kuna njiya
a shafe kango byelloyo?
2.
Huno myaduporikun kanzogbinge
nzo gbinge diyadu
myapojigu ndabo kanga kuna njiya
a shafe kango byelloyo?[21]

English translation:
1.
Nobody will beg me, I refuse you the deaf one
In the past nobody begged your grandfather
When he stood and picked up earth
At the shrine and stood and talked?
2.
I, nobody will beg me, with the deaf one
The deaf one asks,
Was your grandfather begged when he stood and picked up earth
At the shrine and stood and talked?

The song was addressed to Nzeanzo and to the Bachama who attended the shrines of the spirit. The women stressed – either speaking in their own voices or in that of Nzeanzo (verse 2, lines 2–4) – that it is not necessary to beg them to come and worship Nzeanzo ("picked up earth at the shrine and stood and talked"). They go to his shrine voluntarily and, like their grandfathers, they are faithful and loyal to Nzeanzo. The main point of the song is to encourage the Bachama to stick to their customary ways as their forefathers had always done before them.

Sometime in the 1920s or perhaps early 1930s an unknown Bachama composed a Christian song based on the traditional "song of the deaf one." The words of the song were:

21 This and the following songs were both recorded in the house of Mrs. Sadaro and Mr. Nafuku Raymond Mamuno in the village of Imburu on 18th September 1994. The song was performed by a group of 10–12 Bachama women from Imburu. In transcribing the songs I have followed the spelling offered by Mr. and Mrs. Mamuno which on a number of points differs from what is generally accepted as standard Bachama orthography today.

1.

A myawara ka hiuto hyeke yetanya
Fera Yesu a shikan
Yebo kango tago, Ila, Ila, hun kuso
Penge
2.
Atedu kodo lakau badumo wedau
Jikotto be luhambo
Bware, Yesu a sauna suno tufe
Hunaka tufe, madda woyo kyama
Nai

English translation:
1.
You have been called with prayer, you refuse and you quarrel
On the day Jesus comes back
You will be standing saying, Allah, Allah, I have fallen into a trap
2.
You cannot follow that other way up to your death
Christians have occupied the whole place
People, Jesus tells you he is the way
You refuse the way, you sit and work and are going to different places.

The song is a call to the Bachama to follow Christianity so that on the day of Jesus' return they will not find out that they have been trapped. They are encouraged to leave "that other way" – their traditional religion – and to follow Jesus instead of going to "different places" – to the traditional places of worship.

For the present purpose the main point about these two songs is that the new Christian song was composed in the acoustic idioms of a traditional tune, one of the *dyemshi jibwepüle*. To Bachama people at the time the specific tune of the song in itself had connotations for listeners that related to the powerful and superior Nzeanzo, to the need to follow tradition, and to the obligation to be faithful to the spirits. These were sensations that were produced by the very sounds of the song and they were then materialized by the words. The sound of the tune shaped the fundamental affective direction of the songs, which was then verbalized in specific detail. The new words of the Christian song struck the same theme as the traditional one by calling on the Bachama to follow the right path, which in this case was Christianity. The sounds of the old song

conveyed a fundamental affective appeal, which was then verbally transformed and brought into the Bachama church by the new words and familiar sounds. What defined the fundamental character and appeal of the song was not the words as such but the meaning and affect created by their acoustic context.

7 A Song of Loss and Mourning

The following song shows us another aspect of the sounds of Bachama Christian history, or rather anti-Christian history because the song was composed against the introduction of Christianity. Just as Bachama Christians and missionaries composed new songs to promote Christianity, so their opponents composed songs against the Christians. Religious polemics in Bachama society in the early twentieth century very much took the form of songs and sounds, and this is how the polemics has been transmitted to us today.

Around 1930 the following song was composed by one of the most respected and admired Bachama composers, Nzakole Sondo,[22] to his close friend and age-mate, Habila Aleyideino.[23] Sondo and Habila were friends, growing up together in Numan, and both were expected to become *jiboshe* (sing. *nzoboshe*). A *nzoboshe* was a man who could see and exorcise spirits and, in addition, Sondo became a *kura* (one who can shoot without missing), the title of one of the leading and most experienced *jiboshe*. Instead of becoming a *nzoboshe*, however, Habila decided to become a Christian and was baptized with his father Iguda in 1926.[24] Sondo was greatly disappointed by what he saw as his friend's desertion from tradition and their shared destiny. He therefore composed a *dyemshi tuto* against Habila around 1930, a song of mourning consisting of five verses each having one line which was repeated.

1. *Kada ngbange a biyo dake*
2. *Na ngur gbra ta weyi kan*
3. *Nda muno na huro pula bagi a nya kei na kehe?*
4. (*Hina*) *weyo ka nduwa kpegun na we go we ma?*
5. *O, hya weyo vawe we go we be na sunga*

22 This version of the song was performed by Mr. Boniface Vunodakai in Numan on 18th October 1994. The translation is by Nicholas Pweddon and Niels Kastfelt. See also Pweddon, "Dyemshi Bondiha."

23 See the brief biography by Musa A.B. Gaiya, "Habila Aleyideino c. 1907 to 1992, United Church of Christ (HEKAN), Nigeria," last modified 2003, http://www.dacb.org/stories/aaprint-stories/nigeria/aleyideino_habila.html, accessed October 9, 2012.

24 See Niels H. Brønnum, *Iguda. En Fortælling fra Afrika* (Copenhagen: O. Lohses Forlag Eftf., 1933).

English translation:

1. The stick of the mat has broken and left me with nothing.
2. I carry the bag and keep on walking with it.
3. What have I stolen (since) the spirit of my father quarrels with me so that I am weeping?
4. (We) walk with my fellow men, the two of us, what would make me fear death?
5. Oh, you will be afraid (and) fear death when he sees the sword?

Commentary:

1. "The stick of the mat" is the stick holding the *zana* mat which encircles a traditional Bachama compound. Here it describes the stick or pillar of tradition. Habila has broken the stick by becoming a Christian and has left Sondo "with nothing," with a broken tradition.
2. "[T]he bag" is "tradition" and the traditional Bachama way of life.
3. "[T]he spirit of my father quarrels with me so that I am weeping" refers to Sondo's walking around, burdened by the spirit of his father and weeping because he cannot find help to continue the traditional way of life.
4. "([W]e) walk with my fellow men, the two of us, what would make me fear death?": Sondo addresses Habila and says that if they had walked together as age-mates and had both become *jiboshe* they would have had no reason to fear death.
5. Sondo sadly asks Habila if his reason for leaving tradition is that he will "fear death when he sees the sword," referring to the swords or spears used in the initiation rituals of the *jiboshe*.

The song gives us a rare chance to sense some of the emotional loss associated with the introduction of Christianity. Such sensations are not exceptional but often difficult to reconstruct historically. The main tone of Sondo's song was contained in its tune, which colored its words. It was a *dyemshi tuto*, a song of mourning, and any Bachama hearing Sondo's song would know that it expressed mourning, sadness, and loss. Unlike most other songs against the Christians this one was not a *dyemshi daha*, a song of abuse, which is offensive and disparaging. It was full of sadness and grief at the loss of tradition and the loss of a friend.

The affective meaning of sound comes out clearly in the passage in Verse 3 where Sondo asks what he has done that he must walk around alone weeping. If the song had been one of abuse Sondo's weeping would no doubt have sounded abusive, but since the tune of the song belonged to the category of mourning songs, the tune in itself told the listeners what Sondo's weeping was about – not about abuse or offense but a lamentation of loss. The sound shaped the meaning of the words, and when we know the category of the tune we can understand the affective meaning of the sound.

8 Conclusion

This chapter has offered a preliminary analysis of some aspects of sound in the history of an African Christian tradition and has indicated one way of writing such a history. In the many dimensions of African lived Christianity sound is important but generally understudied. Since many Africans experience Christianity not only through texts but also through sound, an acoustic approach is necessary to explore the varieties of African Christianity. It is quite common to refer to the Christians of African societies as "readers"[25] but we clearly also need to understand that they are "listeners." Hearing sounds must be integrated as strongly as reading texts into the study of African Christianity and, without advocating yet another compartmentalized field in exploring African Christianity, I would suggest that stronger attention be paid to its sounds.

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25 See for instance John Lonsdale, "Kikuyu Christianities: A History of Intimate Diversity," in *Christianity and the African Imagination. Essays in Honour of Adrian Hastings*, ed. David Maxwell with Ingrid Lawrie (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 157–197; Peterson, *Creative Writing*; Adeline Masquelier, *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 10–11. A fine starting point for studying the interaction of listening and hearing is John Lonsdale, "'Listen while I read': The Orality of Christian Literacy in the Young Kenyatta's Making of the Kikuyu," in *Ethnicity in Africa*, eds. Louise de la Gorgendière and Kenneth King (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, Centre of African Studies, 1996), 17–33.

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CHAPTER 10

What Has Kinshasa to Do with Athens? Methodological Perspectives on Theology and Social Science in Search for a Political Theology

Elias Kifon Bongmba

"What has Kinshasa to do with Athens?" is a quintessential African question that has its origins in the query by North African theologian Tertullian (Quintus Septimius Florend Tertullianus): "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" (*De Praescriptione vii*).[1] The African version refers to the robust debate on theological method between members of the Kinshasa School of Theology that pitted two faculty members against each other: Tharcisse Tshibangu, the Dean of the Faculty, who championed a theology that would draw its arguments mainly from the African cultural, religious, and intellectual world to make it African theology, and A. Vanneste, on the Kinshasa faculty at the time, who called for a universal catholic theology because an African theology limited only to African thought and culture would be isolationist. Today's question – what does Kinshasa have to do with Athens? – calls for a different analysis that would still involve using African sources; but I must add that another dimension that requires urgent attention if theological thinking in Africa is going proceed from a broad platform is the relationship between theology and the social sciences.

I argue that theological scholarship in Africa should maintain a robust dialogue with the social sciences in order to forge a new and creative discourse on political theology.[2] I begin with a brief review of the debate between Abongkhiameghe Orobator and Charles Nyamiti on methodology to demonstrate the imperative of such a dialogue.[3] I then present arguments supporting my view

1 This chapter was presented at the conference, African Lived Christianity – Faith, Ritual and Power, at Lund University, March 16–18, 2016. I thank the Lund Mission Society for providing the funds for me to participate in this conference of the Lived Christianity Project at Lund University. I thank the Board of Directors of the Mission Society for the warm hospitality they gave us when we met at Lund University. I also thank Mika Vähäkangas and Karen Lauterbach for their wonderful insights and suggestions.

2 Elias K. Bongmba, "Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinarity in African Studies," *Religion and Theology,* 21, no. 3–4 (2014), 218–250.

3 Abongkhiameghe E. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty* (Nairobi: Pauliness Publications, 2005); Charles Nyamiti,

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that such a position is necessary to articulate a progressive political theology in the African context. I do not seek to undermine disciplinary boundaries, merely to argue, firstly, that disciplinary distinctiveness offers only a single perspective, reminding scholars of the claim by Johannes Fabian that when driven solely by its own perspective, anthropology (and here I must add, theology) is a *Grenzwissenschaft*.[4] A critical multidisciplinary dialogue is necessary for many who still live with Africa, if I can borrow an expression from Jan Vansina.[5]

Second, interdisciplinary dialogue is necessary because the place and status of theology has been a hotly contested issue. Modern developments in the social sciences, especially in anthropology, history, political science, and sociology, have opened up the study of Africa by introducing theoretical innovations.[6] This development has led to the denigration of theology which some Africanists have, at best, treated as an arm of the missionary movement or, at worst, largely as a confessional discipline. In the excellent book, *Africa and the Disciplines* (1993), for example, contributors offered brilliant insights from a range of disciplines except theology.[7]

Third, it would be presumptuous to call the human and social sciences partners, but it is the case that theology and the social sciences serve each other's interests as scholars seek to understand and illuminate reality. The mythopoesis that has developed over the centuries, the norms of articulation, the theories, and the intellectual values that have been used to shape our understanding of African communities therefore invite careful critical dialogue between theologians and social scientists.

In the first section, I introduce the debate on methodology in African theology. I then discuss two proposals for political theology from Emmanuel Katongole and Nimi Wariboko, arguing that their insightful theological perspectives should be strengthened by perspectives from the social sciences to have a balanced view of political theology in the African context. I make that case by

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Some Contemporary Models of African Ecclesiology: A Critical Assessment in the Light of Biblical and Church Teaching, Studies in African Christian Theology, Vol 3 (Nairobi: Catholic University of East Africa, 2007).

4 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

5 Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

6 See V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); see also V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

7 Robert Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe, and Jean O'Barr, *Africa and the Disciplines: Contributions of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

suggesting and discussing a dialectical view of the notion of sovereignty as a background to political theology. I should also state that in advancing an argument for a conceptualized notion of sovereignty in political theology, one must recognize the European influence on such ideas, yet also recognize debates that have called into question the influence that Western models of sovereignty have had on African understanding of politics.[8] Nor can one ignore criticism from scholars that discourses that have focused on state failure in Africa have been seen by some African scholars as problematic because many African states have acted in the face of, and continue to find ways of responding to, state collapse.[9] Furthermore, while I address the idea of sovereignty as formulated in the work of Carl Schmitt, I do not assume that Schmitt's perspective is the only valid view of sovereignty.[10] I am sure that one could and should rework African conceptions of sovereignty based on African political systems.

1 Orobator and Nyamiti on Methodology

Nigerian theologian, Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, and Tanzanian theologian, Charles Nyamiti, have taken positions that illuminate the debate between theology and the social sciences. To begin with, Orobator in *From Crisis to Kairos*[11] has argued that much of the literature on the church in Africa has ignored the social context because theologians have used ecclesial models developed elsewhere and employed an "inculturation devoid of any immediately recognizable referent in a particular social context" to ground the church in "static cultural symbols."[12] Orobator calls for greater social analysis in order for scholars to present a more robust picture of the church, rather than their depending on theological analysis alone.

Orobator proposes an ethnographic approach to studying HIV/AIDS, refugees, and poverty in Africa to articulate a contextual theology that engages the "complex issues of social concern."[13] He studies the church in light of *Lumen Gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church [1964] which describes a settled church and its evangelical and proselytizing role) and *Guadium et Spes*

8 Tobias Hagmann and Didier Pélcard, eds., *Negotiating Statehood: Dynamics of Power and Domination in Africa,* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2010).

9 Hagmann and Pélcard, *Negotiating Statehood,* 2010, 2; See James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

10 See also Jacques Maritain, *Man and State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

11 Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos.*

12 *Ibid.*, 13.

13 *Ibid.*, 15, emphasis in the original.

(the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World [1965] which invites a conscious wrestling with the realities of the times, especially in a period of great uncertainty) in dialogue with *Ecclesia in Africa*[14] to provide a theoretical perspective on how to move from crisis to Kairos (the present moment in which the church is called to address many social issues). Orobator promotes fieldwork and participant observation, and emphasizes *verstehen* that calls for the use of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. He carried out his studies in Eastern Africa where he interacted with people living with AIDS, refugees, and poverty. An engagement in the social context in Keya enabled him to observe, gather data, and conduct unstructured interviews during which he asked open-ended questions in formal and informal settings. These sessions varied in length from a few minutes to a little over an hour. The goal was to hear the people on their own terms, and practice what Andrea Fontana and James F. Frey describe as a "human to human" approach.[15]

Charles Nyamiti argues that Orobator accuses African scholars of imposing foreign ecclesiologies but, in doing so, Orobator himself engages in a translation which ignores the social context in Africa.[16] Nyamiti rejects Orobator's claim that African theologians describe the church with static symbols that have no meaning in the social context, claiming that Orobator abandons the hard fought gains made in the theology of inculturation (theological analysis that has taken into consideration African cultural values and context) in favor of the approach of Latin American liberation theologians. Furthermore, Nyamiti rejects Orobator's claims that African ecclesiologies are imported and argues that because African ecclesiology is also rooted in the notion of the family, scholars think of the church that way and therefore include a broad social context; consequently, one cannot dismiss inculturation or claim, as Orobator does, that it has no bearing on the crisis churches in Africa face today. Orobator therefore is inconsistent because he uses ecclesiological paradigms, such as sacramental and communal perspectives, that have been developed outside Africa at the expense of locally developed approaches, such as ancestral theological approaches.[17] By dismissing a "tripartite ancestral koinonia ecclesiology" proposed by Nyamiti as an oddity because it focuses on arcane ideas, Orobator ignores African cultural realities such as ancestral

14 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa,* (Post Synodical Apostolic Exhortation) (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1995).

15 See Andrea Fontana, "The Interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Los Angeles: Sage Publishers, 2005), 654

16 Nyamiti, *Models of African Ecclesiology,* 148.

17 *Ibid.*, 158.

thought that stresses love of life, morality, and the social issues that Orobator addresses.

Furthermore, Nyamiti argues that Orobator's reductionist approach subordinates the mission of the church to its involvement with social wellbeing, privileging the secularization of the meaning and work of the church, and ignoring or conflating the supernatural and terrestrial dimensions of the mission of the church. He claims that Orobator's approach is superficial because he has limited himself to the social sciences and ignored metaphysical approaches to theology, absolutizing his methodology and rejecting doctrinal and missional approaches to theological views of the church.[18] Nyamiti also argues that the images Orobator uses to describe the church, such as healer, Mother, advocate, and pilgrim community of the poor, require a hermeneutics of incarnation, yet his originality is limited by a superficial theological perspective which ignores the nature of the church and its traditional traits, such as catholicity, oneness, and apostolicity. Orobator fails to distinguish the church from a civil state.[19]

In a later essay, Orobator called for a contextual approach because "theology does not operate outside the boundaries of our ordinary human experience."[20] The raw materials for theology, God's self-revelation to humanity, are experienced contextually. Theology is incarnational, grounded on the idea of the *kenosis,* (self-emptying) of Jesus who took on human flesh and lived and worked among people in specific contexts.[21] Theology in Africa addresses the "African reality in the light of Christian faith."[22] Inculturation takes into account the religious thoughts of the people and stresses the dynamic encounter between religious ideas and culture in understanding God.[23] This dialogical approach between African indigenous religions and Christianity has previously been referred to as "adaptation" but today the term "inculturation" is preferred because it reflects a rootedness of the Christian faith in a local culture.[24] Orobator indicates that contextualization is correlative because it discloses and explicates the impact of faith on economic and political matters and vice versa. According to Orobator, "the theologian is a member of a faith community,

18 *Ibid.*, 167.

19 *Ibid.*, 173–174.

20 Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, "Contextual Theological Methodologies" in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations,* ed. Diane Stinton (London: SPCK, 2010), 3.

21 *Ibid.*, 5.

22 *Ibid.*, 6.

23 *Ibid.*, 7.

24 Laurenti Magesa, "African Christian Spirituality" in *African Theology on the Way: Current conversations,* ed. Diane Stinton (London: SPCK, 2010), 74.

who strives to understand its 'joys and hopes, grief and anguish' in light of God's self-revelation."[25] Contextual theology is interdisciplinary. Using the example of HIV/AIDS he argues that the pandemic must be understood in the social, economic, political, religious, and cultural context in which the epidemic has thrived and multiplied.[26]

Nyamiti insists correctly that it would be a great disservice to the theological enterprise to ignore the rich theological data that has accumulated over the years from different sources: biblical texts, tradition, the Magisterium, philosophical and ethical interpretations, and reconstructions forming the cultural and liberation theological discourses which have grown in Africa. There is a mystery about the faith community and a cultural grounding that includes the religious world of Africans that must not be overlooked as arcane, because these remain part of a mythopoetic world that requires a rereading in different contexts and time. This underlying religio-ethical architectonic substratum provides the intellectual grounding for understanding the data presented to us on a daily basis. Therefore, the positions articulated by Orobator and Nyamiti reinforce the need for interdisciplinarity in theology studies in the African context.

Nyamiti notes that the positive aspects of Orobator's enterprise include calling attention to crisis in Africa – wherein social science methodology offers important insights – and also the centrality Orobator accords the incarnation of the mission of the church, which he sees as the body of Christ. Orobator's work includes all the positive elements of liberation theology articulated by the Pontifical Commission on the Bible: awareness that the God who saves is present in suffering; affirmation of the communal dimension of faith in Africa; articulation of the urgency of liberation, justice and love; and a fresh reading of the Bible in the context of contemporary African crises. In the next section, I argue that in moving beyond methodology, a compelling case for critical dialogue is necessary in order for theologians to articulate a critical and engaging perspective on theology and politics.

2 Vibrant Political Theology Requires Dialogue between Theology and Social Science

The Orobator and Nyamiti debate reflects two complementary positions on theology and *Geisteswissenschaften* (which initially in the German academy

25 Orobator, *Contextual Theological Methodologies,* 8.

26 Elias K. Bongmba, *Facing a Pandemic: The African Church and Crisis of AIDS* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

included the social sciences), but to which today we must specifically add the social sciences.[27] Historically, theological studies of politics were championed by liberation theologians in Southern Africa who battled white racist regimes. In the mid-1990s, Jesse Mugambi and Charles Villa-Vicencio spelled out a theology of reconstruction and appealed directly to structural issues, nation building, and human rights. This was a timely argument in the post-cold war era where there was political and economic stagnation and a mounting abuse of human rights. It is in light of the need for a dialogical approach that I engaged in a dialogue with the social sciences and theology in *The Dialectics of Transformation in Africa.*[28] The way forward calls for a theological engagement that takes seriously inculturation, transformation, and human dignity. This is a task that requires serious engagement with the social sciences and critical theological analysis, which must pay attention to the global as well as local historical traditions that have shaped the Christianity, its sacred texts, symbols, and moral ethos. This dialogical approach invites research on countless fronts and to ignore critical interdisciplinary dialogue would be tantamount to a scholarly dereliction of duty. Scholars would do well to avoid marginalizing discipline-oriented research that does not come from their own discipline, as the need for an interdisciplinary dialogue and approach to understanding religion and the religious experience in Africa remains an important intellectual priority. The social sciences, and the methodological approach which privileges data collection through fieldwork, would provide theologians with specific information on different aspects of church life before they address theological concerns. Before we explore that, however, I will discuss the political theology of Emmanuel Katongole, which emphasizes local Christian narratives and practices, to further make the case that for robust interdisciplinary dialogue.

3 Emmanuel Katongole on Political Theology

Emmanuel Katongole has presented a political theology in *The Sacrifice of Africa* that is grounded on the motif of lament and narrative.[29] Drawing from Adam Hochschild's analysis in *King Leopold's Ghost,* Katongole laments the

27 See Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodei, *Selected Works Volume 1: Introduction to the Human Sciences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 6.

28 Elias K. Bongmba, *The Dialectics of Transformation in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

29 I have discussed this account elsewhere. See Elias K. Bongmba, "Lament and Narrative: A Review of Emmanuel Katongole's The Sacrifice of Africa," *Modern Theology* 30, no. 2 (2014), 403–407.

exploitive politics and violence in Africa that continues to sacrifice the continent, and argues that African churches should shift from a social ethics that draws its analysis from the failure of political culture, the problems of structural reforms, discourse on governance, and prescriptions from the liberal global perspective. Katongole proposes an approach to political theology that stresses narrative to redirect the conversation away from a heavy emphasis on evangelization and spirituality, development and relief, or the overemphasis of mediation, advocacy, and reconciliation. These approaches have failed and Katongole argues that social ethics requires a clear focus on stories that reflect the histories and experiences of Africans because this will open up an analysis that goes beyond the focus on leadership failure and calls for structural changes. Africa needs to "discover the founding story of modern Africa, within which nation building and the nation-state project are inscribed. Only by attending to this story and displaying its performance can a new framework for doing Christian social ethics in Africa emerge."[30] Katongole joins many African scholars who have called for a clear African voice in the disciplines; what is different here is that he frames his call in language that invites African theologians to explore the mythopoetic world of their societies as well as the things that have created crisis in the postcolonial state.[31]

In the second section of the book, Katongole offers two theoretical perspectives and practices to ground his argument. First, he lauds "the madness (more appropriately, the boldness) of Thomas Sankara" in Burkina Faso, whose broad reforms recognized the divisive and class-oriented neocolonial exploitation of the people. Sankara rejected the inevitability of poverty and called on the people to build their self-image and develop the self-confidence to promote local economic ideals.[32] Second, Jean Marc Ela challenged the ecclesial community in Africa to imagine a "different world right here," and recognize that Africa was an empire of hunger because conspicuous consumption had made African leaders develop a desire for the West and its goods and ignore local needs in education and healthcare.

In the third and last section of the book, Katongole develops a model for political theology that is drawn from concrete examples (gathered from fieldwork) of a new spirit of activism that promotes reconciliation, peacebuilding, and human dignity. Bishop Paried Taban has created the Kuron Peace Village to offer an alternative space where there would be no discrimination in Sudan.

30 Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011).

31 *Ibid*., 10–20.

32 *Ibid.,* 93.

Angelina Atyam's daughter was kidnapped and raped by the forces of Joseph Kony and, by the time she was able to escape and return, she had given birth to two boys. Yet Atyam has called for forgiveness and reconciliation, constructing a new future that will avoid violence or revenge. Maggy Barankitse started *Maison Shalom* in Burundi to protect and save Hutu children from being killed by rebel soldiers. This place became one of love and forgiveness. Katongole calls on Africans to become fired up and stubborn, to move beyond the social limits on religion, and embrace a revolutionary love and spirituality.[33] The examples Katongole discusses are not unique because Uganda has had an overabundance of faith-based and non-governmental organizations engaged in relief and reconciliation. China Scherz has argued that humanitarianism, development, and charity in the region are all distinct practices, which build both the aid workers and the recipients of aid into moral subjects.[34] Scherz's studies of ChildHope and Mercy House in Uganda demonstrates how these two organizations engage in ethical practices as they relate to their clients and donors, and in analyzing these relations Scherz offers a new perspective on sustainable development and charity, discussed by Katangole.

To sharpen attention on the need for a vital political theology that also draws from a broad dialogue with the social sciences, in the following section I discuss another example, this one provided by Nimi Wariboko.

4 Nimi Wariboko on Pentecostal Theology in Africa

In his *Nigerian Pentecostalism* (NP), Nimi Wariboko offers a fascinating interdisciplinary discussion of political theology. Wariboko's point of departure is Paul Tillich's views of power against the backdrop of the historicity of the political (and ecclesial) community and its anticipation of the new.[35] He studies politics under the rubric of spiritual presence as a context where the Tillichian "ultimate concerns" are experienced and expressed in love, justice, and the Protestant principle. Tillich refers broadly to Protestantism "as a special historical embodiment of a universally significant principle", which could be

33 Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice*, 193–196; See also Emmanuel Kantogole, *Born From Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2017)

34 See also China Scherz, *Having People, Having Heart: Charity, Sustainable Development, and Problems of Dependence in Central Uganda* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). I thank Karen Lauterbach for bringing this wonderful study to my attention.

35 Nimi Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 148.

found in all religions but, in a more specific way, in Protestant discourses that reject infallibility.[36] According to Wariboko, spiritual presence is an enabling modality that enhances moral disposition.[37] It is an engagement that recognizes the Spirit as well as the demonic; hence, his analysis emphasizes social relations characterized by domination and the imposition of suffering.[38] Wariboko pushes beyond the entitative and non-entitative dimension to include the "political as the human organizing of agonistic power in society through practices." Such practices are found in every society and are determinative of the ontological conditions of persons.[39] Ontologically, politics informs social practices which, following Achille Mbembe, Wariboko names *necropolitics,* a term that Mbembe has used to describe political practices that use the notion of sovereignty to determine who lives and who dies in the postcolony. The key to understanding these dimensions of power in Pentecostal spirituality lies in the power of the Spirit who counters the negative dimensions of power. Political spirituality engages systems of power by inscribing the presence of the divine who sees and watches over everything, both at the household and national levels. Therefore, one way of resisting the political network of power today "is the countergeneration of collective power … actualized when members of a corporate body act in concert … It happens when believers stand up together and act for their common good [the good of all members of the community]."[40] This action might include some of the things Pentecostal Christians do, such as coming together to pray all night.

Wariboko claims that dominant and corrupt leaders have abused the notion of sovereignty in political theology in the context of Africa. It is a socio-political context in which "Satan and his cohorts, and God are in competition over human lives and nations. Pentecostals see themselves as securing God's sovereignty over their lives and their nations."[41] He points out rightly that this is what Ruth Marshal reported in *Political Spiritualities.*[42] Spiritual warfare involves raging with forces which Achille Mbembe describes as "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of

36 Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), vii.

37 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 148–149.

38 Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 199; Ruth Marshall-Fratani, "Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 278–315.

39 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 151.

40 *Ibid.,* 153.

41 *Ibid.,* 154.

42 Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualties: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 236.

human bodies and populations."[43] Therefore, Wariboko sees in politics a warfare in which the grace of God and the power of the Spirit counter the negative situation and imagine an alternative social vision, something common to many ecclesial communities. In my view, this is a rather strong characterization because I continue to see politics as the science, art, and practice of enabling, leading, and governing a political community to function, thrive, and nurture the common good. Given the imagery of spiritual warfare, Wariboko sees

> political spirituality as a way of claiming a stake in a hostile world, imposing one's acquired sovereignty (from Jesus, the *superpower*) on daily events, as a pattern of defending one's turf in the agonistic power exchanges to safeguard one's being and to significantly and meaningfully elevate one's level of flourishment, as a form of warfare.[44]

In Chapter 7, Wariboko discusses politics in Nigeria, focusing on miracles, sovereignty, and the idea of community. Wariboko rejects Marshall's view that NP has no prospects of creating a political community that responds to the need of Nigerians because Pentecostalism is fractured, focuses on miracles, and rejects the idea of sovereignty, which has held people and communities together. He suggests, on the contrary, that NP offers

> a community of a new type, proper to the forms of diffuse individualized, monoisopmorphic forms of connectedness in our globalized world. Thus, with respect to structures of authority or forms of collective association or action, the decisive factor remains the spiritual state of the individual.[45]

Wariboko, who approaches the topic from a normative perspective, rejects Marshall's analysis of social reality because she focuses on the sovereign head of a political community and ignores the abuses of that system. He also rejects the view that Pentecostalism has not created the kind of effective institutions that could address political problems, charging that Marshall's formulation is clouded by a narrow view of morality instead of a broad view of ethics that could help people understand sovereignty, which Marshal has misinterpreted

43 Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003), 11–140.

44 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 158. Karen Lauterbach has pointed out that this stresses an individualistic approach. Personal communication.

45 Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities,* 208.

as a single political leader. Wariboko insists that sovereignty in Pentecostalism should be understood through repeated actions, where "norms, virtues of good governance and sustainable polis are cited and recited to produce … the sovereignty it must refer to."[46] The normative principles Wariboko elucidates here may not reflect the Nigerian Pentecostal and political scene. Furthermore, although the distinctions between a moral community and the political community are not made clear, there is an opening at this point in Wariboko's argument to nuance the conceptualization of sovereignty; this he does not do because he is interested in the ethical practices that are carried out in the application of Pentecostal spirituality. Wariboko goes on to discuss miracles as the birth of the new. Miracles are manifestations of the excesses of grace, and he places miracles and the prosperity gospel in the context of structural spirituality, arguing they can be seen as social practices and expressions of lived spirituality.

While Wariboko offers an astute and compelling view of ethics, I do not think one can dismiss Marshall's view that Pentecostalism is not able to develop a viable political community (and one might add a political theology) because it lacks the notion of sovereignty. Given the practices of governance in the postcolony, especially as we have seen in Africa, this is a reasonable concern. One can also not overlook the fact that Schmitt's view of politics and sovereignty causes disquiet among contemporary thinkers because Schmitt stressed the theological roots of power which at the time he wrote had already been secularized, even though the image domination linked to the divine rights gave many in Europe that authoritarian decision-making because of the powers of rulers remained in place.[47] Schmitt also argued that even jurisprudence had an exception, which he described as a miracle to underscore the theological roots of the idea of the political. Schmitt offered a grim picture of the political when he painted a picture of social crises and differences as warfare between friends and enemies in which one seeks to eliminate one's enemy.[48] Schmitt's political theology suggested that to live without violence would be to live in an apolitical society.[49] This inevitability of conflict and violence made Schmitt postulate the idea of the sovereign who makes the decisions in cases of emergencies and can do so because, as sovereign, that person is not subjected to the juridical process as others are.[50] One can appreciate Schmitt's

46 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 180.

47 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p. 36

48 *Ibid*., 27–28.

49 See further discussion in Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue,* trans. J. Harvey Lomaz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 17 ff.

50 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* 35.

somewhat limited historical interpretation, especially if one considers that he published his work during the era of the Weimer Republic.

The response to Schmitt has moved away from the idea of the sovereign "One" to focus variously on the God who liberates through Jesus, through theologies of hope, and liberation theologies in a global context that have fought against dictatorships, contra Schmitt's view that the world consists of two opponents who must struggle to overcome one another.[51] Wariboko joins the chorus that rejects the notion of the sovereign leader by arguing that scholars should rework the wisdom (the broad teachings of the Christian church) which Pentecostalism has inherited concerning community, sovereignty, and miracles but, more importantly, rethink them in the light of virtue ethics.[52] I think there is reason to deploy part of this strategy, but political theology cannot be grounded on that alone. Additionally, Wariboko rejects spirituality as an aesthetic way of life that offers *messianic nows* that lack a unity of life and he calls instead for an approach that has a discernible *telos* that can generate commitment and responsibility for the future. The theology he proposes "includes shifting the line of discourse from an analytical-political science emphasis on sovereignty as an exception or on the inability of miracles to ground a polis to that of practices of and virtues for creating and sustaining a Pentecostal form of community."[53] What Wariboko means is that, rather than constructing a political theology based on the idea of a sovereign leader, certain important beliefs and practices in Pentecostal teachings, such as grace, community, virtue ethics, and spirituality, can serve as the conditions for creating a polity of virtue that would enable actors fulfill their obligations to the state and its people.

On the specific question of sovereignty, Wariboko argues that, in addition to social practices and beliefs, charismatic eruptions also contribute to the cultivation of virtues. The charismatics serve to counterbalance "established

51 See Johann Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973). Political theology is experiencing a renaissance today in the academy with many single authored books and edited volumes. See for example: Alister Kee, ed. *A Reader in Political Theology* (London: SCM, 1977); Alister Kee, ed., *The Scope of Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1978); Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); Peter Scott and Willian T. Cavanaugh, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology,* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006); Michael Kirwin, *Political Theology: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009); Elizabeth Philips, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012). In addition, there is a book series at Columbia University on political theology.

52 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 204–205.

53 *Ibid.*, 167.

symbolic structure (norms, practices, texts, routines)" allowing a retextualization and renormalization of sociality. Marshall focuses on the juridico-political and a rule-governed sovereignty. One cannot doubt that Pentecostal practices offer ethical ideals for political theory and practice to counterbalance "norms, practices, texts, [and] routines", and that such a counterbalancing indeed retextualizes society; but in terms of political discourse and practice, one wonders if it normalizes political practice, if by normalize we mean returning to a functioning polis that works for the common good that would embrace all member of the political community without insisting on a theological norm which others may find problematic. One cannot question the emphasis that Wariboko places on ethics in his numerous writings and one must also agree that he is correct that deploying virtues and moral practices within Pentecostalism which he analyzes through the virtue of friendship has a revolutionary impact on morality and politics in Africa today. However, some would contest the case he has made because it remains an internal ethic that is grounded on another sovereign, the Spirit of God. While one cannot restrict a religious community from demonstrating its ethical impulse, one wonders if in the case of Pentecostalism it is chastened by the respect for difference or even the rejection of the Pentecostal ethos by other Christian communities. To put it more crudely, is the direct application of a theology that promotes the presence, and power of the Holy Spirit and miracles that believers should expect and live by, a hindrance to the emergence of genuine political sovereignty? I think it is.

In the next section, I propose a reinterpretation of the notion of sovereignty as a way of rethinking political theology, a project that can only succeed if there is a dialogue between theology and the social sciences.

5 Rethinking Sovereignty in Political Theology

I am convinced that social scientific theories offer ways of expanding the notion of sovereignty beyond the idea of the "One" which refers to the head of the political community alone. While conceding that the "One" makes decisions even outside the law, I should note that Schmitt made an amazing revelation by affirming that

> all tendencies of modern constitutional development point toward eliminating the sovereign in this sense … But whether this extreme exception can be banished from the world is not a juristic question. Whether one has confidence and hope that it can be eliminated depends on

> philosophical, especially on philosophical-historical or metaphysical convictions.[54]

Therefore, a better way of thinking about sovereignty is to shift it from Schmitt's focus on an individual leader who is all powerful. Instead, sovereignty is inscribed in the constitution, in laws enacted by elected representatives of the people, and the other legal instruments without which sovereignty is incomplete. Since democracy is the rule of the people, sovereignty belongs to the people. In many African countries, that process is grounded in the constitution that spells out the political institutions and lays out the structures of governing authorities and how those who govern are selected. The constitution and laws provide for a judicial system that regulates, sanctions, or disciplines the practices of the state and its citizens. In principle, those who govern work with the elected representatives of the people (in the House of Assembly, Parliament, or senate) to create further institutions that would facilitate governance and enable those who govern to fulfill their obligations to the people, and promote equality, liberty, and justice. A blanket refutation of the notion of sovereignty misses the broad institutional and juridical advantages embedded in the idea of sovereignty as I discuss it here. The constitutional and juridical implications are important because legal provisions and structures offer the means of checking the absolutism of sovereignty if we insist on limiting sovereignty to the "one."

