

RESILIENCE IN A VUCA WORLD

**Reflections on teaching,
learning and health
in turbulent times**

EDITED BY ANNETTE POTGIETER

HTS Religion & Society Series
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RESILIENCE IN A VUCA WORLD

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**EDITOR
ANNETTE POTGIETER**



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Research justification

Resilience in a VUCA world: Reflections on teaching, learning and health in turbulent times sheds light on how humans deal with adversity, especially in uncertain and turbulent times as seen with the COVID-19 pandemic. Resilience theory has become popular in scholarly discourse, and the term is difficult to define as so many opinions exist. This book aims to engage critically with resilience theory as a scholarly debate from the unique vantage point of the world of social work as well as theology.

The inception of the book stems from an interdisciplinary conference held at Hugenote Kollege, Wellington, with the theme 'Rethinking resilience in a time of COVID-19'. Here, scholars from social work as well as theology engaged in a discourse on resilience. Prof. Adrian van Breda, a specialist in resilience theory and from the social work department of the University of Johannesburg, was one of the keynote speakers, inspiring scholars to understand what is meant by resilience. Prof. Yolanda Dreyer, from the University of Pretoria and a seasoned theologian and prolific writer on trauma and resilience, was also a keynote speaker providing insights from a theological perspective. The collaboration between these two fields of thought is unique and renders new insights into engaging with resilience.

Different methodologies and perspectives from researchers are prevalent as contributors are from different scholarly fields. The book ranges from linguistical, liturgical, philosophical, practical, autoethnographical, anthropological, sociological and online methodological approaches contributing to ways to deal with traumatic, turbulent and trying times. All of the contributions are original works from the authors. The book is divided into four main themes that stood out from the results obtained at the conference, namely (1) religious imagination and resilience, (2) communities and resilience, (3) online teaching and resilience and (4) the resilience of philosophical questions. The target audience is specialists in the field of the discourse on resilience, especially related to the disciplines of social work and theology. The publisher ensured through the editorial processes that each and every chapter were subjected to an authentication process to curb plagiarism and replication.

Annette Potgieter, School of Theology and Ministry, Hugenote Kollege, Wellington, South Africa; and Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.

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Abbreviations and acronyms and tables appearing in the text and notes

List of abbreviations and acronyms

BSW	Bachelor of Social Work
CCCC	COVID Coping Creativity and Connection group
CoP	community of practice
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
DSD	Department of Social Development
ERT	emergency remote teaching
GBV	gender-based violence
HEI	higher education institutions
IT	information technology
LEANS	local ecumenical action networks
LMS	learning management software
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament)
NCCC	National Coronavirus Command Council
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
NQF	National Qualification Framework
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PHEIC	public health emergency of international concern
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Service Professions
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistics
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
US	United States
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization

Table list

Table 2.1:	Worship movements in light of Coutu's characteristics of resilience.
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International Honoree Lifetime Award for her contribution to this field. In October 2018, she was elected as the vice president of IASWG. In January 2021, she received a National Research Foundation (NRF) rating as an established researcher with international recognition.

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Theme 1

Religious imagination and resilience

Rethinking images of God: The Song of Moses and a resilient God

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■ Abstract

Every person experiences trauma differently. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has been traumatic, with the effects thereof still surfacing. It has impacted our way of being as we have been confronted with uncertainty and the need to adapt. It is especially in turbulent times that people turn to religion. Religion responsibly interpreted and practised may be interpreted as a healthy coping mechanism. During the lockdown in South Africa, the discourse about God, in some quarters, had become increasingly about a God that punishes and annihilates humans. Accordingly, this raises the question of how we view God and how it impacts us. The Hebrew Bible is itself a story of resilience. This chapter will use the Song of Moses, one of the most popular worship songs in the first century CE, as an example to illustrate

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the diversity of images the ancients had concerning God. It will be argued that a diverse depiction of God, as found in the Song of Moses, aids in cultivating resilient language to deal with life's ambiguities.

■ Introduction

In light of ancient civilisations, such as Egypt, Babylonia, Sumeria and Assyria, it is significant that we continue to engage with the story of Israel. Considering the economic, architectural and technological influences of these nations, it does not seem that Israel contributes to the world stage of powers at play. Israel does not invent the wheel like the Sumerians. They do not invent laws, as seen in the code of Hammurabi from the Babylonian Empire. The list continues of Israel not measuring up to these nations. The relationship between Israel and these nations is often one of Israel being a vassal and subservient to a greater power. On many occasions, Israel ends up as the unfortunate collateral damage of these world players at war – for example, when Egypt passed through to wage war with Babylonia since Israel was located geographically in the middle of all these competing ancient world powers.

However, it is Israel's reaction that is significant. The way they react is better than expected for a small nation that, according to all the normal measurements of achievement, should have been forgotten. Israel's experience of trauma became a crucible for redefining their relationship with God. Israel's constant retelling and reframing amid traumatic events shaped their identity, and this manifests in the Hebrew Bible texts. These texts have been their contribution and the reason we continue to engage with them as we marvel at their story of being liberated from Egypt, the exodus, and finally being led to the promised land. It is through Israel's ability to adapt, bounce back and survive, in situations where it would not have been held against them if they did not, that they may be perceived as a resilient nation.

It is important to define what is intended with the term 'resilience'. The term is difficult to define as there is no distinct definition (Grove 2018:30). Resilience has been defined in a multitude of ways, ranging from it being perceived as an individual's competencies or capacities to being understood as positive functioning in the face of adversity (Van Breda 2018:2). Van Breda (2018:4) states resilience is a process that leads to a better-than-expected outcome. Moreover, resilience is not dependent on the individual and their own strength but also on external resources such as support groups, family, friends, institutions, culture, religions and communities. These external resources can also contribute to the process of cultivating resilience (Dreyer 2014:1).

People react differently to trauma. In some cases, trauma leads to chronic stress that could continue for years, and in other cases, people seem to overcome trauma with a positive and constructive approach to life (Dreyer 2014:1). This better-than-expected relation to trauma is what is

called 'resilience'. Resilience theory has its roots in studies of adversity, with a particular interest in how adverse life experiences impact people harmfully (Van Breda 2018:2). Research on resilience is based on the notion that humans are able to deal with stress and adversity in individual and social respects (Richter 2021:493). Why is it or what is it that makes some people able to have better-than-expected outcomes in the face of adversity while some are unable to overcome their turmoil?

This being said, religion is reported to help people cope with adversity in light of a wide range of illnesses or in a variety of stressful situations (Koenig 2012:4). Faith can function as a survival strategy as it allows people to keep hope and evokes a sense of security (Kowalczyk et al. 2020:2676). Roberts (2019:n.p.) writes that there is a link between health and spirituality because involvement in spirituality is associated with better health outcomes, such as greater longevity, coping skills and less anxiety, depression and suicidal tendencies. Religious beliefs help to give meaning to difficult life circumstances, providing a sense of purpose and resources for coping with stress as well as cultivating coping mechanisms (Koenig 2012:7).

In the Song of Moses (Dt 32:1-43), various imagery is employed, which could be interpreted as describing a process of resilience, with the outcome being that God is understood and portrayed as resilient. This popular¹ Song paints a picture of a jealous and extremely violent God whose wrath is incurred as Israel worships idols. God plans to wage war against his own people (Dt 32:20-25), changes the plan and turns against their enemies (Dt 32:41-42). However, the Song also conflates these images with images of God as a nurturer and a parent. Here it is worth remembering that images are powerful tools that shape people's perception of the world and themselves (see Lakoff & Johnson 1980:1). Whether we are aware of it or not, we are guided by conceptual systems. Metaphors are intrinsic to the way in which we understand ourselves and the world around us. Metaphors consist of understanding one concept in terms of another. Accordingly, the images we use to talk about God are important, especially in times of crisis, as it reflects our perception of the world and how we act in accordance.²

1. The Song of Moses was an immensely popular liturgical text in the Second Temple Period used in worshipping situations, as already seen in 4 Maccabees 18:18 where it was used as a Psalm in the temple and sang in six parts, for example.

2. The portrayal of God as punishing humans was especially prevalent during COVID-19. With the death of the Burundi president Pierre Nkurunziza, pastor Joseph Ndayizeye led a prayer service at the Rugombo Pentecostal Church in the Cibitoke area of Burundi's capital, Bujumbura, with more than 100 worshippers, proclaiming that God is punishing human beings for their sins (Onyulo 2021:n.p.). Pieterse and Landman (2021:2) collected data from a narrative inquiry concerning insight into people's view of the origin of COVID-19; it showed that three themes emerged, namely, (1) COVID-19 is an act of God, (2) it has nothing to do with God, that is, the influence of demonic forces, and (3) God remains in control amidst a devastating pandemic.

The Song of Moses provides a diverse view of God that could aid in exploring resilience theory, which, in turn, could be cultivated within faith communities in order to provide support in helping people construct positive ways to overcome adversity. Accordingly, this chapter will use the Song of Moses to investigate images of God, especially God as a punisher. The relationship between resilience and the Song of Moses will also be explored, along with the role that trauma plays in the formation of the text. What is more, the rock imagery (which is linked to nurturing symbolism) that supports the overarching idea of a God that punishes in the Song of Moses will be dissected with some concluding remarks on resilience and images of God and how this can be constructive to communities.

■ Outline of the Song of Moses

The Song of Moses is a difficult text to examine. It is a culmination of different authors from earlier periods than the rest of Deuteronomy (McClellan 2011:70). It could have been 7th century BCE or even earlier during 1000 BCE. The Song bears traces of different influences over time and is also a culmination of different genres. The opening resembles sapiential literature; Deuteronomy 32:36, 39 has a prophetic style and hymn-like material in Verses 3 and 43 (Von Rad [1964] 1988:200). The Song of Moses broadly fits the categorisation of a hymn but also bears strong resemblances to the wisdom tradition (Thiessen 2004:401). Whether purveyed from the vantage point of a hymn that was memorised or sapiential literature that wants to instruct a person on how to organise one's conduct, the Song of Moses plays a role in the formation of understanding God.

The Song of Moses commences with praise, calling upon the heaven and the earth to focus on the words of the speakers' mouths (Dt 32:1-4). These words are, of course, connected to an understanding of the righteousness of God. This is coincidentally also the goal of the Song. It soon becomes clear that Yahweh is righteous in dealing with a corrupt and ungrateful nation since Verse 5 describes Israel as a crooked and perverse generation (Driver 1902:344). The poem ends with praise again, mentioning the heavens that worship God (Dt 32:43). However, this is not the overarching tone of the Song.

The first part of Deuteronomy 32:1-7 is a didactic part in which Yahweh is introduced as a rock, an image of steadfastness. One of the main themes of the poem is also introduced, namely Israel's denial of Yahweh (Von Rad [1964] 1988:196). In Deuteronomy 32:8-14, it becomes clear that Israel has a history with God. The image is sketched of Yahweh's history with Israel and how he brought Israel safely through the wilderness and planted them in an abundantly blessed land (Driver 1902:344).

The relationship of why God is so involved with Israel when compared to other nations comes under the magnifying glass. In Deuteronomy 32:15-18,

Israel grows weary of Yahweh and turns to other gods (Von Rad [1964] 1988:198). Deuteronomy 32:19–25 describes an outburst of divine wrath. God rejects Israel and calls famine, pestilence and beasts of prey against them (Von Rad [1964] 1988:198). In Deuteronomy 32:26–35, a detailed deliberation of God's heart follows. In the soliloquy, Yahweh was determined to annihilate Israel and to have it blotted out of history. However, Yahweh fears he will be humiliated by his enemies as they would think Israel's demise is on Yahweh's own accord and not Israel's. Appropriately, we read in the next section Deuteronomy 32:39–43, a prophetic message of salvation as Yahweh resolves to destroy other nations and to save Israel (Von Rad [1964] 1988:199).

■ Resilience, images of God and the Song of Moses

The Song of Moses contains multiple depictions of God. It ranges from God as a rock, a warrior, a father, a mother, an eagle parenting its young, a birthing and nursing mother, a healer, and an executioner (Claassens 2005:35; Olson 2013:54). The imagery is subservient to the intrinsic understanding of a merciful God who has limited his punishment. The Song of Moses poem is shaped by Israel's experience of calamity, affirming the potential for restoration and Yahweh as the one and only active, powerful God (Nelson 2004:369). This being said, at this point, it is important to emphasise that images create specific thought patterns. The particular functioning of metaphors can also be traced in the patterns that it creates within a discourse (Semino 2008:22). The metaphors employed in the Song of Moses form part of a rhetorical ploy. Elaborate poetic techniques are utilised in the poem to communicate a suffering community's jarring message of 'blame and shame', as Markl (2020:685) puts it. Patterns of repetition contribute to internal cohesion as it draws on concepts from the same source domain employed to a closely related topic and argument of a text (Semino 2008:23). Patterns of recurrence, again, refer to different expressions that relate to the same source domain connoting an aspect of a reality constructed in a text (Semino 2008:24).

A conceptual metaphor consists of a source domain, the concept from which the image derives, and a target domain, the new knowledge image that is to be relayed. Seeing that a conceptual metaphor entails understanding one concept in terms of another (Kövecses 2010:4), it is incumbent that knowledge of the source domain exists. The source domain will always reflect an image with which the intended hearers would be *au fait*. Conceptual systems shed light on the knowledge that exists within the conceptual system (Kövecses 2010:42). Accordingly, it provides a snapshot of the way an idea was interpreted and the culture it reflects.

It is particularly the way the rock metaphor is developed that could indicate a process of resilience. Of course, Israel would not have been aware of the

idea of resilience. However, it is clear that Israel is experiencing suffering. The trauma experienced probably refers to the Assyrian crisis and the way that they deal with it or, as in this case, do not deal with it, becomes prevalent. In actuality, Israel does not play an active role in their survival in the poem, nor do they have a voice that is being developed throughout the poem (Markl 2020:685).

However, it is not uncommon for trauma survivors to determine the cause of their trauma within their own conduct (Carr 2014:32). It is on account of Israel's sins that God punishes them and then annihilates their enemies. This type of language is not strange; the context of the Song of Moses, as throughout the ancient world, including Israel, the assumption was that suffering was caused by not worshipping enough (Carr 2014:33). Leuchter (2007:316) argues that the Song of Moses is included in the book Deuteronomy, as it fits the propaganda of Josiah's reform. Israel is urged to follow only one God. For Leuchter (2007:316), the Song is from the vantage point of a priest who has been oppressed and discharged from his rightful place. The use of other gods in the Song of Moses does not negate God's existence as the only God. These deities are used in subservience to God (McClellan 2011:71). From the earliest beginnings, the idea has been maintained that something needs to be done to attain the favour of the gods. Pleasing the gods entails health, food, peace and prosperity. Of course, the opposite is also true: if the gods are displeased, bad things happen (Bowden 2010:11). In the Song of Moses, something of this transactional mentality may be traced.

The composition of the book of Deuteronomy was influenced by the Assyrian attack on Israel. The trauma of Israel having survived this attack disseminates into the text. It is clear that Israel is not accusing or challenging God but rather subscribes to God the role of the prosecutor (Markl 2020:685). Wright (1962:26–67) argued that the Song of Moses bears traces of the divine lawsuit or the *rib*-pattern similarly found in ancient Near Eastern documents of suzerains dealing with their vassals.³ The vassal treaty was a text form in which the kings under the dominion and their subjects had to copy and recite, where they even called down curses on themselves if they had failed to show exclusive loyalty 'love' in the treatise towards the Assyrian king. The standard vassal treaty entailed the Assyrian king reminding his vassal of his obligations towards him. The treaty would begin with the history of the Assyrian king, introducing himself and proclaiming what he has done for the people on their behalf. For Wright, the Song of Moses has three commonalities with a *rib*-pattern as (1) there is a summons to witness as seen, for example, in the call to the heaven and the earth to bear witness (cf. Dt 32:1), (2) there is an

3. Huffmon (see 1959:285–295) was the first interpreter to trace the *rib*-pattern but did not connect it with a date – unlike Wright, who dates the Song of Moses in the 9th century BCE.

indictment seen in the interrogation of the plaintiff (cf. Dt 32:15) and (3) the judge's verdict that follows (cf. Dt 32:19–29) (Wright 1962:42–43).