Therefore, given this perspective, I would argue that one can appreciate sovereignty in the manner political theologians have discussed if one considers four further descriptors. First, sovereignty is a foundational and generative ideal and praxis. It certainly derives from the will of the people to co-exist in a political community. One could explore and understand this from the tradition of political philosophy that has stressed the rule of the *demos,* in classical times, or its modern versions which postulate the political community in Hobbesian terms which state that people come together to form a political community as a way of dealing with human proclivities. One could also understand this through a social contract model perhaps best illustrated by the enduring American political phrase "we the people." My argument is that, in all of these approaches, the notion of sovereignty is generative and points to the founding and reproduction of politics and the political community as normative praxis subject to the will of the people. There is no doubt that those foundations – for example, in ancient Egyptian, Greece, and African kingdoms

54 Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* 5–7.

like the Yoruba, the Buganda, the Zulu, and Great Zimbabwe which were colonized and liberated into the *post-neocolonial* state[55] whose arrangements still exist today – may have had mythic and religious roots. But one must insist that what has emerged is a political community where modern political thought holds that those who govern do so better if they govern with the consent of the people. Sovereignty as a generative process then, is a deliberate and thoughtful process which requires that the architecture on which the idea of a nation is constructed draws from the best and most enduring values of humanity and each community. We can debate what those values are but it seems clear that, to most observers, they include life and wellbeing, liberty, freedom, and justice to enable the furtherance of the common good.

Sovereignty of the people, therefore, has foundational qualities that need solid grounds, which, in many cases, are the constitution and institutions of a country. The philosophical, political, economic, and social basis for instruments that ground sovereignty, like a constitution and institutions, must provide it with enduring values to shield it from political and, especially, theological manipulation. Statehood in many parts of Africa during the half century since independence has been marked by the violent manipulation of those instruments of sovereignty by politicians and dictators who have amended, ignored, or suspended their constitutions to stay in power, destabilizing many African countries and destroying the notion of sovereignty.

Second, it follows that sovereignty must be linked to viable national and regional institutions. The constitution must be adopted by the representatives of the people, who also propose, debate, and pass laws and work within certain institutions such as the Presidency, the legislature, the judicial system, and state, and municipal offices. Institutions are normative enclaves because they have rules of engagement and the regulations that stipulate the different bureaucratic processes necessary to maintain a functioning political community. Those rules make it possible for all members of the political community to be subjected to the requirements of the law and the processes of good governance. Hence, members of the legislature can be sanctioned or impeached for ethical violations demonstrating that no one is above the law. Religious groups may condemn those ethical violations, but in the main, the regulations are not religious ideas but legal instruments that deal with public and political conduct and social practices appertaining to the offices to which individuals have been elected, or hired to serve. These institutions are dynamic and adaptive to the needs of the time.

55 The term postneocolonial, is used intentionally to emphasize colonialism and neocolonialism.

One must therefore recognize and accept the reality that political institutions have their own ethic.

Religious communities, on the other hand, comprise different types of institutions that offer a variety of services to the political community. Some of these services – spiritual, emotional, and psychological wellbeing, health care, and education in the African context – have been crucial for the intellectual, social, and economic development of many African countries. Together, religious institutions have helped define the post-neocolonial state, even though they have had their own problems because some leaders of religious institutions have engaged in corrupt practices themselves.[56] While I insist on the notion of sovereignty vested in the people and supported by an institutional framework adopted by the people, Wariboko thinks that the Pentecostal perspective introduces ethical practices that could enable individuals have a positive impact on institutions. He argues: "my overall argument focuses on practices, institutions, and structures that can sustain the ideas of sovereignty and community."[57] My perspective is that political institutions concerned with the governance and sustainability of the state remain the primary theatre of activity and any political theology ought to recognize this reality because those institutions are what make the people sovereign, not religious communities, regardless of the important role the latter have played in the post-neocolonial state.

Third, it follows from what I have said in the previous section that this configuration of sovereignty moves away from sectarian religious perspectives. I use the word sectarian broadly here, to refer to all religious communities. One of the truisms of the sociology of religion during the last two decades has been the recognition that the so-called secularization of society did not materialize because religion has remained a dominant social force. This is true of Western democracies as well as Africa where the church, strengthened by the Pentecostal revival, is experiencing phenomenal growth. However, that does not change the fact that many countries in the world are by nature secular states, not theocracies. Therefore, what is needed for political theology is a rigorous and negotiated vision of the secular, which recognizes a realm defined by a social contract that is broad enough to tolerate and encourage dialogue with other views, but refrains from constraining those visions as long as they do not interfere with the "pursuit of life, liberty, and justice." In other words, sovereignty of the people works best when we guarantee secularity that is loosely defined but

56 Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

57 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 170.

allows for religious beliefs and practices that do not dominate or offer a limited exclusionary view of the world and political community. This, in principle, is the way religious communities relate to political communities, but in many African countries religion has taken center stage and political leaders have acted as if they live in a theocracy, or at least been given a mandate to govern by God.[58] A broad view of the secular allows room for religion, belief, faith, and a morality inspired by those beliefs, yet recognizes that the secular serves as a neutral ground for contested spiritualities that must be deployed in a sphere where sovereignty is not that of a divine being, but the sovereignty of the people.

Given this perspective, many would partially agree with Wariboko's project which stresses "raising issues … from the interior of the Pentecostal worldview and social practices and mutually correlating them with answers from nuanced philosophical interpretations of the notions of community, sovereignty, and miracles," something he argues Marshall fails to achieve.[59] Here, I think Marshall, or anyone who recognizes the specificity of the Pentecostal argument or worldview, has no problem, provided the notion is not rejected that such a perspective can be used in dialogue with, or to contest, philosophical and theological perspectives articulated in Western political theology. In addition, community and polity inspired by ecclesial bodies or religious communities are important, but such polity must not be allowed to dictate sovereignty as I have narrowly defined it here. Wariboko cites John Milbank who argues that,

> for a polity based on virtue, the goal of authority is not simply an effective peace and order, nor the representation of … majority will, nor the liberty and equality of individuals, but rather the education of individuals into certain practices and states of character, regarded as objectively desirable goals for human beings as such.[60]

I must point out that my view differs in that both Milbank and Wariboko describe ethical practices that function within institutional contexts that have a rich democratic practice. However, for post-neocolonial Africa, the recovery of

58 Patrick Claffey, "Kérékou the Chameleon, Master of Myth," in *Staging Politics: Power and Performance in Asia and Africa,* eds. Julia C. Strauss and Donald B. Cruise (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 98–101; See also Patrick Claffey, *Christian Churches in Dahomey-Benin: A Study of their Socio-Political Role,* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 114 ff.

59 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 170.

60 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 326.

the social, the political, and the very idea of a community and polis, needs a democratic base with a broad secular vision where religious beliefs are not only tolerated, but also deployed to promote a pluralistic vision for all members of the political community. Making room for such a religious-ethical approach to the common good requires a fourth and final dimension of sovereignty.

This involves acknowledgment that sovereignty of the people is a rational process. Wariboko rightly reminds us of the dangers of the "religion of reason" as exhibited by the excesses of the French Revolution, and argues that the current Pentecostalism revolution or "religion of virtues" promotes the common good and a human telos. The good life in this context means one is saved (one lives in Christ) and belongs to the eschatological community and the reign of God.[61] Regarding the good life, I should point out that one cannot fault Wariboko for insisting that sovereignty requires techniques of the self that promote discipline and virtues in the Socratic tradition (and, we should add, in African virtues of community).[62] But I must insist that stressing the secular version of sovereignty does not necessarily call on Pentecostals to abandon being who they are spiritually, as long as that spirituality does not engender exclusivist views and practices that can disrupt the political community by silencing other views or supporting dictatorial and corrupt tendencies in politicians who profess to be born again believers, attend Pentecostal rallies, or take unilateral actions to make their countries "Christian nations."[63] One hardly needs to raise the example of President Chiluba of Zambia – a self-professed Pentecostal who declared his country a Christian nation and frequently visited Prophet T.B. Joshua – who was later charged with corruption, though acquitted after a trial.[64] One therefore must insist that what some Pentecostals offer at this point is a privatized ethic and morality designed to serve as the "salt and light of the earth" but there is no guarantee that it can effect a social political revolution without the secular dimensions of sovereignty.

Wariboko has addressed this subject in *The Pentecostal Principle,* offering further illuminating ideas in *The Charismatic City and the Public Resurgence of*

61 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 172.

62 Plato, "Alcibiades," in *Plato: Complete Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 557–595. Citation in Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism.*

63 Isabel Apawo Phiri, "President Frederick Chiluba and Zambia: Evangelicals and Democracy in a 'Christian Nation,'" in *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*, ed. Terence O. Ranger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95–129. See also Gifford, *African Christianity.*

64 "Zambia ex-president Chiluba acquitted of graft," accessed March 13, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-zambia-corruption-chiluba-idUSTRE57G3N320090817

Religion, and argues that sovereignty is also a performative term, insisting that the community guarantees sovereignty, a perspective with which one would agree. He points out that since sovereignty also includes "ideals of control and domination and performance of political norms, then new ways of constructing it are possible," and one would have to say such a position recognizes the dynamics of political ideals and practice in different contexts.[65] However, Wariboko insists that the Pentecostal performance has the power to produce the sovereignty it performs. Asserting that one way to understand sovereignty is to see it as an empty space that needs to be filled, Wariboko acknowledges that the sovereignty of virtues is weak. It emerges from, and functions within, a limited spiritual context. It is for that reason that Wariboko's position is problematic because he goes on to argue that Pentecostal spirituality is not about "institutional design for societal decision or control but what kind of a person or people Pentecostals will [want to] be."[66] He develops this point further by drawing on virtue and character, a move that no one can deny has an important place in the political community. His argument that the Redeemed Christian Church of God, North American division, that has created a legacy week during which people develop a narrative of their collective relationship and interactions in Christ, a project he sees as a new political practice in Pentecostalism, is not strong enough. Finally, Wariboko argues that this community must embody an institutional form (one assumes a Pentecostal ecclesial and ethical framework) that must reflect, in Hauerwasian terms, the community's own self-understanding.

Every discussion of the ethics of virtue requires a fair hearing, but I must insist that a broad understanding of sovereignty ought to be rational. This position has nothing to do with whether the Pentecostal worldview creates a community that offers an ethic that could affect the political community or not. What remains worrisome for me is the lack of rationality involved in practices grounded on miracles that has marked Pentecostal beliefs, discourses, deliverances, and the all too often uncritical critique that African ancestral cultures hinder the opening of the doors of economic opportunities for African Christians to have wealth. To be fair to Wariboko, he is not seeking to demonstrate that miracles can be translated into broad public policy solutions. There is also no doubt that, under certain circumstances, one could find "the ideal person in Nigerian Pentecostalism [who] is fast becoming the autonomous, self-sufficient, free person."[67] One wonders if this is not a rather strong claim to make in a

65 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 179.
66 *Ibid.*, 182.
67 *Ibid.*, 185.

context where people lay a lot of emphasis on power relations, especially the power of the "pastor" who now wields a lot of power in the private and public lives of the people. Wariboko states this "ideal" person is self-sufficient and owes no debts to the past and the future because God and the Holy Spirit will always guide the believer to the things he or she needs to consume (and, here, I do not quarrel with a consumer economy). It is also not revelatory to read that a relationship between Pentecostals and God is not love and sacrifice but a contract, which requires virtues to build a new community, since that has always been part of the broad ecclesial vision.

What I question is the rationality of the economy of miracles. Wariboko argues that miracles are ways for the community to control the possibilities available to them and "speak of surplus possibilities beyond what a community (polity) may understand and control"; the demand for miracles, then, is "a call to defend, control, and embody the excess possibilities."[68] But, more importantly, miracles disrupt control and domination, especially of the sovereign political ruler. One must point out here that some Pentecostal leaders have been very dominant persons and leaders in the churches. Wariboko's argument underscores the view that miracles embrace a community that works on virtue and creates a community in which consent is given by individuals to the larger goals of the community.

Wariboko rightly points out that intellectual discourses on miracles point to their role in destabilizing institutionalized authority. He then describes miracles as exceptional events that create a new situation without suspending or transgressing laws and, more importantly, open new possibilities. Miracles depend on the sovereign God and the person who experiences a miracle, the believer who depends on faith alone. Miracles are discourses which can be seen in the testimonies given by believers. Miracles in this context may not be real, but demarcate excess and signal new possibilities or a form of dream and creates "a full *jouissance* beyond the law."[69] Miracles are performatives which rupture reality in temporal spaces. The miraculous overflows through the cracks because the sacred represents excess that overflows all possibilities because of the grace of God. Finally, Wariboko argues that miracles, then, are a form of capitalism. The activity of miracles is connected by the visible and invisible realms where the social practice of spirituality is mediated by miracles that fracture the sacred veil and connects the two realms and produces specific

68 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism,* 185.

69 See Slavoj Žižek, "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A plea for Ethical Violence," in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*, eds. Slavoj Žižek, Eric Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 134 ff.

goods in a context where "the real is about saving and possessing. This is what it means to have treasure both in heaven and on earth."[70] Drawing from Slavoj Žižek, Wariboko compares this interface of spirituality, transcendence, and the enjoyment of these earthly pleasures to the spirit of late capitalism. But the point here is that Wariboko sees nothing in miracles that prevents the building of a political order; if anything, miracles contribute to and should be an important component of reviving the economy and restoring political order in Africa. Other communities of discourse can also join practices which embody miracles, because they are expressions of an ontological spirituality which have been carried over from African traditional religions.

My concern with this focus on miracles is that its reinterpretation highlights anticipation and gives individuals grounds for hope but the claims that it does not dispense with the law are not correct if we see the law as a body of legal instruments that embody the broad normative context in which political decisions and economic regulations have to be made. We can even argue here that "law" could refer to well tested, precedent-setting ideas, norms, and practices that has enabled generations build strong political economies. Miracles do not offer a stable grounding for public policy that can promote measurable goals. There is no doubt that Pentecostal testimonies speak about successes which the individual did not anticipate, but if you listen to many of them, the narrative also includes the practice of virtue which Wariboko articulates very well; this may include hard work, diligence in one's studies, the practices of thrift and saving, and self-discipline that involves a complete turnaround from waste to constructive behavior, all in a social and institutional context without which miracles would hang in the air or to put it more crudely, make no sense. Therefore, to restructure the public square on miracles cannot work for economy like that of Nigeria or other African countries because, as a project, it lacks the rational elements that are necessary to coordinate a broad national economic policy; miracles, therefore, cannot be translated into broad social policy.

In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the necessity for a dialectical approach to a political theology of sovereignty to round up the theme of this chapter that calls for a dialogue between theology and the social sciences.

6 Towards a Critical Dialectical Political Theology of Sovereignty

What I call for is a dialectical approach which recognizes that the social sciences offer tools with which, as theologians, we can deepen our understanding

70 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism,* 196–197.

of political philosophy, policy, institutions, governance, the political economy, and address corruption, gender discrimination, and human rights abuses. Such a political theology cannot ignore the social theatre of politics, which is often mapped out in social science literature. Therefore, a dialectical political theology must draw from all the sciences to rethink the notion of sovereignty, which I have argued should refer in a broad sense to constitutional and legal authority over a people, or a political jurisdiction.[71]

My understanding of sovereignty is guided by modern political developments that strip away absolutist control by political leaders and reject the notion of the divine rights of kings.[72] It stresses ideals that Jean-Jacques Rousseau contributed to political philosophy by introducing the notion of a social contract that Rousseau defined as a nontransferable general will that was infallible and could be limited only by common interests. Such sovereignty should be grounded in the legal instruments (proposed by lawmakers) and structure of the political community, instruments that, I should add, are not lacking in Africa.[73] John Stuart Mills, who argued that every individual is a sovereign, would formulate the ultimate perspective on sovereignty. There are broad issues here which I cannot exhaust, such as limitation of power, independence, and international implications of sovereignty, but we need an interdisciplinary approach for a political theology that is vibrant in the African context to capture the many essential elements of politics and theology. Such a dialectical approach should exceed Schmitt's view that a "[s]overeign is he who decides on the exception [and] all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."[74] This last section of Schmitt's view must be contested because it grants a special privilege to theology in the formulation of political philosophy. It should be supplemented with the multidisciplinary

71 I am indebted to Dan Philpott, "Sovereignty" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* accessed July 25, 2013. See also Dan Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Stephen D. Krasner, *Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Thomas Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Emmanuel Wallerstein, *World Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

72 Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty: Four Chapters from Six Books of the Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). See also Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1968). Hobbes thought that the governed could resist domination by forming a new commonwealth to force the sovereign live up to their expectations.

73 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract,* (New York : Penguin Books, 2012)

74 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 5–35.

and dialectical approach that I am advocating because, for better or worse, a wider theoretical grounding of political thought and practice lies with Thomas Hobbes' notion of a social contract, which rejects or significantly reduces the concentration of power in one individual and privileges broad legal instruments and institutions that establish politics as an interdependent human and social practice.[75] A viable political theology does not need to depend on Schmitt alone but, rather, seek to move beyond his Weimar Republic perspective, as Paul Kahn has rightly suggested.[76]

In the African context, the drama of the post-neocolonial state or the postcolony has been studied from different disciplinary angles, including that of theology.[77] However, after the fury over the reforms proposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund through the (in)famous Structural Adjustment Program, it is necessary, in an exercise of realignment of sovereignty, to rethink political theology in the African context as people power. Rethinking political theology calls for a reexamination of the lives of ordinary individuals, the governed, who themselves are not only affected by the acts of sovereigns, but could be key actors in the game of politics. It is important to redirect political theology towards the examination of some of the major players in political action in the context: the rise of private, non-governmental organizations and the sustainability of their work. Finally, it is important to reexamine political theology in the African context because it is crucial to examine the role of women in African society.

For many people the idea of political theology is a modern intellectual enterprise that analyzes the state, its institutions, and its governance, but one that has turned into what Mark Lilla describes as a mismanaged liberal project.[78] My own perspective is informed by liberal Protestant thinking that has argued that the sacred traditions of Christianity and Jewish prophetic thought demonstrate a close relationship between the state and religion. Modern political thought provides a liberative perspective by postulating a separation of powers without ruling out the grounds on which people of faith can make

75 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012).

76 Paul W. Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5. See Peter Caldwell, *Popular Sovereignty and the Crisis of German Constitutional Law: The Theory and Practice of Weimer Constitutionalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Ellen Kennedy, *Constitutional Failure: Carl Schmitt in Weimar* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (New York: Verso Press, 2002).

77 Bongmba, *Dialectics of Transformation in Africa.*

78 Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics and the Modern West* (New York: Vintage, 2007).

claims about the responsibility of the state to the members of the commonwealth, understood in light of the social contract, which is largely a human construct that does not need divine sanction to be effective. The emphasis, then, is on the notion that people have mutually agreed to adopt a set of legal instruments that would be the standard for regulating the vision and activity of the political community. Such legal instruments and the institutions are open to scrutiny from all ideological positions.

The social contract as understood by other disciplines introduces liberative and reconstructive dimensions which have, and should, shape African political theology, precisely on the grounds that those who hold and exercise power in a commonwealth are invited to lead and shape the vision of the political community as it strives in different ways to keep and execute a social contract that is amendable to the common good. It is in this context that a dialectical approach to political theology must continue to examine institutions and structures as aspects of sovereignty broadly defined, whether those who conduct such examination draw from the Magisterium, or the rich Protestant intellectual tradition, or normative philosophical and ethical perspectives. In the North American context, some of the things that, one could argue, have limited sovereign exclusivity, such as judicial review of legislative actions and those of the executive branch, are actually things that ultimately strengthen sovereignty because such checks and balances place limits on the extraneous reach of political leaders who may use their religious and theological beliefs to constrain the effective search for the common good.[79] In some countries, this provision is not available. A good example here is the idea of the presidential decree in Cameroon. In jurisprudence, a decree refers to a decision that is arrived at in a court of equity and is tantamount to judgment, except that the process of arriving at a decree allows room for the consideration of the rights of both parties to an issue, and a decree may stipulate what is necessary or needed from the parties involved, the conditions for its execution, or what both parties have to do to enforce the decree. Political decrees may supposedly uphold the constitution of a country and its existing laws but, in the context of Cameroon, a presidential decree is the ultimate expression of sovereignty in the limited sense of the powers of the single ruler because it is the mechanism through which the president governs and makes all appointments from the lowest government officer to the highest government officer including the prime minister. The only person the president does not appoint by presidential decree is the president himself.

79 Kahn, *Political Theology*, 12–15.

Thus, a political theology in the African context still needs to pay attention to institutions and their actors as way of shifting and expanding the notion of sovereignty from its specific focus on the executive branch of government to include the legislative and judiciary since that would be a fuller and richer expression of sovereignty. In such a context, the use of miracles by people to effect political change (although miracles remain a legitimate function and aspect of faith) will be redundant as the grounds for concrete political change and transformation.

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PART 3

Theology in Lived Religion: Case Studies

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CHAPTER 11

African Migrant Christianities – Delocalization or Relocalization of Identities?

Stian Sørlie Eriksen, Tomas Sundnes Drønen and Ingrid Løland

1 Introduction

African migrant Christianity is a field that has been attracting increased academic interest in recent decades. Numerous studies within anthropology and theology have discussed the topic in general and activities connected with it in different countries in particular. In addition, the theme has been studied as a transnational field where the relationship between the soil of the ancestors and the new homeland has been brought to the fore. This chapter highlights two particular aspects of epistemological and ontological interest in order to address the question of how anthropology and theology can come into dialogue: firstly, through analysis of how technology influences human behavior, permits simultaneity, and affects Christian discursive practices in transnational and transcultural relations; secondly, by looking at how migration and the new media affect identity construction for the individual believer.

The chapter will start by highlighting some of the globalizing processes that have influenced the development of various African Christianities and, in particular, the activities of the Nigerian-based Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Norway. Of special interest is how technological media and new forms of communication – in particular through the Internet and social media – generate simultaneity in religious practices and facilitate the development of congregations across long distances. The second section of the chapter deals with the relationship between migration, identity construction, and religion, focusing in particular on theories of identity construction linked to religious practices in diaspora churches.

Towards the end of the chapter recent developments among African transnational churches are discussed within the framework of technology and forms of identity-making. How do technological innovations influence the individual, and how do questions of technology and migration affect theology, understood as religious discursive practices? Does the intensified use of the Internet and social media favor theories of delocalized identities, or could it be

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argued that it leads to a relocalization of identities through transnational Pentecostal networks?

2 African Christianities and the Wider World

The extensive production of scholarly works on globalization and the growth of Pentecostalism in sub-Saharan Africa has raised many interesting questions and provided several good answers. One central issue which has been brought to the fore is what we could call the relationship between Africa and the wider world, a theme that has engaged both anthropologists and theologians who have discussed terms such as identity, modernity, globalization, and the media.[1] It has been established as an undeniable fact that the growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Africa has not happened in a vacuum, and that the development is the result of a multiplicity of social, economic, and technological changes which have the common denominator of moving different social worlds closer together due to increased connectivity. Often referred to as various processes of globalization, this connectivity can be approached from different perspectives. Several recent debates on globalization discuss whether current developments are the results of long-term historical processes, and we might ask whether studies of the contemporary Pentecostal tide[2] in Africa should have Jerusalem, the Berlin conference, or Azusa Street as its starting point – that is, if we approach globalization from the perspective of *la longue durée*. Alternatively, we could follow scholars who see the Pentecostal movement in Africa as the extended arm of current North American TV evangelism,[3] and/or study religion and technological developments through the distribution of literature, cassettes, videos, CDs, and radio and TV transmissions.[4]

1 Among others Ruth Marshall-Fratani, "Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism," in *Between Babel and Pentecost. Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, eds. André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004); Birgit Meyer, "Christianity in Africa: From Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004); Joel Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004); Tomas Sundnes Drønen, *Pentecostalism, Globalisation, and Islam in Northern Cameroon. Megachurches in the Making?* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

2 Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: an introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

3 Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*.

4 Rosalind I.J. Hackett, "Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa* XXVIII, no. 3 (1998); Marshall-Fratani, "Mediating the Global and Local"; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Anointing Through the Screen:

Others emphasize that African Pentecostalism primarily emerges out of African spirituality and the African Initiated Churches (AICs), often predating Pentecostal churches in Africa.[5] It is also possible to hold a more convincing view that African Pentecostalism can be seen as a result of a combination of all these influences which have manifested themselves differently at different times and in different contexts. Regardless of whether our approach is that of slow or rapid globalization,[6] processes connected with it have made Pentecostalism accessible to new audiences all over Africa.

In order to understand the development of Christianities in Africa in general, and that of Pentecostalism in particular, it is obvious that all the abovementioned approaches to religious change have to be taken into consideration. Equally important, however, is the issue of migration, one aspect of the social and economic change that has transformed Africa (and consequently) influenced individual ideas of identity. The issue of Christian African diaspora communities, especially in Europe and in North America, has recently gained considerable momentum in academic circles. From Gerrie ter Haar's pioneering work,[7] through publications from scholars such as Peggy Levitt, Ogbu Kalu, Afe Adogame, and Richard Burgess,[8] detailed descriptions of diaspora theology and discursive practices are now available for scholars and students of African Christianity.

3 The Redeemed Christian Church of God in Norway

As an illustrative example, in this chapter we briefly present the transnational activities of the RCCG in Norway and globally. Having been termed the arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism, the RCCG has been among the largest and

Neo-Pentecostalism and Televised Christianity in Ghana," *Studies in World Christianity* 11, no. 1 (2005); Harri Englund, *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011).

5 Kalu, *African Pentecostalism,* 66–68.

6 Drønen, *Pentecostalism, Globalisation, and Islam.*

7 Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise. African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998).

8 Peggy Levitt, "'You Know Abraham Really was the First Migrant': Transnational Migration and Religion," *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003); Ogbu Kalu, "African Pentecostalism in Diaspora," *PentecoStudies* 9, no. 1 (2010); Afe Adogame, "Transnational Migration and Pentecostalism in Europe," *PentecoStudies* 9, no. 1 (2010); Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Richard Burgess, Kim Knibbe, and Anna Quaas, "Nigerian-Initiated Pentecostal Churches as a Social Force in Europe: The Case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God," *PentecoStudies* 9, no. 1 (2010).

fastest growing Pentecostal groups in Nigeria, with a religious and societal influence extending far beyond its own denomination.[9] Through its structure and mission strategies and by following Nigerians' migration routes and destinations, the RCCG website reports that the church has gained global presence in more than 178 nations.[10] The largest communities are to be found in the United Kingdom and the United States, but even in the Middle East and Asia there are now RCCG communities. This has made it a church that is frequently referenced in large numbers of studies in a range of disciplines, and it is particularly identified with its international general overseer, Enoch Adejare Adeboye.[11] In the Nordic countries, RCCG churches are part of the RCCG Europe Mainland Region 3, headquartered in Sweden but currently led by Pastor Sola David Oludoyi who resides in the UK.[12]

In Norway, the RCCG was established in 2000 by Nigerian Pastor Duke Ajieh who had formerly worked as an RCCG-trained missionary to Port Hartcourt in Nigeria before coming to Oslo.[13] Until his death in 2017, pastor Ajieh was the national coordinator for eight congregations in seven Norwegian cities, amounting to between 700–800 members in total.[14] Parish membership, however, varies, often fluctuating due to migratory issues. Although the size of congregations and numbers of members are relatively small, the RCCG actively seeks to expand into new areas and regions. Some of the more recent congregations were established on the west coast of Norway in Stavanger, Bergen, and Haugesund, emerging in the wake of the Norwegian oil industry when Nigerian petroleum engineers came to the region in order to work for international oil companies or study petroleum engineering at local universities. In Norway, RCCG churches do not only attract members with RCCG background, but

9 Olufunke Adeboye, "'Arrowhead' of Nigerian Pentecostalism: The Redeemed Christian Church of God 1952–2005," *Pneuma* 29, no. 1 (2007); Asonzeh Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008).

10 http://rccg.org, accessed December 14, 2018.

11 Due to recent legal changes governing, among other institutions, religious bodies and churches in Nigeria, Enoch Adeboye stepped down as general overseer of the RCCG Nigeria, but remains the RCCG's spiritual leader and general overseer of the RCCG worldwide. The legal decision was controversial and much discussed in Nigeria. The RCCG is also known for its Redemption Camp, which in essence is an RCCG "city" in the making. The RCCG is currently constructing what is known to be the largest church/auditorium in the world in order to accommodate large crowds at conventions and spiritual rallies.

12 "RCCG Europe Mainland," http://www.rccgmainlandeurope.org/eastprovince.asp, accessed January 20, 2017.

13 Interview with Duke Aijeh, Oslo, February 2, 2014.

14 The national coordinator of RCCG Norway is today Florence Ajieh, the widow of pastor Duke Ajieh.

Christians from a variety of nations with equally varied congregational experiences.

In order to understand how the RCCG operates on the local level it is important to understand the regional and global organization of the church. The late RCCG national coordinator, Duke Ajieh, commented on the importance of the RCCG structure for the church in Norway in the following way:

> The structure of Redeemed is so fantastic, you know. I'm here, I'm not standing alone. Even if this is the national headquarters in Norway. But yet, I am still under authority of the region.... We have what we call Europe Mainland Mission within the Redeemed Christian Church of God with the headquarters, the regional headquarters, in Amsterdam in Holland. So I am responsible for them. I send my reports to the regional office. The regional office in turn sends this report to the national headquarters in Lagos.... So Pastor Adeboye is aware of what is happening ... here.[15]

Hermeneutically and contextually speaking, these perspectives help us understand how the RCCG contributes to identity formation among diaspora Christians in Norway. For example, by identifying with the RCCG, one identifies not only with a growing and global movement, but also with the societal and spiritual esteem associated with Enoch Adeboye and the RCCG, as well as with the projection of spiritual power seen at RCCG spiritual rallies. For example, as displayed in a film and drama presentation called *The Latter Rain* (which was also the theme of the event) at the Festival of Life in Stockholm in April 2016, the emergence of the RCCG under the leadership of Adeboye was depicted as an "end time" move by God. In the presentation, the emergence of the RCCG was compared to the movements that followed historical figures such as Martin Luther and well-known evangelists and Pentecostal leaders in the 19th and 20th centuries such as John Alexander Dowie, Aimee Semple McPherson, and Kathryn Kuhlman. In other words, by being part of the RCCG, one is part of what God is doing today.[16]

Recent studies of the neo-Pentecostal movement in Africa show that religious culture, spiritual worldview, and individual identity is rapidly changing,

15 *Ibid.* In addition, our analyses are based on previous knowledge as well as ethnographic field studies and participant observation of the RCCG in Norway over the course of about two years, from the fall of 2014 through the summer of 2016.

16 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsM9eHJGSZw, about 01:58–02:20, accessed October 3, 2016.

and that researchers need to develop a "conceptual and methodological toolbox that enables meaningful reflection on the contextualization processes of the Christian faith."[17] One way to take these challenges seriously is to look further into how individual African Christians and congregations are entering new spaces where information is transmitted. It is a long path, epistemologically and ontologically speaking, from the meetings in the village church, where the closest contact with the outside world was an evangelist who had once met a missionary at a regional meeting, to receiving daily updates on Facebook from your sister who is member of an African migrant church in the Norwegian oil capital, Stavanger. Let us therefore take a further look into how technology has affected the development of African Christianity.

4 Technology and Simultaneity

One of the pioneers in the study of media and African Pentecostal churches, Rosalind Hackett, wrote the following in 1998:

> I argue further that these developments result in the transformation of the religious landscape in at least two ways: one, they are facilitating transnational and homogenizing cultural flows, and two, they are taking the connections between these movements and the networks they create to new, global levels.[18]

By relating her findings from media practices in Pentecostal churches in Ghana to Roland Robertson's[19] focus on globalization as a dialectic between homogenizing and heterogenizing forces,[20] Hackett draws attention to a central issue regarding the changing role of African Pentecostal churches, particularly in the diaspora. The intensified use of media, and especially the Internet, has made religious practices compatible with a modern technological lifestyle that was previously a marker of difference between developed and less developed societies. For members of the RCCG congregation in Stavanger, this means that they can use technology as a means to connect themselves to virtual

17 Martha Frederiks, "Religion, Migration and Identity. A Conceptual and Theoretical Exploration," *Mission Studies* 32, no. 2 (2015), 198.

18 Hackett, "Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation," 258.

19 Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogenity," in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (London: Sage, 1995).

20 Hackett, "Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation," 271.

conversations across long distances. The Twitter and Facebook accounts of the RCCG Norwegian headquarters reveal a steady flow of inspirational tweets and posts from the Nigeria-based pastor, Enoch Adeboye, in sync with advertisements and information from regional offices or individual local congregations in Norway and Europe. This adds to a virtual global, regional, and national RCCG community to which one is connected. The members of the RCCG congregation in Stavanger can also use the technological skills they acquire through their jobs in the oil business-related companies with whom they work, both in their private religious practices, and in order to help develop the media strategy of the RCCG as a global network.

Another example of simultaneity and connectivity is the use of internet radio. RCCG Radio (www.myrccgradio.com) is one of several RCCG internet radio stations that broadcast nonstop RCCG-related news, publicity for upcoming RCCG events, inspirational messages from Enoch Adeboye and others, in addition to a wide selection of Western as well as African gospel music. The radio broadcasts are not limited to religious content but also include sections on news, sports, business, finance, and politics, as well as nutrition and health tips. The interconnectedness of these stations with various social media platforms provides multiple virtual venues through which RCCG members and others can stay connected (which is one of the radio station's slogans) to home base as well as to the larger global RCCG community. As expressed by one of our Nigerian informants living in Norway:

> Thanks to the technology available, you can tune into whichever message you want to hear. You have them on YouTube, you have their website, you have the podcast, so I don't feel… even if I'm lacking something here, I can always get it somehow. So I don't really have to travel or go somewhere, no, because I have a way of getting it. … So I don't feel that gap anymore…[21]

When members and other social media followers of RCCG's congregation in Stavanger are reminded to read Adeboye's *Open Heavens* devotional entry for the day, they do this in relative synchrony with members and followers all over the world. This way they can virtually take a place around Daddy G.O.'s (Adeboye's nickname) breakfast table, where he shares his spiritual wisdom and

21 Interview, leader in an RCCG congregation in Norway (name and place made anonymous), December 2015.

admonition for the day.[22] When the monthly Holy Ghost Services, or major conventions in Nigeria, are broadcasted live on RCCG's YouTube channel, listeners and viewers have the opportunity to interact in simultaneous real time, for example, through liking or responding to the flow of tweets from the sermon.

Such virtual activities, which are sponsored by all the important African Pentecostal churches,[23] serve many purposes. First, they promote the notion of simultaneity,[24] the fact that members of diaspora communities are engaged in the same daily activities in both place of origin and destination country. Through the church websites and frequent updates on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, the individual believer is informed of news regarding the home congregation and at the same time confirmed as an active and full member of the expanding policy of the church by being at the frontier of the missionary ideology of the Pentecostal churches. It is, for example, possible to follow Nigerian pastors such as Enoch Adeboye, David Oyedepo, and T.B. Joshua as they proceed from place to place, whether they are being received at the United Nations, preaching to their congregations in London, or crusading in South America. Second, they provide the individual with the opportunity to practice a personal religious life according to the norms and moral codes of the mother church through virtual praying rooms and access to podcasts of services and preaching conducted by the head pastor. With the RCCG it is also possible to link the e-Sunday School podcast directly to your mobile phone, so that you receive the weekly updates.[25] Not least, major conventions and programs are broadcasted, streamed, and viewed live globally. Third, these virtual activities strengthen the economy of the church through the online donation links which underscore the simultaneity aspect; donations help strengthen the work of the church both at home and in the host country, enabling the church to expand and fulfill its missionary ambitions. Fourth, this kind of "online

22 This was the way Adeboye described the origin and purpose of the *Open Heavens* devotional in one of the video messages at Open Heavens International Center at Redemption Camp, http://ohic.org, accessed October 1, 2016.

23 J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, ""Get on the Internet!" Says the LORD': Religion, Cyberspace and Christianity in Contemporary Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 13, no. 3 (2007); Rosalind I.J. Hackett, "The New Virtual (Inter)Face of African Pentecostalism," *Society* 46 (2009).

24 Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller. "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004).

25 This service is available in different versions for Apple, Android, Blackberry, Windows and Nokia devices.

religion"[26] promotes what Ogbu Kalu calls a "Big man with a big God",[27] through websites with a strong focus on the leader of the church. Numerous photos and videos of the big pastors convey an image of spiritual and material success, connecting the individual member of the church more closely to the leader and creating individual loyalty to a strong organization with a clearly defined leadership and specific goals in mind. In RCCG congregations worldwide,[28] it is common to show a video containing a recent message from Daddy G.O. on a big screen during the service, especially in conjunction with major events in the church.

Relating this to connectivity and media technology, RCCG theology and beliefs seem to indicate that spiritual power can also flow in virtual space, and during streamed services those watching are often mentioned by Adeboye or other speakers, encouraging them to respond to the message in the same way as those physically present. During the previously mentioned Festival of Life in Stockholm, attendees were encouraged with the following words:

> Presently the program is live on YouTube … [applause]. And we'd kind of advise you, if you can tweet, sms, WhatsApp, or get somebody online to join, then God will bless them abundantly in Jesus' name. … Amen.[29]

It seems as if online presence can function as an extension of, or as a good alternative to, physical presence at the service. Similarly, anointing oil or prayer cloths, first prayed over by Adeboye or others to whom he has delegated authority, can be distributed to churches in various countries, and if they are not available, those watching may use their own, perhaps having them prayed over during the online broadcast. Returning to the question of identity, it seems from the local perspectives we have observed that these practices contribute to a sense of proximity and connection to something larger. From listening to conversations about Adeboye in RCCG meetings in Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands, one may at least conclude that the practices represent images of spiritual strength which connect the individual to something bigger than the

26 See Knut Lundby, "Patterns of Belonging in Online/Offline Interfaces of Religion," *Information, Communication & Society* 14, no. 8 (2011) for a discussion about the difference in meaning concerning the terms "religion online" and "online religion."

27 Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 113.

28 The RCCG website claims that the church is present in 180 countries worldwide, and that the church has more than 700 parishes in the UK alone, www.rccguk.church/our-history/, accessed August 4, 2016.

29 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsM9eHJGSZw, about 01:55–01:56, accessed October 1, 2016.

local, and yet which also inspire continued participation in church activities locally.

5 Simultaneity and Religious Practices

The notion of simultaneity does not only have anthropological implications, it also has theological consequences. Dealing with time, Pentecostals understand God to act in the now. By capturing this appointed (and anointed) time through streaming or recording a broadcast, believers can disconnect the moment from both geographical place and chronological time so that one can feel the presence of God while watching a recording or during reruns of audio or video broadcasts anywhere in the world. Since a key issue is the individual's response to God, prayers can also be carried out while following the sermons online, even after the factual event took place. In one sense, this ability to connect in virtual space enables individuals to link to church networks back home or anywhere in the world. On the other hand, however, it may also involve a sense of disconnection from geographical and physical space or even local or specific churches in terms of loyalty. Linking back to one of the previously quoted informants, the individual can today choose his or her sources of information in a way that was not possible only a decade ago, empowering the religious self to form his or her religious environment. At the same time, however, disconnection and individualization may affect the nature and the meaning of religious practice for the individual. From this and other observations, we have the impression that following online events provides connectivity, identity, and participation, yet perhaps in a different way than when physically present. Simultaneity, therefore, also becomes a flexible notion, meaning that people can follow and respond in relative and proximate but not necessarily absolute simultaneity.

Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors highlight another fundamental question related to the role of media in religious communities in their book *Religion, Media and the Public Sphere*.[30] When dealing with questions of migration, simultaneity and identity construction, the role that religion plays in the public sphere is a highly relevant issue. The fact that the African churches originate in societies where religion is an important part of everyday life, both in state affairs and in civil society, might create tension when they establish their missionary activities in societies where, for several decades, religion has primarily

30 Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

been associated with the individual and the private sphere. It is here noticeable that a double development within the migrant churches has consequences for the wider society.

First of all, the extensive focus on using the Internet as the platform of communication between the major hubs of the home church and the diaspora is a public event. Anyone can visit the website of the church, and anyone can see the videos from services and conventions, all available through YouTube and other public channels. Secondly, the fact that these churches are both expanding and also conducting public events is attracting the attention of the secular media. When the RCCG convention in Stockholm in 2016 drew 3,000 participants to the Globe, it was a matter of public interest, and when the then UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, visited the RCCG's Festival of Life in London during his election campaign in 2015, it was reported by several large UK news channels. In addition, participants from Norway and other parts of the world shared the event's internet links or live moments from their smartphones onto Facebook and other social media, making it available in the now to far more than the 40,000 people who were physically present at the London venue. Thus, being part of significant social movements influences the way individuals see themselves as part of the larger society. Our contention is that the way migrant churches increasingly inhabit public space influences identity construction among the migrant population. Finding a place in a new society may be a challenging affair for migrants, highlighting the need for many to seek spaces where they can feel at ease and be considered as real and contributing members. For example, in RCCG churches in Norway, we encountered members from various kinds of church backgrounds, many of whom expressed a preference for joining the RCCG congregation, somewhere they felt at home socially, culturally, and spiritually. The church provided a recognizable spiritual and social environment, not least in light of being a foreigner in Norway. In contrast, it was not uncommon to hear comments that it had been difficult for many to find similar connections in the Norwegian churches they had attended. Amélé Ekué[31] claims that migrant congregations often play this role of a safe haven, further discussing how these religious communities can play a vital role in the individual life situation. This brings our discussion closer to how technology and simultaneity influence the migratory situation, primarily through questions related to identity.

31 Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué, "Migrant Christians: Believing Wanderers between Cultures and Nations," *The Ecumenical Review* 61, no. 4 (2009).

6 Simultaneity and Identity in the Migratory Situation

Studies of migration have for some time been in dialogue with anthropology and the philosophy of science in order to discuss identity construction, both as an ontological and as an epistemological field of interest. Whether addressing *what* constitutes human identity or methodically figuring out *how* to discuss these findings, no single authoritative answer has emerged from the abundance of scientific inquiries. Identity flux between individual and collective self-understanding forming a dialectic interplay between self-representation and social categorization.[32] The understanding of identity as a stable core of the self – "unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change"[33] – has been especially prevalent when talking about cultural, ethnic, and religious identities.[34] Indeed, the human need for security, and reliance upon a lifeline of truth and belonging – especially in times of risks and threats – must be taken seriously in order to understand the role that the new Pentecostal churches play within the development of the African ecclesiological geography, both in Africa and in Europe.

According to Gerd Baumann, however, a narrow focus on "a stable core of the self" falls short of explaining identities as part of the multifaceted and multicultural riddle[35] pertaining to the globalized world, and several new scientific paradigms have been launched highlighting change, dynamism, contextualization, and social interaction as constitutive elements of identity. The element of change and context, for instance, has been noted by many, among them the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman.[36] His point is that all axioms, convictions, and taken-for-granted assumptions, the whole idea about permanency in life, are illusory and not compatible with a modern understanding of changes in time and space. From the combined fields of theology and psychology F. LeRon Shults

32 Maria Catarina La Barbera, "Identity and Migration: An Introduction," in *Identity and Migration in Europe: Multidiciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Maria Catarina La Barbera (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015); Jeffrey R. Seul, "'Ours is the Way of God': Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 5 (1999).

33 Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

34 *Ibid.*; Gerd Baumann. *The Multicultural Riddle. Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

35 Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle*, 25.

36 Zygmunt Bauman, "Migration and identities in the globalized world," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 4 (2011): 12.

and Steven J. Sandage describe identity formation as a relational, interpersonal, and "dialectical" process "between self and non-self" through which "human persons are identified by and identify others."[37] Shults and Sandage quote McAdams' notion that "identity is the storied self" which "gives unity and purpose to life," a claim which is related to his discussion of personality in the context of life stories, spirituality, and religiosity.[38] From the context of African Pentecostals, an integrative psychological-theological approach to identity fits well with African and Pentecostal life worlds and spiritualities. Having a theological frame for one's life provides tools for interpreting and making sense of daily life as well as addressing existential questions. The RCCG might, for instance, function as a frame for viewing and telling one's own life story.

Going beyond biographical and sociocultural factors, identity, as such, is formed through personal reflection and identification with *the other*. McAdams' notion[39] enables us to grasp, in practical terms, the fact that African Christians continue to identify with, and are identified by, active engagement in Pentecostal churches like the RCCG in the diaspora. This helps us realize that the kind of Christian spirituality and organization that the RCCG represents plays an important part in the remaking of Christians' migrant identities. Addressing identity formation among African Christian migrants in Sweden, anthropologist Jan-Åke Alvarsson discusses the characteristics and hybridity of African, emigrant and immigrant identities in these churches, describing how the African churches function as arenas for reformulating life stories and identities. This might, for instance, be concerned with adjusted expectations related to living in Sweden, which had a tendency to change from expectations of winning Europe for the gospel to winning victories in personal lives.[40] From our interaction with a number of African diaspora church leaders and members, there also seems to be a kind of shared Pentecostal identity with which many identify, relating to the growing global vision and impact of these

37 F. LeRon Shults and Stephen J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 82.

38 *Ibid.*, 170.

39 Dan P. McAdams, "What Do We Know When We Know a Person?" *Journal of Personality* 63 (1995).

40 Jan-Åke Alvarsson, "Afrikanska pentekostaler i Sverige: Kyrkans roll i skapandet av en ny identitet," in *Kristne migranter i Norden*, eds. Anders Aschim, Olav Hovdelien and Helje Kringlebotn Sødal (Kristiansand: Portal, 2016). For a brief overview account of RCCG in Sweden see also Nils Malmström, "How do we succeed as a church in Sweden? An African response" (paper presented at the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education (WAPTE) Consultation, Stockholm, Sweden, August 24, 2010).

churches. Being part of the RCCG implies being part of something bigger than oneself and being included in the move and mission of God today. In terms of cultural and religious identity, our findings also coincide with observations made by Gerrie ter Haar and others[41] that African Christian migrants in diaspora tend to deemphasize Africanness and emphasize shared Christian aspects of their identity. As expressed by one leader in Norway:

> We realize that we need to change a lot of the ways we do things in Africa if we really want to reach out to Norwegians because the vision is to reach out to everybody. At the Redeemed Christian Church of God, we are not an African church; by God's grace, we believe we are international.[42]

Another leader expressed this in practical terms:

> Yeah, we are getting there and we have a lot of work to do with the choir for we are consciously trying to change the image of the church; it's not a Nigerian church, we want it to be an international church, not Nigerian. So we have a lot of work to do in that area.[43]

In Norway, African constituencies and cultural flavors mark the demographics of most African Pentecostal churches. At the same time, it should not be overlooked that other immigrants and even Norwegians, though perhaps in relatively small numbers, make their way into these churches. One should also not underestimate discourses of becoming more Norwegian or attempts to accommodate more international audiences. In several of the churches we have followed, leaders have often expressed intentions of trying new ways of reaching Norwegians or empowering members to do so by facilitating translation into Norwegian for Norwegian-speaking visitors, for example, or holding Norwegian language training sessions. Consequently, what outsiders may perceive as African, the insider may perceive as less African or even attempting-to-be-Norwegian as a result of factors such as printing invitational flyers in Norwegian, singing Norwegian worship songs, or partially speaking Norwegian during a church service. Given the missional focus of the RCCG, missional identity may be part of the identity make-up of Nigerian Christians in Norway, but it cannot

41 Gerrie ter Haar, "African Christians in Europe: A Mission in Reverse," in *Changing Relations between Churches in Europe and Africa: The Internationalization of Christianity and Politics in the 20th Century,* eds. Katharina Kunter and Jens Schjørring (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008); Jan-Åke Alvarsson, "Afrikanska pentekostaler i Sverige."

42 Interview, Stavanger, December 2015.

43 Interview, Stavanger, December 2015.

be taken for granted that it resonates with members to the extent that it does with leaders or official policies. Responding to Martha Frederiks' notion of hybridity of culture and context, it is safer to say that African Christians in Norway hold multiple and hybrid identities.[44] Identity as such cannot be classified as either-or but rather in-between or in-becoming. Different contexts also demand differences in identity projections. An African pastor's professional LinkedIn profile geared at career building in the marketplace may look quite different from the same person's Facebook profile aimed at his or her family, friends, and extended church community.[45]

7 Delocalization or Relocalization of Identities?

In an earlier publication dealing with globalization and African Pentecostal Christianity,[46] we have drawn attention to André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani's edited book *Between Babel and Pentecost*, which gathers together an interesting collection of articles discussing Pentecostal identity construction from different angles. In the introductory chapter they show how global Pentecostalism, through a variety of processes of globalization, has become a *bricolage* of heterogeneous elements of flow and closure which make up a new vision of the world as a response to different processes and promises of modernity. Globalization is here defined as a mixture of material and symbolic flows which influence institutions and individuals to varying degrees. Corten and Marshall-Fratani underscore the importance of distinguishing between the diffuse nature of global networks that make up a transnational Pentecostal reality on the one hand, and the representation of this transnational community as experienced by the individual Pentecostal believer on the other, but their chapter leaves much to be desired when it comes to indicating how this demarcation line should be drawn. In her following chapter on Nigerian Pentecostalism, Marshall-Fratani seeks to amplify the introductory chapter by explaining how Pentecostalism among young Nigerians tends to create what she calls "transnational imagined communities", communities which connect local Nigerian youth to wider global networks. She readily admits that analyses of these processes are challenging because it is difficult to separate and locate

44 Frederiks, *Religion, Migration, and Identity.*

45 Research among African Pentecostal leaders in Norway has included extensive examination of these in various social media. For the sake of confidentiality, churches and individuals are not identified.

46 Drønen, *Pentecostalism, Globalisation, and Islam,* 47–48.

the appropriation of these largely symbolic images.[47] One significant contribution from Marshall-Fratani, however, is her focus on the importance of analyzing the role of global media, a scholarly approach that has been increasingly at the forefront during the last decade:

> Such images, ideas and narratives provide 'a series of elements (such as characters, plots and textual forma) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives,' scripts which, while interpreted in terms of local everyday experience, are taken from global repertoires, and as such, provide means for imagining communities outside or in defiance of the nation-state's bid to monopolise the resources of community formation.[48]

Regarding the construction of Pentecostal identities and inspired by Arjun Appadurai, Marshall-Fratani asks if the above-mentioned processes create delocalized subjects, or at least subjects whose individual and collective identities are formed through a negotiation between local and global discourses and symbols.[49] Some of these symbols may include references to success, material blessing, and individual self-worth, perhaps against and in opposition to commonly held circumstantial perceptions about poverty, fate, or destiny. In turn these symbols represent resources which assist individuals as well as communities to arise, change their circumstances, and make a difference.

This discussion about globalization, public religion, and identity in an African setting is also highly relevant for diaspora communities, and here Jesús Martin-Barbero's approach is of interest. He claims that the religious use of the Internet is "an exercise in the re-enchantment of spaces drained of supernatural presence by western secularism."[50] Mark Cartledge and Andrew Davies also deal with this public presence of religion,[51] either in physical space or in cyberspace, through their study of the largest megachurch in London, Kingsway International Christian's Centre. Here they draw attention to the innovative ways in which Kingsway uses the Internet in order to be of relevance for their members whose background is largely West African. Members can join the iChurch, post their testimonies online, call Hopeline for prayers, or talk to the

47 Marshall-Fratani, "Mediating the Global and Local," 82–83.

48 *Ibid.*, 82.

49 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Marshall-Fratani, "Mediating the Global and Local," 83.

50 Cited from Asamoah-Gyadu, "Get on the Internet!," 235.

51 Mark Cartledge and Andrew Davies, "A Megachurch in a Megacity: A Study of Cyberspace Representation," *PentecoStudies* 13, no. 1 (2014).

pastor on call. There is also an online Single's Ministry responsible for events such as the Single's Christmas Ball. Through this service members from the church can find life partners who share the same values and traditions, thus securing the safety and sameness of cultural identity, while incorporating a redefinition of these values in a different technological and material environment. A community that is partly online and partly offline (partly public and partly private) is created in order to deal with practical needs in all situations in life, an example that resonates with Knut Lundby's research[52] analyzing religious life between online and offline as a new way to make religion happen. He claims that these kinds of religious practices open up new constellations outside traditional religious communities and, through them, new spaces of belonging are made possible.

This brings us back to the question of identity, and to the resources of identity construction that African migrants receive through the Christian communities in which they participate during their absence from home communities. If globalization creates delocalized subjects through technology at home, one might also ask whether technology can lead to the creation of relocalized identities for migrants uprooted from the localities and resources that have created a sense of belonging, inclusion, and security in their lives. One obvious point of departure is to revisit the question of what creates feelings of belonging to a community. The importance of communal activities is obvious to anyone familiar with African traditions, and the vital role that religious communities play became evident during our observations and interviews in African Pentecostal congregations in Norway, Sweden, and Nigeria. This feeling of belonging, of connecting, and of participating in familiar activities are elements that are brought to the fore when African Christians in Stavanger are asked why they participate in the services organized by various migrant communities. One particular example is how these congregations have managed to become a home away from home for African migrants in the region. In addition to creating environments for familiar forms of worship and preaching, the congregation is a place for communal gatherings and social networking where the members discuss jobs, housing, and access to social welfare benefits. The congregation becomes a resource center where migrants can talk about the challenges connected to building a new life in an unfamiliar cultural environment. Identity is foregrounded in many different ways during these conversations. A primary negative concern which is dwelt upon regards the future of the children who will grow up distanced from the soil of the ancestors, and maybe even from the religion of their parents. On the positive side, this community

52 Lundby, "Patterns of Belonging."

becomes a laboratory for glocalizing events, events that encourage members to engage actively in the ongoing negotiation between old and new cultural and religious contexts.

8 Redefining Cultural Values

In an attempt to spread Christian values important in an African setting, the RCCG congregation in Stavanger engages in diaconal work for people with material problems in the region, offers help to refugees, and can periodically be seen at evangelism stands in the city square during weekends. Its members also engage in public events to demonstrate that African Christian migrants can be a resource in society and not only a burden. One example of such an event is their participation in the celebration of the national holiday on 17th May. On a day where schools and civil society organizations join the different parades that are organized, the RCCG is one of very few churches that participate. With African rhythms blending with the beat of a marching band, dancing, and singing, they really stand out in the parade with their blue jackets with "Jesus loves you" written on the back. These people are not examples of delocalized identities; rather, they are individuals trying to redefine cultural values and self-esteem in a new environment. In terms of identity, participation may serve hybrid purposes: hoping to be a good Christian witness by showing the positive and different face of Africans, while at the same time becoming Norwegian by actively taking part in a major Norwegian public event like this. The relocation of identities, as seen in these examples, reminds us to focus on context and culture when discussing migrant religious communities in diverse settings around the world.

Where do migrants find inspiration and courage in this culture-sensitive identity construction project? To give solid answers to that question more detailed research in these communities must be conducted, but let us point to some probable elements. Firstly, participation in services where live messages from the big pastors are transmitted on a regular basis creates an important link to the homeland and to the mother church. This link nurtures the idea of still being included in a large community representing ideas and values familiar to the individual member and providing a connection and a lifeline that creates a reservoir of self-esteem which again helps the individual deal with potential experiences of exclusion and alienation. Secondly, participation in regional conferences helps the individual see that even if their local congregation is small, thousands of migrants in similar situations visit RCCG conventions in Stockholm, Amsterdam, and London. The organization and sacrifices

connected with travelling together to these events also strengthen the friendship and cultural ties that bind the group together, creating feelings of security and belonging. Finally, the extended use of technology and social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Skype creates a lifeline between home and host country, and between individual migrants in different parts of the world. Stepping inside these virtual communities shows that individuals engage actively in church-related online activities, such as online discussion groups, prayer groups, or evangelism. Here they raise important questions related to a variety of church and life situations, as well as seeking advice for many different practical questions related to the migratory situation and issues of faith and identity. We therefore conclude that technology plays a vital role as a means and an end leading towards what we would call a relocalization of identity through the communities created and maintained by African Christian churches.

However, while globalized technology in one sense brings people together within and outside the diaspora to participate in religious practices in the interface between online and offline religion, which in itself may represent a core of stability, the ways in which religion is practiced are also fundamentally changed by the same technology. In this regard, more research is needed in order to study the ifs, hows and to-what-extents this technological turn changes the core of religion itself and its stability. For example, will a highly market-oriented and always available religion lose its sense of exclusiveness and value when available on the same platforms as casual friendships, advertisements, and self-promotion? Answering these questions, however, lies outside the scope of our current discussion.

9 Concluding Remarks

The study of African Christianities is an academic field dealing with continuity and change – and it is a study where both anthropological and theological approaches can help us gain more insight into individual identity construction and communal practices. In this chapter, we have seen that Nigerian diaspora communities in Norway play an important role as bridge builders between the cultural identity and religious practices of the home country, and everyday practices in the new homeland. Through new technology, which opens up opportunities for simultaneous global participation, the migrant communities receive a reservoir of inputs that help individuals deal with issues of exclusion and insecurity common in most migratory situations. In other words, technology helps the individual to relocalize issues related to cultural and religious identity construction, bringing forth issues of human agency, change, and

adaptability, topics that are often neglected in research on migrants. On the other hand, this simultaneity also gives migrants the possibility to interact with the mother congregation, thus also slowly working a change in religious practices on the soil of the ancestors.

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CHAPTER 12

Going to War: Spiritual Encounters and Pentecostals' Drive for Exposure in Contemporary Zanzibar

Hans Olsson

The humid Friday afternoon is turning to evening and a group of Christian migrant workers gather for their weekly intercession and deliverance (*maombi na maombezi*) service. While the church slowly fills up, one congregant after another starts praying. Taking up the arms of prayer (*silaha za maombi*) in order to fight the evil powers (*nguvu za giza*) seen to be ruling over the Zanzibar archipelago, they are going to war. In the hours that follow, afflicted people are delivered from (evil) spirits and forceful intersession prayers invoke the protective power of Jesus—not only to safeguard the members of the church but also to shield Tanzanian society and the nation. In general terms, the prayer service represents a growing feature of contemporary African Christianity, namely, the commitment to fight evil through modes of spiritual warfare.[1]

Christian notions of participation in a spiritual war are usually drawn from the Bible passage Eph. 6:10–12[2] which has spurred debates about evil throughout the history of Christianity. Today ideas about spiritual warfare have gained prominence in the growing presence of Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity[3]

1 Claudia Währisch-Oblau, "Spiritual Warfare—the Royal Road to Liberation and Development in Africa and Europe," in *Encounter Beyond Routine: Cultural roots, Cultural Transition, Understanding of Faith and Cooperation in Development*, 12–24 (Hamburg: Academy of Mission, 2011); Paul Gifford, "Evil Witchcraft and Deliverance in the African Pentecostal worldview," in *Pentecostal Theology in Africa*, ed. Clifton Clarke (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, (2014), 112–131.

2 "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (NIV).

3 I use the term Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity rather than Pentecostalism to point to the variation and diversity that characterizes the sets of churches which are commonly connected the first, second and third wave of charismatic revival during the 1920s, 1970s and 1980s respectively. These sets of churches include classical Pentecostal churches, charismatic movements within the mainline churches (for instance Catholic charismatics) and the so called neo-Pentecostal churches, all of which emphasize the active role of the Holy Spirit; see discussions in Allan Anderson, "Varieties, Taxonomies and Definitions," in *Studying Global*

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globally[4] where evil forces/spirits are commonly seen as hampering human progress and prosperity.[5] In relation to African contexts some scholars have therefore argued that the prominence of spiritual warfare among African Christians should be seen as a means by which people may attain the good life and prosperity.[6] Yet the resulting propensity to see the world in the dual terms of good and evil has also raised concerns about whether, and how, spiritual warfare contributes to the demonization of other religious traditions, and the social and political ramifications this might generate.[7]

This chapter focuses on the implications of spiritual warfare at the City Christian Centre (CCC), the Tanzania Assemblies of God's (TAG) major

Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods, eds. Allan Anderson *et al*., 13–29 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Birgit Meyer, "Christianity in Africa: From African independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 447–474.

4 René Holvast, *Spiritual Mapping in the United States and Argentina, 1989–2005 : A Geography of Fear* (Leiden ;: Brill, 2009); Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans,2010); James K. Beilby, and Paul Rhodes Eddy, "Introduction: Introducing Spiritual Warfare a Survey of Key Issues and Debates," in *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views*, eds. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Grand Rapids, Michegan: Baker Academic, 2012), 1–46.

5 J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Eugene: Regnum, 2013), 47.

6 Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

7 Eg. Harri Englund, "From Spirual Warfare to Spiritual Kinship: Islamophobia and Evangelical Radio in Malawi," in *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa*, ed. Harri Englund (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011), 167–188; Gifford, "Evil Witchcraft"; Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015); Rosalind I.J. Hackett, "Discourses of Demonization in Africa and Beyond," *Diogenes* 50, no. 3 (2003): 61–75; Päivi Hasu, "Rescuing Zombies from the Hands of Witches: Pentecostal charismatic Christianity and Spiritual Warfare in the Plural Religious Setting of Coastal Tanzania," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 97, no. 3 (2009): 417–440; Päivi Hasu, "The Witch, The Zombie and the Power of Jesus," *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 34, no. 1 (2009): 70–83; Andreas Heuser, "Encoding Ceasar's Realm—Variants of Spiritual Warfare Politics in Africa," in *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies*, ed. Martin Lindhardt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 270–290; Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Opoku Onyinah, "Deliverance as a way of confronting witchcraft in modern Africa: Ghana as a Case History," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002): 107–134; Tony Richie, "Demonization, Discernment, and Deliverance in Interreligious Encounters," in *Interdisciplinary and religio-cultural discourses on a spirit-filled world : loosing the spirits*, eds. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Kirsteen Kim and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 171–184; Amy Stambach, "Spiritual warfare 101: Preparing the student for Christian battle," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39, no. (2009): 137–157; Erwin Van der Meer, "Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare and Mission in Africa," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 2 (2010): 155–166; Währisch-Oblau, "Spiritual Warfare."

outreach and the largest Pentecostal congregation on the semi-autonomous Zanzibar archipelago, and the significance such spiritual practices gain in a context religiously defined by the predominance of Islam (97%). While Islam for centuries has shaped the sociocultural setting on the islands,[8] Zanzibar has, since its incorporation within the United Republic of Tanzania in 1964, been a site of political contestations centered around the identity of the Zanzibar state.[9] In this contested sociopolitical milieu, Muslim belonging, as a major unifying component, has resurfaced as a marker of authenticity, with Muslim revival groups pushing to restore Zanzibar's past by promoting a break with the Union and political sovereignty;[10] this goal sparked violence against Christian and Tanzanian institutions in 2012.[11] The community of migrant Tanzanian mainlanders which has collected around the CCC provides a locus for assessing how spiritual warfare takes place and is interpreted by a Pentecostal minority in a politically tense context.

Based on ethnographic research in Zanzibar,[12] this paper argues for the prominent role of spiritual warfare in the daily practice of Pentecostal Christians in Zanzibar, not only through its providing explanations for sociopolitically violent events, but also by playing its own part in the production of social tensions. My approach is to fuse the CCC's theological understanding of spiritual warfare with church members' interpretations of social conflict. Firstly, a theology of spiritual warfare is used as a means for understanding how a Pentecostal minority interprets its position in a conflict situation; and, secondly, the chapter discusses how the practices evolving from such theological

8 John Middleton, *The World of the Swahili : An African Mercantile Civilization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Randall L. Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent : Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African coast, 800–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

9 Eg. M.A. Bakari, *The Democratisation Process in Zanzibar: A Retarded Transition*, *Hamburg African studies, 0947 4900 11* (Hamburg: Inst. für Afrika-Kunde, 2001); Bernadeta Killian, "The State and Identity Politics in Zanzibar: Challenges to Democratic Consolidation in Tanzania," *African Identities* 6, no. 2 (2008): 99–125.

10 Marie-Aude Fouéré, "Recasting Julius Nyerere in Zanzibar: the Revolution, the Union and the Enemy of the Nation," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, no. 3 (2014): 478–496; Roman Loimeier, "Zanzibar's Geography of Evil: The Moral Discourse of the Anṣār al-sunna in Contemporary Zanzibar," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 31 (2011): 4–28.

11 Hans Olsson, *Jesus for Zanzibar: Narratives of Pentecostal (Non-)Belonging, Islam, and Nation* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

12 The analysis builds on ethnographic research carried out in Zanzibar in 2012 at the CCC. During the four months of field research in total (divided into two periods) I conducted 25 qualitative (recorded) interviews, two focus-group interviews, and engaged in numerous periods of participant observation, in addition to many informal conversations and personal communications with members of the CCC.

readings of the world gain wider social significance. In order to do this I lean on Harri Englund's[13] suggestion that the politics of Christian practices in Africa today should be examined through the lens of public engagements rather than through institutionalized politics. Situating the CCC's public significance in the powerful narrative of Christian growth (including social transformation) produced by the church's engagements in spiritual warfare, I argue that the practices which result provide the basis for producing a Pentecostal counter-public[14] in direct conflict with the wider sociocultural norms and customs of Zanzibar society. Thus, based on their aim to expose what they regard as the real problem of society (i.e., the presence of evil), Pentecostal Christians should be seen as significant socio-political agents because their spiritual practices have the goal not only of social change but also of a new civil order.[15] Furthermore, these counter cultural manifestations of Pentecostal Christianity in Zanzibar intersect with the hegemonic status of Tanzania Mainland (the Union), so making spiritual warfare practices public arguably adds to the prevailing tensions between Zanzibar and its mainland partner within the United Republic of Tanzania.

The chapter begins by discussing Christian churches in Zanzibar in general before addressing, from the perspective of the CCC, the practice of spiritual warfare. I then turn to its role in relation to violent events taking place in 2012, when the CCC was torched alongside other churches and political institutions in protests over Zanzibar's role and future place within the Union. Finally, the public significance that the practice of spiritual warfare gains in the context of Zanzibar will be addressed.

1 Christianity in Zanzibar

Zanzibar, located some 25 km off the Tanzanian coast and comprising the two major islands of Unguja and Pemba, is dominated by people adhering to the Muslim faith (primarily Sunni but also Shî'a and Ibadî).[16] Of the islands'

13 Harri Englund, "Introduction: Rethinking African Christianities, Beyond the Religion-Politics Conundrum," in *Christianity and Public culture in Africa*, ed. Harri Englund (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 1–26.

14 Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

15 Birgit Meyer, "Going and Making Public: Pentecostalism as Public Religion in Ghana" In *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa*, ed. Harri Englund (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 149–166; see also Yong, *In the Days*; Heuser, "Encoding Ceasar's Realm."

16 M.A. Bakari, "Religion, Secularism, and Political Discourse in Tanzania: Competing Perspectives by Religious Organizations," *Interdiciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 8, no. 1 (2012): 1–34.

1.3 million inhabitants, around 25,000 are Christians. In contrast to the longer established Roman Catholic and Anglican churches (and to some extent also the Lutheran church), the increase and expansion of Pentecostal Charismatic churches on the islands is something novel that has coincided with the growing flows of labor from Tanzania Mainland to Zanzibar that have followed economic liberalization and polity reform in the mid-1980s. Pentecostal congregations are therefore primarily attended by mainland migrants who come to the islands in search of economic opportunities—especially in the booming tourist industry that has developed since the 1990s.[17] The CCC is no exception to this trend, as most of its members are migrants with origins outside the archipelago.

The CCC originated with a group of deployed mainland Tanzanian army officers who gathered for prayer and worship in the early 1990s, led by a Muslim-born TAG missionary. The CCC's founder and spiritual leader, Pastor Dixon Kaganga, was one of those soldiers. Under Kaganga's leadership the CCC has grown from small group of 35 Christians to a ministry that in 2012 hosted over 900 Sunday visitors. It is currently the largest Pentecostal congregation in the archipelago, equal in size to the largest Roman Catholic and Lutheran congregations. Around 70 other further Pentecostal Charismatic churches and smaller congregations also exist around the islands, together bringing the total to 4,500 Pentecostal Charismatic Christians in Zanzibar. As already indicated, the limited, yet growing role of new Christian churches has not passed unnoticed. Pentecostals' use of music and loudspeakers is one controversial issue; evangelization through the means of public preaching another. Partly as a reaction to these growing Pentecostal and Christian activities in Zanzibar, various Muslim revival groups critical of Zanzibar's political status within the Union have also been formed and launched since the late 1990s.[18]

One such group, called Uamsho (Awakening),[19] surfaced in 2012 as "the Zanzibari voice" promoting increased political autonomy in relation to the Union structure.[20] It claimed that the impact of external influences, whether

17 Stefan Gössling and Ute Schulz, "Tourism-Related Migration in Zanzibar, Tanzania," *Tourism Geographies* 7, no. 1 (2005): 43–62; Akbar A. Keshodkar, *Tourism and Social Change in Post Socialist Zanzibar: Struggles for Identity, Movement, and Civilization* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013).

18 Roman Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills: The Politics of Islamic Education in 20th Century Zanzibar* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 116.

19 Jumuyia ya Uamsho na Mihadhara ya Kiislamu Zanzibar (the Association of Islamic Awareness and Public Preaching,) was at that time a popular Islamic NGO promoting Zanzibar sovereignty in relation to Tanzania Mainland and the Union structure.

20 Marie-Aude Fouéré, "Zanzibar independent in 2015? Constitutional Reform, Politicized Islam and Separatist Claims," *Mambo! Recent research findings in Eastern Africa-French*

Western tourism, mainland immigration, or growing Christian churches, was causing the moral degeneration of the Zanzibar public sphere.[21] Throughout 2012, Uamsho used public rallies to voice the critique, which resulted in the Zanzibar government imposing a ban on public gatherings organized by religious organizations. Despite the ban, on May 25th 2012, Uamsho arranged a public rally to discuss the Union that was later followed by large anti-Union demonstrations in Zanzibar Town; in response, the prominent Uamsho leader, Sheikh Musa, was arrested. With discontent growing among Uamsho supporters, people gathered outside the Madema police station demanding the release of their leader and, when their pleas were denied, their grievance spilled onto the streets. The central areas of Zanzibar Town were soon in open riot. A wide range of political institutions and premises associated with the Union, the ruling party of Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), and Tanzania Mainland were raided and attacked during the following days and the animosities did not stop until armed forces from the mainland arrived on the islands. One of the first institutions to be attacked during the riots was the CCC, where an allegedly armed gang of Uamsho supporters set the pastor's car and the interior of the church on fire on May 26th 2012.[22]

The attack highlighted a link between the presence of Pentecostal Christians and the Union, which by union critical Zanzibari voices are seen as signifiers of a mainland (Christian) domination of the Muslim majority of

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Institute for Reseach in Africa X, no. 2 (2012):1–4; Fouéré, "Recasting Julius Nyerere." Constitutionally, the semi-autonomous Zanzibar archipelago elects its own government and president, and votes for a Union president and government. The Union government, however, is also the government of Tanzania Mainland (which is the official name of the area previously known as Tanganyika) which makes the United Republic a two-tier government Union of which Tanzania Mainland's government also is responsible for issues related to the Union. The Union is thus not actually a Union between two nations but a structure of which Zanzibar is part, with a degree of self determination in terms of internal affairs such as Islamic family law while questions of foreign affairs and national security are the province of the Union structure. A person with Zanzibari citizenship is hence both a Zanzibari and a Tanzanian voting both for a Zanzibari president and the Union president, while a citizen in Tanzania Mainland votes for a president who is both the Union president and the president of "Tanzania Mainland."

21 Loimeier, "Zanzibar's Geography."

22 On the riots in May 2012 see "Rioters torch churches in Z'bar," *The Daily News* May 28, 2012, accessed June 11, 2012, http://www.dailynews.co.tz/index.php/local-news/5610-rioters-torch-churches-in-z'bar; "Destruction as rioters run amok in Zanzibar," *The Citizen* May 28, 2012, accessed May 30, 2012, http://www.thecitizen.co.tz/news/4-national-news/22687-destruction-as-rioters-run-amok-in-zanzibar.html. For more on the riots in 2012, see also Olsson *Jesus for Zanzibar,* Chapter 2.

Zanzibar.[23] It is in this contested public sphere that the CCC's practice of spiritual warfare takes place. But how should spiritual warfare be understood and what does the practice actually imply? How are engagements in a spiritual war materialized in the everyday practice of Christian faith?

2 The CCC and Spiritual Warfare

In a sermon discussing the role of spiritual warfare, Pastor Dixon Kaganga stated that "salvation is a declaration of war." The church was seen as equal to God's army and every Christian was one of its soldiers.[24] To be "born again" as a "saved" Christian (*aliyeokoka*)[25] implied active and vigorous commitment to God through warfare. Based on the Bible passages 2 Cor 10:3–5[26] and

23 Ahmed, Mohammed Saleh, "The Impact of Religious Knowledge and the Concept of Dini Wal Duniya in Urban Zanzibari Life-Style," in *Knowledge, Renewal and Religion : Repositioning and Changing Ideological and Material Circumstances among the Swahili on the East African coast*, ed. Kjersti Larsen (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2009), 199; Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones : Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011). Religious demographics have been a politically tense and highly debated field as religious belonging has not been included in an official census since the 1960s. Officially the ratio between Christians and Muslims in Tanzania as a whole is considered to be of equal and stable proportions. However, recent external surveys, such as the Pew Forum's survey (Pew. "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa." In *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*. www.pewforum.org, 23) point to a rise in Christianity and indicate that around 30 million (60%) of the Tanzanian population today consider themselves Christians. For the numbers of the last official census see Athumani Liviga and Zubeda Tumbo-Masabo, "Muslims in Tanzania: Quest for Equal Footing," in *Justice Rights and Worship: Religion and Politics in Tanzania*, ed. Rwekaza S. Mukandala *et al.* (Dar es Salaam: E & D Limited, 2006), 149–150.