Part of the heart of the treaty was the requirements the Assyrian king stipulated, among which the requirement to give exclusive allegiance: to 'love' only him (Carr 2010:138). Usually, a suzerain would either confront an erring vassal with a declaration of war or with an ultimatum to the vassal who had come into violation of the treaty terms (Thompson 1974:323).⁴ Accordingly, in the wake of the Assyrian oppression, the authors of the Deuteronomy envisioned Israel as in a vassal treaty relationship with Yahweh (Carr 2010:141). This phenomenon is called 'hybridity', as elements are drawn from the culture of the past oppressor. Within the experience of trauma and domination, a complex identity is formed. In Deuteronomy, the theological adaptation of the vassal treaty results in Israel now only worshipping one God. They entered a formal relationship with Yahweh, sealed with blessings and curses. Exclusive allegiance to Yahweh is required (Carr 2010:141). Before, they had to be obedient to the Assyrian king; now, they had to be faithful to Yahweh. Before, the Assyrian king was jealous and would tolerate no rivals; now, Yahweh is depicted as jealous and intolerant of any rival god (Carr 2010:141). In the Song of Moses, Israel's worship of idols incurred God's jealousy and the threat of wrath.

The violent image of God is familiar in a setting of violence. The language used is drawn from the context. The portrayal of God, however, is that of a god who, unlike the Assyrians, will deal with Israel differently as he will save them from the situation (see, e.g. Dt 32:15). The Song of Moses is shaped by Israel's experience of calamity, affirming the potential for restoration and Yahweh as the one and only active, powerful God (Nelson 2004:369). At the core of the Song of Moses is a merciful God who elects to limit the punishment of the people of Israel in spite of the fact that they are a nation that is not deserving of mercy (Christensen 2002:792).

This violent representation of Yahweh is shocking for us as modern hearers, but for many people who experience trauma, the only thing worse than the idea of God punishing them is the idea that God is not in charge at all (Carr 2014:32). It has an attempt to regain control and power by drawing on some kind of lesson that needed to have been learned from the traumatic experience. The pain and turmoil could have been prevented if they had acted in another way, which seems more bearable than a reality of total helplessness (Carr 2014:32).

4. These types of documents date back to the Mari documents in the late 18th and early 17th centuries BCE (Thompson 1974:323).

■ The rock metaphor in the Song of Moses

As a modern interpreter, I draw on the language of metaphors in order to examine the value the rock imagery might have in the light of resilience theory. With this remark, it is important to yield that identifying Yahweh with a rock could have been a literal understanding for Israel. Just because it is strange to a modern ear does not mean it was peculiar for Israel to refer to God as a rock. Israel had a fluid understanding of divinity and did not have a problem identifying God with a rock, as many biblical stories attest to an encounter with God via a rock, for example, Jacob at Bet-el (Thiessen 2013:118). The term 'rock' is frequently found as a poetic parallel to the divine names Yahweh, El or Elohim (Knowles 1989:308).

The manner in which God is viewed becomes important. The rock metaphor features seven times (Dt 32:4; 32:13; 32:15; 32:18; 32:30; 32:31*twice and 32:37) in the Masoretic version of the Song and plays an important role, as the repetition indicates. The source domain of rock conveys something that is steadfast and unchanging. The target domain of the rock metaphor is to convey God as a source of refuge and a protector (Tigay 1996:300). However, throughout the Song of Moses, the image of rock is intricately woven with other metaphors and conflates with the parental metaphor to the point where the rock gives birth. An image that is seemingly static is constantly connected to action.

The metaphor of the rock is an important image in the Hebrew Bible and communicates God has been steadfast and reliable in the history of God's dealings with Israel. In the Psalms, the rock metaphor is especially important, signifying steadfastness, strength, refuge and stability (as seen in Ps 18:1-2; 31:3-4; 71:3-4; 42:10) (Claassens 2005:36). Deutero-Isaiah is contingent on the wilderness tradition of water coming out of a rock in the desert. This is linked to the understanding of God as a rock (Thiessen 2013:111). In prophetic literature, the designation of God as the rock is also employed in the wilderness period (Thiessen 2013:111).

In Deuteronomy 32:4, the metaphor of God as a rock [הַצֹּר] is employed for the first time in the Song. The source domain is steadfast, unchanging and forcible, qualities that are transferred to the target domain to convey that Yahweh is similarly forcible, unchanging and steadfast. Initially, this does not seem to shed light on who God is. These characteristics are abstract and are explained in God's history with Israel (Claassens 2005:36). Knowles (1989:311) argues that the rock metaphor is unusually used in a moral or covenantal manner, as seen in 1 Samuel 2:2 and Psalm 92:16.

However, in the Septuagint version, Deuteronomy 32:4 rock is not translated from the Hebrew text. The verse begins with God [θεός], retaining the emphasis on a rock having been positioned first in the Hebrew version. God [θεός] and

his works are described as truthful [ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ]. The target domain of God's reliability is preserved. The Deuteronomy Septuagint translator, known to have been a more literal translator,⁵ could have avoided the use of rock as it was perceived as too concrete to describe the invisible and ineffability of God (Merrill 1994:649). Moreover, rock is used to refer to both God and other deities,⁶ as is suggested in the use of it in Deuteronomy 32:31 and 32:37 (Tigay 1996:300). Possibly the theologising effects of the Septuagint (LXX) translator may also be at play.

A pattern of repetition can be traced in the utilisation of the rock metaphor. Repetition refers to the use of the same source domain (Semino 2008:23). The metaphor develops. There exists from the source domain an understanding of rock as an unchanging thing, but the unchanging element is rather mapped onto the relationship of God with Israel. In Deuteronomy 32:4, the metaphor of God as a rock particularly indicates that God is just. Within the immediate textual context, these attributes of God are highlighted in Deuteronomy 32:5, depicting the contrast between God's conduct and his children's conduct. The parental metaphor⁷ is implicitly employed in Deuteronomy 32:5. The image of God as a father is inferred in the delineation of Deuteronomy 32:5, בְּנָיו [sons] suggesting a familial relationship. Israel behaves as 'nonchildren' as their actions undermine the parent-child relationship by being 'perverse and crooked' in contrast to Yahweh, who is 'righteous and upright' (Nelson 2004:371). A picture of a just God who is also a father to disobedient children is established.

The nurturing attributes of God are continued in the following instance of the occurrence of rock in Deuteronomy 32:13. The image employed is that of honey that is being suckled from a crag and oil from a flinty rock.⁸ The metaphor could be interpreted as a nursing metaphor that is employed, embroiling on the image of God as mother. The use of 'suckled' suggests God feeding Israel with no effort on their part (Tigay 1996:305). Israel is like a baby vulnerable and needs its mother (Claassens 2005:38). The imagery highlights the passiveness of Israel. God has been just, protecting Israel and providing for them in abundance. The wilderness tradition comes to mind, as even in places where it is least expected, God provides an abundance of sustenance. However, hyperboles are utilised to indicate God's care, as Israel does not

5. The translator of the Greek Deuteronomy stayed close to the Hebrew text, often sacrificing Greek grammar in service of the Hebrew version (Perkins 2015:71).

6. The Hebrew צור [rock] corresponds to the Ugaritic ḡr[mountain], which is one of the Canaanite god Baal's names (Christensen 2002:795).

7. The parental bond with God is depicted throughout the poem (Dt 32:5, 6, 18, 19, 20, 43) (Nelson 2004:369).

8. Similar imagery features in Job 29:6 and Psalms 81:17.

merely receive water from the rock but honey and oil as well (Claassens 2005:38).

The imagery may stem from naturalistic notions. Tigay (1996:305) and as Keil and Delitzsch ([1866–1891] 1996:1:991) mention how bees made nests between rocks and that olive trees grew within fissures. Accordingly, most interpreters render in this instance that rock is not used as a metaphor for God, although all other instances of rock in the Song of Moses are metaphorical. Claassens (2005:39) argues that rock may take on figurative connotations so that it may be extended beyond its literal meaning. She adds that it might be argued that God provides nourishment to Godself. This is particularly helpful considering the notion of God as a resilient God, as presented here.

In Deuteronomy 32:15, the God-as-rock metaphor resurfaces. The poem had moved from setting the steadfastness of God in the story of Israel to a God who is now faced with his children worshipping other gods. The depiction of Israel is particularly dire as it becomes clear Israel acts like a fattened ox. God has given them abundance, but Israel's reaction is ingratitude. Israel is referred to as Jeshurun, a nickname to denote Israel as an upright nation (Brown 1993:299), despite the fact that it rejects God and treats God like a fool, even after having received it in abundance. The second person plural dramatically describes how Israel became fat (שָׁמַנְתָּ [you became fat]), gross (עָבִיתָ [you became gross]) and gorged (כָּשִׂיתָ [you became gorged])⁹ (Christensen 2002:806). In light of God having given Israel everything and the mention of God as also Creator, the disappointment of Israel's decision to worship created things and forsake God is underscored (Brown 1993:299). The parental metaphor is not present in this verse, but in the depiction of God as Creator, another tradition of Israel's origins is drawn upon. The rock metaphor is expounded to include the depiction of God as Saviour. This forms part of the rich wilderness understanding as God had led Israel to the promised land.

However, within this same section of Israel's disregard of God, another rock metaphor is employed in Deuteronomy 32:18. In Deuteronomy 32:5, the image of God as Father was established and God as Creator in Deuteronomy 32:15. But in Deuteronomy 32:18, parental and rock metaphors conflate. Israel is depicted as being unmindful of the rock that bore them and forgetting the God who gave birth to them. Clustering occurs as two metaphors are employed in close proximity, drawing on the source domain of parental imagery. In this first instance, the rock is depicted as having giving birth. At first glance, the conceptual mixing of birth with a rock is unusual.

9. The precise meaning of the verb, תִּישַׁכּ, remains uncertain. The root תִּישַׁכּ does not appear anywhere else in the Bible. Relating the root to the Arabic k-š renders the meaning 'be gorged with food' or 'to cover oneself with fat' (Tigay 1996:306). Another possibility is to consider the meaning as 'grew stubborn' as a poetic parallel for 'kicked' (Koehler, Baumgartner & Stamm 1994–2000, HALOT vol. 2:502).

Metaphors are always coherent. However, the rock metaphor draws on the wilderness tradition. The understanding of rock becoming synonymous with God is evident. The source domain לָּד [bring forth] suggests giving birth, which is a typical use of the word, or to ‘beget’ as also seen in Genesis 4:18 (Bratcher & Hatton 2000:546).¹⁰ It is possible that a father image is used in the first instance, drawing on the meaning of ‘beget’. The second source domain חֵיל [labour pains] suggests a mother and not a father. The combination of both father and mother images suggests the totality of God as father and mother (Tigay 1996:307).¹¹ The accusation of Israel forgetting God is typical in Deuteronomy (6:10–12; 8:11–19) (Nelson 2004:373). However, Israel forgetting its parents sheds them in an unnatural light and expresses human rebellion (Brown 1993:301–302).

However, this rebellion is not without consequence. In Deuteronomy 32:30, the rock is personified as the rock is now undertaking transactions. This comes in light of Israel’s defeats by lesser nations, such as the Amalekites and the Canaanites at Hormah (Nm 14:39–45) (Merrill 1994:421). The only possible conclusion for these losses is that their rock had sold them.¹² Tigay (1996:310) argues that ‘turned them over, delivered them’ is a more accurate explanation, as God must have actively aided the enemy. In this case, being sold implies that God has abandoned Israel to their enemies (Bratcher & Hatton 2000:555). Within the context of Deuteronomy,¹³ the retreat of Israel is the result of curses that have been fulfilled (Nelson 2004:375–376). Again, in Deuteronomy 32:30, the rock is indicated as perfect, even in the context of catastrophe (Nelson 2004:370).

In the following verse, Deuteronomy 32:31, another rock metaphor is employed. The focus changes from Israel to the enemy nations and their relationship with their gods (cf. Dt 32:31–33). They are forced to admit their gods (their rocks) are inferior to Israel’s rock, not only in power but also in quality (Merrill 1994:421–422).

The final occurrence of the rock metaphor is in Deuteronomy 32:37. It forms part of the section of the poem where God issues a prophetic message of salvation. God has decided not to turn his back on Israel and no longer destroy them. However, the accusation of Israel’s rejection remains, as the rock metaphor indicates. In a sarcastic manner, questions are raised concerning ‘where are their gods who ate’ (Nelson 2004:376–377). This highlights how God is not like the other gods. The following verse uses a second plural again,

10. See similar sayings in Isaiah 49:15; 66:13.

11. Similar combination of mother and father metaphors are found in ancient Syrian inscriptions where the kings are described as father and mother to the people (Tigay 1996:307).

12. See also Judges 2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7.

13. See also Deuteronomy 28:7, 25.

making Israel's role clear and returning to the second person plural seen in Verses 6, 15 and 18 (Nelson 2004:376–377). Noteworthy is that the rock metaphor draws on the singular, indicating that foreign gods are many, but God is only one (Nelson 2004:376–377).

Accordingly, the pattern of the rock metaphor repeating highlights God's position towards Israel. However, this bond is explicated with parental imagery. The parental imagery is also inclusive, adding both father and mother images. This communicates God's holistic care of Israel. What is more, the rock imagery draws on the wilderness tradition. Initially, the rock metaphor looks incoherent, but in light of the wilderness tradition, it is associated with God's ability to give life. Within the framework of God being depicted as violent and jealous, God is also depicted as a caring parent, as steadfast and just as a rock. The rock images build on one another, forming a chain that establishes a way of thinking about God.

■ Trauma, metaphors and resilience

Against the backdrop of the Song of Moses is an experience of trauma. The formation and dating of the Song of Moses text are complex, with various authors and redactors. However, the Song of Moses is seen to fit within the scope of Deuteronomy, moving towards an appeal to worship one God. The rock imagery in the Song of Moses particularly sheds light on the steadfastness of God – as the repetition suggests. However, the image conflates with parental imagery: woven into an image of a God who is jealous and vengeful is a God who is also caring, changes plans, provides in abundance and protects.

Perhaps it would be more apt to speak of a resilient God instead of a resilient nation of Israel. Israel continues to be disobedient and ignorant of God. In contrast, the steadfastness of the rock in terms of the relationship with Israel remains; but within this relationship, God is undergoing a process in which the conduct of Israel is being dealt with. Throughout the imagery, it seems that the rock moves to incorporate the symbolism of birth, imagery that does not seem to fit naturally. Here it is worth remembering that resilience develops in an individual as well as a social context, even though stressing individual resilience does not diminish the importance of social surroundings (Richter 2021:492–493), and it is this context that helps to explain the gradual invention of complex metaphors as an aid for religious meaning and collective resilience. It is within this light that we might understand the Song of Moses's portrayal of a God who does bounce back from rejection, from mistreatment and from being disobeyed. The imagery of a resilient God becomes a comfort. It develops a sense of empathy and mindfulness and proffers a way to continue the interaction. It represents a resilient process. The individual resilience of God is ultimately tied to the collective resilience of Israel. Accordingly, the theological reaction of a people rendered numb by their trauma is the

projection of seeing a God that, in spite of the difficulties, remains faithful. The violence reflects the violence experienced, but even within the violent imagery, we have seen how the Song of Moses cultivates rich languages of nurturing. This nurture motif, developing in conflation with the rock metaphor, indicates a resilient God that keeps participating in the lives of his or her children. The God who is nourishing himself/herself, as seen in Deuteronomy 32:13, contributes to the action taken by God. Israel remains passive and continually disappoints. However, this does not deter God from giving Israel life.

What is more, another aspect worth mentioning is that the Song of Moses is used in liturgical settings, one that is told from generation to generation. A language of resilience was hereby practised, teaching generation upon generation how to act using the Song. Intrinsic is the God of mercy, the God that is like a parent. In times of wrongdoing, the parent will rectify the behaviour. This is resilient language, instructing how to cope in a difficult circumstance. The violent image of God is cultivated with nurturing imagery that exemplifies God as a parent who wants what is best for their children.