24 Kaganga, English sermon February 2, 2012.

25 In many Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches being born again refers to the second birth in the spirit found in the Bible passage John 3:3ff. In Swahili, born again literally translates as *kuzaliwa ya pili*. This concept is, however, rarely used in Swahili. Among Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Tanzania (termed *makanisa ya kiroho,* spiritual churches, or *makanisa ya wokovu*, salvation churches) being born again is discussed in terms of *kuokoka*, to be saved. To be saved could be translated to both *kuokolewa* and *kuokoka* with *kuokolewa* connoting passiveness while *kuokoka* refers to a process of activity in order to remain saved, i.e., something one must continuously work at, highlighting the on-going work of sanctification. In the English-speaking part of the CCC's congregation, however, members used the concept born again to imply *kuokoka*. I therefore use the terms to be saved and born again interchangeably when referring to CCC members.

26 "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to

Eph. 5:13–17[27] Kaganga systematically delineated three aspects involved in this war, namely: (i) two opposing sides fighting (good and evil); (ii) the presence of weapons; and (iii) a battlefield where the fight takes place. After determining these basic features, Kaganga stressed that the battlefield is not located in the material world but is part of a spiritual war between the forces of light (*nguvu za nuru*) and the forces of darkness (*nguvu za giza*) which is fought with weapons of prayer that can be launched both individually and communally. While observing that the world should not be seen as evil as such, Kaganga highlighted that the presence of evil in the world is determined by the existence of evil spirits. For Kaganga, "hardships confronting humankind" are thus "ultimately spiritual in nature"[28] and can, therefore, only be overcome through spiritual engagements. By committing to spiritual warfare, the presence of evil in the world—sickness or lack of health or, as in Zanzibar, being targeted, discriminated against, and hated due to professing Christian belonging in public—can be reduced and championed. Kaganga stressed that it is through prayer Christians can tap into, and utilize, God's power, thereby situating prayer as the most powerful act in which a human can engage.[29] While this locates prayer as human empowerment and agency in this-worldly life, prayer and warfare practices also pose questions about their effect on social relations. Could prayers influence society to move in a better direction and so also influence social well-being more generally?

Among CCC members, social encounters outside of the congregation in many ways represented occasions where the Christian could lose her spiritual focus and potentially also her salvation. The world contains the risk of losing and drifting away from stern spiritual attachment. A possible negative outcome of such loss of attention could, for instance, be fighting back physically when faced by physical threats, or doubting in the efficacy of prayer itself. Strict adherence to the spiritual war, and the change and progress this activity promises, thus becomes a prerequisite for the individual's coping with the social reality of a world which, in the CCC's view of the social setting, is seen to be

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demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (NIV).

27 "But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." (NIV).

28 Yong, *In the Days*, 126.

29 Kaganga, English sermon, February 2, 2012.

ruled by malevolent spirits (in Swahili referred to as *mapepo, majini* and *mashetani*). From the CCC's perspective, this means that all actions that enable the individual to remain saved are, in certain ways, related to the spiritual war. Let me give an example of how this manifested in the lives of CCC members.

Raheli, a self-employed shopkeeper in her forties, stressed that every evening she engaged herself in strategic prayers in order to fight and confront peculiar habits (*tabia za ajabu ajabu*)[30] connected to her past life before becoming a "saved" Christian—habits which, if left unattended, could lead her astray. In order to address this danger she made use of the weapon of prayer (*silaha ya maombi*), which placed her in communication with God. Raheli thus routinely engaged in spiritual war as a means to deal with dangerous emotions, something which also provided confidence and guidance in her relationship vis-à-vis the social world of Zanzibar.[31]

In his sermon on the subject Kaganga emphasized the difference this outcome implies in both method and action. A "saved" Christian needs to understand that it is the mind of the believer that is the battlefield, the place where the devil needs to be fought in order to utilize God's power. Prayer activates God's knowledge (here implying God's plan for humans). Through the use of prayer CCC members are able to demolish the forces of evil by making them obedient to Christ.[32] Kaganga's elaboration corresponds to what Beilby and Eddy[33] have referred to as a "classical view" of spiritual warfare, in which a strong focus is placed on the spiritual development of the saved Christian. It is through evolving spiritual maturity that CCC Christians are able to move from a position of isolation towards social engagements. In terms of social relations this implies an internalization of the spiritual war in all areas of life, thus building resistance as well as the ability to fend off pressure to convert to Islam or adapt to the local norms and customs shaped by a Muslim society. Hence, while evil is constantly convicted through violent confrontation in the spiritual world, material confrontations need to manifest this victory through the expression of love, which turns love into both outcome and proof of successful spiritual practice. In this way spiritual warfare does not only serve to protect members of the CCC from evil, but also attempts to unveil evil through social engagements and outreach. Spiritual warfare could therefore be seen to drive Christians into the social sphere and, with growing numbers of mature and

30 *Tabia za ajabu ajabu* generally implies actions of immoral character in Swahili (*ajabu* lit. miracle, wonder, surprise). Raheli mentioned the examples of thief or adulterer while explaining the concept.

31 Raheli, interview with author, October 30, 2012.

32 Kaganga, English Sermon February 2, 2012.

33 Beilby and Eddy, "Introduction."

skillful prayer warriors able to fend off evil, the impact of such spiritual activities was regarded as increasingly influencing developments in the social world. Growing Christian engagements in the spiritual world thus determined the progress made in the material world.[34] This was something which surfaced when members of the CCC discussed and interpreted the attack on their premises in 2012.

3 Making Sense of Violence

While the initial response of CCC members to the burning of their church was one of despair, the congregation quickly moved from seeing the event as something entirely negative to seeing it as an incident leading to progress and growth. Alongside rebuilding it and strengthening the outer walls of the compound, the congregation devoted a full month to intense prayers and fasting.[35] The increased commitment to prayer was not only seen as contributing to the rapid reconstruction of the building; it came to represent an actual renewal of the church. Dreams of expanding the current infrastructure by constructing a "more modern" church building at twice the size were put into action. Moreover, funds were raised within the congregation as well as through international connections.

It was in this context of reconstruction and expansion that interpretations started to emerge that saw the attack as a consequence of the church's long-standing commitment to spiritual warfare. The growing community of committed prayer warriors (*waombaji*) was seen to have stirred up the spiritual realm, that is, the spirits that were seen by the CCC to be empowered by Arab colonial rule in the past and the ongoing presence of Islam in Zanzibar's present. Arab colonialism and Islam were hence both viewed as the reason for Zanzibar's being the "storage house" for evil spirits in Tanzania: a place "controlled by demons."[36] The presence of a community of morally committed Christians invoking the transformative and liberating power of the Holy Spirit had, in other words, started to change the spiritual balance of the islands. The hegemony of evil had been challenged by a group of "saved" Christians entering the

34 Ogbu Kalu, "Preserving a worldview: Pentecostalism in the African maps of the universe." *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 2 (2002): 122.

35 This was nothing unique to the CCC; fasting and different types of prayer actions are common Pentecostal approaches to dealing with unwanted events and a way of dealing with the dark forces that were seen to be behind the animosities. See Kalu, *African Pentecostalism,* 218.

36 Daudi, interview with author, October 28, 2012.

spiritual war, thereby contributing to a discourse that the devil's dominion over the islands was fading.

In this light, violence directed towards Christians was interpreted as a consequence, and so also proof, of their successful spiritual work. Christians' spiritual practices had exposed the strong presence of evil and made what had been hidden visible to the public. As with the deliverance of a spiritually afflicted individual, this initiative of delivering Zanzibar from the presence of evil could not be conducted without a battle. By framing the CCC's spiritual warfare in terms of a territorial deliverance of great scale, eruptions of social violence were therefore not seen as a surprise. The violence and attack on the church in May was interpreted as the materialization of a spiritual victory in the making, implying that the full deliverance of society had not yet been attained; the evil spirits in control of it would not leave without a fight. This highlights the propensity, mentioned above, to perceive what happens in the material world as a manifestation of developments in the spiritual realm.[37]

The narrative of spiritual victory in the making was consolidated when a new round of Uamsho-led anti-Union riots commenced in October 2012 but left the CCC premises untouched. From the viewpoint of CCC members this was a further confirmation that their ongoing commitment to spiritual warfare had improved the general situation. Even though the dark forces of the society had again resorted to violence, they had become weaker. Within this interpretative framework, attacks on Union-supportive political institutions in October 2012 were seen by CCC members as a pretext for forcing Christians to leave the islands.[38] The only way for the evil powers to win this battle was to force Christians to leave, and for CCC members, the only way this could happen was if the Union failed. Consequently, in desperation, the evil powers attacked political institutions that supported the Union. As I have argued elsewhere, prayers backing the Union therefore became part of CCC members' daily religious praxis, investing the Union with a sacred status as the political structure facilitating the spiritual battle of Christians.[39] The CCC's affirmation of the Union thus strengthened already existing discourses in Zanzibar that linked Christian growth to the presence of the Union. From the perspective of the CCC, the Union provided a venue for the spiritual war, while the spiritual war was also needed to ensure the longevity of the Union. As one CCC member put it while reflecting on the tense setting: "It is not a usual war … it is a spiritual

37 Kalu, "Preserving a worldview."

38 Mama John October 1, 2012, Rose October 27, 2012, Neema November 11, 2012, Focus group interview, CCC youth group November 15, 2012, all with author.

39 Olsson, *Jesus for Zanzibar,* Chapter 6.

war … But it is due to the Union that we Christians are here with them … We know it is because of the Union that *wazanzibari* receive the grace to know Jesus. It [the Union] is also a way."[40]

Interpretations by members of the CCC not only connected their growing church with the spiritual war but also placed Christian expansion in continuity with the establishment of the Union. Consequently, Pentecostals' commitment to prayer became part of a moral responsibility to keep the Tanzanian nation (the Union) intact. In this context, a number of public acts signified success in the spiritual war: Christian aesthetics; men tucking in their shirts; women wearing trousers; loud worship services; moral discourses concerning the display of love and prayer for those not saved; adhering to monogamous marriage; and being a successful (Christian) businessman, especially in light of being discriminated against, subjected to violence, or called *kafir* (infidel). For its part, the Union was partly emblematic of the materialization of successful spiritual warfare but was also the structure through which change and salvation could be brought to Zanzibar.

4 The Political Ramifications of Pentecostal Public Engagements

The narrative of Christian growth was, however, not solely a perception present within the CCC; it also circulated among Union-critical Muslims in Zanzibar when assessing the contemporary status of the archipelago.[41] Rather than being a positive feature in the latter case, however, Christian growth was perceived as part of a degeneration of Zanzibar's socio-cultural milieu, linked to

40 *Siyo vita ya kawaida … ni vita ya kiroho … Lakini kwa sababu tuu ya muungano na wakristo tukawemo … tunajua kwa sababu ya muungano ilikuwa ni neema ya wazanzibari kumjua Yesu. Ni njia pia.* Rose, interview with author, October 29, 2012.

41 The role of Christianity presented here draws from a focus group interview I conducted with eight young Muslim men and women (November 17, 2012), most of them either enrolled at a university or with a degree in higher education. Several of the interviewees occasionally engaged in interreligious peace work undertaken by representatives of the Muslim community and the mainline (not Pentecostal) churches in Zanzibar facilitated by Zanzibar Interfaith Centre (ZANZIC). From different parts of Zanzibar, all supported a sovereign Zanzibar—an agenda eagerly promoted by Uamsho in 2011–2012. The interview took place some weeks after the Uamsho leaders were jailed, when support for the organization was politically suppressed due to the October riots. While none of the interviewees claimed to be part of Uamsho they all voiced their support for what it had tried to accomplish. None believed that Uamsho had anything to do with the attacks on Christians, seeing the accusation as a government scheme to quell an increasingly popular public voice favoring Zanzibari independence.

exploitative, capitalist-driven and politically colored flows of migration from Tanzania Mainland to Zanzibar. However, it was primarily the newly arriving mainland Christians (*wakristo wameokuja*) who were targeted. Contrasted to local (Anglican and Roman Catholic) Christians (*wakristo wa asili*) who were regarded as assimilated into Zanzibar culture (*utamaduni*), mainland Christians were viewed as political agents arriving to change Zanzibar. Therefore, critique against Christianity did to a certain degree differentiate between various Christian denominations in Zanzibar—though even those lines have a tendency to shift and Roman Catholics have been attacked[42]—primarily targeting Christian newcomers. Communities such as the CCC were treated with skepticism, seen to come with the objective to destroy (*lengo la kuiharibu*) Zanzibar.[43] As one Muslim Zanzibari expressed it, "they are coming to wage war (*wanakuja kupiga vita*)" against local "Zanzibari culture (*utamaduni ya wazanzibari*)."[44]

Christian public practices that ran counter to local norms and customs had, according to these Muslims, been generating a fear (*imejenga hofu*) of new Christian arrivals. "Why are they [Christians] coming in big numbers? What do they really want?"[45] For one of the interviewees the Christian agenda was clear.

> Invasion, this is an invasion of land (*ardhi*). Christians are to be blamed for this; they invaded these lands and built churches … It seems that one day they just appeared [at the churches]; they play drums that the whole town can hear, drums, drums, and disturbance. These are practices which are performed intentionally; they are repulsive in a way that makes people hate them.[46]

The statements do not say anything about Christians' spiritual significance. Yet the discourse reveals discontent with how Christians acted and behaved in the public sphere. The relatively small numbers of Christians did not, in other

42 "RC priest shot on X-mas in Zanzibar," *The Guardian* December 27, 2012; "Catch the killers, JK orders police," February 18, 2013 *The Citizen*, accessed February 19, 2013. http://www.thecitizen.co.tz/component/content/article/37-tanzania-top-news-story/28921-catch-the-killers-jk-orders-police.html.

43 Male interviewee, focus group interview November 17, 2012.

44 Male interviewees, focus group interview November 17, 2012.

45 Male interviewee, focus group interview November 17, 2012, English in original.

46 *Uvamizi, huu uvamizi wa ardhi. Wakristo wamekuwa wakashutumiwa sana kufanya hichi kitu, wakavamia ardhi hizi na kujenga makanisa … Inatokea siku wanakuja pale wanapiga ngoma tu mji mzima, ngoma ngoma vurugu. Hii ni vitendo ambavyo vinafanywa makusudi wachukize yaani wanafanya watu wachukie.* Male interviewee, focus group interview, Zanzibar town, November 17, 2012.

words, go invisible and unnoticed by the Muslim public. On the contrary, they were used by local Muslim agents to represent what for many were seen as unwanted social developments in Zanzibar. For these Muslims Christians might comprise a whipping boy in a political agenda, yet the narrative of Christian impact on social change in Zanzibar also circulates among Pentecostal Christians and the public significance of spiritual practices is what draws Pentecostal Christians to display God's victory in the open. Spiritual warfare, therefore, not only provides internal strength and endurance for the CCC but also publicly reveals the CCC as a counter-cultural force[47] driven to unveil the "real world" as it actually is.[48]

Birgit Meyer[49] has argued that contemporary Pentecostal discursive practices of exposure, and the work towards social transformation they embody, should be situated in the historical context of Christian practice more generally. Referring to the (evangelical/charismatic Christian) Ghanaian context, Meyer argues that the introduction of Christianity to Africa was linked to a civilizing praxis of relocating the local cultural other—which included the "occult," Islam, and African traditional religion(s)—in a framework of backwardness and secrecy. The hierarchical relations produced by such relocations were shaped within a larger project driven by the will to expose the true nature of reality (most often for the sake of demonstrating the supremacy of Christianity). While ensuing interpretations differed in how the "hidden" was understood and valued across the various African Christian traditions, Meyer argues that the drive for exposure reinforces Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity as a public culture. By unmasking the cause of deprivation and affliction, contemporary Pentecostal Charismatic practices can therefore be placed in a long Christian tradition of revealing what "lies hidden behind the surface of appearance."[50] The normative practice of revealing what is hidden is, in other words, inherent to what it means to be a Christian. In the case of the CCC, this involves a process of identifying Zanzibar as a backward society in which the archipelago's current state of affairs is caused by the historical dominion of Islam and the evil spirits connected to it.

While the practice and knowledge connected to uncovering reality is not exclusive to Christianity—it has also been prominent in African traditional

47 Joel Robbins, "Anthropology of Religion," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism : Theories and Methods*, eds. Allan Anderson *et al.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 156–178; Kirk Dombrowski, *Against Culture: Development, Politics, and Religion in Indian Alaska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

48 Meyer, "Christianity," 152.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.*, 154.

settings[51]— I argue that the CCC's understandings of the violence directed towards Christians in Zanzibar should be read in the context of revealing the world through spiritual engagements. It is part of a praxis which, in Meyer's[52] terms, serves to make the hidden public. In the eyes of CCC members, the events in 2012 publicly uncovered what they already knew was the main problem with Zanzibar, namely, the strong influence of evil running through its society.

Moreover, by not retaliating violently to violent provocation, but, rather, increasing their commitment to spiritual warfare, CCC members not only argued for their impact on society but also stressed their agency in terms of spiritual maturity and civility vis-à-vis Zanzibar. As Christians they were different and also acted differently, thereby defining Christian belonging in sharp contrast to traditional Zanzibari ways. Such distinctions were emphasized through the elaboration of value-charged dichotomies involving Christian mainlanders and Zanzibari Muslims, the latter seen to promote hate over love, religious education over secular education, ethnocentrism over national unity, and *sharia* law over the secular constitution of Tanzania.[53] Combined, this constituted Zanzibar as a religiously biased society (*udini*)[54] where Muslim norms and values were seen as the reason why Zanzibari were against all kinds of (modern) innovations including the capacity to cultivate their own food (agriculture), educate their children, or embrace tourism.[55] As a CCC member addressing the situation expressed it: "A lot of people desire to be saved (*kuokoka*) but religiocentrism (*udini*) keeps them trapped. Their belief traps them."[56]

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51 Harry G. West, *Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

52 Meyer, "Christianity," 154.

53 See Olsson, *Jesus for Zanzibar*.

54 *Udini,* translated as devoutness, religiousness, or religiocentrism, is often referred to as an unwanted development in Tanzanian society following the end of the *ujamaa* regime: the rise of religious belonging and religious alliances have created intra and interreligious tensions and turmoil which threaten the narrative of a nation built on peace and unity despite its multireligious demography. On the more general discursive use of *udini* in relation to perceptions of national identity and the religious other among Christians and Muslims in Tanzania see, for instance, Thomas, J. Ndaluka, *Religious Discourse, Social Cohesion and Conflict: Muslim Christian Relations in Tanzania* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012); Frans Jozef Servaas Wijsen, "Religionism in Tanzania," in *Identity and Religion. A Multidisciplinary Approach*, eds. A. Borsboom and F. Jaspers (Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik, 2003), 121–137.

55 Neema, interview with author, November 11, 2012.

56 *Watu wengi wanatamani kuokoka, lakini udini umeufunga. Imani zao zimewafunga.* Haruni, interview with author, September 28, 2012.

The cultural critique, which is rather explicit in terms of such views, goes back to notions of Zanzibar being a place "controlled by demons." While Zanzibari were seen as backward and restricted due to the influence of Islam, Christianity and Christians were seen to be open to development and progress and thus vital as the means to promote the change that was needed. CCC Christians' were committed to love as social praxis, hard work, and secular education, elements that were seen as superior characteristics of a Christian life. The CCC counter-cultural position not only places Islam (and Zanzibar) as the locus of difference but also stresses the need to liberate the Zanzibar populace from spiritual bondage. Just as the spiritual war was an ongoing venture in the minds of CCC members, the evil dwelling in the other has to be addressed in order to produce a peaceful society.

In the interpretation of CCC members, a Christian individual cannot remain idle but has the responsibility to expand God's peace. Converting the enemy to a friend hence serves as *the* way of creating social cohesion and peaceful co-existence. A comparison could here be made with Harri Englund's study of urban Pentecostals in Chinsapo township, Lilongwe, Malawi, where Englund[57] assesses the social effects of spiritual warfare practices in the context of Christian-Muslim relationships. By situating spiritual warfare between the individual's salvation and the salvation of others, Englund argues that it serves as an important framework for understanding Pentecostals' social engagements. Like the CCC in Zanzibar, Englund stresses that Pentecostals in Malawi see the conversion of the other to a fellow follower of Jesus as the means for establishing peaceful coexistence in the social sphere. Spiritual warfare, therefore, informs discourses of engagement that contains the potential for Christian expansion and growth.[58] Englund takes Pentecostal radio testimonies of spiritual battles with evil as examples to illustrate how public witness not only strengthens Pentecostals' own faith through narrative praxis but also stresses salvation as a life-saving event.

In a similar way, the presence of evil in Zanzibar thus directs the CCC towards the other, the non-saved Christian, and situates spiritual warfare as an essential medium for expanding the community of saved Christians, a goal that is demanded by Christian individuals' experiences of Zanzibar as a site of evil (violence, discrimination). The ongoing production of an imagined community of spiritual kin, persisting via prayer and healing, becomes a practice

57 Englund, "From Spiritual Warfare."
58 *Ibid.*, 176.

which will turn strangers, even the Muslim other, into a potential fellow. Rather than increasing social tensions, therefore, Englund concludes that the constant will for expansion in spiritual warfare encourages modes of civility and human relationships.[59] Contrary to scholars who have asserted that Pentecostals' commitment to fight evil constitutes a potential site for sociopolitical conflicts and violence,[60] Englund's assessment claims that spiritual warfare redirects Christians from physical violence.

Yet, in the case of praxis at the CCC, perceptions of Zanzibaris' lack of civility are connected with outright rejection of both their culture and religion and, furthermore, Zanzibari are discursively stripped of human agency. Thus, while in certain ways the spiritual war promoted by the CCC produces the modes of non-violence presented by Englund, I would argue that the transformation envisaged by such practices needs to be situated in how it is received as a public culture. As already touched upon, for some Zanzibari Muslims the CCC's public engagements not only signify disrespect of local norms and customs but also constitute an attack on Zanzibar's political sovereignty. Thus, placed in the tense socio-political context of Zanzibar-Tanzania Mainland relations, spiritual warfare, publicly voiced in forceful prayers, becomes not only activities through which CCC members intend to make "the effects of God's victory over all evil powers"[61] known in Zanzibar, but also turns Pentecostal practice into a significant marker of both social resistance and political dominion. In recognizing that the narrative of Christians on the rise circulates among CCC Christians and Zanzibari Muslims alike, the public significance of such spiritual practices not only becomes apparent, but also possibly influenced the escalation of the violence in 2012.

59 *Ibid.,* 181–184.

60 Gifford, "Evil Witchcraft"; Hackett, "Discourses"; Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*; Richie, "Demonization"; Beilby and Eddy, "Introduction." There are some cases where this has led Pentecostals to support military activity against the other. Amos Yong gives an example from Guatemala where a number of Pentecostal pastors defended the government against accusations of atrocities directed towards the country's indigenous people. By depicting indigenous Indians as communist demons the Pentecostal pastors placed the indigenous people on the dark side of good and evil (Yong, *In the Days*, 134). For another example of the dubious moral outcome of spiritual warfare practices see Wink and Hardin's response to Emma Greenwood's presentation of strategic spiritual warfare against an abortion clinic in Texas which led to the director of the clinic later being killed by a pro-life mob, Walter Wink and Michael Hardin, "Response to C. Peter Wagner and Rebecca Greenwoood," in *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views*, eds. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 200–203.

61 Währisch-Oblau, "Spiritual Warfare," 16.

5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has discussed the practice of spiritual warfare through the case of a Pentecostal minority in Muslim-dominated Zanzibar. I have argued that it is the commitment to a spiritual war aimed at unveiling elements of evil in Zanzibar society which drives the CCC as a public culture—meaning that spiritual warfare should be seen as the lens through which the world is interpreted as well as the method by which the world's tangible reality is undressed. In Geertzian terms spiritual warfare works not only as a model *of* the world but also *for* the world in a highly normative sense.[62] For the small CCC minority, spiritual warfare provides a framework for individuals, already largely perceived as outsiders due to their mainland origins, not only to resist social pressure to adapt but also to oppose the surrounding Muslim majority. In the CCC's interpretations, the violence directed against Christians is seen as a symptom, as well as a proof, of the efficacy of such practices. In other words, forceful prayers and acts of spiritual warfare can be seen to carve out political space in the public realm, providing CCC members with a political identity that not only aims to take control of both social time and space but also produce alternative sites of social belonging.[63] The identity produced by perceiving "themselves as extremely powerful in the spiritual realm and thereby expect[ing] to effect positive changes on the social and material level"[64] points to the role of spiritual practices in collective mobilization and identity formation. In the highly politicized Zanzibar context, where social locations and religious belonging have become deeply entrenched in the Union-Zanzibar controversy, this turns theological and religious practices into politically significant actions.

Approaching spiritual warfare as the hermeneutical key through which Pentecostals filter social experiences of alienation, discrimination, and violence, the chapter therefore suggests that spiritual warfare and the discourse of victory which permeates Pentecostal praxis provides a fruitful example of how an exposed Christian minority engages with the public and partakes in wider political contestations. With the narrative of Christian growth also discursively used among Union-critical Muslim agents in Zanzibar, the Christians' notion that they are agents of change not only seizes public space but also significance.

62 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures : Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

63 Yong, *In the Days*, 156–159.

64 Währisch-Oblau, "Spiritual Warfare," 16.

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CHAPTER 13

The Dramatization and Embodiment of God of the Wilderness

Isabel Mukonyora

This chapter marks the first hundred years of the Johane Masowe Apostles Church with something long overdue – a study of theological ideas found in a collection of sacred texts called the *Gospel of God*.[1] These texts tell stories about the founder of the Masowe Apostles, Johane Masowe, the pillar of a church inspired by stories from the Bible. For instance, the stories about Moses acting as the leader of the people of God – victims of oppression who wander in the wilderness in Exodus – explains the ritual behavior of Masowe Apostles and migration from Zimbabwe to Botswana, South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, and beyond.[2] Since the 1930s, Masowe Apostles have also walked towards the fringes of cityscapes to give expression to the same quest for liberation in Zimbabwe, and wherever else in the world that the problems of life on earth have turned Masowe Apostles into believers inspired by the idea of wilderness to reach out to God. Today, Masowe Apostles are known to travel far and wide, starting with the continent of Africa, and, they are even more well-known for dressing in white robes and going outdoors to pray for salvation.

As shown below, additional stories about John the Baptist and Jesus talking about salvation in the outskirts of the City of Jerusalem also inspired the development of a lived understanding of the New Testament Masowe Apostolic theology as to express in terms of oral tradition of faith. Anyone who reads the *Gospel of God* after reading this chapter should be able to see that the sacred texts were produced in an attempt to textualize an oral tradition of Christianity

1 The *Gospel of God* is the appendix to Clive Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers: A study of the Masowe Apostles, an indigenous African Religious Movement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 138–145.

2 Nowadays, Masowe Apostles can be found in big cities in England and North America. I have suggested that we start looking at wandering in the wilderness as symbolic language for addressing questions about God. See Isabel Mukonyora, "Women of the African Diaspora Within: The Masowe Apostles, an African Initiated Church," in *Women and Religion in the African Diaspora: Knowledge, Power and Performance,* eds. R. Marie Griffith and Barbara D. Savage (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2006), 59–80.

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in which the scriptures inspired strong beliefs in a God whose presence can be experienced on earth.[3] Clive Dillon-Malone, the anthropologist who compiled *The Gospel of God* with some of the immediate followers of Johane Masowe led to this inquiry allowing the author to test the suggestion that Masowe Apostles developed a distinctly African lived theology.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to show how theology is being done by people who dramatize, embody, and/or perform their knowledge about God. For instance, instead of reading stories about Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus wandering in the wilderness as described in the Scriptures, Masowe Apostles ground it in their ritual behavior. For example, by walking to the outskirts of the city of Harare, removing their shoes and spending four to six hours praying on the dirt with the sun shining and the wind blowing, they perform their knowledge of God. The term *sowe* is used to describe the sacred places used for prayer, which can be on the edge of a golf course, small forests, or dry meadows – wherever there is unoccupied land with which to give expression to the idea of children of God on the margins of society. Masowe Apostles are theologians of liberation whose understanding of God is thus lived, dramatized, and embodied. There is a lot to learn about lived Christianity from this ritual behavior, especially as it draws attention to Mother Earth whose elements of nature also tell us something about human suffering in the world.[4]

The *Gospel of God* is looked at in this article on Masowe theology because it gives meaning to the lived conceptualization of God by the founder of the Masowe Apostles. This booklet consists of stories about the birth of Johane Masowe, somewhere between 1914 and 1915, his difficult youth in a colonial homeland called *Gandanzara* (Land of Hunger), near death experiences caused by severe headaches, and conversion experiences associated with his healing and ministry to serve fellow African children of God as their wandering messenger of the hope for healing and salvation. Although most people take it for granted that Masowe Apostles dress in white robes and go to pray in the margins of Africa's cityscapes, this oral tradition of Christianity would not exist without the founder turning his own experiences of reality into a story telling us something about the meaning and purpose of God among victims of colonial oppression, the poor and sick. Briefly, Johane Masowe's own journey left behind thousands of followers in southern, central and east Africa because he became the prophet setting an example by "wandering in the wilderness"

3 Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

4 Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

until his death in 1978.[5] Today, Johane is the prophet and founder of one of the most studied popular African Initiated Churches (AICs) originating among the Shona in Zimbabwe. As the anthropologist Matthew Engelke found in his book, *A Problem of Presence*, about a separate church called the Masowe we Chishanu Apostles, such is the power of the oral tradition of Christianity among the Masowe Apostles, they take us beyond the Scriptures by making their knowledge of God live and direct. What Engelke is saying is that the Judeo-Christian Bible has a place among the Masowe Apostles although the Word of God must be "live and direct from the Holy Spirit," that is, something performed or dramatized by the believer.[6] Theologians must be more aware, therefore, of the need for humans to practice their faith and, furthermore, to learn to do so from dramatizations of knowledge about God as it becomes embodied and engages the believer through prayer.

1 Matters of Theory and Methods

Cited throughout this chapter is a "thick description" of Christianity for theologians, social scientists, and scholars publishing works on the anthropology of Christianity in Africa. The working definition of religion provided by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz is useful to note because he writes that it is

> (1) a system of symbols (2) which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in humans. (3) by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[7]

Masowe Apostles not only dress in white linen, they face east to pray, remove their shoes on sacred ground, which they call *masowe* (the sacred wilderness), and insist on speaking in Shona at prayer. They go outdoors so that the didactic function of the message of the gospel centered on images of human suffering "has an aura of factuality" in Geertz's terms.[8]

In this case study on Masowe Apostolic theology, old narratives about God and human beings hoping for redemption become meaningful through

5 "Gospel of God." Johane was in his early 20s when he started preaching.
6 Engelke, *A Problem of Presence*. See Introduction, 1–45.
7 Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (New Work: Basic Books, 1973), 90.
8 *Ibid.*

symbolic acts of prayer that go on for anything from five to six hours at weekends, and occasionally all night long. Rather like liberation theologians draw attention to concrete social problems of oppression and climate change,[9] Masowe Apostles draw attention to the serious problems of colonial and post-colonial oppression, industrialization, and urbanization as the historic roots of the ecological destruction of human and other forms of planetary life. As reflected in discussions of the Masowe understanding of the concept, God is a voice speaking to individuals through their conscience about self-empowerment, caring, sharing, healing, and generally giving all believers hope for salvation.[10]

As hinted above the *Gospel of God* is an African narrative about the Exodus, and New Testament sources for the knowledge of God which Johane Masowe developed in terms of a religious understanding of himself as a prophet addressing African experiences of colonialism and, as he traveled north of Zimbabwe into Zambia, post-colonial violence, much sickness, and poverty.[11] Although cited throughout this chapter, one does not hear much about the *Gospel of God* in dramatizations of faith among Masowe Apostles. In fact, the emergence of an African orthodoxy for the wilderness church is very important, but not the starting point for the study of a lived conceptualization of God in which reading sacred texts and doing hermeneutics are replaced by ritual behavior. After all, the Shona culture underpinning the church was, until the colonial era, sustained by a spirituality based on an oral tradition made up of *ngano*, folklore with a special focus on social values and ethics, songs about existential problems of life on earth, rhythmic dance, and thoughtful prayer at ancestral ceremonies for the sick and dead. In the writing of the *Gospel of God,* the New Testament was used, rather like folklore, as a source of knowledge for a Shona-speaking messenger from God to *vanhu vatema* (black people) who shared his feelings of marginality, hope for liberation, and ultimately the salvation promised to Christians after death.[12]

In fact, the Masowe Apostles encountered during my anthropological research in the margins of Harare viewed the Bible as an old book telling stories about God's revelation to believers from the ancient past. When I asked

9 Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí: On Care for Our Common Home,* Encyclical Letter, 2015.

10 The conclusion is reached by watching Masowe Apostles pray in the sacred wilderness. "National Public Radio interview with Krista Tippett": http://www.onbeing.org/program/sacred-wilderness-african-story/169/audio – February 22, 2007.

11 By the time Johane Masowe died, the AIDS pandemic was growing on the continent of Africa.

12 Isabel Mukonyora, "The dramatization of Life and Death by Johane Masowe," *Zambezia* 25, no. 2 (1998): 191–207.

questions about the old Bible, the answer was always that it refers to lived theologies of children of God in the past. When it comes today, we know it is the same eternal God because Masowe Apostles are prompted to do what they do, Him speaking to the conscience. Going to pray on the margins of the cityscapes from which Masowe Apostles migrate on the continent and beyond thus comes naturally to all the children of God.[13] When it comes to lived theology, what is more important is the African oral tradition of Christianity – a means of communicating certain fundamental principles of life, social values, and ethics for direct consideration.[14]

It is time to see if, almost a hundred years later, Masowe Apostles still have a lived theology of liberation for *vanhu vatema* (black people) and to examine the forms it takes in the wilderness of African cities still faced by problems of oppression and violence, the AIDS pandemic, poverty, and climate change.[15] Whilst the methods of inquiry used by liberation theologians draw attention to life through critical reflection on society, Masowe Apostles have created a rich pool of culturally appropriate religious terms, images, and symbolic actions which correspond with "the live and direct" knowledge of a God of the poor and sick.[16]

As a result, this theological inquiry is rooted in human behavior. The popular definition of religion by Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) cited above is used in this chapter because, for almost a century, Masowe Apostles have dramatized their theology by walking across dry marshes, small forests, rivers, lakes, the edges of golf courses, and the spaces behind shopping centers to spend, on average, whole mornings or afternoons embodying their understanding of the God they associate with the gift of the Holy Spirit: making a mental connection with a biblical past in which images of the wilderness are used to reveal deep

13 I have an anonymous recording of Masowe Apostles traveling from the Johane Masowe headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, to spread their gospel among the poor in India. I also have emails from London, Manchester, and California from individuals trying to establish if I am a practicing member of their global church. It is also possible to find websites on Masowe Apostles living in the West.

14 *Ngano* were usually told regularly by the fire in Shona homes. Whenever there was a special point to note, the participants would respond by saying *dzepfunde* – "we agree with this wisdom."

15 The first sign of Masowe Apostles and groups of African Christians who decided to start their own lived theology of liberation through schism are white robes and outdoor worship in the *masowe* or sacred wilderness.

16 Liberation theology opens the door to sociological and political issues that influence the lived understanding of God among the poor, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

emotions to do with the need for healing minds, bodies, and souls on a quest for God the creator. Images of John the Baptist, Jesus and Moses listening to God on desert soil, and the sanctified children of God dressed in white linen (Rev 3:18; 7:13; 19:18) are all reimagined and emulated, to the extent that it is not possible to explain Masowe theology without examining the various ways of grounding biblical ideas so that they shape ways of thinking through the symbolism of ritual behavior. More important when it comes to the timing of this article, the spiritual quest for liberation also draws attention to a call for eco-justice from an African perspective. In a world where globalization is the main cause of poverty, oppression and climate change, there is something powerful about going to pray in the wilderness.[17]

Johane Masowe thus laid the foundations for an African conception of God suited to questions about the African believers who struggle for survival as if they are in the diaspora. Masowe Apostles now have an established culturally appropriate system of biblical "symbols, which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations focused on being in the wilderness."[18] In other words, Masowe Apostles produced a tradition of Christianity allowing believers to embody and dramatize their knowledge of the Biblical God.

Going outdoors to look for the margins of the cityscapes of Harare, Francistown, Johannesburg, Durban, Lusaka, Ndola, and Nairobi has produced the lived setting for the embodiment of knowledge about God for the Masowe Apostles. Old biblical imagery of a patriarchal God who liberates the victims of oppression and leads them to spiritual awareness is transformed here into the creator healer, in Gaian terms, of the fragmented social, physical, and psychological relationship with other creatures on earth. What has developed during the course of a hundred years of African Christians' wandering and praying in the wilderness is now part and parcel of the lived understanding of God that contains answers to questions about eco-theology in Africa.[19] Although it would be just as easy to associate this God with the harshness of deserts and the margins of the landscape far away from cities using the English language, the use of the Shona word *masowe* here is culturally significant as it describes a church or ecclesiastical community but also the liminal places used to reach out to God in prayers for salvation.