Undoubtedly, conceptual systems are present in religious language, moreover in resilient language. This raises the question: how do we think and talk about God, and what type of language do we cultivate in our communities? It is vital to discern what type of metaphors we use in church services and in our communities, especially in light of the fact that religion often supports people in developing coping mechanisms. Resilience is also a way of thinking and behaving; it can be taught and developed and is a continuous process that needs sufficient time and effort to develop. The Song of Moses has a didactic character and was recited in worship services. Reacting to COVID-19 with the notion that God is punishing humans is a normal human reaction. Trying to find fault in one's own conduct and not allowing the deity to be at fault ensures comfort in the notion of taking control of one's actions and being assured the deity is in control. The theological reaction of understanding God as creating COVID-19 to punish people stems from a particular trauma concerning the loss of power. This image, however, even within its context as an attempt to have a grasp on reality, is a dangerous view to purport. Dangerous because, unlike the Song of Moses, which draws from the violent language in its milieu, the depiction is one-sided. It is not constructive in creating resilient language nor aiding in dealing with life's ambiguities. In some faith communities, there is little build-up of constructive language in dealing with COVID-19. Merely stating it is God's plan or that COVID-19 is God's way of punishing humanity only contributes to a reductionistic understanding of God and bereaves a person of a multifaceted spirituality that could help in dealing with the trauma.

The Song of Moses does not provide a one-dimensional view of God. Even within this overarching image of violence, which is the language of the setting, God is still depicted from various vantage points, including both mothering and fathering metaphors and in animate and inanimate ways. The images contain ambiguities as life is complex and without easy answers. The variedness in the depiction of God rather lends to a richness and nuanced manner of speaking of God and the ability to navigate life's complexities. As I have said previously, resilience is an ongoing process. Rethinking the type of language we use about God already aids in creating imaginative ways to cope with the ongoing trauma of COVID-19.

■ Conclusion

In a time of COVID-19, where we are still only at the tip of the iceberg in seeing the traumatic effects on our communities, resilient language about God is pivotal in navigating us through uncertainties and difficulties. Religious and resilient language should ideally contribute to an understanding that assists people in bouncing back and constructing a healthy understanding of God. It should be an inclusive language that reflects the diversity of what we find in the Bible. Moreover, it is necessary that the resilient way we think and talk about God becomes practised faith, thereby shaping our communities. Perhaps there is some solace in thinking about God as a resilient God. A God who, unlike humans in their attempt to decipher who is to blame, bounces back as a life-giver in spite of the inaction of Israel. For a person in a state of being in shock and stunted, a resilient God invites a person to deal with the complexities in life – the good and the bad. Within the imagery of God as a resilient God, however, God is also depicted as jealous and wanting to take wrath on Israel. They decide not to – an indication of the intention to save Israel. But the flip side of this depiction of God leaves room for that which is difficult to understand and hard to manoeuvre. It becomes an assurance that God encompasses all, even the chaotic.

Reimagining liturgy in the light of resilience

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■ Abstract

The worship service can be an event through which resilience is cultivated. While literature often highlights the role of the worship service in addressing trauma, the pre-emptive work of fostering resilience in the worship service is somewhat more neglected. This chapter considers the four movements in the worship service (Gathering, Word, Table and Sending) in the light of Diane Coutu's three characteristics of resilience: facing reality, meaning-making and ritualised ingenuity. By intersecting each of these elements and suggesting a verb at each of these 12 intersections, it is indicated how the liturgy can be reimagined to cultivate resilience. This is possible due to the fact that resilience (the act of bouncing back) is not just a psychological advantage but a witness to the resurrection in this life and the next.

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■ Introduction

Resilience entails facing both the realities of the known and the unknown in order to be able to bounce back from disaster. The truth lies in both these realities – and the intersecting spaces where we do not know what we think we know (Gregersen 2017:1). Gregersen (2017:16) writes that ‘life will never be as smooth as expected but the very acknowledgement of this fact uncovers the divine source of a religiously-based resilience’. Writing on resilience, I am immediately reminded of a post that recently spread like wildfire on my social media newsfeed (Brown 2022):

I dream of never being called resilient again in my life. I'm exhausted by strength. I want support. I want softness. I want ease. I want to be amongst kin. Not patted on the back for how well I take a hit. Or for how many. (n.p.)

Since it was posted on 19 May 2021, this Twitter tweet by Zandashé l'Orelia Brown was retweeted 26 600 times, quoted 2300 times and received 79 900 likes. These numbers do not even consider the appearances it made on other social media platforms. If we want to theorise on resilience, the experience of the bodies with whom this tweet resonated should be taken seriously. Is research on resilience and the promotion thereof in society something that helps people flourish? Should we talk about resilience as much as we do?

Warner et al. (2020) provide a helpful perspective in their book *Tragedies and Christian Congregations*:

Resilience is one of today's buzzwords [...] However, the current enthusiasm for promoting resilience is not without its shadow side. *Having* resilience to cope with unfortunate and unavoidable setbacks is a definite advantage. However, what is *not* helpful is for a person to be expected, or required, by others to display high levels of resilience. (p. 279)

In an interview with Sarah Horsman, she warns against the ‘resilience agenda done badly’ (Southgate 2020:268). According to her, the bad approach to resilience places the onus of resilience on the individual alone without talking about the shared responsibility of care and mutuality within the larger community. One can see signs hereof in Brown's tweet when she opposes resilience with being amongst kin and having support. Churches, as communities of care and mutuality, share in the responsibility of building resilience: not only in individuals but (especially) also in congregations and communities.

As a minister and a researcher in liturgical studies, I immediately started thinking of the worship service as an event that promotes resilience. At that moment, I was reminded of myself as an 18-year-old, sitting with the ‘smoker-kids’ behind the church, cynically making conversation while the sound of a band and teenage voices singing songs of joy and praise faded into the background. Practical theology starts with practice, and sometimes, practice is knowing with

your own body that worship services and their liturgies are *not* always the place for the mourning, the questioning and the knocked-down.

There is a growing body of literature (Beaumont 2019; Kraus, Holyan & Wismer 2017; Smith & Schoenfeld 2019; Warner et al. 2020; Sancken 2022) discussing the manner in which churches can and should address trauma on a congregational and community level through, among others, worship services. Yet Eggers and Barlow (2019:16) are concerned that organisations not only help people get through trauma or cope but that they rather work proactively to instil resilience through which people rise after trauma, ‘stronger and better for it’. Is it possible to reimagine the liturgy in the light of resilience in such a way that it can create spaces for the joyful and the mourning, the faithful and questioning, the fallen and the ones trying to bounce back again? In this chapter, I look at the four movements within a worship service in the light of three characteristics of resilient people in order to explore markers for a liturgy that can help people bounce back.

■ Resilience within the four movements of a worship service

The worship service typically consists of four movements: Gathering, Word, Table and Sending (Clasen et al. 2010:5). Each of these four elements consists of various moments and rituals within the liturgy, but they share a common purpose according to the movement they form part of.

The Gathering is where God gathers God’s people and assembles them. God’s invitation flows through us to others (Scheer 2014). The movement of the Word typically involves scripture reading and preaching (Clasen et al. 2010:5). The Table is the reminder that ‘the Holy Spirit unites us with the Trinity and with each other’ (Scheer 2014). It is about the Lord’s hospitality but also about the church’s hospitality in community with others. The Sending is the response of the congregation to the Word and sacrament as they are sent out to minister to the world (Clasen et al. 2010:5).

In order to look at these four movements through the lens of resilience, I will be using the three characteristics of resilience as defined by Coutu (2002:13): facing down reality, the search for meaning and ritualised ingenuity.¹⁴ In what follows, I discuss each of the four movements of the worship service in light of the three characteristics. The liturgy, meaning ‘the work of the people’, is about what humans are doing in coordination with what God is doing in the event of an encounter with God, and therefore I identified verbs at each intersecting point in aid of the exploration (see Table 2.1).

14. Coutu’s article, ‘How resilience works’, was published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 2002.

TABLE 2.1: Worship movements in light of Coutu's characteristics of resilience.

Resilience	Facing reality	Seeking meaning	Ritualising ingenuity
Gathering	Acknowledging	Embracing	Focusing
Word	Confronting	Imagining	Retelling
Table	Encountering	Communing	Ritualising
Sending	Blessing	Participating	Merging

Source: The author is expanding and interpreting Coutu's (2002:13) characteristics of resilience. This table is the author's own work.

■ Facing down reality: Acknowledging, confronting, encountering and blessing

Facing down reality is a counter-movement to blind optimism and denial that demands a realistic, even pessimistic view of things (Coutu 2002:15). Gregersen (2017:2) describes disasters as residing between the unforeseeable and the predictable.

The worship service that faces reality starts with acknowledging what they do know: Jesus Christ as the Truth (Jn 14:6). Yet facing reality also requires that congregants acknowledge the truth (in their clarity and ignorance) of who they are and the realities they face. McKnight and Barringer (2020, p. 153) propose that churches that seek truth (and thereby goodness) include a confession of sin in their liturgy as an act of truth-telling about who we as people are. Confessing our sins, after all, is knowing all too well that we do not always know. Their suggestion refers specifically to abuse and exploitation within the church, but the underlying value of speaking the truth and facing reality within the Gathering moment of the liturgy should be noted.

One of the most notable areas in which a worship service can face reality (or not) is in its hymnology. Warner (2020:166) points to the too-often occurrence where there is a disconnect between the world people experience and the world of (and the song and sound emanating from) the church service – a disconnect Don Saliers (in Warner 2020:166) refers to as the 'lament denial'. Warner (2020:167) writes: 'it is a truth universally acknowledged that the Church lacks a practice of the expression of grief, shock and anger and the lament psalms are the answer'. Martin Tel (2021) encourages a hymnology that does not only listen to the poets or our own voices but also the voices of others, thereby acknowledging that the laments are also true and needed for and on behalf of those not present. In this way, the congregants face not only their own realities but also the realities of those surrounding them. He proposes this to counter Froehlich's (in Tel 2021) concern for occasional, artificial lament services that substitute regular lamenting as part of the liturgy. Lamenting should be a constant act of facing the reality of the world within the liturgy. According to Brueggemann (2014:78), such grieving may be a prophetic task as it draws attention to the losses people (sometimes unwittingly) suffer.

The lack of acknowledgement of reality in the Gathering is often the result of a lack of confrontation with reality within the scripture. Warner (2020:82) reminds us that the Bible is a product of trauma. As such, it is filled with stories of the real struggles and traumas people have faced across the ages – stories often filtered when choosing scripture for Sunday's sermon.

Brueggemann (2014) delves into scripture to understand the dangers of denial in both Israel's and current ideologies. He attributes Israel's theological crisis following the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE to three factors (Brueggemann 2014:1). Two of the three factors centre around Israel's denial that their ideology has failed and the despair in the face of that reality. Not facing reality can lead to crises and, therefore, Brueggemann offers three tasks in a prophetic ministry (Brueggemann 2014:1). Granted, Brueggemann's focus is on larger (political) systems and ideology, but this does not take away a core truth he works with: denial is a danger to a people's and system's well-being and as those in scripture had to confront reality, Christians are called to be confronted by the Word of God. This realism can be a prophetic task. Brueggemann (2014:22) writes: 'Prophetic realism is always juxtaposed to ideological deception. The issue is joined with courage and freedom and sometimes breaks the bubble of illusion'.

As much as ideological deception may refer to exceptionalism, it may also be prosperity, ease and a superficial proclamation of hope (Brueggemann 2014):

Ideology gives us a constructed, contained view of reality that covers over the facts on the ground and offers us instead a preferred set of facts that reassures and confirms the way we thought and wished the world were. (p. 45)

This deception is often fuelled by a misreading and misrepresentation of scripture and not facing the Word in all its complexity, or rather not allowing the Word to confront us in all its honesty.

At the Table moment in the worship service, one finds a moment of encounter. On the one hand, there is a divine-human encounter (Doyle 2021:123). On the other, a table is a place where Christians encounter one another (or not). Held Evans (2015:146) writes on the subversive nature of the open Table of Christ. The word *companion*, she points out, literally refers to someone you share your bread with (Held Evans 2015:149). According to her, the challenge is to encounter others around the Lord's Table, though they may be different, may have caused pain and might not seem to be deserving (Held Evans 2015:151).

Doyle (2021) picks up a similar line:

The early Christian practice of sharing a common meal at one table with bread and cup revealed sacramentally what theology could not. They discovered in the sacrament a oneness with Christ through the Cross. Their eating and drinking also revealed their dynamic interrelationship – reconciled and redeemed kingship. (p. 123)

Yet the Table, despite churches' theology of inclusion and encountering the other, remains (in many congregations) homogenous. And so, the reality of whom the church does not encounter at the Table ought to be faced as squarely in the eyes as who is indeed encountered. Much has been written on the link between people's eating habits (companionship) and social capital (Wepener 2010; Wepener & Greyling 2019), which in turn is necessary for resilient communities (Aldrich & Meyer 2015; Guo et al. 2018). But expanding the Table just for the sake of resilience would, of course, miss the true meaning of what encounter and companionship entail.

What communion does entail is that *all* are encountered but also that they are encountered *equally*. Doyle (2021:124) writes that encounters around the Table are just encounters: 'in so doing it creates a community of justice, not charity. It is not a tainted power relationship but interdependence'. In a country like South Africa, one is forced to look realistically at the empty seats around the Table and question the power dynamics involved in the past and present and their influence on the Table. These dynamics may spill over to current tables where bread may indeed be shared. Reflections such as these may help the church to face the realities of the country, of the social capital and resilience of the church, but also of the integrity of the Table in the congregation itself.

Behind the lack of diversity around the Table in many churches lies (among others) a history of many churches' misconstrued notions regarding what it is to be sent. I was a teenager when I heard the saying: All mission outreaches are either a form of rape or masturbation. Though this may come across as crude, it might be time for churches (especially those in positions of power) to face the reality of what the implication of many well-meaning missions might be. Corbett and Fikkert (2009) have pointed out the potentially hurtful ways in which churches, Christians, and people from all walks of life can be involved when trying to help others. Part of the challenge is the paradigm with which the sent work. Gregersen (2017:11) differentiates between the vulnerability and resilience paradigms. The former is valuable as it shows that some communities (due to injustice) are more vulnerable than others. Yet a resilience paradigm acknowledges the strength within all communities and thereby refutes the disproportionate power relations when one community feels sent to 'save' another.

Although mission outreaches have their potential pitfalls, Sending is still a vital part of the liturgy and church life. The Great Commission still stands and the church is still invited to take part in the *Missio Dei* in various spheres of life (Bosch 2014:398). The blessing given at the end of most services tends to be trinitarian and may sound something like this: 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all' (2 Cor 13:14) (Clasen et al. 2010:61). This blessing can serve as a reminder that it is, in fact, God's blessing. The God who created equal, the God who

came to serve, the God who moves in all people. Such a blessing is a reminder of the vulnerability of mankind, as well as the resilience instilled in them through the work of the Triune God. It is by receiving the depth of the blessing that the church may come to truly bless those around them.

Thus, facing reality asks for an acknowledgement before encountering and confronting the blessing. Moving too quickly, skipping these moments, may steal away from the moments of reality so needed in resilience and the liturgy.

■ **The search for meaning: Embracing, imagining, communing and participation**

The search for meaning happens when people attach meaning to their suffering and thereby avoid a victim perspective (Coutu 2002:16). Meaning is often symbolised in the form of values and creeds (Coutu 2002:20). This makes one question the tendency of some churches and denominations to abandon the reading of the law (values) and the weekly recital of the creeds. Not that values and creeds are limited to these liturgical moments, as the baptism (also typically celebrated during the Gathering) also conveys certain important values and beliefs as God's children are reminded of the manner in which God embraces them.