My first attempt to introduce Masowe Apostles to an audience interested in addressing ecological problems is in an article called "An African Gospel of

17 My own observation.

18 Geertz, *Interpretation*, 90.

19 Mukonyora, "Women."

Survival in an Age of Ecological Destruction."[20] That also ends with a reference to Clifford Geertz and an invitation to engage in further studies on ways of instilling the values of the practice of Christianity in an era of climate change. Why? Because the encounter with religious traditions in which religion is a way of life has increased awareness of the need to shift from abstract ways of doing theology, especially now that the real problems of life on earth call for action. In this scenario, climate change also calls for the combination of anthropological methods of inquiry with traditional theological methods of investigating Christian texts, sacred, primary, and others.

Anthropology and theology thus come together in this exploration of Christianity in Africa. The Shona language spoken by Masowe Apostles corresponds with Bantu culture in which knowledge is transmitted orally, meaning that it is necessary to examine closely the ritual behavior needed to make the biblical God real.[21] Millions of Africans are experiencing economic hardship, life threatening diseases like AIDS, cancer, colds, fevers, problems of unemployment, and other misfortunes caused by militant ways of keeping authoritarian regimes in power. Let us begin by examining how the official leaders of the Masowe Apostles movement agreed to give God of the wilderness his aura of factuality by producing the *Gospel of God*.[22]

2 The Double Patriarchal God

The *Gospel of God* refers to *Baba* (Father), sometimes *Tenzi* (Lord), terms used for God. The honorific, *madzibaba*, is generally used with first names to refer to boys and men as "fathers," especially at prayer meetings. The document entitled "The Calling of Baba Johane," speaking of the prophet and founder of the Masowe Apostles reads,

> God then asked, do you know why you have been ill for so long? He (Johane) answered, 'I don't know Lord.' God said, 'You have been ill because of the sins which you have committed against me on earth since the day you were born.' Sixpence [nickname for Johane] was unconscious…We (his followers) were hearing his voice answering Jehovah from heaven…

20 Isabel Mukonyora, "An African Gospel of Survival in an Age of Ecological Destruction," *Worldviews* 14, no. 2–3 (2010): 171–184.

21 Mukonyora, "The dramatization."

22 Zimbabwe has been controlled by the same militant regime led by Robert Mugabe since 1980. Since I finished my fieldwork around January 2000 and left the country, the difficult human conditions have got much worse.

> while his body was lying before us…[then] we heard the spirit getting back into the body, making a sound like that of air being pumped into a bicycle.[23]

This story is one of several in which "Baba Johane" is portrayed as sleeping, unconscious, or nearly dead, which is a little confusing in Shona where the term *kufa* (to die) is commonly used to describe different kinds of human suffering, including death. As observed by anthropologist Matthew Schoffeleers, Bengt Sundkler, and other scholars of religion in contemporary Africa, it was common for other prophets and healers in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa to associate suffering with spiritual gifts of *n'anga* whereby death – like suffering, feeling withdrawn from society, and sickness – is invoked in stories about individuals who are later recognized as healers, diviners, or spirit mediums.[24] The *Gospel of God* is thus a good example of an African attempt to interpret the suffering and death of Christ. The stories of Johane Masowe, Johane Maranke (also popularly known as John the Baptist), Alice Lenshina from Zambia, Isaiah Shembe from South Africa, and Simon Kimbangu from Zaire, demonstrate that the religious imagination may be used to draw attention to the redemptive passage through life to death before healing the relationship with God takes place.[25] In the story of Isaiah Shembe, the prophet illustrated his acceptance of the crucifixion by explaining a dream in which "he found himself surrounded by a rattling host of skeletons of the dead, making noise…and fell down in terror." When Shembe awoke, he was convinced that God had protected him from the forces of death and was sending him to spread the gospel.[26]

In short, we have in the *Gospel of God* a good example of a common practice of dramatizing knowledge about God by highlighting kufa (suffering and/or death). Victims of suffering thus embody knowledge to do with a powerful God who heals the sick and uplifts the poor, as the creator heals Mother Earth by sending rain to combat drought, for example. Experiencing healing through the power of the Holy Spirit is, in other words, a way of drawing attention to New Testament stories about Jesus performing miracles among the poor, not to mention preaching the famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, and 7), which has become a live and direct message for Masowe Apostles. To make

23 "The calling of Baba Johane" in "Gospel of God."

24 Matthew Schoffeleers, "Folk Christology: The Dialectics of the N'anga Paradigm," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 19, no. 2 (1989): 157–183.

25 Richard Werbner, "The Suffering Body: Passion and Ritual Allegory in Christian Encounters," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23, no. 2 (1977): 311–324.

26 Bengt Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists* (Uppsala: Oxford University Press, 1976), 184–185.

sense of this live and direct way of proving that God exists, it was necessary for Johane Masowe, their founder, to experience kufa. In doing so, he brought the gospel closer to a culture destroyed by drastic social changes imposed by colonial regimes than the European missionaries who viewed the symbolic act of exact readings from the Bible as the way to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in Africans, thereby claiming authority to talk about God in Christianity.

During the 1930s Economic Depression, when Johane started preaching, he was often sick, unemployed, and preoccupied with feelings of total dependence on God. European missionaries may not always have been conscious of it, but they created the setting for the rise of oral traditions of Christianity in modern Africa. They developed a lived theology by building churches for their rituals, translating and telling stories from the Bible into Shona, insisting on modern African clothes and manners, and teaching reading, writing, and other technical skills associated with Western ideas of the successful spread of patriarchal Christianity in Africa.[27] The prophet Johane Masowe thus lived in the shadows of a changing society of people being taught to view themselves as individual sinners as their Shona culture was replaced with Global Christianity as the framework for the growth of a gendered colonial discourse of morality.[28] It is no surprise the passage from *Gospel of God* cited above refers to Sixpence and "a bicycle" in the context of a story intended to show the extent of God the Father's healing power. Bicycles were being manufactured as cheap transport for factory workers and postmen in Africa of the time.[29] Although I never witnessed such a serious manifestation of the healing power of God through the Holy Spirit, I listened to one sermon after another stressing the fact that God of the wilderness has the power defeat Satan, conquer the forces of death, heal the sick, console the poor, and generally help believers deal with personal misfortunes.[30] The "Calling of Baba Johane" is just one of several powerful

27 Isabel G. Antonio, *Independent Churches Among the Shona* (thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1989), 51–95.

28 Diana Jeater, *Marriage, Perversion, and Power: The Construction of Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia 1894–1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). This is an excellent book on the moral discourse based on a lot of assumptions about Christianity as a patriarchal world religion.

29 Zimbabweans often laughed at me for riding a pink bicycle and wearing colourful cotton trousers to avoid being confused with men from the local factories. Although able to ride the bicycle for fieldwork, I needed to be discreet.

30 Although the words "suffering and healing" are used in the title of the book Isabel Mukonyora, *Wandering a Gendered Wilderness* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Group, 2007), there is no talk about miracles, just healing in social and psychological senses.

dramatizations of the power of the Holy Spirit that is part of the Trinitarian God of the Christian faith.

This way of talking about God is associated with patriarchal Christianity here because research has shown that only men dominate as official leaders of AICs, such as those mentioned above from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia, and Zaire. As indicated, before they are recognized as preachers, healers and/or prophets, they show the power of God in their lives in the wilderness by talking about God in the masculine form using the Shona term *Mwari* (the high god)-*Baba* (Father). Male preachers talked about Mwari-Baba in sermons and, when presiding over healing ceremonies, some of them shout at Satan, pace up and down, wave their hands in the air, point their fingers, and push the sick to the ground to draw attention to either the gravity of the problem of sin and death, or the power of God entrusted to them by the Holy Spirit. A lot of these gestures are not of the sort commonly used by women to communicate their thoughts about God. God becomes embodied in male leaders of members of a Shona patriarchy whose power was otherwise shattered in the patriarchal Christian roots of African colonial modernity.[31]

Here is a typical example of the words often used to portray God. "Mwari-Baba created us men with gifts which women did not get from the beginning. Those gifts include leadership of the church, the homes for our male seed (children), and society in general…women must obey! That is God's own wish since creation."[32] This excitable preacher went further; "Men are strong enough to do the work of Holy Spirit when it comes to the fight against Satan. Women were not made for the fight against Satan."[33] Spontaneously, the women elders present at the prayer meeting concerned started to sing. Difficult though it was to follow the lyrics, it was obvious that they were songs expressive of the transcendent beauty of God and the hope that salvation would effectively highlight the limitations of sexism. Masowe songs, even those led by men, could be used to motivate and encourage mutual love and friendship among believers.

In the Shona past, songs were often used in the same way, to reconcile different opinions about problems of injustice or conflict. At funerals, marriage ceremonies, and the problem-solving meetings of elders, women would suddenly start singing songs to be taken as advice or warning about the need for justice,

31 Michael F. C Bourdillon, *Where are the Ancestors? Changing Culture in Zimbabwe* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1993).

32 Isabel Mukonyora, "Religion, Politics and Gender in Zimbabwe," in *Displacing the State: Religion and Conflict in Neoliberal Africa,* eds. John H. Smith and Rosalind I.J. Hackett (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame 2012), 136–159.

33 *Ibid*., 147.

peace, and harmony.[34] This creative way of making songs an alternative form of God-Talk in a contemporary world in which the majority of Africans believe in the idea of a biblical God, is easy to relate to the definition of religion used to explain the dramatization and embodiment of knowledge of which Masowe Apostles are known for spreading in Africa. At least, insofar as the burning questions one might ask of Christianity are addressed through the ritual behavior of the Masowe Apostles, who did not see any need to read the Bible as taught by European missionaries, Shona women use melody to create "verses" that correspond with their spiritual need to eradicate sexism among the children of God. Rather like announcing that one is reading the gospel and demanding silence just before the sermon in mainline churches around the globe, the women of the wilderness rely on the religious freedom to sing. The "verses" become a culturally appropriate way of inviting believers to stop what they are doing and concentrate on the fellowship of believers in the same transcendent God. Everyone is expected to pay attention to divine words of wisdom that come with these songs of the wilderness. They are called "verses" not necessarily because they are words taken directly from the Bible, but because the motivation to sing is inspired by the spiritual need to change the mood and motivation of male preachers who tend to sin during God-Talk – which is meant to be a theology of liberation – by sounding sexist and oppressive to women.[35] Indeed, there is no doubt sexism is a problem among Masowe Apostles. Women use singing to remind men that the "God beyond the Father" loves all his children.[36]

During the 1930s when Johane was first arrested for preaching on the margins of the cityscape of Harare without a pass or license to preach from the colonial authorities,[37] European missionaries would use the term Mwari-Baba to develop the lived understanding of God; this was rejected by Masowe Apostles as serving the interests of a British colonial regime responsible for the displacement and subjugation of Africans. The police who arrested Johane for

34 It was common for women to sing in public as a way of expressing their fear of bad husbands, something I noted whenever I attended marriage ceremonies or funerals. My own mother tongue is Shona.

35 In some groups, the men started to lead songs themselves, trying to impress women with their voices, rather like boys in a choir. This silenced some women, but not most elder women who were well versed in oral tradition.

36 Mary Daly, *God-Beyond-the-Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973). This book looks for an answer to the problem of the reciprocal relationship of a patriarchal world to centuries of God-Talk in Christianity.

37 "Statement by Shonhiwa to Detective Bond (C.I.D.) in Salisbury," interpreted by Zakia, November 1st, 1932, S138/22, National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare.

preaching in the wilderness were conversant enough with the problem of oppression at the time of Jesus to recognize the mood and motivation of the founder of the Masowe Apostles. He was using biblical stories of oppression to address an African audience of Christians caught up in social changes causing the poor to migrate from rural areas to cities where it was crucial to find employment in a job market forced upon Africa through industrialization.

Johane made a connection between his personal feelings of marginality and displacement and the oppression of Africans loud and clear by dramatizing his suffering, death, and healing often enough for his followers to remember his theology. As a young man and preacher, Johane was inspired by John the Baptist, as well as Jesus who is also said to have walked through the wilderness surrounding the city of Jerusalem preaching and healing the sick. Insulted by the symbolism of Johane's behavior, the police beat him up, threw him in jail and, upon the prophet's release, mocked him, saying it was time for him to leave the city and return to Gandanzara (Land of Hunger), a rural homeland that encapsulated the whole problem of Europeans' seizing fertile land and pushing Africans to more barren areas.[38] In this case, the agents of colonial oppression enforced the white male supremacist rule of excluding the poor from the city in a manner which strengthened Johane's resolve to preach about Mwari-Baba of the wilderness.

There are some interesting names for Mwari-Baba which suggest a variety of things about his nature relevant to the perspective of theological discourse in which knowledge about God as male first finds bold expression: Mwari as he who rules the heavens is called *Nyadenga*; Mwari as he who is at the apex of creation is *Wokumusoro* (the one above); and he is also *Musiki* (the maker of things), *Musikavanhu* (the creator of humans), and *Muzivazvose* (all knowing). For the sake of brevity on this matter of divine attributes, which male preachers presume to go hand in hand with biblical language referring to Mwari-Baba, the latter could also be called *Mutangakugara* (the first to exist). Although European missionaries talked about Mwari as Baba to help converts to Christianity realize the difference between Mwari with a female dimension and the father figure and the Supreme Being, the patrilineal ancestor system of the Shona benefitted from the added use of male imagery to describe Mwari as an omnipotent "high god."[39] Given the hierarchical social order that put men in

38 *Ibid.*

39 Written with lower capital letters, the reference "high god" was used by Europeans to characterize Mwari. However, when it comes to Mwari, Europeans had no problems using Mwari with the capital letter "M" to designate Mwari as the same Supreme Being as the biblical God.

charge of women, children, and whole territories, it suited Masowe Apostles to call God the Father, Mwari-Baba in Shona.

In "The Calling of Baba Johane," 1932 is year that Johane Masowe started preaching. Following the arrest described above, Johane Masowe asked his first followers, "Did you hear me talking to my Father?"[40] In other words, it was not enough to say "Jesus the Son of God." Johane developed a personal view of God as his own Father (Baba). The New Testament was a source of this knowledge about God as a deity whose love is as direct as it is personal. In "The Descent of Baba Johane," the immediate followers of the prophet clearly viewed themselves as living witnesses to a story of redemption in which the Bible was invoked. The text reads, "It happened one day that Johane Masowe said, 'I am going to my father…it was his habit that when he went to his Father, he would lose consciousness…"[41] In other words, the image picked by the founder of the Masowe Apostles to explain the popularity of the term Mwari-Baba, is that of God as a father figure. The other Shona patriarchal term used to refer to reinforce the image of God-the-Father is Tenzi, rather like "Lord" in New Testament Greek. In his "calling" or conversion experience, Johane refers to God as Lord when he begins to see that human disobedience and the burden of sin against God is the root cause of human suffering.[42] Then he responded to God's calling by doing the appropriate thing, a course of action found in millions of other conversion stories in Christianity. He asked for the mercy of his Father – or "Tenzi," in the sense of someone who controls a territory and protects the families who live on it. In Daneel's study of the Rozvi, one of up to eight groups of Shona people known through dialects spoken in Zimbabwe. The Rozvi confederacy consisted of loosely affiliated vassal states stretched over a vast territory. Rozvi dominance was not exclusively to do with military superiority, but also the result of the widespread belief that the Shona High God himself had called the Rozvi monarchy into being.[43]

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40 "The Calling of Baba Johane," by Samson Mativera, dated October 1st, 1932, cited in Clive Dillon-Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers: A study of the Masowe Apostles, an indigenous African Religious Movement,* appendix B32 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 145.

41 *Ibid.*

42 "Descent of Baba Johane on Mount Marimba," written by General Secretary, Nairobi (date unknown), cited in Clive Dillon Malone, *The Korsten Basketmakers: A study of the Masowe Apostles, an indigenous African Religious Movement*, appendix B64 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 151.

43 Martinus Daneel, *God of the Matopo Hills: An Essay on the Mwari Cult in Rhodesia* (Hague: Mouton and Co., 1970), 19; Terence O. Ranger, *Aspects of Central African History* (London: Heinemann, 1968), 112–113.

The reference to God as Tenzi, or familial guardian of African lands, endeavors to communicate the Lordship of Christ associated with the return of Christ in the patriarchal culture of the New Testament. In the Standard Shona dictionary produced by the Catholic priest, Fr. Hannan S.J., the term Tenzi designates the proprietor of a *dunhu* (territory) or a patrilineal spirit. This lineage spirit has power to rule, defend, and protect territories from harm.[44] As van der Merwe put it, Mwari among the Shona is concerned with the "welfare of the tribe." Mwari thus protected the life of members of the Shona patrilineage.[45]

When Johane Masowe cries out, "You are the Lord…Have mercy on me Lord," in Shona, he gives meaning to a traditional way of thinking about God as a father figure who created and rules the world with male leaders of lineages making sure that God is obeyed in the Bible and his Shona-speaking target audience at the same time. No wonder Johane Masowe found it easy to travel throughout central Africa, leaving behind members of the wilderness church led by groups of men whose claim to authority was the belief that Mwari is powerful and omnipresent, only this time he was addressing victims of colonial oppression. It became Johane Masowe's personal duty before God to warn people "to seek righteousness if they wished to survive the mighty judgement to befall the earth."[46]

Masowe Apostles continue to turn human suffering into the reason for prayer in a world where disempowered members of a male dominated society were accustomed to express their hope for liberation as male leaders first.[47] For the women who have always attended Masowe prayer meetings as majority believers – and whose own belief in God the Father corresponds more with the concept of a God who loves all his children, and liberates all victims of oppression, male or female, as long as they are poor, sick, and experiencing other misfortunes to do with life in the margins of the global village – male dominance presents a unique challenge. Despite the prevalent use of the metaphor

44 There is a religious dimension to the idea of a "double patriarchy" studied by Elizabeth Schmidt with the history of Zimbabwean society in mind. See Elizabeth Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870–1939* (London: James Currey, 1992), 14–42.

45 Martinus Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches* (Leiden: Mouton Press, 1971), 88–90.

46 *Ibid.,* 151.

47 See Isabel Mukonyora "The dramatization" on Masowe Christology. Johane hints at the belief in God's continuing revelation by sending messengers of God like the prophets, Jesus and Johane Masowe. The idea of a Black Messiah figures in AICs such as the Kimbangu Church, originating in Congo, and Isaiah Shembe, originating in South Africa, comes from similar cultural roots with a lived understanding of God the Father being revealed among humans.

for God as the Father and men as official leaders of the church of the wilderness since the beginning, we should make a note of the sacred role of women at this stage. Women sing the "verses" as a medium of communicating a perception of God inspired by a much more radical quest for liberation for all children of God.

3 God the Father through Women's Eyes

As indicated above, women are not passive recipients of knowledge about God during prayer. The sexist behavior of the male preachers oftentimes leads women to interrupt sermons by singing choruses that draw attention to ways of thinking about God the Father differently, as a deity of love, peace, justice, and healing on earth. Anyone who is attracted to the wilderness in the hope of experiencing divine compassion through the gift of healing and the treatment of the children of God as equal will understand the need for more research on the lived understanding of the Masowe concept of God. As the majority members of the Masowe Apostles, without whom there would be no vibrant wilderness church, Shona women and children should be viewed as important agents of knowledge, especially when it comes to rituals at which men are mostly, if not always, outnumbered by women and the children they bring to the wilderness.

In this context of lived Christianity, we do not have to read St. Augustine to be sure that Masowe Apostles have a correct understanding of Western orthodox doctrine. The need to diversify the language that references God is made apparent in all sorts of ways, starting with the fact that women have always had an embodied knowledge to do with traditional roles in which giving birth was a symbolic act which corresponded with God-Mwari as the source of life on Mother Earth. In the Shona past, it was women who farmed the land and acted as stewards of the earth as well as cared for children and the homestead. Although men viewed themselves as the lineage heads of the family and owners of the land, they were taking advantage of women.[48] for men to bear in mind when exercising authority and making claims about representing God on earth. Without male preachers going out of their way to add the word Baba to the name of God (Mwari) this chapter would begin here, with ideas of an ecological deity who gives hope to all believers in God of the wilderness. After all, the "verses" aside, the term "masowe" does not merely describe harsh or wild surroundings; it also refers to sacred sites for prayer. Rather than being places

48 Schmidt, *Peasants*, 14–42.

that might fill one with dread, Masowe Christians count on *Mweya Mutsvene* (the Holy Spirit) to make sites for prayer sacred.[49] It is even taboo to question any woman who decides to start singing the "verses" in the middle of sermons. Even though the goal is a positive one of encouraging preachers to address questions about life on earth in moving ways, male preachers must stop to let the Holy Spirit do its work of revealing the nature of Mwari-Baba as the God of love for all the vanquished.[50]

In short, the lived concept of God of the wilderness examined above is incomplete. The God in question is simultaneously revealed by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit does not discriminate between the children of God, including real children brought to the wilderness for prayer.[51] To complete this discussion about the Masowe concept of God, therefore, one must bear in mind the fact that women and children far outnumber men at most if not all Masowe Apostles' gatherings in the wilderness. This is despite the official roles of men and the official language about God found in *The Gospel of God*, and witnessed during fieldwork. Masowe ritual activities are not the same without large numbers of women and children. Indeed, most of the sins described are blamed on women – they are deprived creatures, lacking a sense of morality. As McCulloch found in his study of archival documents written by European missionaries who supported the colonial treatment of Shona women as subordinates of their fathers, husbands and uncles, the best place for the Shona woman was at the rural margins of the country with missionaries providing education on how to develop good morals and obedience.[52] In other words, Mwari-Baba, as seen through women's eyes, raises questions about the nature of the Trinity in Christian God-talk. Insofar as this is a discussion of a system of symbolic actions describing the fundamental theological ideas of the Masowe Apostles shaped by the *Gospel of God,* God of the oppressed is coterminous with the aura of factuality surrounding God as the Father of Jesus as represented by the female adherents of the faith at prayer. Acting through what Masowe women believe to be the power of Holy Spirit to discern the will of God, the potential for the development of a distinctively African eco-theology is possible.[53]

49 "National Public Radio interview with Krista Tippett."

50 Some songs are happy while others are a way of giving sound advice otherwise lost in dramatizations of male authority.

51 See book cover of Mukonyora, *Wandering.*

52 Jock McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2001), 128–166.

53 Mukonyora, "The dramatization." This article is about Johane's dramatization of the life and death of Jesus and the cultural significance of making salvation a matter of having the same hope for salvation as Christ had at his death. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a

Moreover, the *Gospel of God* recognizes and makes it an official role of women to represent the divine wisdom of the Logos.[54] Not only did a woman communicate Mwari's wishes as his *Izwi* (Voice) in the Shona past, the most popular name used during prayers for rain, good harvest, and the fertility of women as mothers and farmers in charge of agrarian household economies, was *Mbuya* (the Great Mother). Even more interesting to note here, in terms of the Shona background to the writing of the *Gospel of God*, is the ritual function of women devotees as symbols of the living voice of Mwari. Hence, another popular name for Mwari is *Dzivaguru* (the Great Pool), a way of describing a shrine for Mwari as the great womb of creation from which emanates the *Izwi* of God. Hence, one finds to this day a shrine located inside a cave in Matonjeni containing a pool which is a symbol of the Divine Mother' womb, with amniotic fluids that are the *fons et origo* of life.[55] All this demonstrates that Shona people already have terms with which to translate the idea of the Holy Spirit from the *paraclete* (Greek for helper or advocate) into a language about *zvakazarurwa* (the revealed word) in which prevail feelings of awe and total dependence on a transcendent God, source of all life in the universe.[56]

Clearly the term Mwari-Baba does not fully capture the meaning of God of the wilderness until we consider the large numbers of women who attend prayer meetings confident they have the paraclete on their side. The point made earlier that Masowe Apostles take us beyond God the Father to another realm of life and to direct experiences of the Holy Spirit certainly furthers our understanding of the Masowe concept of God once we are prepared to test Clifford's definition of religion with facts about the ritual behavior of Masowe Apostles.

It seems appropriate to end this discussion with proof of the special interest taken in the Scriptures of knowledge that comes direct from God. Revelation 7:9–10 reads,

> After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and

problem for Masowe Apostles, unless Western theologians insist on making it an intellectual matter instead of a formula of faith.

54 Daneel, *God of the Matopos Hills*.

55 Herbert Aschwanden, *Karanga Mythology* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1989), 13. This is an excellent book to read on Shona ideas about God-Mwari as male, female and, simply transcendental beauty.

56 Being immersed in mother nature with questions about the meaning and purpose of life on earth as embodied knowledge goes well with the lived understanding of God.

> were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'

As a participant observer of a Masowe theological discourse whose participants always dressed in white robes, sat shoeless on the dusty ground, and treated the sacred wilderness as a place to share fundamental beliefs, it was interesting to meet so many strong women prepared to uphold justice at prayer meetings. In fact, it would be a mistake to end this chapter with what the male preachers say about God. The idea of God perceived as an ecological deity whose presence is given expression by women at ritual thus completes the dramatization, performance, and embodiment of knowledge among Masowe Apostles.

Finally, it seems appropriate to acknowledge Richard Werbner's pioneering work on Masowe symbolism. Werbner argued ten years before my gendered encounter with Masowe Apostles that they leave us with "an argument of images: From Zion to the Wilderness in African cultures."[57] Among the earliest Christians, of whom were many women, the latter sought liberation from poverty, disease, and general misfortunes that came with oppression in the patriarchal world of the Greco-Romans. The Roman Empire created a spiritual crisis by seizing the "The Promised Land" or Zion. As stated above, the spread of Christianity in colonial Africa led to the rise of churches responding to another spiritual crisis, this one caused by social change and acts of environmental degradation associated with industrializing society in Africa. When it comes to approaching theology in terms which are anthropological and based in oral traditions, Masowe Apostles present an intellectual challenge for anyone who wishes to talk about Global Christianity and develop theological ideas to match its contemporary growth. Given the continued spread of the Masowe Apostles in Africa, it is time to draw attention to an environment largely destroyed by industrialization, urbanization, and the abuse of people, land, animals, and plants to create a vast modern Africa whose God of the wilderness calls for further investigation, with special attention to environmental ethics.[58]

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57 Richard Werbner, "The argument of Images: From Zion to the Wilderness in African churches," in *Theoretical Exploration in African Religion*, eds. W. van Binsbergen and M. Schoffeleers (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, Plc. 1985), 253–286.

58 Isabel Mukonyora, "An African Gospel." As I prepare a monograph of Masowe Systematic Theology for Climate Justice, I have been looking for the opportunity for publications like this one.

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CHAPTER 14

Breathing Pneumatology: Spirit, Wind, and Atmosphere in a Zulu Zionist Congregation

Rune Flikke

1 Introduction

This chapter is based on three years of ethnographic fieldwork among a group of Zulu Zionists in an urban township in the vicinity of Durban, South Africa. The Zionists are part of the African Independent Churches (AICs) and were for the largest part of the twentieth century the most rapidly growing religious movement in Africa south of the Sahara.[1]

There has long been a fruitful academic exchange between theologians and anthropologists in research into Zulu Zionism and the AICs. Academic studies of the movement first gained momentum through the work of the Swedish missionary Bengt Sundkler.[2] His publications were ethnographically rich, detailed, culturally embedded, and imbued with a sound historical awareness, thereby opening up a sociological understanding of the Zionist movement. Sundkler's work was followed by a series of publications in missiology and anthropology which largely pursued his lead, interpreting the rise of the AICs as a reaction towards the paternalism, racism, and general exclusion experienced in the larger colonial society as well as the mission churches.[3] Several of these

1 David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968).

2 Eg. Bengt G.M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*. Second, expanded ed. (London, Lutterworth Press, 1948); Bengt G.M. Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); See also Bengt G.M. Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, ed. C. Steed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

3 Eg. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal*; Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African people* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Marthinus L. Daneel, *Zionism and Faith-Healing in Rhodesia* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1970); Jim P. Kiernan, *The Production and Management of Therapeutic Power in Zionist Churches Within a Zulu City*, *Studies in African Health and Medicine, 4*. (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); G.C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study*. (Grand Rapids. MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968); G.C. Oosthuizen (ed.) *Religion Alive: Studies in the New Movements and Indigenous Churches in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986); H.W. Turner, *History of an*

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authors had a theological background and became increasingly sensitive towards the biblical foundation of the AICs. A case in point is the theologian G.C. Oosthuizen, who first introduced me to the field in South Africa. In *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study,*[4] he depicted a large number of the AICs as syncretistic movements which should be viewed as "new religions" built on magic, where the prophets took the place of God. Eighteen years later he edited the book *Religion Alive*, where he described the AICs in respectful terms as a valid response to the Bible that theologians should value and learn from as fellow Christians.[5] Oosthuizen's later work seems to have been accepted by most theologians publishing on the topic.

The Pentecostal theologian Allan Anderson,[6] for instance, has pointed out that theology, and in particular pneumatology – the doctrine of the spirit – has been a major source of tension between mission-based churches and the AICs, since the latter have tended to emphasize the work of the spirit to the exclusion of other doctrines.[7] Another site of contention was that the work of the spirit was not an element of formal theology in the AICs but remained part of the religious practices and experiences.[8] In his work on the Masowe Apostolics – the "Christians who don't read the Bible" – Engelke[9] has convincingly argued that the imposition of colonial rule was largely attached to issues of literacy, and hence the movement was an expression of political resistance.[10] The Bible, a Masowe pastor said, was written by "men with black hearts [and] is a record of what the Europeans want others to know."[11] Despite these theological tensions Anderson has argued that practices related to the Holy Spirit largely overlap in the AIC and Pentecostal movements. This, he claimed,

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African Independent Church: The Church of the Lord (*Aladura*) Vol. I. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); H.W. Turner, *History of an African Independent Church: The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord* (*Aladura*) Vol. II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

4 Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa.*

5 Oosthuizen, ed., *Religion alive.*

6 Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, Allan. 1991).

7 See also J.P. Mostert, "Men of 'the Spirit' or 'of spirit'?" in *Religion Alive: Studies in the New Movements and Indigenous Churches in Southern Africa,* ed. G.C. Oosthuizen (Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986).

8 See Turner, *African Independent Church, vol II,* 338.

9 Engelke, *A problem of presence: Beyond scripture in an African Church.* Edited by J. Robbins, *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

10 See Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa, vol. I* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), Chap. 6; Comaroff, *Body of Power.*

11 Matthew Engelke, Text and performance in an African church: The Book, "live and direct." *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 1, 2004, 78.

constitutes a common biblical foundation, is not related to the AICs "pre-Christian past" and begs for mutual respect and dialogue.[12] Though I think Anderson's approach and position in relation to the AICs is laudable, I partly disagree with the latter point, emphasizing in this chapter the continuities that exist between my Zulu Zionist informants' spiritual experiences and precolonial Zulu ritual practices. I use this perspective to suggest that pneumatology can be viewed as a result of a long-standing ritual relationship between Zulu people and what anthropologist Tim Ingold has coined the "weather-world."[13]

Before I proceed, a brief outline of the historical context of the AICs and the Zionist movement is required. I particularly focus on South Africa and the Zulu people, as this uncovers the historical foundation for the particular forms taken by encounters with spirits during my fieldwork.

2 The Historical Backdrop

Although the first secessions from the mission churches occurred on the Eastern Cape during the 1880s,[14] Barrett concluded that more than 50 per cent of the AICs originated among the Zulu people.[15] These congregations had two sources: they either seceded from mission churches or emerged under African leadership from outside the churches, drawing on African traditions entering into dialogue with Christianity.[16] The central role of the Zulu in these movements is often accounted for by referring to the sufferings and social changes imposed on the Zulu people in particular.[17]

The first decades of intense mission work in South Africa occurred in a century plagued by war, turbulence, and great social upheaval. It started with "the time of great unrest" (*mfecane*), which sent shock waves through southern Africa in response to Shaka Zulu's warfare.[18] These violent demographic changes

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For a noticeable exception see Joel Cabrita for an account of the *Ibandla lama Nazaretha,* often referred to as the Shembe Church Joel Cabrita, *Text and Authority in the South African Nazaretha Church*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

12 Anderson, *Moya,* 6.

13 Tim Ingold, "Footprints through the weather-world: walking, breathing, knowing," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16, (2010), 121–139.

14 Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets,* 38.

15 Barrett, *Schism and Renewal*; See Daneel, *Zionism and Faith-Healing,* 9.

16 Barrett, *Schism and Renewal,* 110.

17 *Ibid.*, 50.

18 See John Laband, *Rope of Sand: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1995); Stephen Taylor, *Shaka's Children: A History of the Zulu People* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994).

were further stimulated by "the great trek" in 1836, when the Boers, tired of interference from the British administration, moved inland and settled in the Orange Freestate and Transvaal, spurring further conflicts as they displaced African settlements from the areas they occupied. This was followed by the great mineral discoveries in the 1870s, which, among other things, resulted in the implementation of new tax laws in order to force African men into wage labor in the mines.

An independent Zululand had remained a constant factor of distress for the British settlers. The "excuse" to invade Zululand came after the crowning of King Cetshwayo in 1873, when he started a nationalistic policy of building up the army and a more centralized state, which restricted British interests.[19] Several nineteenth-century missionaries considered the national pride of the Zulu a major obstacle to conversion and thus have been regarded as another factor behind the British invasion in 1879. This was resplendently exposed in an article in a Norwegian Missionary bulletin which noted: "To human eyes it looks as if this people only through material and political humiliation can be brought to their knees and taught to seek something higher."[20]

A year after the invasion the Zulu kingdom crumbled in the battle of Ulundi. Zululand was divided into thirteen provinces ruled by chiefs appointed by the British administrators and, in 1897, fully incorporated into the British colony. Meanwhile, in the years following the Zulu war, the British were in continuous friction with the Boer republics. Foreign investors and traders moved into the mining areas and, as the struggle for control of the riches escalated, violence increased. Conflict with the Boers erupted yet again in 1899 when the Boer army attacked the Cape Colony, a war that ended with British victory in 1902. These wars inflicted great hardship on the African communities, killing a large percentage of the population and breaking descent and kinship ties as the people were uprooted and placed in camps scattered throughout the Natal midlands and Transvaal, without concern for lineage or clan affiliation.

With the introduction of The Natives Land Act of 1913 the African communities were effectively barred from owning land and sustaining a viable household. This caused further frustration and increased suffering in the African communities and the AICs emerged as a venue open for resistance towards

19 Jeff Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand 1879–1884*, 1994 ed. (Pietermaritzburg: The University of Natal Press, 1975).

20 *Norsk Misjons Tidene* Feb. 1860, in Jarle Simensen, "Religious change as transaction: the Norwegian mission to Zululand, South Africa 1850–1906," in *Religion, Development and African Identity*, ed. K.H. Petersen (Uppsala, Sweden: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies: 1987), 89.

colonial rule.[21] Sundkler clearly stated: "the separatist church problem is a corollary of the land problem," and moved on to quote an oft heard statement among African agitators: "at first we had the land, and you had the Bible. Now we have the Bible, and you have the land."[22] There seems to be complete agreement among commentators that the exponential growth of the AICs started in the aftermath of the Natives Land Act. These developments had a particular bearing on the clan system. The clan was not only a central aspect of individual identity but harbored a particular significance for notions of health and well-being. As I will now argue, a good, prosperous life depended on the unity of the clan.

After the Native Land Act was implemented the once so proud Zulu, with their identity firmly entrenched in their famous clans and agnatic lineages, were uprooted and placed in an environment where their traditional network was weakened, cut off, or irrelevant to the social reality they experienced. This situation was aggravated by the fact that the missionaries had established a clear dividing line between Christians (*amakholwa*), and traditionalists (*amakhonza*).[23] The division between these two camps in Zulu society was strict and it split the clans, with little contact across the religious divide.[24] The mission practices ensured that conversion to Christianity implied a break with the non-Christian (*khonza*) fraction of the clan, a split that continued to affect the lives of my informants negatively in contemporary South Africa.

In order to illustrate this, I turn to my informant Thandi, who had some difficult and life-changing encounters with winds that were experienced as spiritual interventions in her life. I then moor these encounters in a historical understanding of ritual practices in which the split between the Christian and traditionalist Zulu society emerges as a source of misfortune.[25] Finally I argue

21 Comaroff, *Body of Power.*

22 Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets, 33.*

23 Simensen, *Norsk Misjon og Afrikanske Samfunn,* 91–95; See also Rune Flikke, "Embodying the occult: religious experiences and ritual practices in urban Zulu Zionism," in *The Power of the Occult in Modern Africa: Continuity and Innovation in the Renewal of African Cosmologies*, ed. J. Kiernan (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), 214. The literature mostly refers to the traditionalists as the *amakholwa*, whereas they were usually referred to as the *amabhiwa* during my fieldwork.

24 Absolom Vilakazi, *Zulu Transformations: A study of the Dynamics of Social Change*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1965).

25 Though this was the case in traditional Zulu practices (e.g. Axel Ivar Berglund, *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolism* (London and Cape Town: C. Hurst and Co. Ltd, 1989), 260) the attribution of suffering to the work of ancestral spirits seems to vary within the AICs. In a study of Zionists close to my own field site, Jim Kiernan (Kiernan, *Therapeutic Power*) claimed that suffering was usually not ascribed to the work of ancestral spirits but

that an analytical focus on the phenomenological connections between air and spirit can account for Thandi's spiritual experiences.