The gathering of congregants is, in most cases, the gathering of the baptised. Held Evans (2015:14) states that baptism 'is a naming'. Naming is concerned with identity, and identity is meaning-making. It is at the baptismal font that Christians are identified as the beloved and forgiven children of God, and it is from the baptismal font that the children of God learn to live out their identity. Baptism, as Warren (2016) reminds us, gives meaning to everything, both in the worship service and in the everyday lives of the baptised:

My wet fingers dipped in the baptismal font remind me that everything I do in the liturgy – all the confessing and singing, kneeling and peace passing, distraction, boredom, ecstasy, devotion – is a response to God's work and God's initiation. And before we begin the liturgies of our day – the cooking, sitting in traffic, emailing, accomplishing, working, resting – we begin beloved. (p. 20)

The baptismal font cannot but overflow, spreading meaning and resilience throughout the liturgy of the worship service and the liturgy of life. Might one venture to say that the baptism and its link to being buried and raised again (Col 2:12–13) is a form of resilience – though not because of the internal fortitude of the individual or group as Eggers and Barlow's (2019:16) definition suggests, but because of the work of God? In a personal interview, Professor Danie Veldsman (pers. comm., 30 October 2021), a systematic theologian, also links embracing (and, by implication, the baptism) and resilience. He traces the etymology of the German word *Trost* [consolation], used in the first question in the Heidelberg catechism, to the idea of 'moving forward' or 'being

helped up'. The answer to this question (which our only consolation in life and death lies in the fact that we belong to Jesus Christ) often recited or sung at baptisms is thus a reminder that resilience (bouncing back) lies in God's embrace.

When it comes to the proclamation of the Word in the four moments of the worship service, resilience demands that the stories are not only absorbed but that it goes through the process of meaning-making. The stories within the Bible are not meant to be heard but to be imagined. While hearing is a passive act, imagining is the process through which that which is heard is received and re-enacted in the body, thereby giving meaning to what is being heard.

Smith (2009) is well-known for refuting the idea of people's identity being not cognitively located, but rather affectively. As desiring creatures, people have kingdoms at which their desires are aimed and which shape their rituals and liturgies. However, these kingdoms and desires are 'caught more than they are taught' (Smith 2016, loc. 400). The way these kingdoms and desires are caught is through stories, habits and liturgies and, more specifically, through people's imaginations. Smith (2013) writes:

[W]e live at the nexus of body and story – a 'between' space where the aesthetic force of a narrative or poem captures our imagination because it resonates with the bodily attunement that so fundamentally governs our being-in-the-world. (p. 107)

When considering the moment of the Word in the worship service, Smith's work is significant as it reminds the liturgist that the meaning-making of people's stories and the stories in the Bible does not happen because of people's rationality but because it is located in people's imaginations and bodies. Instead, humans come to understand stories on a gut level because they have absorbed the stories as their own (Smith 2013:125).

Smith (2013:129) makes an important remark when he points out that liturgies are "'performed stories" of a sort'. Stories are not only told in services but they are enacted through the liturgy. What Colossians 2 does, for example, is it does not only tell the story of Christ's burial and resurrection and the embracing and redemptive nature thereof on a cognitive level. It also enacts the story. The baptism becomes the proclamation of the Word as it enacts the story liturgically. It is less about knowledge and more about the story being embodied and lived out as a proclamation of 'the good life' (Smith 2013:136). In liturgies, the imagination is engaged as body and story combine (Smith 2013:138). Should preachers and liturgists alike seek to help others make meaning of the Word and their own stories, they are called to consider how the evocation of people's imaginations in the storytelling and the story-re-enacting play a powerful role.

Both the baptism and the Eucharist are what Doyle (2021:123) refers to as 'narrative-bearing vessels'. The moment of the Table is the moment where the story becomes part of the bodies of those who take part in the Eucharist. When this happens, the ones partaking in the Eucharist are called to become what Dom Gregory Dix (in Doyle 2021:125) called the *homo eucharisticus*: 'as an embodied eucharistically celebrating community, *homo eucharisticus* makes sense of the world in the presence of the risen Christ at his Table'. Meaning-making in this moment of the liturgy is to commune: first by participating in the Eucharist and secondly by living from the Eucharist (communion) outwards. To live as *homo eucharisticus* is to counter the *homo economicus* and move from a place of consumption to communion (see Williams in Doyle 2021:126). The *homo eucharisticus* stands in communion, directed towards a just society away from oppression and self-service.

According to this, meaning-making in the Eucharist goes hand in hand with the Sending moment in the worship service. For it is from the Eucharist that the *homo eucharisticus* moves towards participation in a larger community and enacted liturgical life called *civitas eucharisticus*. This Sending finds its meaning in the community modelled at the Table and seeks to establish and strengthen connections to such a degree 'that just work is not human-centric but envisions a cosmic or creation orientation' (Doyle 2021:126). This *civitas eucharisticus* is concerned with the spaces where communion is sacrificed for the sake of economics, for the sake of individuality (Doyle 2021:127). It is participating in society in such a way as to grant others the opportunity to fully participate as well.

Meaning-making takes us from God's embrace of ourselves to our communing with others and participation in the world. This is possible because scripture moves from our brains into our hearts and our bodies.

■ Ritualised ingenuity: Focusing, retelling, ritualising and merging

When people or organisations display ritualised ingenuity, they tinker, adapt and improvise with what is at hand, making them bricoleurs (Coutu 2002:22). Bricolage, related to the concept of bouncing back, has to do with inventiveness and improvising with what is at hand (Coutu 2002:22). Inventiveness is not a tool to be used on a rare occasion but rather something that is ingrained into the fibre of the individual or organisation and can become a tradition in itself (Coutu 2002:24). That being said, Coutu (2002:24) indicates that stress and trauma cause people to revert to their habits. Strong rules and habits, therefore, can also add to resilience.

Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014:120) discuss the growing prevalence of tinkering in the liturgy of worship services and note that the term bricolage

is often applied in practical theology with negative undertones ‘namely as an indication of a less coherent, stable and substantial spiritual life’. This negative undertone, they argue, is unnecessary once it is understood that ‘liturgy should not be a fixation, but must move freely against the professed and believed “truth”’ (Barnard et al. 2014:128). The current trend in worship services in South Africa and other countries is thus not so much about a fixed liturgy as it is about a fixed departure point that serves as truth or particularity: Jesus Christ (Barnard et al. 2014:130). Herein lies the first clue to the way ritualised ingenuity can play out in the Gathering: by not improvising the departure point and focusing on the truth, against which the rest of the liturgy, the tinkering and the improvisation revolve play out. The Gathering, therefore, is the departure point of the worship service, as well as the departure point of the play and improvisation in its various forms throughout the liturgy.

Focusing on Jesus Christ as the departure point creates the freedom for the congregation to tinker in the moment of the Word without focusing on the fixed truth. Here, the call is to allow scripture to model resilience as scripture shows how it is possible to retell the stories and thereby seek new meaning in changing realities (Warner 2020:88). ‘Specifically, what is important for resilience is preparedness to be flexible in the telling of one’s story, allowing it to shift and develop with changing experience’ (Warner 2020:89). Her words bring to mind a form of bricolage in storytelling. The retelling of stories, Warner (2020:89) explains, is not changing the story dramatically (creating a new carpet) but the interweaving of different strains and patterns.

Retelling is not limited to people’s own life stories but also entails the retelling of the story of God and God’s people. For those concerned by the idea of tinkering with scripture, Warner (2020:89) points out that the reframing of stories often happens, especially in the Old Testament. As also seen in the work of Brueggemann earlier in the chapter, Ancient Israel was disillusioned with their ideologies and in the process, they had to retell the story in a new way that made sense. The story was retold continually within scripture as realities changed, meanings evolved and views of God and God’s work were reframed (Warner 2020):

One of the ironies of Christian attempts today to ‘follow the Bible’ and to do what ‘it’ says, is a tendency to overlook the Bible’s inner processes of development and revision, which ensured that the revelation of YHWH to the Israelites continued to speak to successive generations. (p. 90)

The invitation then is to invite congregants to ‘tinker’ with the Bible to seek the meaning of scripture within their respective contexts through the work of the Spirit. It demands wrestling with biblical texts within the contexts in which they were written and retelling them in a new contextual way. Perhaps one can here draw again on Smith’s emphasis on imagination and consider the role of imagination in imagining the Kingdom of God in new ways once we find that the old ways no longer function. At this point, it is worth emphasising

that this does not entail creating a new carpet, rejecting the fibres already inherent to the story, but working on new fibres.

One of the ways in which the retelling of the story can be translated liturgically is through ritualising. When life fails to work out as planned and previously imagined, new paths are to be explored to help the fallen bounce back. In their award-winning book, *Ongekaart [Unmapped]*, Wepener and Greyling (2019:7) point out that amidst the many liturgies and rituals for rites of passage, there are many significant transitions (most of which could be highly traumatic) that remain ritual-liturgically unmapped. In their unmapped status, these stories are pushed to the sidelines, allowing them to remain on the peripheries of the consciousness of many. Wepener and Greyling (and their co-authors) then go on to propose various rituals and liturgies for these unmapped moments. What they did, was an act of ritualising. Grimes (2014:193) use the word 'ritualising' to refer to 'the act of cultivating or inventing rites [or rituals]'. This inventiveness in the ritual landscape makes it a form of ingenuity or bricolage. Not that ritualising is necessarily always received well: 'Rather, it [ritualising] happens in the margins, on the thresholds; therefore, it is alternately stigmatised and eulogised'. However, should the Table be sincere in its desire to encounter the other, to commune with others from the place of the broken Body of Christ, then the Table ought also to be large enough to accommodate rituals and liturgies that map the unmapped, tell the untold and thereby truly encounter and commune together.

When being sent out in the liturgy, congregants are sent back to the ordinary course of life (Clasen et al. 2010:3). Yet life poses many challenges and the postmodern life abounds in knowledge, wisdom, rituals and liturgies outside of the church or even Christian tradition that can easily be cut and pasted into the Christian's liturgy of life alongside that which the church has in its arsenal. Bricolage is also referred to as 'cut and paste'. Calitz (2011:21) asks for critical reflection where bricolage liturgy is involved in order to avoid, at its worst, syncretism. He proposes a 'copy and merge' approach rather than one of 'cut and paste'. Copying and merging take into consideration integration and inculturation (Calitz 2011:21). It is an intentional act of looking at what is around and how it might be merged into the current context to achieve the desired results. While there are voices that would warn against cutting (or even copying) anything from 'life outside the church', I propose that Calitz's wisdom of copying and merging ought to be adhered to. Ritualised ingenuity in the liturgy of life may just entail that churches assist congregants in looking at what is at hand both inside and outside their church or Christian tradition and then merge this into their lives. The emphasis on merging instead of pasting reaches back to the Gathering: all tinkering in the Christian's life begins with Jesus Christ. On account of fixed departure points that bring everything into focus, it is thus possible to play, improvise and merge.

■ Conclusion

A few years ago, I attended a Lenten service. The congregation had a painting put up at the front of the liturgical area: nails poignantly protruding from Jesus' hands and feet. The next day, the painting was removed. It turned out somebody complained that the painting upset them. Accordingly, the painting, like its Subject, was buried away where it could no longer upset anyone. The removal of the painting deeply disturbed me for reasons partially unknown to me at the time.

As I wrote this chapter, this painting, this body, was my constant companion. Perhaps because it reminded me that we cannot and should not, bury reality, regardless of how upsetting it may be. Perhaps because this painting, this body, stands central to my meaning-making in my moments of suffering, death and resurrection. Perhaps because this painting helped me to focus on the body from which the retelling of my own stories emanates. It may be all these, but it is also because I still mourn the moments in which so many of us sit outside the church, listening to the moments of joy inside, longing for a place to hang our upsetting paintings of brokenness and, in the act of doing this, be resurrected.

When reimagining the liturgy in the light of resilience, the main concern is not to turn the liturgy into a social science project of building resilience. The focus of the liturgy remains to facilitate an experience through which people can worship and experience God. Yet it is, among others, in the act of rising again, being resurrected, that we give testimony to resurrection in this life and the next - a resurrection that we witness and celebrate every Sunday. Reimagining the liturgy in the light of resilience asks for more than adding or adjusting an element or two in the liturgy. It asks for an approach to the worship service that takes seriously the reality into which Christ was incarnated; the meanings that the Creator God breathes into creation and calls us to and the ingenuity of the ever-moving Spirit.

Theme 2

Communities and resilience

Local ecumenical collaboration: Beacons of hope

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■ Abstract

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the uncertainty that encompasses the traumatic experience also created an opportunity for transformative action with long-term benefits for the church as well as the community. This article focuses especially on the local ecumenical action networks that originated as an emerging practice and act of resilience in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) during COVID-19. The resilience cultivated is synonymous with an inclusive understanding of the biblical image of ‘the Body of Christ’ and echoes the principles of Jesus’s prayer for His disciples to be one in John 17. It also resonates with *koinonia*, as seen in the New Testament. At its core, collaboration demonstrates the nature of the Triune God functioning in relation to Himself, humanity and creation. Believers are invited into this community and accept the nature of the Triune God. This tendency to reach out in collaboration with others, especially occurred during COVID-19, also

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articulates resilience. The building of networks and partnerships with a similar vision or calling as well as mission proved to be a key feature in building and sustaining resilience. What is more, in addition to the resilience being built, this approach puts the DRC well on its way towards a desired future where church structures are transformed into synchronised, ecumenically integrated networks, serving communities at the grassroots level, embodying God's generous love towards people in distress.

■ Introduction

Collaboration in disaster relief and partnership in deeds of compassion between churches in South Africa and especially in the Western Cape was the result of the perfect storm caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The unprecedented socio-economic distress that followed a national lockdown in March 2020 in South Africa immediately caught the attention of the Western Cape Synod of the DRC. In line with the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and its strategy of forming local ecumenical action networks (LEANS), the Western Cape Synod encouraged congregations to initiate collaboration and engage in local networks in response to humanitarian need, deeds of compassion and pastoral care (SACC 2021):

Getting through the COVID-19 pandemic will require people to act together where they are. We all have a role to play and there is a lot we can do in our own communities. The SACC COVID-19 Pastoral Plan [...] is also a springboard for rebuilding a new and long-term reality of greater social cohesion and economic vibrancy at community levels beyond the COVID-19 onslaught. (n.p.)

Theologically the DRC in the Western Cape reflects on this period since the COVID-19 pandemic began, as an experience of accelerated progress towards a missional ecclesiology and missional diaconal praxis.¹⁵ In 2019, the General Synod of the DRC initiated a strategic process of revisiting its vision for the church going forward. With this work in progress, the General Assembly of the DRC (General Assembly, 29–30 September 2020) accepted in principle that the future includes church structures transformed into synchronised, ecumenically integrated networks, serving communities at the grassroots level, embodying God's generous love towards people in distress. Merely six months after the initiation of strategic planning, on the wave created by a global pandemic, 75% of congregations in the Western Cape reported being part of newly formed ecumenical networks responding to the needs of vulnerable people.

15. 'Praxis is an action in which the truth is discovered through action, not merely applied or "practiced". In praxis, one is not only guided in one's actions by the intention of realising the "telos", or purpose, but by discovering and grasping this telos through action itself' (Van der Merwe 2014:23, cited in Anderson 2009).

Against this background, collaboration and the embodiment of compassion through unified action networks and partnerships can be reported as a hope-giving experience, contributing to the church's capacity to adapt quickly, respond appropriately and secure support to vulnerable communities in times of disaster.

■ A theological grounding for partnership, networks and collaboration

Missiologist and church historian, Sunquist (2013:370) considers partnership, networks and collaboration as one of the major concerns for mission in the 21st century. Technology, immediacy, the economy of communications and transportation links Christians together more than ever before in mission history. It opens endless opportunities for partnership as a means of and mode for mission. Defining the concept (partnership) theologically might contribute to a deeper understanding of the Godly opportunities in building true community (*koinonia*) and serving the world (*diakonia*).

According to Sunquist (2013:376–378), partnership, networks and collaboration are grounded in four basic theological and biblical concepts: (1) the Trinity, (2) Jesus's high priestly prayer, (3) the church as the Body of Christ, and (4) the apostolic missions in the New Testament. Partnership is ultimately about God and consistent with God's creative and redemptive purpose. The experience in partnerships becomes an experience of resilience and hope. There is strength in numbers.

■ Partnership in the nature of the Trinity

The DRC builds its identity and mission on its understanding of God Himself. As the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in relationship, each to the other, the church sees itself invited and included in this union. The DRC embraces a missional theology in which every believer is invited and sent by God (*Missio Dei*) (DRC 2013:4).

Ross (2010:146) refers to the well-known Rublev's icon to describe God as a community, inviting participation in a relationship of unity and diversity. When meditating on the open circle in the formation of the seated figures, one has the distinct sensation of the figures inviting the observer into the circle. This can be applied to a theology of partnership. In her discussion of partnership as a concept, Ross (2010:145) explains the nature of partnership as a relationship entered upon in freedom by persons who remain free. Each person of the Trinity is a distinct person in a loving relationship that unifies them in one Godhead. In the same way, distinct individuals in collaboration with each other exist in relation to and with each other, freely accepting the invitation and joining the circle of partnership.