3 Thandi: Suffering, Winds, and Spirits

I met Thandi through the prophet Themba, who shortly before I started my first fieldwork had founded his own Zionist congregation in order to deal with some personal health problems he described as "asthma and chest pains." As will become apparent below, this was taken as a sign that his traditionalist ancestors wanted to have an influence on his otherwise Western and Christian life-style. Themba's congregation met at his house on Sunday mornings, though the most attended and anticipated service was held the first weekend every month, when we met on Saturday evening for an all-night "commemoration service for the departed."[26] The general picture that emerged from the illness narratives I collected was that the afflictions with which his patients struggled were related to violence, poverty, loneliness, and illnesses, and closely associated with African life in a violent, racist, apartheid state.

These generalized sufferings were spoken of as *umnyama* (darkness), and have strong connotations of illness and suffering. When I asked my informants what someone was suffering from, they would often describe the affliction as *ubumnyama*, a term Themba said was best translated as "walking in darkness." Though he often translated *umnyama* as "bad luck," the term described a state of being where the afflicted literally generated suffering. Thus *ubumnyama* was created by "dark" substances, which caused suffering for those "walking in darkness."[27] It was therefore considered a "being-in-the-world" whereby the afflicted generated problems through their bodily presence.[28] This could be caused by witchcraft or be the result of general environmental pollution, to which I return below.[29]

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to witchcraft. During my fieldwork, both were very common explanatory models. The two were clearly distinguished but I often heard claims that if the ancestral spirits had been properly tended, they would have been able to protect the victim from witchcraft.

26 Rune Flikke, *The Past in the Present: A Semiotic Exploration of Urban Zulu Zionism in Durban, South Africa.* Cand. Polit, The Department and Museum of Anthropology, The University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway, 1994.

27 Flikke, "Embodying the occult" 228f.

28 Otto F. Raum, *The Social Functions of Avoidances and Taboos Among the Zulu*, *Monographien zur Völkerkunde* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), 46off; Flikke, "Embodying the occult."

29 See also Rune Flikke, "Enwinding social theory: Wind and weather in Zulu Zionist sensorial experience," *Social Analysis* 60, no. 3 (2016), 95–111.

I had recently started my first fieldwork when I first met Thandi in Themba's office. She stood out from the rest of the people I had met there. She was elegantly dressed, would always greet me with a handshake, address me in fluent English, and look me squarely in the eyes. For most of my Zulu informants, this was not only rude and disrespectful behavior, but could also be associated with witchcraft since an invading gaze is an indication that you are out to control the recipient. Facing me as a Western man, however, she signaled that she was a sophisticated and liberated African woman who managed to navigate the two worlds. Thandi's education was impacted by the school boycotts that spread at an epidemic rate after the Soweto uprising of June 1976 but what she lacked in formal education, she compensated for through hard work and intelligence. When we were first introduced, she worked in the finance department of a large governmental institution.

Shortly after we met, she mentioned that she had started to abruptly fall asleep a while back. This often occurred at mid-day and she was unable to control it. While asleep she dreamt frightening dreams where she saw people she loved in pools of blood; she dreamt she was safe at home when blood started to seep in under her door and run down the walls of her house. At this time she also struggled with spates of uncontrollable hiccups and yawning. Within pre-colonial Zulu cosmology, these are significant developments. Dreams are messages from the ancestors and violent dreams like these are highly problematic. She therefore contacted a number of traditional healers (*izangoma*), who all told her the same story – somebody was out to harm her and she was in danger. Several claimed it was her mother who was trying to take control of her money because she was jealous of her daughter's success. Apparently, since Thandi had no father, her mother felt Thandi's income rightfully belonged to her until she was properly married. The dreams, she was told, were a sign that her mother was using witchcraft to establish that control.

As I have recounted elsewhere,[30] Thandi experienced a brutal attack when five men forced their way into her home one night to kill her and use parts of her bodily organs in witchcraft remedies in order to transfer her "good luck" to the users.[31] She lost her grip on the world after the attack. She fainted on a regular basis, was afraid to leave her house in the morning, and could not cope at work. It was during this time she contacted Themba. In a few short months he had got Thandi back on her feet and brought back the self-confidence which

30 Rune Flikke, "Thandis historie. Når tid, sted og kropp møtes," *Norsk Antropologisk Tidsskrift* 18, 3–4 (2007), 296–307; Flikke, *Enwinding Social Theory*.

31 See Isak Niehaus, *Witchcraft, Power and Politics: Exploring the Occult in the South African Lowveld*, *Anthropology, Culture and Society* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 66.

was so striking when I first met her. Soon after Themba started the treatment her dreams changed: from containing nightmarish images they were now filled with experiences of flying, wind, and water. One night, she told me, she woke from a dream with a feeling that her chest had opened up between her breasts and shoulder blades. A wind started blowing and created a draft through her upper torso. It throbbed so intensely that she was unable to sleep. She was awake the rest of the night. She added pensively that it had not been windy outside. The next day she was unable to work because of the pain. She immediately connected this experience with something that happened a while later. On this occasion she woke with a feeling she described as being repeatedly hit by a boulder. She bounced up and down in bed while she spoke English as well as in tongues.

I did not collect similar narratives from other informants. However, Thandi's experiences with winds were part of a larger cultural landscape connected to notions of the spirit and hence created no comment or reaction in the congregation beyond people's singling Thandi out as a spiritually gifted person. The literature, however, reveals a number of similar accounts. Sundkler recalled how an informant explained his conversion to Zionism by referring to an experience with a nocturnal wind: "I awoke. A sharp wind blew. I felt that I was full (*ngisuthile*), I was full indeed. I almost burst … I fell down. I threw myself in all directions. My whole body was shaking … I was perspiring and filled with *uMoya*."[32] Furthermore, Themba's services were always accompanied by an endless flow of sneezing, belching, groaning, and whistling sounds that emphasized the unusual and irregular movement of air during periods of the services when the Spirit moved.[33]

In order to understand this particular ritual behavior there is a need to take a closer look at spirits in the Zulu conceptual universe, as well as investigating more closely pre-colonial and traditional ritual practices.

4 Wind, Breath, and Spirit in Zulu Religious Practice

In Zulu cosmology, the person consists of three parts: first, *umzimba*, which is the physical body; second, *isithunzi*, which literally means the "shadow" of an

32 Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets,* 245. *Umoya* usually refers to spirit, wind, or breath. The term will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

33 See B.A. Pauw, *Religion in a Tswana Chiefdom* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 200.

object or person and is the spirit in the living, which forms part of the ancestral spirit (*idlozi*)[34] after death. *Idlozi* is philologically related to *umlozi,* the spirit of a necromancer made audible as a whistling sound and hence associated with winds. The missionary Axel-Ivar Berglund – who was born and raised and then worked in the mission field in Zululand, and spent time as a member of the South African Council of Churches – stated that *isithunzi* is the preferred term for spirit among the Traditionalists.[35] The third term, which is my main concern here, is *umoya*, which refers to spirit, soul, air, wind, and breath.[36] *Umoya* is the vital force of humans and, once it leaves, the body stops breathing and is dead. Then people say "*umphefumelo,* i.e. the air, the breath, or the spirit has left the body and the person is no more."[37] The Catholic missionary A.T. Bryant argued that, historically, *umoya* should only be translated as breath, wind, and air but that the term was also used by early missionaries as a translation for the biblical concept of soul and spirit.[38] Berglund's discussion supports Bryant, claiming that *umoya* most probably was given emphasis by Christian missionaries and hence primarily refers to the Holy Spirit.[39] Though I think this is very likely, I have elsewhere argued that Zulu history indicates a longstanding connection between ritual practices and wind, air, and atmosphere.[40] The translation of *umoya* as spirit would hence make sense in relation to traditional ritual practices. Furthermore, in Themba's congregation the Holy Spirit was specifically referred to as *umoya* ***ongcwele*** (pure and holy).[41] In the following I therefore focus on the continuities between Christian and pre-colonial Zulu cosmology and ritual practice.

In order to stress the common ground between the traditional and Christian notions of the spirit, I will now connect Thandi's encounter with the spiritual realm and winds – *umoya* – to a long-standing ritual relation between the spiritual and the weather-world. David Livingstone's account of his interaction

34 For a more thorough discussion of *idlozi* see Berglund, *Zulu Thought Patterns*, 89ff.

35 *Ibid.*, 85.

36 The KiKongo term *moyo*, translated as "soul" or "life force" by Janzen, see John M. Janzen, *The Quest for Therapy: Medical Pluralism in Lower Zaire* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1978), 179, note 7. It was discussed in the same context as breath (*ibid.*, 175) and dizziness (*ibid.*, 177).

37 Vilakazi, *Zulu Transformations,* 87.

38 A.T. Bryant, *Zulu–English Dictionary* (Pietermaritzburg: Davis, 1905), 392.

39 Berglund, *Zulu Thought Patterns,* 85.

40 Flikke, *Enwinding social theory*.

41 *Cwe* can be translated as "clear," "transparent," or "bright" and has been adopted by the Catholic Church to depict a holy person or saint, see Harriet Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine: An Ethnography of Health and Disease in Nyuswa-Zulu Thought and Practice* (London and New York: Academic Press, 1977), 118f.

with the Kwena rain doctor indicates that the weather has been a point of contention since the first contacts between European missionaries and the populations of southern Africa. In Livingstone's account the rain doctor presented a cosmos in which humans were firmly embedded in the weather-world, possessing the ability to influence, as well as be influenced by, the weather.[42] Similar links between people and the weather-world are also apparent within the contemporary Zionist movement.

4.1 *Air, Wind, Health, and Misfortune*

Vicious thunderstorms are a regular occurrence in KwaZulu-Natal. Lightning is naturally feared for its power to kill, but is also perceived as "heat" from the "Lord-of-the-Sky." It is said to be a result of his anger (*inthukuthelo*) and a physical manifestation of power (*amandla*). Mountains are struck relatively often by lightning and hence become infused with spiritual power from the Lord-of-the-Sky. As I will outline briefly below, environmental pollution, as an aspect of material substance, is both a source of health and disease.[43] The association between mountaintops and lightning ensures that mountaintops are sought out as places of worship, healing, and restoration,[44] yet they are also potentially polluting places due to "tracks" the lightning leaves behind.[45] Therefore ritual places should be approached with caution. Therefore, Themba would only lead us up to the cairn at the highest mountain near his house for the night-long commemoration service for the departed after an elaborate cleansing ritual.

In Zulu cosmology, all substances have metaphysical qualities. As we move through the landscape, some of our substances are shed and left behind and others are picked up.[46] These are the tracks (*umkhondo*) that dogs detect while hunting, a belief that is a cultural trait shared with the neighboring Khoisan.[47] As mentioned above, diseases were mostly spoken of as *umnyama* (darkness)[48] caused by pollution, and whenever people or cattle crossed tracks left by

42 David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London: J. Murray, 1857), 23–25.

43 For a more thorough discussion of this notion of pollution as an aspect of material substances, see Berglund, *Zulu Thought Patterns,* 256ff. Rune Flikke, "Writing 'naturecultures' in Zulu Zionist healing," *Nordic Journal of Science and Technology Studies* 2, 1 (2014) 13f; Raum, *Social Functions of Avoidances*, 46off.

44 Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine,* 25.

45 Vilakazi, *Zulu Transformations,* 24f.

46 Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine,* 24ff.

47 Chris Low, "Khoisan wind: hunting and healing," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (*N.S.*) 13, no. 1 (2007), 75.

48 Flikke, "Embodying the occult," 211ff.

humans or animals associated with *umnyama*, they were exposed to defiling forces that would eventually make them sick unless they were properly cleansed and strengthened through ritual means.[49] The tracks can also float in the air as "threads" that connect people and places.[50] In this case they are spoken of as *imimoya* (plural of *umoya*). *Imimoya* can be inhaled, and if these aerial threads are defiling (*imimoya emibi*) they will pollute and result in disease.[51] These tracks become particularly troublesome in large cities, plagued both by pollution and an abundance of people.[52]

As Janzen has convincingly argued, ritual practices are dominated by affinities across Africa's Bantu speaking populations.[53] In this context it is worth noticing that Monica Wilson gave similar accounts of the close connection between winds, illnesses, and destruction among the Bantu speaking Nyakusa. "The witches," she wrote, "fly by night on their pythons, or 'on the wind.'"[54] In this context, the wind transports the witches and their evil deeds, thereby spreading disease and devastation. The air could also be a medium through which witchcraft (*ubuthakathi*) was spread. The culprit, Adam Ashforth[55] informed us in a study of witchcraft in Soweto, could hold the witchcraft remedies in the palm of his hand and blow the powdered substance into the air to be carried away by the winds, tracking down and striking the victim.

The presence of witches and their evil deeds could not be seen, but rather sensed in the air. The Zulu "witch finders," Krige wrote, "smelled out" [*ukubula*] the witches. As he danced towards the suspects, he "examine[s] them by means of his olfactory sense,"[56] following the threads in the air left behind by the evil doers. The perception of witchcraft as a substance of a negative, forceful, and dark appearance therefore has certain olfactory qualities. This finds a parallel

49 William Beinart and Karen Brown, *African Local Knowledge and Livestock Health: Diseases and Treatments in South Africa* (James Curry: Woodbridge and Rochester, NY, 2013), 210ff.

50 Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement. Knowledge and Description* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 121.

51 Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine,* 24ff.

52 See Flikke, *Enwinding social theory,* 102.

53 John M. Janzen, "Ngoma: Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa," in *Comparative Studies of Health Care Systems and Medical care*, eds. J.M. Janzen and C. Leslie, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).

54 Monica Wilson, *Good Company: A Study of Nyakusa Age-Villages* (Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Press, Inc, 1951), 91.

55 Adam Ashforth, *Madumo: A Man Bewitched* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 126.

56 Eileen Jensen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus*. 1950 ed. (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter. 1936), 225.

in Khoisan notions of both wind and witchcraft,[57] as well as in the coastal areas of East Africa, where Parkin has argued it is because smell "wafts on the wind that it is of crucial importance" in ritual contexts.[58]

Winds carry dust, smoke, and odors, thus weaving perceptible, defiling threads through the atmosphere – threads that connect people and places in ways that cross time and space, potentially bringing humans in touch with substances from places associated with pollution and disease as well as well-being. These atmospheric threads can have detrimental influences on those exposed. Yet not only substances float in the air. Sounds do as well. I have elsewhere accounted for how "bird-talk" and chirping were of spiritual importance.[59] These sounds float in the air, bringing subjects in contact with distant people, places, and spirits. These auditory aspects of air are essential for the creation of a ritual atmosphere.

4.2 *Winds and the Sound of Spirits*

Mountaintops and coastlines, favored locales for Zulu Zionist ritual activities, are open spaces of contact characterized by their exposure to winds. The winds at these locations would interact with the surroundings, speaking as they whistled over the crags or mingled with the sounds of the waves pounding the shoreline, carrying sounds from afar and, at times, drowning the voices of those standing next to you. These whistling sounds permeated the ritual processes, not only a result of interactions between wind and landscapes but also of the spirits taking hold of, and filling the bodies of the participants.

In this context it is interesting that the Nyakyusa word for "witch" (*abalozi*) means "the one that travels with the wind."[60] This is the same word the Zulu use for the practice of divination in which the diviner (*isangoma*) sits in *umsamo*, the place where the ritual artifacts of a household are stored, and interprets whistling sounds coming from *ikhothamo*, the sacred area in the thatching at the back of the hut.[61] These are the voices of the spirits and, in these divination practices, the wind whispering around the huts carries messages from the ancestors. I claim that the same messages from the same source are heard when the wind interacts with the landscape, filling the hollows of the ground with sounds as it blows through valleys, whistling as it grabs hold of mountains and caverns. The presence of the ancestral spirits – in this context referred to as the

57 Low, *Khoisan wind*.

58 David Parkin, "Wafting on the wind: smell and the cycle of spirit and matter," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (*N.S.*) 13, no. 1 (2007), 41.

59 See Flikke, *Enwinding social theory*.

60 Wilson, *Good Company,* 91.

61 See Berglund, *Zulu Thought Patterns,* 119.

abaphansi (those down below)[62] – was also sought in canyons, by waterfalls, and in caves. These are permeable places, openings to the ancestral world below, and filled with the auditory presence of the unseen. These sounds make the places come alive, filling the air with the audible presence of the ancestors.

In a similar vein Terence Ranger has accounted for how the inaccessible Matopos, south-west of Bulawayo, with its "wild granite hills with narrow gorges"[63] was a traditional spiritual center for the oracular cult of the High God, Mwali. Quoting a letter dated 28 March, 1880, he described the area as a place where:

> God lives in a subterranean cave in a labyrinth of rocks … In this cave is a deep, black well, the well of the abyss. From time to time dull sounds like thunder come forth from this well. The faithful … seek information about hidden things, future happenings, the names of people who have bewitched them. … After a few moments of deep silence, they hear, in the midst of the subterranean noises, inarticulate sounds, strange words, broken and incomprehensible.[64]

These relations between the realm of the spirits, landscapes, and movement in the weather-world were not articulated in Themba's congregation other than through testimonies such as that given by Thandi. However, when the spirit (*umoya*) swirled amongst the ritual participants as the wind (*umoya*) interacted with the ritual landscape, those possessed by the spirit would emit whistling sounds, grunt, yawn, and in other ways respond by audible changes in the respiratory functions, demonstrating that bodies, just like landscapes, are permeable and interact with *umoya*. These events were an integral part of the ritual life in Themba's congregation, hence an aspect of the habitus and best elicited as unreflexive bodily engagement with the world which indicated the presence of non-Christian ancestral spirits (*amadlozi*).

I have thus argued that Thandi's spiritual encounters should be interpreted as cultural and historical adaptions to exposure to the weather-world. The question that remains to be addressed is how we can theoretically account for

62 There are many different terms used to refer to ancestral spirits. The most common among my Zionist informants was *abadala* (the old ones). The *amadlozi* discussed above were mostly reserved for non-Christian ancestral spirits.

63 Terence O. Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 11.

64 *Ibid.,* 15.

these connections while outlining some cross-fertilization that might occur when theological and anthropological understandings enter into dialogue.

5 Weather, Perception, and the Open Body

The winds at the mountaintop I climbed with Thandi and the other participants in Themba's congregation the first Sunday of every month howled over the landscape and grasped hold of our bodies. We bent over, flexing our muscles to withstand its force. On these occasions the bodies of the afflicted took shape from the will to resist the power of the wind. The force and lightness of the wind shaped the force of the spirit. The two are not only signified by the same word, *umoya*, they were both haptically present when the winds touched the afflicted at these places of worship, physically challenging them to rise, stand, lean against its force, and move forward. These were bodily motions that, I started to notice, influenced the ritual atmosphere, as the participants were gradually invigorated and filled with the lightness of the air and spirit as we approached the summit.[65] Thandi's particular encounters with the weather-world make further sense once we look at relations between bodies and the winds of *umoya*.

As discussed above, the threads in the air (*immimoya*) reflect a tradition in southern Bantu thought that perceives winds as sources of both disease and health. Bryant noted that for the Zulu, the common cold (*umkuhlane*) was brought by the winds; certain winds were therefore threats to health and avoided when possible.[66] Thandi's accounts brings to the fore a different connection between winds and wellbeing. The winds she encountered caused stabbing pains as her upper body was opened and filled with *umoya*. The fact that the stabbing took the form of wind blowing through her torso suggests a strong connection between wind and the pain. This is confirmed by historical sources; the sensation of a cavity opening in the abdomen is well known and described in the ethnographic studies of the Zulu peoples from the early nineteenth century onward. The pioneer missionary Callaway, for example, accounted for symptoms similar to those Thandi experienced when he referred to a phenomenon called *uthlabo*, from the verb *ukuhlaba* (to stab). He wrote:

65 See Gaston Bachelard, *Air and dreams: an essay on the imagination of movement*. First French edition, 1943 ed, *The Ballard Translations* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Institute Publications, 1988), 156.

66 A.T. Bryant, *Zulu Medicine and Medicine-Men*, reprint, 1983 ed. (Cape Town: Centaur, 1983);. Cabrita, *Text and Authority,* 17.

> Uthlabo is known by causing a sensation of perforation of the side; and the man says, 'I have pain under the armpit, beneath the shoulder blade, in my side, in the flesh. It causes the feeling as if there was a hole there; the pain passes through my body to each side.'[67]

This was an illness that could have a natural cause and be treated with the traditional herbal medicine *umuthi*. However, if it persisted after treatment, the ancestral spirits were causing it by "walking in the person,"[68] a sign that the person had a call to become a diviner. In light of the above account of Thandi's experiences it becomes apparent why she had a central position as a prayer lady in the church. Callaway further informed us that the successful treatment of *uthlabo* would make the illness diminish because "his people [ancestors] are in him. They wish him to dream."[69] Dreams are the primary way of communicating with the ancestral spirits and – since protection and guidance from the ancestors is essential for a good and prosperous life – of vital importance. Furthermore, dreams are directly connected to pains in the shoulders and upper body, since these spots are the places where the ancestors can make themselves felt.[70]

The stabbing nature of Thandi's encounters with winds was also the result of being compromised and opened by metaphysical forces that merged her fate with the metaphysical qualities of the substances the winds carried. Despite the pain, her experiences were positive; winds entering through the chest indicate positive ancestral intervention. Pain in the chest and shoulder blades is a sign of ancestral presence in the afflicted since the chest and upper back is "the place they occupy in a man."[71] These experiences were accompanied by vivid dreams and water, which were associated with the flight and movement of the spirits and cleansing properties of water.

I am suggesting that it is not enough to approach these phenomena as symbols and cultural thought-patterns, but, rather, that they are haptic engagements with the weather-world and need to be approached as ontologies. However, that raises the question of how culturally specific historical developments have influenced our engagements with the weather-world.[72]

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67 Henry Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulus*, Africana Collectanea Volume XXXV, facsimile reprint, 1970 ed. (Pietermaritzburg: Davis and Sons, 1868), 268.

68 *Ibid.*

69 *Ibid*., 270.

70 Berglund, *Zulu Thought Patterns,* 98.

71 *Ibid.,* 115.

72 See Oliver J.T. Harris, John Robb, and Sarah Tarlow, "The body in the age of knowledge," in *The body in history: Europe from the Palaeolithic to the future,* eds. J. Robb and O.J.T. Harris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 167.

Tim Ingold is one prominent social theorist who has pondered why weather has been so understudied.[73] The reason for this lack of analytical investigation, he argues, is that since Descartes the Western world has increasingly conceived of life as existing on the external surface of the globe, thus turning humans into "exhabitants" who are composites of body and mind, residing in a world of matter and a world of ideas respectively.[74] In this world of increasingly separate and labeled objects and subjects, the ground under our feet became the source of stability and the material subsistence requirement for life, while the atmosphere retreated to become a passive backdrop against which mobility, and olfactory, visual, and auditory perception occurred. In this modernist understanding of nature, the surface of the landscape marks the limit of materiality and the air is for the most part conceived of as immaterial – an empty space that enables the interaction between human subjects and material objects.[75] In short, we have an ontology that prioritizes surface over medium, and thus misrepresent the intermingled relationship between bodies and the air.

Ingold suggests that we should turn this ontology on its head and treat the world as consisting of earthly substances and an aerial medium in which we are immersed.[76] Thus, rather than taking the landscape as the surface on which human activities are played out, we should view weather and the earth's atmosphere as the central medium through which most human actions occur. This reversal creates a world where human life, rather than being founded on solid, stable earth, emerges as spun on "a fragile ephemeral raft,"[77] thereby tying human experience closer to fluidity, flux, transformations, and transience, which indeed are at the core of spiritual experiences. As such, the ontological reversal Ingold suggested promises to place flux, emergence, and change in the midst of social theory, a course which fits well with the fact that air is the foundation of our existence. Without air and breath there is no life. In line with Ingold's argument, we could therefore say with Robert Chapigny that, "air is breathing rather than what a body breathes."[78]

The weather-world is hence the medium through which humans perceptually engage with the external world and thus has the capacity to influence

73 E.g. Tim Ingold, "The eye of the storm: visual perception and the weather," *Visual Studies* 20, no. 2 (2005), 97–104; Tim Ingold, "Earth, sky, wind, and weather," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (*N.S.*) 13, no. 1 (2007), 19–38; Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement. Knowledge and Description.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), Part 3.

74 Ingold, *Being Alive,* 116.

75 Ingold, *Eye of the Storm,* 103.

76 Ingold, *Being Alive,*116.

77 Ingold, *Eye of the Storm*, 103.

78 Bachelard, *Air and dreams*, ix.

perception of, and engagements with, the world as emergent process. Air then, is inseparable from life and consubstantial with the sensing body as our "setting in relation to the world."[79] Consequently the weather-world has the capacity to "affect the whole of consciousness."[80] The "lightness" and "thinness" of air is the essence of life that enables movement.

Within this interpretive framework Thandi's oneiric flights are clearly joyful dreams of lightness, freedom, new possibilities, upliftment, and growth.[81] They were encounters that literally "enwinded" her, reinstating her as an acting subject in charge of her own destiny.

6 *Umoya* and Life in the Weather-world

In Zulu culture the ancestral spirits are venerated through small everyday practices as well as through more elaborate ritual sacrifices.[82] They are considered to be omnipresent and, as the elders of the clan, they have influence over their descendants. The ancestral spirits have kept their way of life and personal traits, and therefore appreciate being shown respect by being served their favorite food and having their favorite hymns sung during the altar service (*ilathi*) conducted at most ritual gatherings. As mentioned above, afflictions were commonly and explicitly taken to be signs that traditional ancestral spirits were objecting to a Christian life style. Such expressions of anger (*inthukuthelo*) were considered to be acceptable ways on the part of both God and ancestral spirits of responding to wrong-doing,[83] and a central tenet in most ritual activities I encountered during my fieldwork. Themba's healing rituals aimed at accommodating both Christian and non-Christian ancestral spirits and showing the latter respect through the adaptation and adoption of some of their ritual practices as well as idiosyncratic traits.

Though the literature points out that the roots of Zulu Zionism are to be found in the Pentecostal movement,[84] Themba, Thandi, and the large majority of the regular attendants at Themba's church services came from mission churches which sanctioned involvement with ancestral spirits. The result was that the historical split between the *kholwa* and the *khonza* surfaced as an

79 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans C. Smith, English translation, 1962 ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 303.

80 *Ibid,*. 136.

81 See Bachelard, *Air and dreams*, 33f.

82 E.g. Raum, *Social Functions of Avoidances*.

83 Berglund, *Zulu Thought Patterns*, 248ff.

84 Anderson, *Moya*; Sundkler, *Zulu Zion.*

explanatory source whenever my informants experienced a serious or prolonged period of illness and misfortune. Thandi repeatedly said that she was ambiguous about Zionism because it was laborious, time consuming, and costly. She said that she came to Themba and the Zionists to be healed through a ritual process whose aim was to mend the rift between the *amakholwa* and *amakhonza* and hence restore the unity of the clan as the source of a good and prosperous life. Once that was achieved, she hoped to return to the Anglican Church and what she often expressed as a "modern lifestyle." One final story will illustrate my point.

Mrs Xaba was a Christian healer following in the footsteps of her Christian grandfather, also a healer. After years of successful practice, she started to experience afflictions which signified an unbalanced relation with traditional spiritual powers. Themba brought Mrs Xaba through a cleansing ritual and held an *ilathi* service for her. She responded to the treatment by belching, groaning, and sneezing, which Themba interpreted as an indication of disharmony between the spiritual influence of the *amakhonza* and *amakholwa*, because he conceived it to be a traditional response to a Christian healing process. In an effort to recreate the harmony, Themba told her to go through an *amagobongo*[85] process to "balance" the traditional influences with the Christian, thus catering for the non-Christian ancestral spirits who were the source of her difficulties. Before she finished the process, however, her Christian grandfather – the most powerful of the ancestors – appeared in a dream telling her to stop the *amagobongo* process, which she did. A while later she received yet another dream where she saw herself walking along the road with a Bible under her arm. She was followed by three men of whom one was dressed as a traditional diviner, *isangoma*, whereas the other two were dressed in suits which, Themba emphasized, signified their Christian belonging. She started preaching to these men as they walked. Then she heard the men in suits say, "We have given her this power. She is powerful, so we must follow her." A lively discussion between the two men in suits and the *isangoma* followed. Then, all of a sudden, the *isangoma* was wearing a suit as well.

Themba said the interpretation was obvious. The *isangoma* had been converted in the hereafter through the ritual persuasion and sacrifices which asked him to accept his child's Christian life style and healing practice. He further emphasized that the spiritual power of Mrs Xaba, which now incorporated that of the converted *isangoma*, was even more potent than before because the traditional power had been redirected into the "Christian stream." This

85 *Amagobongo* is a traditional ritual process, which received its name from the calabashes used to mix herbal medicine *umuthi*. The aim of the process is to strengthen the traditional spiritual power in a person.

would be very helpful in her treatment of people with spiritual problems that had a traditional root, because the traditional knowledge and the spiritual power of the converted *isangoma* were now integrated into her Christian healing. Subsequent to this dream, Mrs Xaba again pursued her Christian healing without encountering further disharmony.

7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that mission history is essential to understanding the growth of the AICs in general, and the contemporary ritual dynamics within the South African Zulu Zionist movement in particular. The mission practice of sanctioning contact between the *kholwa* and *khonza* lay at the core of the illness narratives I collected over the three years I worked with Themba. When poverty, urban violence, and disease threatened the wellbeing of my informants, the lack of unity within the clan surfaced as a perpetual source of worry. The appeal of the Zionist movement is to be found in this historical gap. As the case with Mrs Xaba illustrates, the disputes between Christian and non-Christian ancestral spirits were still experienced as a barrier to the creation of the harmony conceived to be essential for the establishment of a good, prosperous life. Only after Mrs Xaba negotiated a ritual space where her dual heritage was recognized and her traditional ancestor accepted her Christian way of life was her health restored, allowing her to continue her Christian healing practice while also recognizing her Zulu heritage. In light of this outcome and those similar to it I claim that the spiritual encounters we witness in the Zionist movement should be approached through culturally and historically grounded studies.

In the southern Bantu cultures, where elders are respected and the ancestral spirits provide guidance and protection for the living, the rift created between the *kholwa* and *khonza* constitutes an existential insecurity, although it has been a central concern for me to argue that this understanding is not enough to account for the social dynamic of the vibrant Zionist churches. Thandi considered herself to be an Anglican, and she wanted to return to the Anglican Church. Her participation in Themba's congregation was not primarily to be understood as a question of faith but, rather, as a way to come to terms with her somatic responses to the traumatic attack. Her suffering brought her in contact with winds that surprised her. Her body was literally "enwinded" in ways that paved the route to healing and restoration.[86] We therefore need to account theoretically for the fact that the body constitutes a surface that

86 See Flikke, "Embodying the occult."

continuously interacts with the atmosphere that surrounds us and, in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, constitutes a setting in relation to the weather-world.

I approached this by first outlining historical material that revealed an intimate relation between winds and the landscape. Places where the interaction between wind and landscape has come to life have a long-standing significance in the ritual practices of southern Bantu peoples and their engagements with the spirit world. The winds touching the surfaces of the landscape created haptic and auditory relations with the realm of the ancestral spirits. Juxtaposing these practices with current Zionist practices, I suggest that we have a lot to gain from theoretically approaching the human body as a surface that is shaped in its interaction with the weather-world. By taking this ontological aspect of human life seriously, Thandi's case illustrates a profound aspect of human sensory engagement with the weather-world. The ephemeral touch of the wind, the haptic and auditory presence through the rituals, and the human inability to contain and control these forces are potentially spiritual and deeply existential experiences.

The winds Thandi encountered not only made the landscape come alive with sounds that were interpreted as messages from the spirits, they also physically blew through her body, as through the caverns and caves of the landscape, filling her with pain, but also enough life to counter the negative effects of the violent attack she and her family had undergone. It was an emotionally charged, restorative, and life changing experience which put her back on her feet after a highly traumatic event. This ability to engage practically with the predicaments of African life in a society that is still experienced as racist and exploitative by a large proportion of its members is essential for the appeal this movement has, even for individuals like Thandi, whose upward mobility is a product of her intelligence and hard work.

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CHAPTER 15

Gendered Narratives of Illness and Healing: Experiences of Spirit Possession in a Charismatic Church Community in Tanzania

Lotta Gammelin

Church services at the Gospel Miracle Church for All People (GMCL)[1] follow a dramatic pattern that is always very similar: the culmination point comes after the sermon and offering with the healing session in which women lost in spirit trances become the focus of the congregation's attention. Usually they scream, resist, and try to escape, and several people are required to hold them down and still during the loud and vivid intercession prayers and laying on of hands. As the prayers commence, and Prophet Mpanji, leader and founder of this community, encourages people to join him in prayer and spiritual warfare (*vita vya kiroho*), female choir members and pastors wrap large pieces of cloth around their waists to protect their clothing. It is a practical act, since healing prayers are physical and messy. The patients roll around on the mud floor and as the holy water is thrown on them sludge builds up that covers their clothes and bodies and also spatters the prayer servants for whom assisting in the healing session is physically demanding. Dressing for a prayer session is also a strongly symbolic action: they are entering a war on behalf of their sisters who are forced to live with malicious spirits and long for redemption. Meanwhile the congregation is invited to join communal prayer for the spirit possessed, as well as being urged to destroy evil forces in their own lives. More than that, they are also spectators whose fascination for the on-going drama is obvious and who watch events with fervent intensity. When spirit possession becomes public it invites "contemplation, interrogation, identification, and edification for those around them", as Lambek writes.[2]

1 Empirical data for this chapter was gathered during a total of eight months of fieldwork in Mbeya in 2013 and 2014. I choose to use the abbreviation GMCL as it is used by the community in question. All the names of the informants are pseudonyms apart from Prophet Mpanji's.

2 Michael Lambek, "Rheumatic irony: Questions of agency and self-deception as refracted through the art of living with spirits," *Social Analysis* 47, no. 2 (2003): 41.

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1 Introduction

The GMCL is a locally founded church community situated in the city of Mbeya, Southern Tanzania, in the vicinity of the Zambia-Malawi border. The GMCL has, during its decade-long existence, grown from a small prayer group meeting in a private home into an established and locally well-known Christian community that attracts around 500 adults to its Sunday services. Healing prayers that concentrate on driving away spirits are part of every worship service and are, for many believers, the main reason for joining this community. This chapter is based on interviews conducted with female members of the GMCL, and their narratives of falling ill and healing; it examines spirit possession that takes place in a Charismatic Christian community by paying attention, not primarily to the spirit trance, but to the ways in which people who live with spirit possession describe and explain their lives.

The general discourse on illness in the GMCL is strikingly gendered; in healing sessions almost all the sick, or *wagonjwa* as they are called by the community, who experience spirit trances are mostly women in their reproductive years, although little girls and older women were also prayed over on occasion. During more than eight months of fieldwork I only saw a few exceptions to this rule when teenage boys and older men were spirit possessed and dragged to the front. Is it the case that masculinity provides protection from the attacks of the spirit world whereas femininity makes one vulnerable? Certainly, as this chapter discusses, possession and its healing seem to have a strong link to fertility, sexuality, and reproduction – not that there is anything unique about spirit possession as a gendered phenomenon; on the contrary, most spirit possession cases reported in research are in some way gender specific.[3] It is a shared belief in the GMCL that men can also be harmed by the spirits and made ill by them; their illness, however, seems to follow a different pattern that lacks the aspect of trance: the unconscious state of being taken over by the spirits. Furthermore, men's involvement with the spirits seems to be less connected with sexuality. For women who seek help from the GMCL, sexuality is strongly present in their narratives of how they perceive their illness, healing, and spirit interference in their daily lives. These stories illustrate how illness and gender are intertwined in this community: How do women explain their

3 David Gordon, *Invisible Agents. Spirits in Central African History* (Ohio: University Press, 2012) Kindle Edition, loc 401; Janice Boddy, "Spirit possession revisited. Beyond Instrumentality," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23 (1994): 407–434; Heike Behrend and Ute Luigi, "Introduction," in *Spirit Possession. Modernity & Power in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), xiii–xxii.

experiences of falling ill due to interaction with the spirit world? What is the nature of the discourse on sexuality, agency, and gender roles in society that is being created by these stories?

All the interviews I conducted with lay Christians and female pastors[4] contained a common theme: when I asked to hear their life stories I was told a narrative of falling ill and being attacked by the spirits. I was expecting this of some of the research participants, since a number lived in the church premises because of their problems; these were the congregation members generally referred to as *wagonjwa*, although their medical conditions varied. Some stayed there for weeks, some for months, and some more than a year. Reasons for this could be largely practical – the homes of some were far away in the province or in another region and they had no relatives in Mbeya to host them – but some chose to stay in the church because they felt safer there. At home, they said, the spirits' attacks were more severe. At the church there was always someone to pray for them, and frequent morning, evening, and afternoon prayers were conducted with the church dwellers.[5] Yet I found it surprising and noteworthy that all the women I interviewed, whether they were lay Christians, choir members, or pastors, told a story of falling ill, being afflicted, and finally regaining well being at the church. Most recounted a personal journey, while some were looking for help for their children, but for all of them the reason for coming to the GMCL was illness, and the church was a place of healing. Selecting this particular church was thus not only a choice of place of worship but also a health-seeking decision, which was often the result of searching for help from various other places before turning to Prophet Mpanji.[6]

Maybe due to its glaring otherness to the outsider encountering it, spirit possession has attracted immense scholarly interest and accumulated a lot of theorizing. In the past, possession was sometimes seen as a separate and discrete sphere of life, but it is now widely accepted that possession also speaks of and to other fields in the societies in which it takes place. This notion has directed research examining different forms of possession towards more contextualizing tendencies that view it in relation to the wider historical and social framework. As Janice Boddy has argued, spirit possession is more than just the

4 Pastors in the GMCL were lay pastors in the sense that they had no paid positions but had their livelihoods from elsewhere. They were called to duty by Prophet Mpanji according to his visions.