In the New Testament, this invitation (calling) is confirmed in the high priestly prayer when Jesus prays for His disciples in John 17, giving even more substance to a theology of partnership.

■ The high priestly prayer

Jesus becomes aware of the approaching end of His time on earth. In concern for the continuation of the mission given to him by his Father, He prays the very important prayer in John 17:13–25 that has since become the foundation for Christian unity and ecumenical witness. To seek the unity found in the Godhead (vv. 21–26) is to give expression to the continuation of Jesus’s mission to bring glory to God (v. 23). ‘Partnership’, according to Sunquist (2013:377), is in fact too weak a word to give expression to this high calling. In meditating on the meaning of the prayer, we might recognise partnership in unity as a divine gift bestowed upon us by God.

The best word to describe the gift of unity that comes with collaboration should most probably be the word *koinonia*. In a semantic study of the word, Louw and Nida (1989:562) define *koinonia* as an association involving close mutual relations and involvement. It refers to partners or associates who participate with one another in some enterprise or matter of joint concern. Burger (1999:231) applies *koinonia* to the supportive and community-creating activities when believers are connected to one another by Christ. In this togetherness (and working together), the caring and healing power of the gospel is experienced. *Koinonia* is about people who see and respect each other. Partnership can, as Burger (1999:245) calls it, be regarded as a type of organised *koinonia* but should have much the same outcomes of informal, supportive relationships as are experienced when believers gather as a congregation to support each other and share in worship.

Koinonia adds to resilience, seeing that no one person ever needs to feel or be alone. Ross (2010:147) adds that partnership indicates the true relationship between human beings. Unity should be characterised by equal co-operation that can be achieved by acknowledging a common loyalty to something outside all of them. In Jesus’s high priestly prayer, this external focus is the glory of God (Jn 17):

I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (v. 23; New International Version)

While focusing on His glory, participants become aware of the hope-giving experience of being together, as God Triune is one.

■ The Body of Christ

Networking and collaboration comfortably fit the image of the church being the Body of Christ. Paul uses the image of a body as a communal reality in the first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 12:12–31. Verse 12 reads: ‘As it is, there are many parts, but one body’. He encourages that whatever strengthens the community of the church is to be sought, welcomed and nurtured as God’s good gift. A well-functioning body consists of many members, each contributing to the whole in an equal and unique way. The different parts have a supporting role to play in terms of the whole; each part brings balance to the whole; the function of all parts needs to be coordinated and the well-being of the whole benefits each different part. The body works together to bring about healing and prosperity for all.

■ Partnership in the apostle’s mission work

Distinctively, the apostles worked in pairs right from the beginning (Mt 10, Lk 10). The partnership model is pertinent right throughout the New Testament. Paul, for example, although being held up as a great missionary, always worked in collaboration with others, such as Luke, Silas, Timothy, Mark, Barnabas, Epaphroditus, Euodia, Clement and many others. Of importance is that not only was the mission done in partnership but there was also unity in suffering: ‘I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death’ (Phlp 3:10)’.

Sunquist (2013:379) interprets this as an attitude that acknowledges that partnership includes partnership in the suffering of Christ. Resilience and hope lie in this realisation.

These four biblical concepts strengthen the idea of collaboration and partnership that brings people together, in which gifts and resources are shared, spaces are created to learn from each other and mutual support is offered. In the context of COVID-19, a network approach does not only resonate theoretically with a biblical understanding but also contributes to much-needed *pragmatic missional guidelines* that will contribute to more effective and sustainable involvement in times of disaster.

■ Emerging practices during COVID-19

The unique experience of our compassion ministry during COVID-19 was the realisation that we are not necessarily able to fall back on so-called *best practices* but that we are dealing with *emerging practices*, and we had to learn together as we go. We had to reflect frequently and articulate the lessons

learned and almost immediately adapt and implement what we have learned. This explains the very first lessons learned: resilience requires (1) frequent reflection (2) between a group of people and (3) agility through (4) leaders who are able and willing to execute this practice. Lessons were documented as we progressed through the crisis.

■ Observing emerging practices that build resilience

Several rounds of quick research within the DRC in the Western Cape during the first three months of COVID-19 pointed towards (1) high levels of personal motivation and missional drive (an aptitude for service) and (2) a preference for ecumenical collaboration in missional activities. It seems that the tendency to reach out and to do so in collaboration with others articulates something about resilience. Is it in human nature to seek community in suffering? Was this a surprise or in any way an unknown missional practice in the DRC? At the least, it spoke to the intentions in the DRC since 1994 to make a meaningful contribution to the socio-economic well-being of South Africa and to do it in collaboration with others.¹⁶

It has already been mentioned that the DRC dreams of a future in which church structures are transformed into synchronised, ecumenically integrated networks, serving communities at the grassroots level. It seems that COVID-19 accelerated such a reality. Here are some of the observations from several rounds of quick research by the DRC that indicates the clear calling of the church, the willingness to serve and a tendency to collaboration, resilience and hope:

1. **Benevolent intent – generous and caring:** In April 2020, one week into the national lockdown, *Kerkbode*, the official newspaper of the DRC, ran an online poll with 219 respondents. Congregants were more concerned about the needs of vulnerable people than focusing on their own needs. Given the option between personal interest during this time and the needs of vulnerable people, the vast majority indicated a concern about others (Bosman 2020).
2. **Existing relationships provided a good basis for collaboration:** An inclusive approach, also known as an asset-based approach, to join networks was followed. This included ecumenical participation as well as role-players from other sectors, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the business sector and local government. The prevailing

16. The General Synod of the DRC in 2007 makes known the intention to ecumenical participation (collaboration, partnership) in response to social distress in the new South Africa post-1994 in the following declaration: 'We want to take hands with all other Christians to be able to build up our societies and relieve the painful situations people find themselves in. We want to lovingly encourage, lead, and empower each other, as congregations and leaders, to become involved in the healing of our country(-ies). We make ourselves available for, and commit ourselves, to acts of service within communities'.

experience is that relationships established over time contributed to swift responses when the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

3. **A high level of willingness to participate was apparent:** Participants were looking for ways to get involved. What contributed to the openness for participation was reported to be a clear vision, the transparency of project plans, mutual and public trust and good communication between different role-players.
4. **‘Together we are stronger’:** This belief caught on to various partners admitting that they felt overwhelmed by the extensive nature of their needs and did not see their way open to engaging in isolation from others. The most obvious opportunity through collaboration is the collective value of gifts and resources, of human capital and communal effort, contributing to sustainability and resilience to overcome the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. **A practical and clear platform for engagement channelling compassion:** The willingness of people to be involved in acts of support was reported to be overwhelming. Well-organised initiatives created ample opportunity. The significance of being able to help built resilience both ways, unto the giver as much as unto the receiver of kindness and support.
6. **Previous experience of involvement in disaster relief contributes to readiness:** In June 2017, devastating fires in the Southern Cape led to deeds of compassion from across the country. This happened during an ongoing drought and subsequent shortage of water for human consumption, known as ‘Day Zero’ in the Cape Metropole. When COVID-19 struck, the previous experiences resulted in more articulated awareness and appropriate responses.

■ Challenges that threatened resilience

One needs to take the complexity and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic into account and keep an open mind to the challenges it presents in terms of resilience. Respondents from our quick research identified several realities that threatened benevolent intent. This includes:

1. a lack of efficient leadership
2. different expectations between partners in a network
3. role uncertainty
4. poor coordination in certain areas
5. legislation threatening involvement (rather than appropriate and enabling policies)
6. and even power struggles within partnerships.

Reflecting on these lessons and following the flow of emerging practices, synodical leadership for compassionate outreach and ministry support of the

DRC designed a tool within the first two months of lockdown to assist local networking in minimising threads and overcoming obstacles for collaboration. The tool is now known as 'Unlocking Hidden Treasures: Effectiveness and sustainability versus volunteer fatigue'. The prototype, briefly known as *Hidden Treasures*, has already undergone the first phase of application and revision to increase its effectiveness.

■ A networking tool: Unlocking hidden treasures

Hidden Treasures works with the conviction that in creating spaces for like-minded partners to meet, they will become a support system that can achieve more together than apart. Therefore, *Hidden Treasures* creates the space and structures the conversation with a strength-based approach. The purpose is to create, through a process of discernment, an innovative and integrated missional response to social and other needs. The purpose of this response is to serve the Kingdom of God and make his presence and reign visible.

An asset-based approach is a process of recognising, identifying and harnessing existing 'assets' or strengths (i.e. resources, skills, knowledge, capacity, experience or enthusiasm) that individuals and communities have, which can help to strengthen the response to certain challenges within a community. Instead of looking at what a community needs or lacks, the approach focuses on utilising the 'assets' or the gifts that are already there. The whole idea of *Hidden Treasures* is to 'dig deeper'.¹⁷ In a single congregation, there are many gifts; in the Body of Christ, the treasures are innumerable. Keep on digging!

Hidden Treasures is a structured process with four sessions that are designed to be facilitated online, although it can also be used in person. An open invitation invites potential role-players within a local community to this conversation. As the conversation takes place in a pre-designed, structured way, it places minimal demand on the facilitator. The outcome of the process is not predictable. It depends on who joins the conversation, their openness and willingness to participate, what comes on the agenda and how the Holy Spirit leads participants in discernment in their collective efforts.

17. The story is told of an explorer who once discovers a treasure and takes it home. Part of the fund is a potsherd on which something has been written in a foreign language. After living out the wealth of his fund, he decides to mount the potsherd and hang it on the wall in his study. Years later, a traveller comes to his house and asks if the man knows the meaning of the words on the potsherd. 'No,' replied the man, 'I simply kept it out of sentiment'. The traveller replied, 'It is written, "Dig deeper"'. The man realized that the real treasure had been buried deeper and that he had missed it because he was satisfied with his first attempt' (Marais 2022, n.p.).

■ Session 1: Discover the treasures in your community

Whoever initialises the process puts an open invitation to as many ecumenical role-players as they can think of. Existing relationships do benefit the process initially but do not dictate inclusion, seeing the aim is precisely this: to form new partnerships.

The first session is used for introductions and sharing interests, goals and strengths. Discovering mutual goals and interests in the local community and sharing a desire to bring healing and build the Kingdom of God contribute to those role-players coming forward who are willing to collaborate for the sake of the greater purpose.

A Microsoft PowerPoint presentation guides the conversation:

1. **Connecting:** Share how you are involved in your community.
2. **Practical arrangements:** Identify someone to keep minutes of your meeting.
3. **Discover treasures within yourself:** What are the personal treasures in terms of gifts/skills, time and experience that you can bring?
4. **Discover the treasures in our midst:** What are the networks and resources in our community that we are aware of and how are their services communicated?
5. **Share the wealth:** What will we be able to offer if we pull all these resources together?
6. **Values:** Are we willing to commit to honesty, offering a safe space for collaboration, human dignity, appreciativeness, not being prescriptive, being teachable, being receptive and accountable to each other?

Preparation for the second session is needed. Each member prepares by contacting at least three people/organisations that are involved in some area of relief or care (Marais 2022):

Assignment: Make a call to three people who are doing something about the need in the community. What are they doing? What activities will they be involved in in the next week? What needs do they currently have that we can communicate in our network? Make notes of the answers you get in the three conversations so that you can report them to the network next week. (p. 29)

The first session ends with participants reflecting and sharing the experience of meeting each other in the space created by the *Hidden Treasures* process. It is expected that participants will be enthusiastic about the discovery of diversity and what it brings to the whole.

■ Session 2: Let the information flow

The second session focuses on how the treasures identified are to be put to use. In times of disaster and hardship, communication is essential to effective involvement in the community. The session starts by listing the resources and needs members discovered in preparation for this meeting. Both resources and

needs are listed and categorised as logistics, finances and psychological (emotional/spiritual) resources and needs. The group starts to unpack the needs:

1. Where (with whom) did the need occur?
2. What causes the distress?
3. Is there an opportunity for integrated response through the newly formed network?

The final step in this session is to decide how to communicate the need as well as the offer to assist within the different systems to which the network is connected.

In preparation for the next session, each member will gather as much as possible logistic information (names, contact numbers, addresses) of service organisations and ministries within their own networks. This information should also be linked to the specific needs it addresses.

■ **Session 3: Mapping the resources**

At this stage, the group will already have identified those with administrative skills. All the information gathered needs to be registered and organised in a manner that supports the activities of the network.¹⁸ There are many ways to capture and organise information. The purpose of this activity is not only to have a clear picture of available services but also to identify gaps to take proactive action.

■ **Session 4: Dig deeper – grow the network**

The last session is spent on analysing the needs that were discovered. The network needs to decide how to address these gaps. Can they be addressed through the new network? Are there, in light of the gaps, any other participants who can be invited to join the network? The network also needs to decide on the way forward. Is it a temporary arrangement or does the network foresees itself to be a more permanent platform? Will the network be a gift that keeps on giving?

■ **Feedback from participants**

After the design of *Hidden Treasures* as a prototype to assist local networking and overcoming obstacles for collaboration, the DRC Toringkerk in Paarl offered to initialise and evaluate the use of this missional tool (Du Plooy 2021):

18. Worcester in the Western Cape serves as an example of how an ecumenical network mapped many soup kitchens organised by the network during the first semester of COVID-19. Although the map is not active anymore, it can still be accessed and gives a decent idea of how it served the purpose. When it was active online, there were names and numbers available of the convenor for each of these service points and on which days soup where served. Use the link to access the map: <https://bit.ly/3ETGTQN>.

1. *In what way did Hidden Treasures assist/help you?*
 - Before COVID-19, we (DRC Toringkerk) were a very isolated congregation. Hidden Treasure built a bridge, and we are very grateful.
 - Relationships were formed with like-minded (hearted) people in our community whom we never knew before.
 - The newly formed network gave us a mandate to operate in areas we did not have access to before.
 - We experienced the privileged and advantage of shared resources.
 - We became inter-independent.
 - There was more imagination for ministry in our diverse communion than when we worked isolated.
 - We had a very positive experience of cross-cultural and cross-generational collaboration.
 - Strong leadership emerged in the network.
 - Individuals in the networks testify to personal growth because of their involvement in the network created by *Hidden Treasures*.
2. *Is there an outstanding feature of Hidden Treasures that worked well?*
 - The process was very efficient in directing our vision and setting goals.
 - The exposure Hidden Treasures gave us helped us to read our context much more effectively. We (DRC Toringkerk) discovered how out of touch we were with the needs of our community. It was a humble space (according to respondents).
 - The space created made possible a deep connection between role-players.
 - It forced us out of our comfort zones, confronted our presuppositions and helped us to listen (to others).
 - The fact that we could pray together allowed God to lead us through His Holy Spirit.
3. *What did not work?*
 - We found the mapping of the community challenging.
 - It frustrates us that more people did not respond to the invitation and did not join the network right from the start.

Respondents conclude by expressing their gratitude. The community of Paarl is divided in two by a river. 'Hidden Treasures built a bridge over that river,' they explain, 'and it was a dream for all involved'.

■ Summary

Hidden Treasures creates a space and assists congregations and other role-players within the same community in discovering their combined strengths. This includes capabilities, capacities and resources. Communication is an important catalyst for developing an integrated and well-coordinated response, increased efficiency and a sustainable ministry of support and

development for those in need. Functioning from a network not only breaks the isolation but also ensures a better understanding of the context of a community.

■ Correlation with existing praxis

In his book, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory*, Sunquist (2013:379-382) concurs with the idea that partnerships in mission require constant reconfiguring (agility). He then offers eight guidelines (as opposed to rules) for structuring collaboration:

1. Ask: 'Who are the local partners already at work?'
2. Maintain worship in Christian unity.
3. Make sure unity is both personal and corporate.
4. Identify and name the type of partnership.
5. Be clear about each partner's own gifts and limitations.
6. Encourage both local initiatives and outside perspectives.
7. Encourage the broadening of the understanding of partnership.
8. When possible, seek long-term partnerships.