5 Interview with Faraja, July 18th 2013. During my fieldwork the number living in the church fluctuated between 20 and 35. I was told that the group had been bigger in previous years, with more than 100 residents.

6 See Lotta Gammelin, "Health-seeking nomads and faith-healing in a medically pluralistic context in Mbeya, Tanzania." Mission Studies. Volume 35. (2018) 245–264.

dramatic acts visible and audible in rituals, but rather something that is encountered and lived with in everyday life. It has to do "with one's relationship with the world, with selfhood - personal, ethnic, political, and moral identity."[7]

As a theologian exploring lived Christianity I build theoretically on previous anthropological research into spirit possession, especially that of scholars who examine it in relation to agency and morality. Michael Lambek's extensive study of "lives lived with possession" in Mayotte, for instance, has helped to move studies on spirit possession from an instrumentalist orientation towards a more meaning-oriented approach.[8] Lambek views spirit possession in relation to the social world as a means of communication by which messages are conveyed between people in a specific cultural setting. He also makes a necessary distinction between persons who are directly possessed and persons through whom a spirit acts. In the case of the latter the experiencing of a spirit is "distanced and objectified sufficiently to be available for … others in form of a narrative."[9] This is also true of my research participants. Apart from spirit trance, which seems to be an unconscious state that leaves no active memory on the part of the spirit medium, interviewees were able to talk about their relationships with the spirits, producing consistent, detailed narratives that unfold in various directions. As Janice Boddy points out, spirit possession is almost always about morality, hence relationships with the past,[10] and at the GMCL the spirits attacking human beings are often associated with ancestors, meaning that possession in this context specifically engages with what is seen as the past.

It was not difficult for me to take seriously the stories of my research participants as they shared what were clearly extremely painful experiences, and yet, in many situations, especially when the state of spirit trance was publicly displayed, I found myself pondering its obviously socially created character. Instances of trance took place and intensified at the end of church services, for example, when there was appointed space for them and time for the healing session. The stories I heard and the dramatic nature of the trances made me ask myself a question that is doomed to remain unanswered: What really happens when people are spirit possessed? Ethnographic fieldwork is always a meeting point between different worldviews, and the researcher's own ontological perspective becomes especially visible in encounters with radical

7 Boddy, "Spirit possession," 414.

8 See Michael Lambek, *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte: Local Discourses of Islam, Sorcery, and Spirit Possession* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Boddy, "Spirit possession," 408, 410.

9 Lambek, "Rheumatic irony," 54.

10 Boddy, "Spirit possession," 414, 422.

otherness, as spirit possession was for me. I found myself wondering, like many researchers before me, if spirit possession might be a local expression of something with a Western equivalent in psychiatric diagnoses. Or is it a local cultural category – in Boddy's terms a "metacultural"[11] production – that should be met on its own terms, without attempts to translate it into something intelligible to the outsider's mind?[12] Addressing the question "what really happens?" is both tricky and irresolvable yet, in my opinion, necessary, as it lays open epistemological differences that are at work in ethnographic research: ethnography, as I see it, happens when the researcher allows her own confusion and at times even discomfort to meet with the local understandings without claiming to know better or discrediting the local narratives. Spirit possession is, as Boddy argues, a story that its participants tell themselves, about "themselves and others",[13] although not in a sense that suggests inauthenticity. Lambek writes about this conflict in the following terms:

> Spirit possession is simultaneously a part of life, something that really happens, that hurts, harms, or heals and establishes relationships, and an artistic production and performance, a lens of drama through which life is inspected, highlighted, reshaped, reflected upon, and responded to.[14]

I argue that our analyses of encounters with the spirits can only be accountable when they accept, value, and remain open to epistemic premises different from those the researcher possesses. The experiences of people living with the spirits must be taken seriously while also looking for alternative meanings and explanations.

2 Falling Ill Due to Spirit Attack

Symptoms of spirit involvement varied among my research participants. Some told me of headaches, dizziness, fainting, and being unable to work, which in effect caused economic problems and an inability to look after one's family. Some started to see blood where other people saw water. Abdominal pains are a general symptom, which were often associated with the womb. Some reported experiences of struggling because their personality was taken over by someone else; some were driven to the brink of suicide or murder. In the stories

11 Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 9
12 Boddy, "Spirit possession," 407–413.
13 Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 9.
14 Lambek, "Rheumatic irony," 53.

I was told spirit involvement generally brought chaos to the lives of its victims, decreased their intelligence, and destroyed their capacity to strive in life. It complicated relationships and made its victims vulnerable. Yet, although there is great variety in the symptoms and different hardships caused by the spirits, there are also numerous similarities. Since stories are shared with others publicly in church services, and Prophet Mpanji also includes anecdotes of spirit possession in his sermons, there are inevitably certain similarities in the narratives of spirit attack. Furthermore, individual stories of falling ill are reflected on and further developed as ideas in relation to other, similar experiences.[15]

My research participants were not necessarily very specific about the actual spirits that possessed them, although some spirits were known by name and there were distinctions and a sort of hierarchy between different types of spirits.[16] The terms *pepo* and *jini* could both be translated as spirits, but *majini* (pl.) were generally seen as stronger and more disturbing than *mapepo* (pl.).[17] Nuru, who herself had been troubled by different kind of spirits, explained the difference:

> *Jini* is greater than *pepo*. It is possible you meet a person and you are told this person Nuru has *jini*. And maybe Mary has *pepo*, so the war of Mary and the war of Nuru must be different. I would say, mostly *pepo* is sent to torture a person, but when *jini* comes to a person, mostly it is to kill her straight away.[18]

15 Päivi Hasu has presented a similar notion in her analysis of the Glory of Christ Tanzania Church located in Dar es Salaam in relation to publicly shared zombie narratives. Päivi Hasu, "The Witch, the Zombie and the Power of Jesus: A Trinity of Spiritual Warfare in Tanzanian Pentecostalism," *Suomen Antropologi/Antropologi I Finland/The Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 34, no. 1 (2009): 75.

16 In the letters addressed to Emmanuel Milingo, at the time Roman Catholic Archbishop of Lusaka, in the 1970s by people asking for his prayers exhibit a similar lack of specificity in naming the spirits. In her analysis of the letters Gerrie ter Haar points out that the distinctive local categories that previously existed in Zambia concerning different spirits have eroded and Zambians who wrote to Milingo were referring to one category only: evil spirits which ter Haar sees as process where local spirits are incorporated into a universal religion. Gerrie ter Haar, *Spirit of Africa: The Healing Ministry of Archbishop Milingo of Zambia.* (London: Hurst, 1992): 108–113.

17 *Jini* is sometimes suggested as having its origins in Islamic understanding of spirits as the word derives from Arabic but I never heard this explanation in Mbeya. See Kjersti Larsen, "Morality and the Rejection of Spirits. A Zanzibari Case," *Social Anthropology* 6, no. 1 (1998): 61–75.

18 Interview with Nuru, February 3rd 2014. "*...jini ni kitu kikubwa kuzidi pepo, yaani unaweza ukakuta mtu unaambiwa kwamba huyu, huyu Nuru ana jini. Huyu, labda huyu Mary ana pepo yaani vita ya Mary na Nuru lazima iwe tofauti. Yaani jini sijui niseme mara nyingi sana*

Nuru further explained that not only do different spirits work in different ways, but every person is also tested and affected in different ways.[19] Spirits are sometimes identified according to their effects, such as *pepo la ulevi* (spirit of drunkenness) that causes alcoholism, *pepo la uzinzi* (spirit of adultery) that makes one indulge in adultery or other sexually immoral behavior, *pepo la kiburi* (spirit of arrogance) that brings conceit.[20] Spirit possession is not an emic term, however, and my research participants did not use it. When speaking of their interactions with the spirits they used Kiswahili words for being abducted (*kutekwa*), disturbed (*kusumbuliwa*), made ill (*kuumwa*), or being attacked (*kuvamiwa*) by the spirits; many also spoke of spirits that inhabit (*kukaa*) a person.

My research participants often associated spirits with ancestors, usually female. Some spirit possessed women told me they were haunted by late relatives who wanted to influence their lives even after death, with deceased females especially interested in their descendants' ability to conceive. Some spoke explicitly about witchcraft (*uchawi*) as the source of their problems, and most were able to name some contemporary member of their community who aimed to harm them or profit at their expense by manipulating the spirits. There was, however, an element of speculation and uncertainty, even reluctance, when naming the person or persons causing these problems, and none of the women I interviewed had any desire to confront these people as prayer was seen as sufficient defense. As Nuru said, spirits seem to be *sent* by someone; they are agents, not acting on their own but assigned a mission.[21]

In the context of Charismatic Christianity the spirits are identified as malevolent representatives of the pre-Christian past and are seen as a threat to Christian faith. I was told by my research participants that the spirits are very attracted by born-again Christians and make them particular targets of attack, thereby putting faith to the test. Pentecostal interpretation of the ancestral spirits often demonizes them as unequivocally bad, whereas traditionally the ancestral spirits were seen as ambivalent, bringing good, bad, and in-between.[22]

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pepo anapotumwa kwa mtu kumtesa. Jini linapokuja kwa mtu mara nyingi ni la kuua moja kwa moja."

19 Interview with Nuru, February 3rd 2014.

20 Interview with Pastor Lusungu and his wife Susan, July 16th 2013.

21 Although Nuru referred here to *jini*, people in Mbeya talked about both *mapepo* and *majini* as agents that could be sent by someone.

22 Birgit Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past.' Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 316–349.

3 Occupied Wombs

Many of my female informants told me about sexual relations – either forced or voluntary – with the spirits. The spirits are gendered and some spirits form relationships of a sexual nature with the people they possess. One of them is Sofia, at the time of our interview a thirty-year-old woman who was born and raised in Mbeya. Sofia came to the GMCL after years of struggle. Her problems started when she met a boy at school and got pregnant at the age of sixteen. Due to her pregnancy Sofia had to drop out of school and they started life together as husband and wife.[23] The boy's parents opposed this as they wanted their son to continue his education, but the young couple was persistent and he also left school. Sofia, however, lost her baby before the child was born. They then moved to Dar es Salaam where they lived together for two years during which time Sofia's condition was devastating: she was exhausted, kept fainting, and was haunted by a strong, unpleasant perfume. Then she got pregnant again. By this time her father had forgiven her and she travelled home to him, leaving her boyfriend behind, but when he discovered her pregnancy he was furious and sent her away to stay with her boyfriend's parents. Sofia was in her eighth month and had two weeks left before her due date when one night she awoke to a sharp and sudden pain in her belly. Sofia's father heard about this and sent her to the hospital where the doctor examined her. The baby had oddly disappeared from her womb. The doctor said that the signs of pregnancy were there but the baby was lost, and there was no medical explanation for this. After these dramatic events Sofia's father enrolled her in a private secondary school for a fresh start but, as he died later that year, Sofia had to drop out of school again for there was no one to pay the fees. After losing her father and the baby Sofia's condition started to worsen. She often fainted, but also started to wake up in graveyards in a terrible condition after going to sleep at home, although in Tanzania graveyards are avoided as dubious places apart from funeral attendance. "Going to the graves" is a euphemism for ancestral veneration, a practice associated with pre-Christian religious practice, and in urban settings witch accusations and rumor often contain stories of graveyards. Sofia also found *chale* (cuts) on her wrists, arms, and stomach, with no idea of their origin.[24] She tried to work in a stationery shop, but its owner could not put up with her unpredictable condition. Every night the spirits took her to *kuzimu*, the underworld, a place ruled by satanic forces. Sofia could still remember how

23 Co-habiting without officiated marriage is common in Tanzania.

24 Many traditional healers also make *chale*, ritual cuts that are part of therapeutic processes.

it was and described it to me in obvious agony. She had seen people who were forced to work without any rest. Enslaved, they were forced to act against their own will. I asked Sofia if she was forced to work, too. "Yes," she replied, "I was forced to give birth and to breastfeed those babies. They were *majini*, spirits."[25]

When I asked Sofia whether she knew the source of the difficulties she had to face she answered that her problems were caused by her former boyfriend's family. They wanted to use her star, *nyota*, for their own benefit. *Nyota* was mentioned in many stories I heard. All human beings are born with a star that is part of their personality, containing their abilities and the personal qualities that enable success, which can be stolen and exploited through witchcraft. After prayers over Sofia began at the GMCL her former boyfriend was committed to mental hospital and his father, who had been harsh to Sofia and made her work very hard in their household, had a stroke. Without claiming that that revenge was inflicted upon them through prayer, she explained that it happened *because* of the prayers. Since coming to the church in 2010 in search of healing Sofia has been much better. She does not wake up in graveyards, she does not have bleeding wounds on her arms and wrists, and she is no longer taken to *kuzimu* at night to give birth. Sofia met her husband at the GMCL and they have a nice home; however, despite the prayers and getting much better, the spirits still trouble her and she is not able to get pregnant, although a medical doctor has not found any physical reason for this. According to Sofia it is because her late mother stops her from conceiving. Sofia believes that her mother, who passed away years ago, is trying to persuade her to become a *mganga*, a traditional healer, like her grandfather was. "She disturbs me; I think she wants me to do the work her father did. For me not to lose their tradition," Sofia said.[26] But Sofia refuses to become a *mganga*, and her mother continues to trouble her.[27]

The theme of breaking with the past is not only present in the lives of Charismatic Christians in Tanzania; all Christian traditions deal with it in one way or another.[28] In Sofia's story the conflict with the past that in many ways reaches into her present life is a feature of her late mother's insistence on her becoming a *mganga*, indicating that what is often referred to as "the past" is actually the present: powerful, tangible, and playing a role in the here and now. In Sofia's case it has brought anguish and loss through control over her fertility.

25 Interview with Sofia, January 17th 2014.

26 "*Ananisumbua, nafikiri anataka nifanye kazi labda aliyokuwa akifanya baba yake, nisipoteze asili yao.*" Interview with Sofia, January 17th 2014.

27 Interview with Sofia, January 17th 2014. Traditional healing is often passed on in a family.

28 Meyer, "Make a Complete Break."

Since biomedical examinations have not shown any medical reason for infertility, the past seems to have power over the biological facts. The unsuccessful visits to traditional healers and biomedical healthcare practitioners that reoccur in many of these narratives seem to testify to prayer as the only viable instrument for removing the spirits. Biomedical care seems to be especially helpless in the face of spirits, whereas prayer penetrates the spirits' realm and has power to manipulate the otherworldly powers.

As already noted, grandmothers or female relatives frequently play a part in spirit possession stories. They are portrayed as bringing misfortune and miscarriage, preventing conception, and disturbing marriage plans.[29] I argue that this hostile representation of older women has to do with two things: first of all, there is certain amount of contradiction in attitudes towards elderly women in general in Tanzania. They are valued and respected for their life experience and wisdom, but the theme of old women as witches is also prevalent in the popular imaginary. In some areas of Tanzania witchhunts and accusations against older women have in recent years have caused attacks on and even the murders of alleged witches.[30] Because of their age, they are excluded from the reproductive tasks of the society at many levels: they cannot participate in work like the young and they no longer give birth. It is suspected that, as a result, they envy younger women who are vital to the society for their reproductive capacity. In popular witchcraft discourses the witch is someone who is excluded from society and his or her actions are often motivated by envy.[31] The second reason why grandmothers reoccur in these stories could be that old women are seen as a link to traditional practices which are, of course, a much needed enemy ex officio for the Christian narrative. In Sofia's story her mother wanted her to maintain family traditions by becoming a traditional healer, a demand Sofia saw as contradicting her Christian faith.

The ways that sexuality and fertility are discussed through the medium of spirit possession are also exemplified in Hekima's life story. Hekima and her

29 In her work among the Sukuma-Nyamwezi, Hinkkanen suggests the same notion, especially with regards matrilinear ancestors. For the Sukuma infertility can be caused by a powerful female ancestor from matrilineal side who has been infertile herself. In my fieldwork I did not encounter this passing on of infertility. Reea Hinkkanen, *"Someone to welcome you home." Infertility, medicines and the Sukuma-Nyamwezi,* (Helsinki, Reea Hinkkanen, 2009), 75–76.

30 Edward Miguel, "Poverty and witch killings," *Review of Economic Studies* 72 (2005): 1153–1172.

31 Mark Auslander, "Open the Wombs!" Symbolic Politics of Modern Ngoni Witchfinding, "in *Modernity and Its Malcontents. Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa,* eds. Comaroff & Comaroff (London, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 178–179.

husband were married for almost five years before their first child was born. The problems started after that. Hekima lost interest in making love with her husband, which created discord in her marriage. She felt no pleasure with him but, rather, avoided intimate contact. During her sleep, however, she was frequently visited by a lover with whom she enjoyed having sex. This lover looked like a man, but in reality was a spirit (*pepo*). Hekima said she did not even know she was troubled by the spirits, when in fact she was married to them. Another problem started when she weaned her baby. Although the infant no longer needed her milk, lactation did not end and milk continued to flow in a disturbing way. Later on it was explained to her that the breast milk was for feeding the babies she was having in *kuzimu*, a place that is ruled by the *nguvu za giza* (the forces of darkness) where the spirits reside. She was troubled for years and sought help from biomedical healthcare. After meeting various doctors she even went to Muhimbili hospital in Dar es Salaam, meanwhile attending a Christian ministry in Mbeya where she was prayed for again and again, to no avail.[32] Finally, when Hekima was in the process of making an expensive trip to India for a medical operation that would stop lactation, she heard about Prophet Mpanji and decided to give his church a try. She attended prayers for several months, both during the service and performed individually by the prophet, which reduced lactation to a tolerable level while her headaches, exhaustion, and marital problems came to an end. She is still awaiting another pregnancy – in God's time. "It was not my expectation to have one child. I assumed I would have three children. But I am waiting for God to give me other children."[33]

Sofia's and Hekima's stories of being used sexually by the spirits are not unique. Many research participants told me about similar experiences, and marriage with the spirits (*ndoa na majini*) was fought against in communal prayer during the services.[34] Some research participants were forced into sexual intercourse with the spirits; for others, like Hekima, it was at first a pleasure

32 Interview with Hekima, April 30th 2013.

33 "*Si matarajio yangu kuwa na mtoto mmoja. Nilitegemea niwe na watoto watatu. Lakini ninamsubiri Mungu anipe watoto wengine*." Interview with Hekima, April 30th 2013.

34 Marriage with the spirits is a common trope found in possession narratives in different regions of Africa, both in Christian contexts and other possession cults. See for instance Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015), 21–23. In her research among Brazilian Pentecostal churches in Mozambique Linda van de Kamp analyses case of spirit spouses. Van de Kamp sees conversion to Pentecostalism as a strategy for controlling one's body and sexuality. Linda Van de Kamp, "Converting the Spirit Spouse: The Violent Transformation of the Pentecostal Female Body in Maputo, Mozambique," *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 76, no. 4 (2011): 510–533.

but later proved to be a source of problems. The spirit lover (*jini mahaba*) was often the last of the problems to remain when prayers had already started to alleviate other troubles. Like Sofia and Hekima, others also told me about being forced to give birth to children who were actually not children, but evil spirits. This was especially painful if the person was childless and unable to conceive real children; being *mzazi*, a birthgiver in *kuzimu*, was seen as a reason for infertility because one's womb was already taken, occupied by the spirit babies.

In the Tanzanian context children are highly valued and infertility is seen as a tragic condition. Family planning is usual, however, especially in urban and semi-urban contexts like Mbeya, and having a very large family can be seen as backwardness and irresponsible behavior in the face of harsh economic realities; while children were previously considered an economic asset they are nowadays seen as a source of expenditure. Yet the availability of contraception, and education encouraging smaller families, have not erased the widely shared notion of children as a blessing and social capital. Infertility, whether primary or secondary (the inability to carry pregnancy to term following the birth of one child, as in Hekima's case), is generally seen as a bigger problem for women than for men – even a source of social stigma. Becoming a mother in Tanzania makes a woman a person of social relevance, and it is the woman who undergoes medical examinations to seek a solution to the problem; the husband is not necessarily tested for infertility at all, and thus blame stays with the wife.[35] Infertility, as my research participants explained it to me, seems to be the least desired position one could imagine for anyone, and thus a very popular motif in witchcraft narratives fuelled by revenge and envy. Infertility as a female problem was also clearly demonstrated in the church services, as many times during his vivid sermons Prophet Mpanji asked if there was anyone present who was there in search of a child ("*Nani anatafuta mtoto*?" Who is searching for a child?) and dozens of women would raise a hand or, in the case of eager longing, both hands. I never saw men publicly demonstrate their wish for a child in the same way, although I do not claim this to indicate that fertility and offspring were not of paramount importance to both men and women. Nonetheless, it seems that this concern is assigned to women in public life and that the concern over motherhood and reproduction actually produces a gendered sense of self.

35 Hinkkanen, "Someone to welcome," 54–56; Auli Vähäkangas, *Christian Couples Coping with Childlessness. Narratives of Machame, Kilimanjaro,* American Society of Missiology Monograph Series. (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

Once, during a worship service, Prophet Mpanji invited a woman to the front with her toddler son, and interviewed her. She had to describe the biomedical examinations she underwent because of her childlessness, but there was no mention of her husband going through similar procedures. The medical doctor had examined her and discovered that her fallopian tubes were not functioning, and due to this it was biologically impossible for her to conceive. Despite the hopeless prognosis she came to Mpanji for prayers and now stood in front of the congregation holding her toddler son who was named David after the prophet, for he had made the impossible possible. Mpanji was visibly very pleased as he asked the name of the child. In many pre-colonial societies it was the responsibility of the king or chief to ensure fertility of his subjects.[36] Thus, by praying for fertility and giving space for concerns over reproduction, Mpanji embodies the idea of a leader who enables fertility and thus touches the core values of society.

The relationship between sexuality and supernatural forces is well documented in ethnographies of various African societies. The example that is geographically closest to Mbeya is provided by Monica Wilson's work on the Nyakyusa. The Nyakyusa are not native to Mbeya city, but their homeland is in close proximity, in the surrounding countryside and neighboring towns, and many of them live in Mbeya city nowadays. In traditional Nyakyusa perception, as documented by Wilson, ancestral spirits can prevent sexual intercourse from being fruitful and are thus seen to be an element of sexual relations between living human beings.[37] I find it interesting that these accounts of sex with the spirits create a space in which to talk about women's sexual desire, which is generally not discussed, at least not publicly. At the same time sexuality in these encounters with the spirits is mainly seen in relation to fertility and reproduction, and is actually portrayed as dangerous. This discourse links sex with illness, destruction, and leading an unsatisfactory life. Apparently, these stories of illness are about control over sexuality and fertility, combined with warnings about extramarital sex. Public discourses on sexuality in East Africa are often fundamentally linked with either reproduction or HIV/AIDS and the moral panic that comes with them. The way sexuality is presented in the narratives of illness told by my informants seems to reflect and reproduce similar values: sex is intended for marriage only and especially for creating offspring,

36 Märta Salokoski, *How kings are made, how kingship changes. A study of rituals and ritual change in pre-colonial and colonial Owamboland* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2006), 17–19; Gordon, *Invisible Agents,* loc. 10102–10103.

37 Monica Wilson, *Rituals of kinship among the Nyakyusa.* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 55.

while extramarital relationships, even with the spirits, cause trouble. Given the religious tradition of this area, obsession with the womb and ensuring fertility is not a surprising feature in local Christian discourse. In pre-colonial religious and political thought control over fertility and reproduction was a religious matter and there was a shared understanding of its connection with the ultimate powers. The link between sex and the sacred is strong.[38]

4 Falling Ill as Lack of Agency

As my research participants narrate their lives with the spirits they often implicitly speak of the loss of subjecthood and agency. The spirits cause them to lose their abilities and stop them from achieving something they desire. By agency I simply mean the capacity to act, to make life choices and to some extent be in control of one's life. Nuru explains how she felt when her troubles begun:

> I felt really bad, because all my things stopped at that point. Because of my condition I changed; I started to go out of my mind. I was unable to do any work, because at the time I had a rice business. It could happen that I was at the machine husking the rice and suddenly it [the spirit] became like a person standing in front of me. That meant my business has stopped. I have not gone back to it again since I started to suffer from this condition. I have not done business since then. Even if I said I did business, it was not successful; it was ruined. Even if I do business, I sell, I see no profit.[39]

Like Nuru, many others explain their troubles not only as physical pain but also as the end of active life, and often loss of livelihood as well. The loss of agency due to a spirit's involvement is exemplified in Asifiwe's story. Asifiwe's mother knew God and although she was illiterate she loved the Bible and

38 Gordon, *Invisible agents*, loc. 412–417.

39 Interview with Nuru February 3rd, 2014. "*Nilijisikia vibaya sana kwa sababu kwanza kila kitu changu kimesimama. Kwa hiyo ile hali pale pale nabadilika naanza kuchanganyikiwa. Yaani nilikuwa nashindwa kufanya kazi yoyote, sababu unaweza ukakuta mimi nilikuwa nafanya biashara ya mchele. Naweza nikawa niko mashineni nakoboa ghafla anakuja kama mtu anasimama mbele yangu. Ina maana biashara zangu zilisimama na toka pale sijawahi kufanya biashara tena toka nilipoanza kuhangaika na ile hali, sikuwahi kufanya biashara tena. Halafu hata kama nilisema nifanye biashara haiendi, inaharibika yaani kwamba naweza nikafanya biashara nauza, sioni faida.*"

always bought her children books that had pictures of Jesus. Asifiwe and her siblings attended Sunday School and church and she was born-again at a school revival in the Moravian church when she was in fourth grade at primary school. From then on she led the life of a born-again girl: she went to school, acquired a fiancée, and married and moved to Mbeya city from the nearby countryside. They were married for nine years but Asifiwe did not get pregnant and childlessness became more painful as the years passed. Asifiwe started to ask God: "Why is it that I do not succeed in life although I know God? Why is my life like this?"[40] In 2010 they heard about Prophet Mpanji and went to see him. At the time Asifiwe's husband was also ill. Asifiwe herself was in a poor state; her face had changed and her body was altered. Prophet Mpanji asked them questions, and then he explained the root of their problems: the spirits had taken over Asifiwe. Despite prayers for his health, Asifiwe's husband died six months later. She was left alone but continued to go to Mpanji. Just before his death Asifiwe's husband had also encouraged her to continue attending the prayers, saying, "You are not yourself."[41] The prophet had told her that God would release her, which puzzled Asifiwe as she was already born-again.

Prophet Mpanji gave her a package of salt and told her to go home with it. Asifiwe was surprised but followed the prophet's instructions to use it normally while cooking. The night after she started to use the salt, she had a dream. She saw that she was not at home but somewhere else, in a valley. She saw Prophet Mpanji standing on a top of a mountain and started to run to reach him. When she met him, the prophet told her that she was wearing her grandmother's face and that he would take it off. Then Asifiwe also saw it: she was not being herself. She had kind of a layer on her face and when the prophet removed it her face became her own again.[42] Asifiwe is now a young widow. She has experienced being released from the spirits' realm and is attending the GMCL services three times per week and choir practices in addition. Once possessed herself, she is now a prayer servant helping others who suffer as she used to. Instead of losing consciousness and screaming and kicking in a spirit trance, she is now among the women who dress up for the healing prayers and pray for the women rolling on the mud floor. "If we had come earlier to Mpanji,"

40 "*Nikafika mahali sasa, kwa nini nimeokoka halafu namjua Mungu, kwa nini sifanikiwi kwenye maisha yangu, kwa nini maisha yangu hivi*?" (I then came to a place in my life, I asked why, I am born-again? I know God, why do I not succeed in my life? Why is my life like this?) Interview with Asifiwe, February 10th 2014.

41 "*Wewe sio wewe*." Interview with Asifiwe, February 10th 2014.

42 Interview with Asifiwe, February 10th 2014. On the relevance of dreams in African church contexts see Simon Charsley, "Dreams in African Churches," in *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa* ed. M.C. Jędrej and Rosalind Shaw (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 153–176.

she says, "my husband would be alive." But it is probably easier to be a childless widow than a married woman without a child. "To be saved is more than being born-again," she says. "It also takes salvation of the soul." In the GMCL she has come to possess something she previously lacked.

Asifiwe's story illustrates the social shame and exclusion that comes with childlessness in a society that values family life and where a woman's primary role is to be a mother. As Boddy has argued, "a threat to women's fertility is a serious threat to their gendered sense of self."[43] Asifiwe's narrative also interestingly demonstrates the lack of agency that is present in many of the illness narratives I heard from my research participants. Being attacked and possessed by the spirits is above all a loss of personhood and agency. Asifiwe was not allowed to keep her own face but wore the face of an old woman, one who had already passed away. A person is told apart from other people by her face and losing one's face is a strong metaphor for a lack of recognition. The face conveys emotions, speech, and expressions, and impacts on social acceptance. When Asifiwe explained her condition she said that she was someone who was not herself. She was not able to express herself normally, and when she spoke her sentences were meaningless. Her relatives rejected her. It was the life of an outcast. Wearing the face of an old woman transformed her into an unwanted person and altered her life plans. Like old women she was not able to give birth. As she lamented her childlessness, she asked God why she did not succeed and why her life was what it was. A similar pattern was present in many stories I was told: in dealings with the malicious spirits one is robbed of one's plans and dreams for life. One's personality is taken over together with one's abilities and used for someone else's profit. In stories of spirit possession the theme of exploitation came up regularly. The spirit possessed told me how their own economic situation worsened, while the spirits made them labor for someone else's benefit. Similar themes of loss of identity and exclusion from a life that is communally considered meaningful are widely documented in research on witchcraft.[44]

Academic discussions on personhood, self, and agency in African contexts have often revolved around the opposition of what is seen as Western individualism and an African understanding of personhood which is said to be embedded in relationships.[45] The dichotomy has been challenged by Kaphawagani,

43 Boddy, "Spirit possession," 417.

44 Sónia Silva, "Political evil. Witchcraft from the point of view of the bewitched," in *Evil in Africa. Encounters with the everyday*, eds. William Olsen & Walter van Beek (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 29–42.

45 See Ifeanyi Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," in *African Philosophy: An Introduction* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 171–182.

who has pointed out that this kind of dualistic approach does no justice to the diversity of African discourses of personhood,[46] wherein questions of autonomy and belonging are equally relevant. Nyamnjoh speaks of domesticated agency that "stresses negotiation, interconnectedness and harmony between individual interests and group expectations."[47] In African understandings of agency, the achievements and self-fulfillment of an individual are meaningless unless they are made communal. My research participants talked about agency when they explained how the spirits restrained them from achieving what they wanted to achieve. Their wish to be well again translated into regaining not only health but, with it, the abilities and power to achieve a meaningful life. By making their suffering and their yearning for a different life public and communal, the women in the GMCL were domesticating agency. Spirits made them objects, some even say slaves, and healing through communal prayers restored them as subjects.[48]

5 Restoring Moral Agency

Being made ill by the spirits was often linked with (in)fertility, and explanations for women's vulnerability to spirits were found in the female body, which attracts spirits as its reproductive organs – the womb and ovaries – are considered to contain a lot of blood, which is food for the spirits. Moreover, women's reproductive abilities are useful to the dark forces, since the reported sexual relationships between women and the spirits result in the birth of new generations of spirits, as the stories of Hekima and Sofia illustrate. But reasons for their greater susceptibility to possession were also found in their hearts and minds. I was told that women have a greater propensity to sin than men, as illustrated by the biblical story of Eve and the garden of Eden.[49] This was explained to me by Nuru:

46 Didier Kaphawagani, "Some African conceptions of person. A critique," In *African Philosophy as Cultural Inquiry,* eds. Ivan Karp & D.A. Masolo (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 66–79.

47 Francis B. Nyamnjoh, "Delusions of development and the enrichment of witchcraft discourses in Cameroon," in *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, eds. Henrietta Moore & Todd Sanders (London: Routledge, 2001), 31.

48 *Ibid*.

49 Interview with Pastor Lusungu and his wife Susan, July 16th 2013.

> Us women, we are easy in a different way than men which means we are weak, it means us women, we are created somehow weak. It also means that the spirits easily enter us, more than with men. I think that men, our partners, I do not know how God created them, this I do not understand yet, but us women, we have a sort of weakness.[50]

I was also told that women leave the door open to Satan and make way for his servants to enter. The link between sin and illness was thus clearly pronounced by many Christians in the GMCL, and illness has been associated with moral corruptness in many African societies. With regards the Nyakyusa, Wilson wrote, "there is a direct and immediate link between misfortune and wrongdoing."[51] But instead of confessing one's sins and repenting, being diagnosed as spirit possessed frees the individual from the burden or suspicion of being morally corrupt, and, rather, transfers the blame to some other agent: the spirits, kinfolk, haters. Many of my informants spoke about the link between illness and sin but none of them explained their own illness in terms of personal moral failure. Being the prey of the spirits constituted them as victims, not as fallen. They were made innocent again. The logic of spirit possession in this context and in this community is that of exploitation. Someone else is profiting from one's suffering but the evil has its roots outside the suffering person. The evil is not distant but nor is it in oneself; rather, it is associated with kin and family. In these narratives spirit possession elevates mundane suffering, like alcoholism, infertility, and dropping out of school, and gives them purpose and explanation that is embedded in the social world, family, and kin. The moral agency of a person is restored and she is not subject to blame.

A turning point in these stories comes when the sick hear about Prophet Mpanji and come to him. Hardly anyone talks about coming to this community, but they speak explicitly about coming to the prophet, thereby making it clear that the GMCL is a community that gathers around the prophet's power to heal. The church is a place of diagnosis and the prophet has the ability to explain the root cause of the spirits' attacks. Coming to him marks the end of the worst of the suffering, although some problems may remain. Sofia explains:

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50 Interview with Nuru, February 3rd 2014. "*Kwa hivyo wanawake sisi ni wepesi tofauti na wanaume, ina maana sisi udhaifu, ulikuwepo tokea enzi hizo, ina maana sisi wanawake tuliumbwa na udhaifu fulani. Ndiyo maana hata haya maroho ni rahisi kuingia kwetu, maana kwa mwanaume. Naona wanaume wenzetu, sijui Mungu aliwaumbaje, hapo ndiyo bado sijaelewa lakini, sisi wanawake kwa jumla tuna udhaifu fulani.*"

51 Wilson, *Rituals*, 214.

"I got relief to a big percentage."[52] Many experience healing despite the cure not being perfect. Many of those who came because of childlessness are still waiting and struggling with problems of infertility and the psychosocial pain and shame that come with it. Dramatic symptoms of trance, fainting, and seizures are still present. However, the treated stay in the church, continue to express gratitude and relief, and constantly come for prayers. I argue that this suggests an understanding of healing as a process where the cure is to some extent secondary;[53] it is not so much about solving the problem as about having an explanation and recognition for one's affliction and struggle. In the stories of my research participants, the Christian community is a place for diagnoses but also a place for mourning one's loss and misfortune together with others. It is a community that restores hope; while one is still waiting for the perfect cure and solution, there is something meaningful to do and hope to cling to. As I argued earlier, spirit involvement comprises loss of agency and control over one's life. But is this community a place where women regain their agency? Or is it taken from the spirits and handed over to another master, Prophet Mpanji, who holds a pivotal role in diagnosing and thus explaining their lives?

Charismatic Christianity often places the "past" or "tradition" in strict opposition with what is seen as modernity, and presents itself as counterforce that brings progress by protecting people from the power of their past with the power of the Holy Spirit.[54] The terms in which spirit possession is discussed and interpreted in the GMCL strongly suggests that the past holds one back and keeps one from a fulfilling and meaningful life. As the spirits are identified as deceased family members or representatives of the religious other, the GMCL becomes alternative kin that restores not only health, but also moral agency, and enhances belonging. Explanations given for spirit involvement thus discuss past, present, and morality in a powerful way.

52 "*Nilipata nafuu kwa asilimia kubwa sana*." Interview with Sofia, February 17th 2014.

53 Candy Gunther Brown, "Introduction. Pentecostalism and Globalization of Illness and Healing," in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

54 Rijk van Dijk, "Witchcraft and scepticism by proxy. Pentecostalism and laughter in urban Malawi," in *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities. Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult In Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Henrietta Moore & Todd Sanders (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 103.

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CHAPTER 16

Revealed Medicine as an Expression of an African Christian Lived Spirituality

Carl Sundberg

1 Introduction

Tropical Africa is often mediated through televised news programs and the printed press as a region where plagues, famine, and wars dominate the suffering populations. Very seldom we see reports on other parts of the social realities in which people live. During my years in both Congos, I have met people from various Christian denominations and visited fast growing Christian congregations that engage in a diversity of activities for the benefit of the societies in which they operate. Some denominations run schools and hospitals in areas where governmental health-care and schooling does not suffice. Many parishes have health centers and nutrition projects for those that have lost everything except their lives. Quite a few of these centers have been established on the basis of revelations and dreams. As will be shown below, the Kongo people traditionally live in two worlds: the "day world" and the "night world."[1] What is experienced in the night world may well be realized in the day world. Dreaming of a health clinic may result in the construction of one.