The local ecumenical action network approach during COVID-19 and the implementation of *Hidden Treasures* that followed show similarity to the process Sunquist (2013) proposes. Elements of bringing role-players together (creating spaces for connection), discerning common goals, building the network and continuation resonate with what the DRC experienced, specifically with the influence on and outcome for resilience. It testifies to a spirituality that embraces communion and *koinonia* ecumenically and serves the purpose of an inclusive approach to a community.

In addition to *Hidden Treasures*, the DRC has been developing a praxis for disaster relief called 'Spirals of Hope'¹⁹ since the Southern Cape fires in 2017. Spirals of Hope builds on the theory of Van der Merwe and Kassan-Newton (2007:350-365) in their discussion on trauma and the role that connections between people, mutual understanding, social networks, *ubuntu* and norms of reciprocity play in building resilience. 'Spirals of Hope' identifies and encourages togetherness or *koinonia* in building resilience and overcoming difficult times. *Hidden Treasures* once again proved this theory true. Nobody should be alone in times of trial and turbulence. This is true for both the one who reaches out to support and the one who welcomes the support.

19. See *Spirale van Hoop*: <https://kaapkerk.co.za/diaconia-spirale-van-hoop-elektroniese-boekie/>

■ Conclusion

Local ecumenical action networks originated as an emerging practice during COVID-19 and were encouraged as a preferred strategy, with very rewarding results. It led to the development of a tool to assist congregations in forming networks for partnership and collaboration.

Collaboration proves to be a key feature in building and sustaining resilience. It is a synonym to an inclusive understanding of the biblical image of 'the Body of Christ' and echoes the principles of Jesus's prayer for His disciples to be one in John 17. It also resonates with *koinonia*, as seen in the New Testament.

At its core, collaboration demonstrates the nature of the Triune God functioning in relation to Himself, humanity and creation. Believers are invited into this community and accept the nature of the Triune God.

COVID-19 creates an opportunity for transformative action with long-term benefits for the church as well as the community. In addition to resilience being built, this approach puts the DRC well on its way towards a desired future where church structures are transformed into synchronised, ecumenically integrated networks, serving communities at a grassroots level and embodying God's generous love towards people in distress.

A missional reflection on the lamentable realities of COVID-19

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■ Abstract

This chapter is in conversation with Emmanuel Katongole through his book, *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa*. It reflects on the lamentable realities caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic as observed in the context of the township of Soshanguve. It argues that these challenges could build a sense of resilience in local residents so that they can survive the threat to life and livelihood COVID-19 poses. It sees the church as a participant in building resilience in people so that people can wisely face their challenges, learn how to cope constructively and learn to imagine a hopeful future generated by pain, suffering and lament. It asks the question: how can the church actively participate in building resilience in local communities so that ordinary people may not only survive the COVID-19 pandemic but also see the opportunities it presents? It uses grounded theology as a methodology to capture the author's interaction through

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interviews with 20 participants about the realities and experiences of lament during the COVID-19 pandemic season. It concludes that lament could lead to a social and political dynamism that improves the quality of life of local community residents. It could also help people develop coping mechanisms that equip them to handle adversities wisely. It could finally help in the hopeful imagining of a future where the common good is prioritised.

■ Introduction

This chapter is written from a posture of lament, a lament born from the challenges and restrictions caused by COVID-19 all over the world and specifically in the township²⁰ of Soshanguve where the author lives. This township is the primary context where he generates his knowledge and awareness of the impact of COVID-19 on the quality of life of ordinary people. This chapter is in conversation with Emmanuel Katongole's book, *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa*. This book captures the realities of lament generated by violence and war in the Great Lakes Region of central Africa.

The lamentable realities of COVID-19 are still current in our South African context. Many people in the context of Soshanguve have had a first-hand experience of someone who tested positive for COVID-19 and got sick or died from it. These harsh realities will remain current for the foreseeable future. Resilience seems to be a virtue that would carry people through this time. It could be understood 'as a process of adapting successfully in the context of a threatening situation. It enables people to muster considerable strength and capability to address their crises' (Buys, Korevaar & Stubbs 2020:3). Resilient people seem to have the following characteristics: 'they coolly accept the harsh realities facing them; they find meaning in terrible times, and they have an uncanny ability to improvise' (Coutu 2002:1). In addition, (Coutu 2002):

[M]ore than education, more than experience, more than training, a person's level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails. That's true in the cancer ward, it's true in the Olympics, and it's true in the boardroom. (p. 4)

Resilience can also be seen as the 'capacity to sustain development in the face of expected and surprising change and diverse pathways of development and potential thresholds between them' (Folke 2016:1). Resilience thinking:

[/]s about how periods of gradual changes interact with abrupt changes, and the capacity of people, communities, societies, cultures to adapt or even transform into new development pathways in the face of dynamic change. (p. 3)

20. In the South African context, this is an underdeveloped and overpopulated peri-urban location (informal settlement). Before 1994, such locations were racially homogenous where non-white populations lived. Soshanguve is located 40 km north of Pretoria.

This chapter reflects on the challenges brought on by COVID-19 with the intent of generating some wisdom. Katongole (2017:23-24) shares an experience of a Nigerian-American journalist who travelled throughout sub-Saharan Africa and learned a lot about 'how ordinary people are dealing with the challenges they face every day'. This journalist found out that resilience, joy and innovation were key to their survival. She argues that 'this spirit of creativity, resilience, and innovation' is a consequence of challenges and 'difficulties many Africans face' (Katongole 2017:23-24). Therefore, this challenging season of COVID-19 may also be an opportunity for creativity and innovation for people to survive and thrive. The church needs to participate in the unfolding of this opportunity. Katongole (2017:26) thinks that there is a 'need for the church to contribute' to the well-being of local African communities. He sees such a 'contribution as part and parcel of the church's ministry of hope' (Katongole 2017:26). Therefore, the question this chapter is posing is: How can the church actively participate in building resilience in local communities so that ordinary people may not only survive the COVID-19 pandemic, but also notice the opportunities it presents?

This chapter uses grounded theology as a methodology to explore the realities and experiences of lament in Soshanguve during the COVID-19 pandemic season. This methodology aims to nurture 'a theology of experience and theologies from below' (Stevens 2017:203). The nurturing of such a theology happens when people practise something they believe in. The author believes that personal experiences of pain, suffering and challenges could be a resource for self and others in building resilience.

■ Ethical considerations

The author interviewed 20 participants in the age range of 19–47 years old. He used purposive sampling to select 10 males and 10 females who were all residents of the township of Soshanguve. The author handed out to each participant a consent letter to sign before being interviewed. The consent letter states the aim of the research, a commitment from the author to keep the participants' identities anonymous and the participants' voluntary willingness to be interviewed.

The author asked three questions to each participant related to their challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, their coping mechanisms and their envisioning of the post-COVID-19-pandemic world.

■ Challenges

The author asked his research participants what their challenges were during the COVID-19 season. The following answers were given:

1. The school disruptions and schedule changes. Some students saw their internship programmes cancelled and could not graduate as a consequence because internships are a requirement for their degree. In interacting with high school students, it is noticeable that they are lagging behind in their respective curricula.
2. People have not been able to socialise with friends because of the strict social distancing regulations.
3. It is harder to access medical care for those in need of such because COVID-19-infected people are prioritised, and other patients are discouraged from going to hospitals.
4. Work activities are constantly disrupted due to government regulations for people who work in the human services sector. Even the movement of people has been restricted. During the very first lockdown, people were not even allowed to walk alone in the streets of their neighbourhoods. Places of worship were closed. Many people connect with God by attending a church service.
5. Services are very slow. Many offices are closed and people are working from home. It takes longer to do anything.
6. There is a feeling of being suffocated in public transport because people have to wear masks in them. The wearing of masks is itself a challenge.
7. Many people lost their small businesses and their livelihoods as a result.
8. Mass vaccination is a cause of anxiety for those who do not want to be vaccinated.
9. The passing away of family members without a proper burial. Many people are dying in a short period.
10. Many people are having financial problems due to many family members dying and losing their jobs. Some people have also seen their studies disrupted because of their parents' loss of income.
11. Social distance is causing a trust deficit in people.

■ Laments born from these challenges

As human beings, our life journey is filled with challenges we can lament about. The aforementioned challenges are things many people can relate to and lament. Card (2005:19) stresses that lament begins from our birth when 'our mothers lamented in pain giving birth to us'. The research participants expressed these challenges as a lament as they grieved 'for the loss' of the normal such as their weekly school routine, socialising with others and a slower pace in service delivery (Katongole 2017:12). Katongole (2017:xviii) sees lament as a healthy process to learn to deal with challenges, such as the ones of the COVID-19 pandemic. He makes a 'connection between the God of lament and the incarnate and crucified God, a God who responds to an excess of evil with an excess of love'. This excess of love can be attained

through resilience. The latter can help someone 'survive and recover from even the most brutal experiences' (Coutu 2002:1). According to Coutu (2002:5), resilient people possess three characteristics: 'a staunch acceptance of reality; a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful; and an uncanny ability to improvise' (Coutu 2002:5). They 'devise constructs about their suffering to create some sort of meaning for themselves and others' (Coutu 2002:6). They 'find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed' (Coutu 2002:6). Some people had to be resilient and wait long for their medical needs to be taken care of because COVID-19 patients had to be prioritised. For many people, planning things has been hard because of constant changes in government lockdown regulations. Many people have to endure feeling suffocated because of the wearing of masks. Some people lost their jobs, businesses and livelihood. Some loved ones died and were not buried properly according to known customs because of the lockdown regulations. Many people died in a short time. Moreover, there seems to be a general increase in financial problems in the local community. The mass vaccination encouraged by the government and other private institutions is causing anxiety in some people because they do not trust the efficacy of the jab, and the social distancing rules to help prevent the spread of the virus seem to harm how people trust one another.

All the aforementioned mentioned issues need indeed to be lamented. Katongole (2017:182) stresses that 'the loss of lament is also a loss in social and political dynamism', leading to a social justice movement that could bring about a smooth communal improvement of the quality of life of people. Therefore, a proper lament has the potential to yield positive outcomes. It could be seen as an 'uneasy but necessary' companion in our search for survival mechanisms in a challenging season (Serfontein 2021:4). It could be both a necessary tool and a process on the road to the imagination of a hopeful future. It could finally sharpen someone's sense of resilience in seeking 'an alternative reality' that promotes the common good. Such seeking could challenge people to critically interact with what is seen as normal and learn to embrace 'non-conformity' as sometimes a way to generate wisdom because it would mean being open to other alternatives when a known routine is not working anymore (Brueggemann 2008:223). The former Burkinabé president, Thomas Sankara (quoted by Katongole 2017:254), saw non-conformity as 'a willingness to turn one's back on old formulas to invent the future' towards a better promotion of the common good. This invention necessitates the refusal to 'accept things as they are' and be a passive recipient of the challenges this reality brings but to be disposed to explore an unfamiliar territory, which may help someone overcome or survive adversities (Katongole 2017:110). Such a posture has the potential to strengthen people's coping mechanisms.

■ Learning to cope

The author asked this question to his informants: 'What is helping you to cope amid the COVID-19 lockdown challenges?' The following answers were given:

1. It has been good to be able to study from home, continue to play sports and hang out with friends both face-to-face and virtually. It has also been good to continue working, although with a smaller number of people.
2. I now enjoy not having to travel to school five days a week and do most of my work and tasks online.
3. I can still use my mobile device to search for things I need to know about, whereas before, I relied on friends.
4. I am getting used to staying at home, watching a lot of television series' and eating a lot. My parents are even complaining about food finishing faster than before.
5. I am growing comfortable being alone and only interacting with friends and colleagues virtually.
6. I am very disciplined at regularly wearing my mask to protect myself because I do not want to get infected.
7. I am singing more regularly because I find joy in singing.
8. I am witnessing a growing hunger for God in the people around me. More people come to our ministry activities than before COVID-19.

■ Reflection

Coping well sometimes means learning to convert a challenge into an opportunity. Such was the case of Maggy Barankitse, a Burundian founder of several orphanages who was an eyewitness to the massacre of innocent people and loved ones. She knew where these people were buried and chose to sometimes 'return to the gravesite [...] not to relive the trauma' but so that she may envision a better future for all Burundians (Katongole 2017:234). Such a discipline to return to a traumatic memory as an exercise to imagine a better present and future could be a resource during a pandemic such as COVID-19. We could learn to look at the present challenges and hardships and develop coping mechanisms that could help us survive. Having to study from home through virtual means, when someone has only known going to school every day, is certainly a challenge. Being forced to design a curriculum in short periods when someone was used to doing it once a year is a challenge. Being restricted from interacting more with a cell phone to learn about things when someone was used to extracting knowledge from interacting with friends is a challenge. Learning new habits such as staying at home longer and watching television or series for longer than usual because someone is bored is a challenge. It is also a challenge for parents and guardians to have to go grocery shopping more frequently than usual because their dependents are at home

due to the lockdown. Wearing masks is a challenge. Doing sports to avoid getting infected could also generate some anxiety.

Yet, all the aforementioned challenges are also coping mechanisms that are helping people to survive during the COVID-19 pandemic season. Coping well through the aforementioned challenges would imply resisting 'any impulse to view' ourselves as victims but rather 'create meaning' for ourselves and others (Coutu 2002:1). Such an exercise could also help any ordinary people 'build bridges' from these current challenges to 'a fuller, better future (Coutu 2002:1). Those bridges will make the present manageable by removing the sense that the present is overwhelming' (Coutu 2002:1). They could trigger our creativity to imagine 'possibilities others don't see' (Coutu 2002:1). This is how the author sees the importance of looking at opportunities amid challenges using a few examples: learning to find joy in small things such as singing, spending quality time with the people someone loves and looking at the brighter side of things like studying from home and not having to travel to school five days a week, or shopping online instead of travelling to a mall.

An acquaintance with the stories of martyrs could also be helpful in the development of our coping muscles during COVID-19. Katongole (2017) stresses that:

[M]artyrs provide the most decisive and clearest example of hope, and their memory is a form of resistance against cheap hope and struggle to transform the structures of [...] marginalisation into an excess of love. (p. xix)

The memory of martyrs and brave people around us who sacrificed their lives to defend an altruistic cause could motivate ordinary people towards social engagement, which could advocate for everybody's survival. We have already seen that COVID-19 has brought 'a sense of solidarity among the nations of the world' (Serfontein 2021:7). A lamentable situation such as COVID-19 has the potential to nurture and sustain 'social engagement' (Katongole 2017:xiv). It could help us wear new eyes and develop emotional muscles that would make it possible for us 'to endure and survive extraordinary hardships' (Coutu 2002:6). Katongole (2017:254) points out that 'if the memory of martyrs fertilises the soil of the Christian struggle for a more peaceful world, the gift of dreaming is what sustains that struggle'. Our ability to dream in a certain way could help us cope with the current hardship of COVID-19, which feels like evil on many fronts.

A personal and social introspection could also build our coping mechanism if we hope to catalyse a social revolution from below as an outcome of lessons learned from the current COVID-19 challenges. Katongole (2017:164) stresses that 'we cannot transform the social system without reforming ourselves first, provoking in ourselves a renovation of spiritual and moral life'. A certain resilience can only be built by 'eyes that have cried' and learning to cope by converting their cries into a resource that helps others smile or cry in a way

that is therapeutic (Katongole 2017:164). A prolonged situation of pain and suffering, such as a pandemic, could cause 'psychological and physical harm' to many people (Denton 2021:2). This impact could affect the existing 'defence mechanisms' a community possesses. It is, therefore, critical for people to build positive coping mechanisms that defend and protect them. Such mechanisms could also spur them onto the imagination of a hopeful future that lament could catalyse.

■ Imagination with hope

The author asked this question to the respondents: 'Can you imagine what life will be like post-COVID-19 restrictions?' This question generated the following answers:

1. Remaining focused on generating quality and worrying less about quantity of things.
2. Nurturing relationships.
3. Learning to positively inspire others even amid challenges.
4. Learning to contextualise things.
5. Adapting to the climate. Getting vaccinated will be critical in the post-COVID-19 world we are in.
6. Employment creation and the opening up of the economy of our country and other nations.

Katongole (2017:109) states that 'the spine of lament is hope'. Therefore, remaining present to what we are learning from this COVID-19 pandemic, such as focusing on quality rather than quantity, nurturing relationships one has, challenging oneself to inspire others and our adaptability positively could be critical to our thriving as a society. Theology could be an encourager on this journey of hope. Katongole (2017:109) states that 'African theology should be at the service of the ministry of hope'. It should facilitate (Katongole 2017):

[7]he creation of a visionary, creative and resourceful society for the struggle against all the negative forces that Africa is suffering from. Hope propels human beings to not only survive but also thrive. (p. 26)

It is a 'life-long journey toward self-actualisation' that is important in achieving a 'better present and future for individuals, households, local community and humanity as a whole' (Maholmes 2014:1-2). It 'is the essential mindset that enables individuals to have resilience in the face of adverse circumstances' (Maholmes 2014:2).

According to Katongole (2017:26), a better future for Africa depends on Africans' determination to change their 'mentality and socio-economic-politico-energies'. Faith and theology could help 'in mobilising these energies [...] and thus become a transformative force for a better future in

Africa' (Katongole 2017:26). They can help raise 'leaders who are critical in their thinking, who are grounded in ethics of love' for everyone, including those who disagree with them (Katongole 2017:217). Such leaders should be trained to be resilient. It seems like 'people who have survived a crisis build up a resilience to crises because they realised that they had made it through past crises' (Buys et al. 2020:3). Such resilience allows them to endure challenges and crises. They are also able to extend that ability 'to reach out to others in adverse experiences and comfort them to deal with their challenges' (Buys et al. 2020:3). This extension of ability could shape the sense of hope in Christians in helping them be present to 'God's promises [...] of eternal glory and love' (Buys et al. 2020:3). It could cultivate an agency from below inspired by the current 'experience of suffering they are going through so that they can embrace, hold, and transform the experience of personal and communal suffering and tragedy into energy, commitment, and advocacy for' a better future for all (Katongole 2017:xiii). An effective way to show resilience during the COVID-19 climate is 'to remain in solidarity' with everybody. Africans need to remain present in this sense of solidarity if 'they hope to catalyse a better future for all of them' (Katongole 2017:168). Altruism is 'associated with resilience both in adults and children' (Wu et al. 2013:6-7). Such altruism is demonstrated by Angelina, a Ugandan female, daughter was once kidnapped by the rebels of the Lord Resistance Army. She then started an advocacy group to raise awareness about the kidnapping practices of this rebel group. At some point (Katongole 2017):

[7]he rebel leaders [...] offered to release her daughter if she would stop the advocacy and publicity campaign. She turned down the rebel's offer. She would only stop the advocacy if the rebels released all the abducted girls, for she had told them every child is my child. (p. xi)

This was a hard decision because her own family disliked it and turned against her. Her daughter ended up escaping the rebels and returned home after 'seven years and seven months' (Katongole 2017:xii).

Such painful memories of pain, hurt and suffering could be 'a guide to the future' we would like to become (Katongole 2017:234). Such a future would be catalysed by people with a high sense of self-abnegation, like Angelina, for the promotion of a collective good. The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a collective lament that should challenge humanity to seek a collective solution to the eradication of the COVID-19 pandemic and the putting in place measures to prevent such a pandemic from occurring again. A collective seeking of a solution is the hope the author wishes. It has the potential to make humanity a better place for all. Currently, the world is an exciting place for a few people only. Our ability to lament well the inequalities around the world that COVID-19 has highlighted could equip us to advocate for equity for all. The book of 1 Peter reminds us that 'the reason for hope is located at the intersection of

Christ's suffering and death and the gift of his resurrection' (Katongole 2017:37). The suffering we are enduring during this COVID-19 pandemic may be a resource for our participation in the building of the future we desire.

The prophetic ministry of the church could be inspired by the current lamentable situation to creatively design stories of hope where people learn to live in solidarity with one another through 'common interest practices such as sport, art, dance' (Katongole 2017:258). Stories and experiences of hope could help ordinary people look 'beyond the present realities and [lead] to the transformation that reaches beyond the set boundaries of past experiences and perspectives' (Groenewald 2017:3). Resilience will equip ordinary people to 'make meaning of hardship instead of crying out in despair, and improvise solutions from thin air' (Coutu 2002:9). The current realities of high unemployment caused by COVID-19 will continue to be a stress on our local communities. A 'loss of 1.6 billion jobs in the informal economy' has been predicted by the International Labour Organization as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic (Van der Merwe 2020:1-2). Those who do not want to get the COVID-19 vaccination may feel increasingly excluded in society. Katongole (2017:200) states that what is the most encouraging factor in the imagination of a hopeful future is that 'we have come to believe that even simple people can effect change'. Everyone has the potential 'to transform their communities and their nation' (Katongole 2017:201). Our collective efforts of transformation could become 'the story of hope' of a local community or a nation, which would be a fertiliser to inspire other stories of hope within and beyond a local community or a nation (Katongole 2017:265).

■ Conclusion

This chapter used the grounded theology methodology to reflect on the lamentable realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. The author interviewed 20 residents of the township of Soshanguve to learn about the challenges COVID-19 brought in their lives, how they are coping with those challenges and how those challenges could be imagined as resources in the building of a future that prioritises the common good. It saw lament as a cornerstone leading to a social and political dynamism that improves the quality of life of people. It also saw it as a resource to help people develop coping mechanisms that equip them to handle adversities wisely. It saw it as a posture that could encourage people to imagine a hopeful future where the common good is affirmed and prioritised.

Youth, religion and resilience in South Africa: An autoethnographic perspective

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■ Abstract

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic posed a serious challenge to humanity, which demanded necessitating crisis management solutions at all levels. Life as we knew it was upended, as uncertainty and dread spread across numerous areas. It highlighted numerous disparities and worsened the marginalisation and vulnerability of many South Africans, particularly children and the youth. Although the pandemic was unexpected, such unforeseen catastrophes frequently test humanity's resilience. As a result of COVID-19, the discourse of resilience in the face of uncertainty has become an important discussion in many academic fields. This chapter aims to explore and understand resilience research from an autoethnographic perspective through a religious lens. This chapter is thus part of a personal narrative and an autoethnographic account of the resilience discourse. The first-person narrative of the author will

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be integrated with the resilience theory and stories and experiences of the youth in South Africa who are regarded as vulnerable and marginalised.

■ Introduction

The youth in South Africa are perceived to be a vulnerable and marginalised population in today's society (cf. Aziz 2020; Department of Social Development [DSD] 2013:30; cf. Swart et al. 2022). This view of youth marginalisation and vulnerability is influenced by a wide variety of social factors and issues, such as economic hardship, unemployment, a high rate of students dropping out of academic settings, unsatisfactory skill development, poor health, an increased occurrence of HIV and AIDS, inadequate youth work services, crime and violence, high prevalence rates of substance abuse, such as drug and alcohol abuse, a lack of access to opportunities for cultural and sporting development, a lack of social cohesion and volunteerism and disability (Beukes & Van der Westhuizen 2016:113-114; 2018:1; Republic of South Africa [RSA] 2015:10-15). Youth marginalisation and vulnerability are also illuminated in several statistics and research findings (cf. DSD 2013:30) on youth being omitted from educational settings, training opportunities and employment (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2017). Because of the high prevalence of youth unemployment, a considerable portion of the youth are unable to make a financial contribution to relatives and households. Moreover, South Africa has extremely high levels of economic inequality, as evidenced by a 2014 Gini coefficient of 63.0%, the highest in the world from 2011-2017 (World Bank 2018a). This has been further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. Francis, Valodia & Webster 2020:342-355).

Likewise, further sketching what contributes to South African youths' marginalisation and vulnerability is that the youth (15-24-year-olds), who make up roughly a third of the South African population (Statistics South Africa [StatsSA] 2017), had the highest percentage of youth unemployment in the world in 2017 at 57.4% (World Bank 2018b). Child poverty in South Africa remains at 30%, implying that nearly a third of the youth cannot afford a minimum balanced meal (Van Breda & Theron 2018:237). In 2014, it was indicated that 13% of South African children were single orphans, and a further 3% were double orphans (Van Breda & Theron 2018:237). South Africa's ability to address these concerns successfully is impeded by the country's socio-economic profile.

Furthermore, many young South African females are subjected to gender-based violence (GBV), violent crime and associated issues, such as prostitution, rape and mental illness (Nadat & Jacobs 2021:87). Gender-based violence is another social issue that intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. Dlamini 2021; Nduna & Tshona 2021). When young females turn to unsafe ways of earning a living, including prostitution, it appears that the complexity

related to the prevalence of crime, unemployment and poverty cannot be dismissed (Nadat & Jacobs 2021:87). Dlamini (2021) and Nduna and Tshona (2021) opine that sexual offences and violence against females cannot be attributed solely to prostitution as, according to some estimates, the rate of GBV, which includes rape and domestic abuse, is greatest in South Africa (cf. Dlamini 2021:588; Nduna & Tshona 2021:347; cf. Onyejekwe 2004). South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, highlighted the problem of femicide and GBV in a *Daily Maverick* newspaper article, titled 'Gender-based violence is South Africa's second pandemic, says Ramaphosa' (Ellis 2020). He also said that one woman is killed every three hours (Dlamini 2021:588). The epidemic of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown were connected to an upsurge in both GBV and femicide (Dlamini 2021:588; Nduna & Tshona 2021:347).

Various other scholars concur with the vulnerabilities South African young people have to grow up and live in. According to Van Breda (2017:226), disadvantaged communities are more susceptible because of poverty, crime and family problems. Poor housing (inadequate shelter), poverty, violence, inadequate electrical and sanitation service supply, socio-economic marginalisation, resource-poor schools, high incidence of infectious illnesses (e.g. AIDS and tuberculosis [TB]) and unemployment all contribute to high-risk societies and groups (Nadat & Jacobs 2021:87). As a result, in this South African context, 'resilience' is regarded more and more as a vital aspect of a comprehensive understanding of children and youth (Masten 2001; cf. Van Breda 2013, 2017:226). This is particularly true for children who have been subjected to adversity, such as being abused and mistreated, growing up in poverty or experiencing a significant number of losses. These kinds of predicaments are common among the South African youth populace, and the negative effects of such hardship may be seen among the youth in the years after they have left school (cf. Van Breda 2013, 2017:226).

I could just continue along this line, but I do not want to exhaust the topic about the South African setting. The point I am conveying is that under such tough circumstances, as demonstrated hitherto, there is a growing interest in how certain young people manage to mature normatively or display better-than-expected abilities and perform better than others. Researchers want to know how some youth overcome adversity and establish themselves as young adults (YAs) in their school, career and family lives. According to Van Breda (2017, p. 226), resilience can help these young people navigate these difficulties and lead an independent life, especially as they become older.

I regard myself as by no means an expert in the field of resilience research. However, this topic interests me, as I have also grown up in very difficult circumstances and hardships. What triggers my interest is how two siblings from the same household living in the same circumstances can show dissimilar resilient attributes. This chapter aims to explore and understand resilience research and the role of religion therein. Therefore, this chapter seeks to

contribute modestly to the body of literature from an autoethnographic perspective through a religious lens. I will do so by first explaining the research methodology used for this chapter. Secondly, I will give a brief first-person narrative of my life, which will be integrated with the next section on resilience theory. Thereafter, the role of religion will be discussed.

■ Research methodology

For this chapter, I am using an autoethnography methodology. In autoethnography, the writer or researcher delves into their own life experiences in order to present a narrative or story (Ballard 2009; Jones 2003; Ritchie et al. 2013). According to Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010):

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*). (p. 273)

It is a type of methodology that illustrates struggle, introspection, embodied life and emotion (Ellis & Bochner 2006:433). This method provides greatly personalised versions that draw on the author or researcher's experience (Sparkes 2000:21). "Auto-" ethnography places the researcher's experience as something to be studied' (Haluza-DeLay 2008:72). In other words, an assessment of the researchers' own lived experience can yield valuable conclusions (Haluza-DeLay 2008:72). As a result, the data for this chapter are based on personal experience. However, in addition to personal reflection, this chapter is complemented by a literature review on the subject. Legitimate autoethnography ('self-study') procedures, like any other research, must adhere to strict criteria and use established methods for evaluating qualitative research (Bullough & Pinneager 2001; Creswell 1999). Recognising the value of the knowledge obtained by personal experience as a reflection of societal challenges, autoethnographic methodology de-emphasises abstract and categorical knowledge in preference to the testimony of narrative (Haluza-DeLay 2008:72; Polkinghorne 1988). This narrative is not meant to be an afterthought (Van Maanen 1988).

By using the autoethnography methodology, I do acknowledge and recognise the countless ways the research process is influenced by my own experiences. For example, a researcher employing this approach determines who, what, when, where and how to do research, decisions that are inextricably linked to institutional needs, resources and personal circumstances. A researcher may also modify names and locations for privacy, condense years of research into a single document and design a study in a predetermined manner (Ellis et al. 2010:274). I also acknowledge that by using this method, it will be difficult to have a neutral, impersonal or objective stance, but I will still engage critically with my subjectivity. According to Ellis et al.(2010:276),

researchers that use the autoethnography approach write retrospectively (with hindsight) and selectively about experiences that arise from or are made possible by being a part of a context, culture or circumstances and having a certain cultural identity. However, in addition to reflecting on their personal experiences, autoethnographers are frequently expected by social science to analyse them, which I will do by integrating them with the literature study on resilience research.

This methodology helps me rethink and understand resilience from a personal standpoint while also integrating it with resilience theory and so many stories from South African youths.

■ First-person narrative: Sharing my story

Even though it is impossible to share my whole life story in a page or two, for relational ethical reasons (cf. Ellis et al. 2010:280–281) as well as time and space constraints, I will give a brief snippet-view of how my life is connected to resilience theory.

I am the eldest of four children (with two sisters and one brother). I was still very young when I experienced domestic violence resulting from alcohol abuse. This constant abuse of alcohol and domestic violence led to my parents' divorce. We moved back to my grandmother's house, who was a very religious person. She taught me about the Bible, how to pray and why it was important to attend Sunday school and church. My grandmother's eldest son (my uncle), who was already a teacher by then, shared his room with me. This was where I lived, and I still remember how we formed a strong bond and how I was very happy for the three years we lived with my grandmother, grandfather and uncle. My mother got married again and we had to move. Unfortunately, this marriage also had its own problems. Again, as a child, I experienced domestic violence, but on a harsher level. This time it was extreme GBV.

Every time GBV or domestic violence occurred in our household, I had to protect my siblings and make sure that they were calm, locked in a room and hidden underneath the bed until the fight was over. What I witnessed as a child was traumatic on various levels, which I do not want to go into detail about in this chapter. This marriage did not last and eventually led to a divorce. Still, my mother gave my stepfather another chance, which also did not last too long as the same events occurred over and over again. So much so that we had to move and we lost our house. My mother, my siblings and I had to live in a tent for three years. Living in a tent is obviously not the same as camping in a tent. With camping, you know that the camp will end somehow, but living in a tent without certainty about the future or how long you will live in a tent was traumatic and had psychological implications. My mother was not working and we lived in poverty. As a teenager, being in high school and

among friends was an escape from my reality, a temporary freedom. However, it also occurred frequently that some peers would tease and make fun of me because of my circumstances. So, although I enjoyed being at school among my friends and playing sports as a way of escaping from my own circumstances, I was constantly reminded that I lived in a tent, which impacted my self-esteem from time to time. I say, 'from time to time,' as I really tried my utmost best not to let the teasing and bullying influence me too much. I also gave my heart to the Lord as my personal saviour and redeemer while still in school and always reminded myself that my circumstances would not determine my future. Hence, my life was about school (academics), church (religion) and sports (social), while I was hoping, believing and praying that my situation would change. I have always encouraged myself to use my circumstances as motivation to excel and not an excuse to stagnate. I believed that if I could prioritise my school work (academics) despite being poor, I might be able to change my circumstances. I found a sense of belonging in my sports teams and the church, especially in the youth ministry, and although I had no real father figure in my life since then, I became my own father figure by using some of the best characteristics of my uncles, with whom I had a good relationship.

So much happened during and after that time, but today I am writing this chapter as an academic while my brother did not finish school and fell into substance abuse. When I talked to him about the different directions our lives had taken, he would always tell me that I would not understand because it was the way we grew up. Which I could not understand, as I was in the same circumstances and experienced and witnessed more from being the eldest while he was not even born yet.