In this chapter, based on fieldwork carried out in Brazzaville, in the Republic of Congo, I present the results of my studies of a method of healing that was revealed during and after the spiritual Revival of 1947 (described below), in today's Evangelical Church of Congo: a method referred to as the Revealed Medicine.

Between 1982 and 2010, I periodically lived and worked in Brazzaville as a missionary pastor and teacher in the Eglise Evangélique du Congo (EEC). Like many other Westerners I have suffered from malaria, parasites, wounds, and other illnesses, and I have met with several people suffering from diseases that I have never even heard of. Naturally I have been interested in finding out what people do to get well. There are a few state-owned hospitals in Brazzaville and

1 Kongo, with a K, (sometimes written Kôngo) signifies the peoples originating from the former Kongo Kingdom located in what is now the western part of the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Angola.

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the Chinese government has tried to establish well-equipped hospitals, which are much liked, but since a large percentage of the population is very poor, cheap solutions are widely sought. At the Bacongo market one can find many different kinds of antibiotics, most of which are probably fake. People buy them by the capsule and eat as many as they can afford, very often too few. I have met with charismatics who cure people's wounds with *la pierre noire* and prayer. A piece of black petrified wood boiled in milk is applied to the wound and fixed in place with a bandage. The charismatic prays to draw out the evil spirits. When the "black stone" falls off, the wound is healed. I have also met with people who have told me that they suffer from *Mbazu*, an illness, according to my informant, caused by "a very nasty fetish that kills the one it is destined to kill and wounds other people who come near it. *Mbazu* can only be cured through sessions of prayer with a charismatic healer having the gift to heal that specific illness."[2]

Brazzaville is a multicultural and multi-religious melting pot. People search for very pragmatic solutions to their everyday problems, and these solutions are often believed to be found in charismatic independent churches and prayer groups, where healing and exorcisms are carried out. Modern forms of fetishism and sorcery also exercise influence as protection is needed and pursued.[3] In this setting, the therapeutic centers of the Revealed Medicine offer low-cost treatment and healing to anyone seeking to get well, practiced in the same way whether offered at a local parish or at a bigger center. It is holistic in its perspective and the personnel take care to examine not only the illness of the client but also his/her social status and setting. The religious foundation is that God loves human beings and wants them to be well and to function in society, and it is manifest that it is God who heals. The treatment and medicines are only the means by which healing occurs. Without the religious ceremonies – counseling, intercession, and dialogue – the medicines in themselves are ineffective.

The focus of my work is to see how the Revealed Medicine originates and develops in the tension between the Kongo's traditional values and expressions, today's expressions of Christian faith, and also in competition with the "Western medicine" of modern society. In this chapter, I evaluate the sustainability of the Revealed Medicine as a low-cost panacea accessible to all, and discuss whether it is to be seen as the Christianization and adaptation of

2 Interview, February 2000, Albert Mutinu, driver.

3 Carl Sundberg, *Conversion and Contextual Conceptions of Christ – A missiological study among young converts in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo*. (Studia Missionalia Svecana LXXXI, Uppsala, 2000), 26.

"traditional healing" to a modern Christian setting, offering a re-reading of a traditional method.

An introduction of the Bakongo worldview provides the background necessary to understand how the Kongo conceive of illness and healing, and information on the traditional views of medicine and magic. Thereafter I present the Revealed Medicine – or "healing through the distribution of revealed leaves", from its beginning up until my 2016 fieldwork. The paper ends with a discussion of the possible paths or outcomes of the Revealed Medicine. Will it cease to exist or is there a future for the God-given treatment and medication as expressions of a lived-out Christianity in the rapidly changing Congolese society?

I know a lot of people in Brazzaville. Many are used as informants. To simplify things and assure the anonymity of everyone that took part in an interview, I have changed their names. Mostly they themselves proposed an alternative name that corresponds with their ethnic belonging. Quite a few students of the Faculty of Theology of the Protestant University of Congo, in Brazzaville, have written Masters and Licentiate papers on the revival and that material has also been used. In addition, I have relied on my own fieldnotes and partially transcribed, digitally taped, interviews with informants.

2 Elements of Kongo Cosmology

Every so often we are reminded that worldviews are not rapidly exchanged. A Congolese who moves to secular southern Sweden does not immediately, or even after quite a long time, change his ideas about why certain things happen or how the elements of life interact. Every society has a conception of existence, a worldview. There is a perception of the global (all that is created), in which we place and arrange humans, animals, plants, and inanimate things. At the same time, according to Wyatt MacGaffey, this cosmology is not a set of fixed axioms but varies and undergoes change as social structures are transformed.[4] Meredith McGuire confirms this in *Religion, the Social Context*, and adds that in "modern societies religious meaning systems compete with many other worldviews. Individuals are less likely to use any single comprehensive meaning system but may apply religious meanings to segments of their lives."[5]

4 Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in central Africa: The Bakongo of Lower Zaïre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986), 5.

5 Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion, the social context*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992), 28.

Many African scholars underline that a characteristic feature of Bantu worldviews is that all things belong to one of two worlds, the visible or the invisible.[6] The visible world consists of the sky, the earth, and all the material things familiar to man. The invisible world consists of the heavenly realm, home of *Nzambi* (the Creator and sustainer of life) and a number of deities, and the "spirit sphere" where ancestors, spirits, and disembodied spirits dwell.[7] This world is located in the ground. Following this model, the Bantu, and even more specifically, the Kongo, do not see a fixed border between the two worlds; rather, they exercise power and influence on, and to some extent, overlap, each other. "One is the carbon copy of the other", says Emefie Ikenga Metuh, a late Nigerian scholar.[8] The Kongo have a very holistic understanding of everything. All is intertwined and, as Magesa puts it, quoting Baudin, "[t]he world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network."[9]

The individual, says John Mbiti, "is immersed in a religious participation which starts before birth and continues after his death…[Hence] to live is to be caught up in a religious drama."[10] Although these words were written some 40 years ago, I dare say they are still valid today.

In October 2014 I took part in a number of meetings at the Hôpital de Dieu in Brazzaville. A rather well-to-do woman had come to the center to receive treatment for her inability to get the travel documents required for a longer business trip to Europe and Asia. She, like everybody else, was received with respect and followed a fourteen-day treatment, including potions and therapeutic talk; at the end of her treatment she provided a testimony that "the

6 See for instance: John Mbiti, *African religions and Philosophy* (London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969); The use of the word "bantu" is not problematic, since *mu-ntu* in Kikongo means "man" and *ba-ntu* means "people."

7 When the Christian mission came, with the Portuguese mission directed by Diego Caô, in 1493, the missionaries adopted the already existing name of God, Nzambi, or variations of this word. This has been commented by Ragnar Widman, *Trosföreställningar i Nedre Zaïre från 1880-talet* (Falköping: Gummessons, 1979); Raphaël Batsikama ba Mpuya ma Ndawla, *L'Ancien Royaume du Congo et les baKongo* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999).

8 Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *The shattered Microcosm: a critical survey of explanations on conversion in Africa.* Paper presented at the Religion, Development and African Identity Conf. Uppsala, 16–21st of Aug. 1984. (1987), 51.

9 Pierre Baudin, *Fetishism and Fetish worshippers* (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1885). Quoted in Laurenti Magesa, *African religion: The moral traditions of abundant life* (Maryknoll, N.Y. Orbis Books), 46.

10 Mbiti, *African Religions,* 15.

treatment had given her peace of mind and had dissolved various problems and that she now was 'free' to travel – thanks be to God."[11]

3 Medicine and Magic[12]

Concerning the origin of disease/illness the Kongo propose three causes: natural, unnatural, and supernatural. The natural disease lasts only for a short period of time and the patient gets well. Natural illness can be cured by simple therapies, often using pharmaceutical products, which can be easily found in marketplaces or pharmacies.[13] The patient with an unnatural disease does not easily recover, or repeatedly gets ill with the same disease. Thus, any chronic or alarming illness which resists treatment or occurs suddenly is considered unnatural and is often seen as caused by, or indicating a tension or social conflict among, members of the *kanda* (the extended family or clan), or even by a disequilibrium between the living and the living-dead (ancestors). Unnatural sickness can also be caused by the breaking of various taboos or by somebody exercising sorcery or witchcraft against the patient.[14] Since this illness covers every aspect of human life (biological, psychological or spiritual, social, and cultural) it can only be treated with pharmaceutical products in combination with medicines containing a supernatural force. The patient is thus treated pharmaceutically and psycho-therapeutically at the same time.[15] From this it follows that the treatment of an unnaturally sick patient not only considers the patient but also the whole kanda. The third type of illness, *kimbevo kia Nzambi* (sickness from God) has its origin in Nzambi and covers every illness due to old age or illnesses that cannot be cured. Then it is said that "Nzambi has eaten him", or that it has been Nzambi's will.[16]

Quite a few symptoms which are not considered illness or diseases in Western society may well be considered and treated as such among the Kongo. This

11 Fieldnotes, October 2014.

12 This section is condensed from my doctoral thesis, Sundberg, *Conversion.*

13 However, many prescribed medicines are often misused or used for too short a period to have the desired effect. This is mainly due to their high cost and the lack of money.

14 For profound descriptions of sorcery and witchcraft, see Eric de Rosny, *L'Afrique des guérisons* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1992) and Peter Geschiere, *Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

15 Kimpianga Mahaniah, *La maladie et la guérison en milieu Kongo* (Kinshasa: EDICVA, 1982), 28f. Mahania is Professor of History at the Free University of Luozi, Democratic Republic of Congo.

16 Karl E. Laman, "The Kongo II," in *Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia*, vol VIII, ed. Sture Lagerkrantz (Uppsala: Almkvist Wiksell, 1957), 78.

is related to the fact that everything which disturbs or weakens a person's "life force" (*makindangolo*), is seen as disturbing the life force of the kanda. Besides various illnesses caused by sorcery and malediction we find, in Mahaniah's list of diseases, "social problems" classed as supernatural or abnormal. He writes: "*Kimbevo kia sanse* (diseases of chance): Thus are classed problems such as the loss of a trial at court; Having been by-passed and not given a higher position at work. Or just having 'bad luck' … *Muntu kabakanga salu ko*: Man couldn't keep a job."[17]

The above mentioned episode of the woman who was unable to get her travel papers in order is a good example of how something many outsiders would not consider an "illness" could be treated at a therapeutic center in Brazzaville as a *kimbevo kia sanse*, a supernatural illness. These illnesses must be treated by a person with a special gift or power to cure them, the *nganga* in Kongo society, and its overall priest, healer, psychologist, advocate, and stabilizer.

4 Revealed Medicine – or "Healing through the Distribution of Revealed Leaves"

4.1 *Historical Background*

The EEC has its roots in the mission of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden, the Svenska Missionsförbundet, which began in 1906 when Swedish missionaries in the then Congo Freestate, later the Belgian Congo, crossed the border and the mountains separating the two Congos from each other. The revival of 1947 occurred at a time when the mission church was undergoing a crisis. "The revival broke out at the seminar, among the students, at the seat of the mission, the place where the young got their education."[18] After a long period of ethnic unrest, local political instability, and opposition to the colonizing power, the church found itself in a state of decline due to growing materialism and people turning away from Christ.[19] With the revival came a spiritual renewal during which a number of gifts were bestowed by the Holy Spirit, including two that receive special attention here: the gift of healing and the gift of writing.[20]

17 Mahaniah, *La Maladie,* 40, 44.

18 Efraim Andersson, *Väckelse och andra kristna folkrörelser i Kongo,* in Missio, vol 12, ed. Gösta Stenström, (Uppsala: Svenska Institutet frö Missionsforskning), 84.

19 Andersson, *Väckelse*, 84.

20 For more on the revival, see: Bertil Åhman, *Daniel Ndoundou, väckelseledare i den Evangeliska kyrkan i Kongo.* Studia Missionalia Svecana CXIII (Uppsala, 2014); Sundberg,

4.2 *Daniel Ndoundou and the Gift of Healing*

As early as 1931, Daniel Ndoundou, a charismatic pastor of the EEC, had a vision in which God indicated a place outside of Ngouédi, in Mfouati, at the base of a waterfall, where he was to dam up water and create a *Kizinga kia Siloa* (a pond of Siloa – see the Gospel of John 9:7) into which people were to dip themselves in order to be healed.[21] However, it was not until December 1972 that the project was realized and the dam was inaugurated. Interestingly later therapeutic centers are often referred to as *kizinga*.

In August 1948, Ndoundou prayed for a lame boy during a public service and the boy was healed. Then, in 1949, Ndoundou, together with two laypeople, received the spiritual gift to heal people with medicines (tisanes/infusions) prepared by boiling the roots, stems, or leaves of various plants in water.[22] Daniel Ndoundou attracted hundreds, if not thousands of people, who came to him for treatment. Other gifts of healing were administered by the Holy Spirit to further Christians in the coming months along with gifts that were related to the that of healing, namely: "the gift of seeing" in which the charismatic can give a diagnosis and see the fundamental causes of an illness; "the gift of tisane" in which the charismatic receives the recipe for medicine to distribute, individually, to each patient; and the "gift of intercession" which allows the charismatic to plead with God to heal the client using the medication prescribed. Occasionally the gift of direct healing was also given which worked an immediate healing through prayer only.[23] In 1968, twenty years later, the first center outside of Ngouédi was inaugurated in Boko and in 1981, according to Dorier-Apprill, all the parishes of Brazzaville had therapeutic centers where people could come for healing.[24]

"The gift of writing" was first seen in Komono, in 1974, and is described by Andersson as manifesting when someone "attending to a service, in an ecstatic or inspired state, during the sermon or the singing, writes signs or takes illegible notes in a notebook. This gift, as the gift of speaking in tongues, demands

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Conversion; Andersson, *Väckelse*; Å. Dalmalm, *L'Eglise à l'épreuve de la tradition, La communauté Evangélique du Zaire et le Kindoki* (Paris: EDITAF, 1985); Further reading includes the Journals of the various Missions (in Swedish) deposited at the Riksarkivet (National archives) in Stockholm, Sweden.

21 Andersson, *Väckelse*, 113; Interview with Philippe Louhemba, 18 February 2013. Dr. Louhemba is today among the foremost informants on the revival of the EEC.

22 Andersson, *Väckelse*. See also Elisabeth Dorier-Apprill, "Christianisme et therapeutique à Brazzaville," in *Politique africaine* 55 (Oct 1994), 133–139; For further reading see: Elisabeth Dorier-Apprill, "*Environnement et santé à Brazzaville* (*Congo*) *: de l'"écologie urbaine" à la géographie sociale*." Doctoral dissertation, Paris 10, 1993.

23 Dorier-Apprill, "Christianisme," 135.

24 *Ibid.*

an interpreter to be understood."[25] I have personally seen this happening on numerous occasions. I have also asked people about the interpretations and some have answered that they will come "in due time." I return to that gift below, when commenting upon an event in March 2016.

4.3 *The Trip to Loukakou*

During the dry season in 1984, my wife and I accompanied Pastor Dembi from the parish of Mansimou to one of the outposts in the countryside. At Loukakou, a Centre Therapeutique (CT) was to be opened. A deaconess of the parish had "seen" in a dream people coming together to pray for the sick and people being healed drinking tisanes (potions) of various kinds in the *mbongi* (meeting-hut) at the center of the village.[26] The dream had been reported to the pastor and the board had, after some discussion, decided that a center could be opened. We were to participate in the opening ceremonies.

On the day of the opening I awoke quite early and, when walking about the village, I saw the evangelist's wife stirring three huge aluminum pots on a fire with a big wooden spoon. The saucepans, of some 40–50 liters, were boiling slowly. She grabbed a mug and, from a distance, I saw her plunge it into each of the pots in turn and take a small sip. Then she replaced the lids and continued stirring. Later in the day I asked her why she had tasted from the pots and she answered: "Well, one doesn't always know what kinds of diseases one has. No harm in getting cured."[27] Later in the morning people came from the village and nearby villages and took part in the service and various consultations and, during the Sunday service, the Therapeutic Centre of Loukakou was officially recognized.

What struck me then, in 1984, was that to my knowledge one could not take a Revealed Medicine and use it in a prophylactic sense. If not properly used, the tisanes in the pots were nothing but plain plant teas. However, the evangelist's wife must have believed that the healing power was in the liquids – which is not what the charismatics engaged in the Revealed Medicine say. So, how does it work?

4.4 *A Typical Therapeutic Center in the Early 1970's – the Lukunga Center*

In 1974 Pastor Jonathan Mayingani wrote his final paper on "Healing through the use of revealed plants", describing various healing services in three

25 Andersson, *Väckelse,* 167.

26 In the EEC, laypeople – mostly elders of the parish – may, after initiation, serve as lay-deacons. The French word is *diacre*, which is a title serving both women and men.

27 Personal notes 7 April 1984.

countryside parishes in the districts of Musana and Madzia and giving a very detailed description of buildings and equipment used at the Lukunga Center. It is as if, according to him, the structures are as important as the treatment given. However, he also talks about a woman, one Mrs Badidila, who, in spite of being illiterate, received the complete program for therapeutic sessions – including Biblical texts to be read and a song to be sung – as a gift from the Holy Spirit. The song, according to Mayingani, reveals everything that is to happen: that people will disclose all their pains and then they will be healed. As the song is sung, people approach Mrs Badidila one by one, and tell her about their illnesses. The secretary, who is her husband, gives every patient a card on which the illness as well as the treatment is written. In the third verse, it is said: "*fukameno bwabu ya luniakisa*" (kneel and I shall heal). When this strophe is sung, everybody kneels and Mrs. Badidila prays for all who are kneeling, asking God to proceed with the healing of everyone present. When the singing has ended and while people are still on their knees, those who want to pray may do so. And the ceremony comes to an end as everybody takes part in the Lord's Prayer. On the morning of the following day, every sick person goes to the laboratory to receive the prescribed medicine. Some have brought bottles, and receive the medicine for free. Others pay a very modest sum for a bottle.

As everything is written on cards and in books, there are statistics available and Mayingani writes: "From 1969 to 1971, more than 886 brothers and sisters have found healing at Lukunga. In 1973 only, more than 1,093. During this period only 11 people have died. Most due to old age and only a few due to incurable illness."[28]

5 Revealed Medicine in Brazzaville, in the 1970s

In the city of Brazzaville things, at the time, were a little more formal. One of the distinguished leaders of the Revealed Medicine in the district of Brazzaville was Mama Veronique Nsonde, a lady in her sixties and member of the huge Poto-Poto parish in the east of the city. Mama Veronique frequently told the story of how God showed her mission to her. In a dream she had seen a forest through which were walking small groups of people. As each group came into sight the names of medicinal plants, adapted to various illnesses, appeared over their heads. In the morning – still in her dream – she was told to bring a certain plant to her own, epileptic, mother and to pray for her healing.

28 Jonathan Mayingani, *Guérisons au moyen de la Médicine Révélée*. Mémoire de Fin d'Etudes. Unpublished (Brazzaville, 1974), 13–15.

At the time when Mama Veronique had her dream, she was not allowed to begin practicing with the information it imparted. When she told her pastor he did not allow her to exercise her gift until they had gone to see Pastor Ndoundou at Ngouédi. Ndoundou was said to have the gift of discernment and was "very strong" in revealing whether people wanted to practice their gifts for their own benefit. However, after returning from Ngouédi, Mama Veronique was among those who were authorized to start the Therapeutic Centre at Poto-Poto, in 1976.[29]

I had the opportunity to meet with Mama Veronique in the early '80s. She was, in spite of her age, a radiant woman who was very keen to tell us, young missionaries as we were, of the mighty things God had done in the Congo.

6 Who are the Charismatics?

The people who work at the therapeutic centers come from all groups of society. I have personally met quite a few. In the above description of the Lukunga Center we read that the woman in charge, Mrs. Babidila, was illiterate. But Mama Veronique of Poto-Poto was a respected nurse and member of the parish board, while in the Mayangui parish I met Tata Samba Diouf, a former teacher, who was one of the elders and taught me a lot about Revealed Medicine.

In 1983, Professor Levy Makany worked as chargé d'affaires for the People's Republic of Congo, in Ghana. One night he dreamed that he should resign from his post in Ghana and return to Brazzaville where God would give him a new job.[30] Without knowing what kind of job to expect, he left Ghana with his family and returned to Brazzaville. After some months, he met with an old friend who told him that he in turn, in a dream, had seen Professor Makany open a hospital that was to receive "everybody, regardless of social status, religion or ethnic origin" in order to receive healing through prayer and the distribution of herbal medicines that were to be revealed.[31] Towards the end of 1983 the Hôpital de Dieu (God's Hospital) was opened. It functions on an ecumenical basis, and representatives from all the recognized churches (EEC, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, Evangelical Orthodox) are members of its board and

29 Interview with Louhemba, 13 February, 2013.

30 Interview with Levy Makany, 19 February, 2013.

31 Interview with Levy Makany, 19 February 2013. Professor Makany has been Rector of the Marien Ngouabi University, former Minister of Education under President Alphonse Massamba-Débat and former Secretary General of African universities.

act as non-paid servants. One of the principles of the Hôpital de Dieu is that treatment should be totally free of charge and that the hospital should operate purely on the basis of financial gifts.[32]

7 Hôpital de Dieu – God's Hospital

I have visited the Hôpital de Dieu several times, carrying out interviews and gathering photographic material there. It is an interesting institution, which, thanks to Professor Makany's status, has become accredited by the government and is well regarded. The hospital consists of several buildings and is well organized. One enters a big hall, seating some 200 people, which is used for church services, giving testimonies, and conferences. For a few years (2013) the hospital has also had a documentation centre. Behind the hall are several buildings for treatment and for the distribution of medicines. Storage rooms and a garage are located in the garden behind the man building.

The weekly program is well defined:

Monday: The center opens to the public. People come and participate in the morning service, which takes about an hour and a half. Pastors from different denominations preach and, towards the end of the service, time is devoted to testimonies of healing. After the morning service people are received, in turn, at the Secretariat where they meet with those who have the gift of diagnosis. This meeting begins with individual prayer and intercession. Occasionally complicated situations arise: people may have visited a fetishist, be heavily indebted, in an unharmonious marriage, or experiencing complicated relations within the family. Those "cases" are guided to the pastor's office where the client may confess sins and get absolution. At the Secretariat, the client deposits the vessel appropriate for the kind of medicine she/he is to receive. Before the patient leaves the hospital the "oral vaccination" is given.[33]

There are five forms of treatment: (1) a tisane to be taken at specific times; (2) medicinal eye drops; (3) "scarification" in which the skin is cut with a razorblade and the medicine is rubbed in; (4) anointing, whereby the medicine is diluted in palm oil and worked into the skin of the patient through massage; and (5) "Tyoko", in which the medicine is diluted in hot water and the patient

32 Interview with Levy Makany, 19 February, 2013.

33 The oral vaccination consists of a potion based on the leaves of the herb *Chenopodium album* (Sv. Svinmålla). Dictionaries mention that *Chenopodium album* is commonly used in African traditional healing.

inhales the vapors. Only the first treatment – tisane – can be auto-administered; the rest require that the patient visits God's Hospital.

Tuesday: Those who have the gift to collect plants leave the town by car or bus to go and find the herbs, plants, or wood required for the fabrication of medicines. Pieces of wood and plants that can be dried can be stored for some weeks in the storage rooms but many potions require fresh ingredients.

Wednesday: Medicines are prepared.

Thursday and Friday: These are "reception-days" when patients come to collect their medicine bottles or to receive the appropriate treatment. For those who so desire intercession is always available.[34]

8 Revealed Medicine and the Confusion of the 1990s

Congolese society underwent dramatic change in the 1990s.[35] I worked in Brazzaville from 1989 to 1992 and, thereafter, conducted several periods of fieldwork there for my doctoral studies, some of which were carried out between the civil wars that afflicted the city. In 1992 the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden met with the EEC for discussions regarding future collaboration, including the future of medical collaboration. Although the "medicine through revealed plants" was spoken of as a "gift from God, for the benefit of a people deprived of economic means", numerous problem areas were presented. Some that need to be mentioned are:

- the tendency to align with purely spiritual practice whereby medical diagnostics and treatments are put aside;
- jealousy among the charismatics and their unwillingness to present their "products" to the broader mass of the population;
- the possibility that the centers will be transformed into lucrative businesses.[36]

In retrospect it suffices to study the list of participants at the meeting to notice that no representatives or practitioners of Revealed Medicine were present during the deliberations; the different centers had not yet created any national boards or common organizations. However, the EEC had a medical board

34 Fieldnotes and interview, 19 February 2013.

35 Suggested readings: Gaston-Jonas Kouvibidila, *Histoire du multipartisme au Congo Brazzaville*, tôme 1–3 (Paris,L'Harmattan, 2003); Anne Sundberg, "The Struggle for Kingship: Moses or Messiah – Ethnic war and the Use of Ethnicity in the Process of Democratization in Congo Brazzaville," in *Ethnicity Kills*, ed. Einar Braathen, Morten Bøås, Gjermund Saether (Palgrave MacMillan, UK, 2000), 87–108.

36 Minutes, EEC, Brazzaville 1993, p. 35.

supervising the work at its many dispensaries and clinics and these may have felt at threat from the therapeutic centers. As a result of the meeting a recommendation was made for the reorganization of the Oeuvre Médical which then should comprise four commissions: 1) the Commission of Dispensaries and Maternities; 2) the Commission of Pharmacies and Depots; 3) the Commission of Public Health; and 4) the Commission of medicine through revealed plants.[37]

Although the study group expressed its worry regarding the eventual creation of lucrative, local businesses, that did not happen. However, a number of "charismatics", benevolent workers at the various centers, began establishing *kizingas* at their homes. One of my informants told me that the privatization of Revealed Medicine was the biggest problem during the '90s,[38] leading to a massive distrust among people, while the therapeutic centers in quite a few parishes fell apart.[39] So, by the time the EEC was finally ready to incorporate the centers into its organization, the formerly strong presence of centers had almost dissolved. Throughout the '90s God's Hospital was one of the best functioning centers; however, it was not organized under the EEC but, rather, was a private venture that sought to be connected to the Ecumenical Council of Congo.

9 The Young, the Revival and Revealed Medicine

When I worked in the two Congos in the years from 2007 to 2010, I occasionally visited therapeutic centers in Brazzaville. What struck me was that it was the same "old" people working there. The recruitment of younger collaborators did not seem to go very well. In 2013, the situation was the same and I went to talk with one of my former students, Pastor Samba, who worked as urban evangelist among the young in Brazzaville. During our long talk Pastor Samba repeatedly stressed that the young have a different spirituality or, at least, a spirituality which is expressed in other ways. The "Revival of 47", he said,

> …belongs to the old, to a different generation at a time that was completely different. At that time the *batata*, the old men, could spend a whole day, or even half a week, at spiritual retreats or prayer meetings.

37 EEC, Brazzaville 1993. p. 36. Œuvre Médical is the Medical Office of the EEC.

38 Pastor Zoe has a long experience with Revealed Medicine. In his twenties, around 1980, he was assigned as responsible for the Centers of Traditional and Revealed Therapies in the Department of Kinkala (Responsable des Centres de Thérapies Traditionelles et Revellés), by the local political authorities.

39 Interview with J.C. Zoe, 3 August 2013.

> They had the time to go and find the plants that God revealed and they had the time to cook tisanes for hours. But "La jeunesse" [the young] are disconnected from that. The times have changed; the world changes with every second and we, the young, are with that world. Europe and the West have captivated the young and the young are looking for completely new strategies to survive in today's rapidly changing world. The Church cannot impose its Africanity on the young who want to be modern. The young are no longer typically African.[40]

On my asking how the young relate to the therapeutic centers, he answered that "there will always be some young who integrate into that movement, as there will be young who integrate into and sing in the Kilombo choruses."[41] But these young, he continued, "are often those that have grown up in the village and have become orphans and have moved to town to live with the extended family. They do not easily integrate with the youth chorus or the Bible study groups."[42]

Pastor Samba would never go to a therapeutic center to find a cure for some ailment. He informed me that the Mayangui parish has its own hospital where he goes if needs medical treatment. When I tell him that Mayangui also has a therapeutic center he says that he is not confident in that kind of healing. God has inspired the parish to build a hospital with "…Western medicine, doctors, nurses and a pharmacy selling scientifically developed medicines. Isn't that better?"[43]

In a later talk, that same day, I found Pastor Samba at his home with a group of young people of his age. Pastor Samba mentioned our earlier interview and they began a long discussion of modern forms of sorcery versus various forms of healing and liberation from sorcery's effects. It became quite apparent that all kinds of magic are used by university students – in order to obtain higher grades in exams, for example. It became clear that although the young do not want Africanity to be imposed upon them, they live in a society which in many ways is very different from the Scandinavian, from which I come.

During the discussion, a young woman mentioned that she had heard about a hospital in town which was, as she saw it, nothing but a formalized, large-scale

40 Interview with G. Samba, 3 July 2013.

41 The Kilombo chorus is also a product of the Revival. It is established around one or a few persons who have received songs from God On Kilombo, cf. Celestin Bissila,. *Recherche Authentique Hymnologique et Instrumentale dans l'*EEC. Unpublished final memoir. Fac. De Theologie Protestante de Yaoundé, Cameroun, 1985.

42 Interview with G. Samba, 3 July 2013.

43 Interview with G. Samba, 3 July 2013.

kizinga: one with blocks and wards just a like a normal hospital, but where the treatment was the same as at the therapeutic centers. She also said that at that hospital they had an oral vaccination that everybody received and that had healed quite a few, "Just like that." The statement caused a number of those present to laugh and somebody said, "That soup ought to be distributed for free all over Brazzaville."[44]

10 Revealed Medicine – the Situation in February 2016

Two weeks before writing this chapter, I returned from a month in Brazzaville. I did not have time personally to visit God's Hospital but I had collected some published material and conducted a few interviews. I visited the therapeutic center of the Bacongo Parish and found "the same old people." Not much had changed. However, I was told that the EEC had finally, in the last couple of years, established a National Board for the supervision of those centers that were still functioning. To my surprise the Mayangui parish had reopened its center and new centers had been opened in a few of the younger parishes. God's Hospital has now been in service for 33 years, since 1983, and the new documentation center is well used. Professor Makany, now in his eighties, is still going strong and continues to lecture at the Marien Ngouabi University. He is still, as Professor of Botanics, an authority in the Republic of Congo.

MaGloire, a lay-person of the EEC, had received four years of education at the l'ENAM (L'École Nationale d'Administration et de Magistrature), a high-level school for employees of the national administration. He told me that the Lord had got him into that school and finally had given him a position as Director of Human Resources at the Mairie de Brazzaville. He had held this position for another four years when the Lord one day said to him, "You have done your work well, now come and work for me."[45] MaGloire then told me that he had been among those who, after a spiritual retreat in Kindamba (2014), had formed a national prayer group with members from different parishes throughout the southern districts of the EEC, from Brazzaville to Pointe Noire. As a member of the Bacongo parish, he was one of the Brazzaville group of intercessors.

The special gift that the Lord had given MaGloire was that he received messages through the Holy Spirit, which could go like this:

44 Taped conversation with G. Samba and friends, 7 March 2013.
45 Interview with MaGloire, 21 February 2016.

> [T]he Lord tells me: "Take your notebook and a pen and go to work." So I grab my notebook and go to work. Often this happens at night. Like, when we were in Musana, with Papa Hans. I was at work for the Lord and Papa Hans came and asked: "What are you doing at this time, in the middle of the night?" I told him that I would explain later. You see, for him to see someone who fills a 112-page notebook, working all night…He will say: "But what are you doing, scribbling rapidly like that, like an idiot?"
>
> …You see, I receive information on medicines. When I begin writing I am informed that this is a medicine for the treatment of, for example, malaria. But I have no idea what the posology is or how to administer it. I just do the writing. In the morning I call an elder, a woman who has the gift of interpretation. She now writes down what the Lord has told me. Then we archive the original text as well as the interpretation.[46]

Like so many others in the EEC, MaGloire has received the "gift of writing." As stated above, this is considered one of the gifts of the 1947 Revival, a gift that was confirmed by Tata Ndoundou and, as such, it has been extensively practiced in the EEC. Hundreds of notebooks are stored at some parishes without ever having been interpreted. In consequence, the gift has been criticized by many as sheer destruction, whereas others, often the writers themselves, have held the position that interpretation will come when the Lord so decides. In this case, the interpretation may come the following day as an interpreter is at hand. MaGloire also told me that sometimes, when they intercede for a specific person, the Lord can tell him to get his notebook and pen and to write down a specific treatment for the client. Then it comes with details such as quantities and very often it is also "said" that the price shall be 200 or 300 CFA, not more (about USD 0.5).

Interestingly MaGloire sees the specific-person case as arbitrary. The Lord has told the prayer group that the Republic of Congo shall be developed through the churches and that the churches shall engage in establishing farms, fisheries, and various kinds of small productive units *and* in promoting "scientific Revealed Medicine." MaGloire – and the prayer group – believe that the medical prescriptions of a general character that he receives via the Holy Spirit must be tested by pharmacologists and, if they work, must be exploited in ways that are profitable to all churches.[47]

46 Interview with MaGloire, 21 February 2016.

47 Interview with MaGloire, 21 February 2016.

11 Conclusion

When the Portuguese came to Kongo at the end of the 15th century they adopted the already existing local name for God, Nzambi, the creator of all and the sustainer of life and society. Since then there has been an ongoing process of adaptation and inculturation. Christianity has been adapted to Kongo culture and Kongo culture to Christianity.

There are, in my opinion, many similarities between spiritually given healing through revealed plants and traditional plant therapies. Tata Samba Diouf, one of the elders of the Mayangui congregation, when asked, denied all connections between what people "knew" from tradition and what was seen in visions or dreams. He was very rigid in his position that what was revealed by God through this "gift of the plants" had nothing to do with what God had revealed to his forefathers, in the old times. "Then the forefathers knew that this plant will heal this illness and that plant will heal that illness. Today it is different," he said.[48]

> Today this plant can cure that illness and that plant can cure this illness because, more important than the plants, is the confession of sins, the intercession and the inspired treatment that God has told us to give. We pray for every single person and we take care of every single person. It is not just a distribution of medicines.[49]

Tata Diouf's argument is also endorsed by the EEC wherein it has always been underlined that any resemblance is coincidental. God – Nzambi – has revealed the medicinal qualities of plants and how to use them for the treatment of various illnesses. My objection to that is that the same Nzambi also provided knowledge and wisdom to the forefathers and that this knowledge has then been traded down the generations. Thus, it cannot be considered "pagan" to use traditional methods to heal with plants.

One reason that the discussion is not very open within the EEC may be because the constitution of the EEC, and its disciplinary documents, prohibit discussion of elements referring to "old traditions."[50] It is thus forbidden to relate to and discuss personalities like the traditional *nganga* (the priest) or the

48 Personal diary, 1984

49 *Ibid.*

50 EEC 1990 and EEC 1998. The original documents were established in the 1960s by Swedish missionaries, and the Congolese church leaders, unfortunately, tend to venerate what was written by the "Elders."

sorcerer, and their respective activities. In my opinion, many of the problems that the EEC faces today, regarding modern forms of fetishism and sorcery, could have been overcome if the teachings of Buana Kibongi had been popularized and made accessible to the pastoral students of the EEC and to its parishes and members.[51] The constitution, in fact, hinders a local, thorough study and discussion of similarities between the old and the new, rendering the rereading of Kongo traditions rather difficult.

I find Pastor Samba's comment – that the young of today do not want to be pushed into "some kind of old Africanity" – interesting. I have collected plenty of evidence indicating that students use modern forms of sorcery or fetishism to gain an extra portion of life force in order to perform better in university exams and a range of other life situations. That same force, however, is also believed to be channeled through treatments with revealed plants. The woman with travel-document problems, for example, searched for healing when suffering from an illness that could be ranged under *kimbevo ya sanse*, or bad luck. Professor Makany and Mr. MaGloire also combine the old with the new in various ways. Makany has systematized the *kizinga* and shaped it into God's Hospital, where the Holy Spirit acts through vaccinations, psychotherapy, and medication of the whole person in a setting and with personnel that could make Western-medicine hospitals envious. MaGloire, on the other hand, feels it is possible to systematize spiritually given knowledge to heal not only specific persons but the whole Congolese society. This study shows how a well-established, mission-based church in Brazzaville, Congo, struggles to keep alive one aspect of the experience of a powerful revival (of 1947) that transformed the entire church, while at the same time, the same Holy Spirit fuels other expressions of Christianity.

Africa, someone said, will always remain Africa. And with the aid of mobile phones, the Internet and migrating Africans we meet its enchanted worldviews, its interpretations of Christianity and its expressions of spirituality in every corner of the earth. Let us there meet each other with interest and curiosity, but also with respect and love.

51 Raymond Buana Kibongi (1929 – 1998) in the years 1963 – 1967 was Principal of the Theological Seminary of the EEC. Beside Daniel Ndundu he was one of the leaders of the revival of 1947.

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