So, how can two siblings from the same household and circumstances end up with one being more resilient than the another?

■ Resilience

According to Van Breda and Theron (2018:238), 'resilience theory' originates as a reaction to the fact that, despite tough circumstances, when many people experience a decline in psychosocial functioning, other individuals recoup or retain a 'good' level of functioning. This theory therefore deals with the question of what permits some individuals to recover while others cannot. Thus, Masten (2014:10) defines resilience as 'the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development'. The three components of resilience theory are shown here: adversity, effective adaptation and capability or processes (Luthar & Cicchetti 2000).

Resilience is a complicated concept that may refer to a variety of phenomena (Pargament & Cummings 2010:203). Various scholars define resilience in a

certain way. According to Masten (2001), resilience is the ability to thrive in spite of severe obstacles. For Theron (2011:1-2), two conditions must be met before somebody might be described as resilient. She goes on to say that there must first be a serious threat that puts the individual at risk of undesirable consequences (such as depression, suicide, criminal behaviour, etc.) or disrupts normative development. As a result, resilience cannot be defined in the absence of adversity. Most people associate adversity with psychosocial stress or trauma. Adversity, according to her, might also be biological (e.g. chronically poor health, disability, etc.). However, most of the dangers that make young individuals prone are compound risks (Theron 2011:1-2). Theron states the second condition as follows: the individual must adapt successfully to considerable risks or demonstrate good growth, given the risk(s) present in their life or given the severe attacks on the developmental process. She continues along this line of thinking, arguing that resilience cannot be equated to words such as 'well-being', 'coping', 'good mental health' or 'competence', all of which do not need the presence of severe risk. Positive adjustment is difficult to define because it varies among people, situations, cultures, contexts and developmental stages (Theron 2011:2).

According to Dillen (2012:62), who works with children from a theological viewpoint since her field of expertise is children's ministry, resilience is defined as a person's ability to flourish despite adverse circumstances. As a result, she believes that resilience relates to children's capacity to cope with unpleasant events and grow as a result of such experiences (Dillen 2012:62). According to Nadat and Jacobs (2021:88), resilience is an individual's positive adaptability in the midst of significant adversity. They agree with Theron (2011:1-2) that positive adaptation, despite exposure to risk, is required for a person to be regarded as resilient (Nadat & Jacobs 2021:88; cf. Masten 2011). Resilience is the idea that, despite the many bad elements in a person's life, they may tolerate harmful situations, develop resistance and prosper (Mosavel et al. 2015:245). As a result, Saleebey (1996:299) cautions that resilience should not be interpreted as the joyful denial of tough life situations, suffering and scars but instead as the ability to persevere despite these. Van Breda (2017:227) and Vaillant (1993) use the bouncing and spring metaphor to describe what resilience is. For Van Breda, resilience is the ability to 'bounce back' after overcoming a time of difficulty, while similarly, for Vaillant, the ability to be bent without breaking and the ability to bounce back into one's original shape are both aspects of the concept of resilience (Vaillant 1993; Van Breda 2017:227).

Resilience encompasses both strength and adversity, which distinguishes it from, say, the strengths approach in social work, which focuses solely on the strengths (Saleebey 2008). The strengths viewpoint necessitates a new way of viewing people, families and communities. Everyone must be judged by their abilities, talents, competencies, prospects, visions, ideals and dreams, no

matter how shattered and deformed they have become as a result of oppression, trauma and circumstance. The strengths method necessitates an assessment of what people are capable of doing and what they are knowledgeable about, however unclear that assessment may appear at times. It necessitates compiling a list of resources available inside and around the individual, family or community (Saleebey 1996:297). According to Gilgun (1999), protective characteristics such as self-esteem, humour and hope can also serve to mitigate risk and even avert unfavourable outcomes and so might be considered strengths. Which brings me to the question of whether religion, faith and spirituality can be considered strengths?

■ Religion

According to Vähäkangas et al. (2022:92–93), the majority of South Africans identified themselves as religious and nearly 80% as Christians during the 2001 census, while only 15% of those polled in 2001 said they had no religious connection (cf. StatsSA 2004:24). The General Household Survey of South Africa is a representative survey of non-institutionalised and non-military persons and families in South Africa and has been conducted regularly since 2002 (Schoeman 2017:3; Vähäkangas et al. 2022:92). While not as extensive as the national census, the data from the 2013 General Household Survey are noteworthy because they address religious questions. During this General Household Survey, 92.6% of South Africans stated that they were religious (Schoeman 2017:3; Vähäkangas et al. 2022:92). Thus, considering the last census as well as the most recent survey, it can be deduced that South Africa as a nation can be regarded as quite religious (Vähäkangas et al. 2022:92–93).

Religion, as compared to spirituality, is considered to be organised (Ammerman 2013:258–260; Ellingson 2001:257–260). According to Newman (2004:106), to be spiritual or to have spirituality means that people strive to live their lives in accordance with the spirit of their faiths. People can pray, meditate or make deliberate decisions about their behaviour depending on how they feel the Spirit is directing them. In a nutshell, it is a way of being. Ammerman, on the other hand, contends that this distinction fails to reflect the complexities of the connection between spirituality and religion, and she emphasises that spirituality is neither a dispersed individualistic phenomenon nor a singular cultural replacement for religion (Ammerman 2013:258). These definitions imply that spirituality is an aspect of organised religion and is, therefore, in this chapter also used interchangeably.

All of the participants in a study done by Nadat and Jacobs (2021) among vulnerable young black females claimed to be Christians. The findings of this research study are consistent with the literature on the crucial function of religion in resilience (cf. Manning & Miles 2018; Nadat & Jacobs 2021:92). The research study showed that religious involvement is related to significantly

higher hope and optimism, as this was also indicated by many participants who referred to hope as a theological theme (Nadat & Jacobs 2021:92). The research findings also illustrated that prayer is the most commonly utilised spiritual coping tool and is regarded as a 'resilience enhancer' (cf. Malindi & Theron 2010:323; Nadat & Jacobs 2021:92) for southern African youth. Gunnestad and Thwala (2011:171) also found in their study that when individuals are confronted with difficulties, intercession and prayer play a significant role in the resolution of such difficulties. Prayer and reading religious books such as the Bible provide solace and inner peace (cf. Jones et al. 2018:525; Nadat & Jacobs 2021:92). Methods of active religious obedience used for the purpose of gaining control, doing reassessment, introspection and looking for spiritual assistance from others are effective ways of reframing pressures (Nadat & Jacobs 2021:92; cf. Pargament, Feuille & Burdzy 2011:56) and can be regarded as examples of the combination of external and internal positive resources. According to Bardi and Guerra (2011:910, cited in Nadat & Jacobs 2021:92) and Fischer et al. (2010, cited in Nadat & Jacobs 2021:92), when confronted with stress, religion is more commonly used in non-Western cultural groupings. Religion was validated as the most influential protective factor of resilience in this study by Nadat and Jacobs (2021), which was anticipated given the considerable proportion of South Africans who are Christian. Similarly, data from various other South African studies indicate that religion plays an important role in the development of resilience (Ebersöhn & Bouwer 2013; Mohangi, Ebersöhn & Eloff 2011; Nadat & Jacobs 2021:95; Van Breda 2017). Religion is a protective and supporting element because it integrates internal assets with favourable external sources. Religion, in this context, entailed the integration of internal assets with positive external sources, and it can thus be defined as a protective and supportive factor (Nadat & Jacobs 2021:92). Similarly, Pandya (2019:309), although using the term 'spirituality', also believes that spirituality functions as a barrier against adverse circumstances.

Kenneth Pargament is a scholar who has advanced the subject of resilience and coping in connection to religion (cf. Gunnestad & Thwala 2011:173; Pargament 1997; Pargament & Cummings 2010). He pioneered the notion of 'religious coping'. Religion, according to Pargament (1997), may have a role in all aspects of the coping process; that is, the problem scenario, how it is interpreted (whether God is punishing or blessing) and the coping behaviours (confession, prayer, attending services). Scholars have extensively accepted Pargament's notion of religious coping (Ganzevoort 1998; cf. Pargament & Cummings 2010; Torbjørnsen 2001). Pargament discovered a variety of religious coping mechanisms in challenging circumstances, some favourable and others negative, via his research. Examples of positive coping methods include (Pargament 1997, cited in Gunnestad & Thwala 2011):

Positive reappraisal - which entails reframing a source of stress as a blessing that God wishes to educate us through; Collaborative religious coping entails

attempting to gain control by interacting with God. Seeking spiritual assistance, meaning-seeking solace via God's love and care; Seeking assistance from clergy/church members and also seeking assistance or prayers from others; Religious assistance, which entails striving to offer spiritual support to others, both victims and perpetrators; Religious forgiveness entails appealing to religion to help you go from anger, fear, and hurt to serenity; and finally, religious support comes from the belief that the victims are now with God. (p. 173)

Examples of Pargament's 'negative coping methods' include (Pargament 1997, cited in Gunnestad & Thwala 2011):

Punishing reappraisal: redefining the stressor as a punishment from God; demonic reappraisal: redefining the stressor as an act of the devil; reappraisal of God's power: thinking some things are beyond God's power; spiritual discontent: questioning God's love or church members/pastors love and care. (p. 173)

According to some studies (cf. Brittian, Lewin & Norris 2013), religion has the potential to significantly impact South African youth because it encourages desired behaviours and can provide them with social and emotional support, tolerance to cope, a sense of purpose both internally and externally, an association with the past and a moral conscience (Brittian et al. 2013; Vähäkangas et al. 2022). However, one should not simply believe that religious doctrines and ideals dictate the behaviour of their young members. Several studies have shown how youths act in ways that clearly contradict the beliefs and expectations of the church or religion with which they are affiliated (Brittian et al. 2013; Burchardt 2011; Eriksson et al. 2013; Garner 2000; Mbotho, Cilliers & Akintola 2013; Vähäkangas et al. 2022).

■ Conclusion

In an effort to be objective with regard to my own story, it is worth mentioning that I am seven years older than my brother and that we were in different developmental phases when we went through our ordeal. Also, I had the privilege of having a good relationship with my grandmother, while he did not have the same privilege. Being taught little about the value of religion, scripture and prayer by a very religious person in the form of my grandmother laid the foundation of my spirituality and belief system, which was an experience my brother did not have. While I grew up going to church, attending Sunday school and youth ministry in the church, as well as attending an inter-denominational youth ministry structure outside of my own denominations, my brother never attended any of these. Furthermore, I shared a room with my uncle and have good relationships with all my other uncles, whom I regard as mentors, while my brother does not have the same relationship with them. So, although we went through the same circumstances, from my point of view, perhaps we did not really go through the same circumstances

(cf. Theron 2011:1-2) due to my internal and external strengths such as age, maturity, genetics, exposure to threats, frame of reference, temperament style, development phases, self-esteem, humour, hope, support systems, mentors and my sense of belief and faith (religion), which are all contributing factors to resilience.

Theme 3

Online teaching and resilience

‘Resilience is our chant’: Online support groups during COVID-19

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■ Abstract

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic caught the world by surprise. Within days and weeks, everything familiar changed. The need for connection and coping mechanisms escalated because human beings need contact with others. Technology and web-based communication software and applications, such as Zoom, Skype and Google Meet were explored and used to address the need for connection with others, not only for work purposes, but also on social, religious, psychological and emotional levels. This chapter focuses on online support groups as a method of intervention for coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. The research includes a discussion of a group of young adults who met online weekly and participated in online arts-based activities. Arts-based exercises can easily be integrated into online group work and provide a tangible product that brings satisfaction and a sense of control and help focusses discussions. Exploring the value of online

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support groups is a rich new field. However, the results proved online support groups facilitated by skilled group leaders are attainable and helpful.

■ Introduction

COVID-19 and the impact thereof caught the world by surprise. Within days and weeks, everything familiar changed. Countries instilled lockdown regulations that included curfews, limited social gatherings, social distancing measures, wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks and regulations for sanitising. Educational institutions closed and people started to work from home. Although the new normal was a reality and society had no choice but to adapt and obey, the influence on well-being and mental health was significant. The need for connection and coping mechanisms escalated because human beings need contact with others. Younger and older people reported anxiety, uncertainty, frustration, powerlessness, threats to life, detachment, isolation and lack of control when confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic (Cabiati 2021:685; Pavarini et al. 2020:187; Wang et al. 2021:252; Williams 2020:320). Technology and web-based communication software and applications, such as Zoom, Skype and Google Meet were explored and used to address the need for connection with others, not only for work purposes but also on social, religious, psychological and emotional levels. Although far apart from each other, with the click of a hyperlink, people immediately connected with others. Confined to a screen on a technological device, all became equal in evenly-sized blocks.

Society is composed of groups: formed or natural. The social nature of humans through interaction and connection with others results in the development of groups of people who interact and share similarities. Through the dynamics in a group, people socialise, learn, grow, receive and give support, experience mutual aid and plan and execute tasks. Groups are crucial components for a linked and united society (Toseland & Rivas 2021:17). Group work as an intervention method in social work aims for support, growth, socialisation, education and therapeutic intervention. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person interaction in group contexts was the norm and most research focused on group dynamics where group members were in each other's physical presence. Lockdown regulations and isolation to prevent the spread of COVID-19 asked for creative strategies to enable connections to curb loneliness, frustration and anxiety and to assist in adjusting to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on human connection. Although online or computer-based support groups are not a new phenomenon, the prevalence of online groups increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This chapter discusses online support groups for coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. The content will include a discussion of a group of young adults who met online weekly and participated in online arts-based activities.

Building resilience through participating in arts-based exercises and through mutual aid in group contexts receives attention. Mask-making, colouring mandalas and poetry as art-based activities to enhance resilience will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with feedback on the value of the online support group in building resilience and how online support groups can curb social isolation through mutual aid.

Group members collectively worked on a poem about the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives and how they built resilience through mutual aid, supporting each other and socialising online. The emphasis on resilience to manage the challenge and to bounce back and grow despite the adversity is clear in the chorus of the poem:

It's not defeat we sing, but our ability to withstand

It's through resilience that we stand

Resilience is our chant

■ Background of the online support group

In October 2020, a group of young adults enrolled in a subject in the field of applied sciences had a career briefing on possible careers within the humanities in a Zoom meeting with the author. During this Zoom meeting, the group of young adults expressed the need to connect online to socialise and support each other during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the start of a COVID-19 support group, which came to be known as the 'COVID Coping Creativity and Connection Group' or, as group members referred to it, the CCCC group. Group members eagerly joined as the group provided them with opportunities to form a bond and friendships during a period of isolation filled with masks, sanitisers and social distancing.

■ Support groups

Support groups aim to assist people going through some form of challenge and who need help to cope with the challenge and adapt to life events (Cabiati 2021:686; Hepworth et al. 2017:280). Support groups focus more on emotional support than on personal change or social action and revitalise members' coping skills, thus building resilience (Hepworth et al. 2017:280; Newell 2020:66; Toseland & Rivas 2021:36). In a support group, members become aware that other people may encounter the same problems, feel similar emotions and have similar thoughts (Jacobs et al. 2016:15). Belonging to groups with other people who share similar experiences creates a sense of support and belonging (Marmarosh et al. 2020:128). In support groups, the group dynamics of reciprocity, where members give and receive support, with a shared reality, results in mutual aid (Cabiati 2021:676; Giacomucci 2021:20; Huss & Samson 2018:8; Steinberg 2014).

Synchronous online groups with chat rooms and live connections increased because of the development of technology. Web-based connections provide opportunities for real-time groups to form. Although people were restricted by governments' regulations to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and were confined to their homes and places of residence, these advances in technology afforded social connections. Even though asynchronous groups based on communication through electronic mail and social mobile applications such as WhatsApp are not necessary, at the same time, they also provide opportunities for connection. Marmarosh et al. (2020:129) report on studies that show that members of these groups are satisfied, and the connection increases their coping with challenging situations. It provides people with the support that they need, but that is limited because of social isolation. The ability to socialise while practising social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is provided by online groups and is a major source of support (Marmarosh et al. 2020:130). Pavarini et al. (2020:188) reiterate that young people should be provided with opportunities during the time of social isolation to participate and, in this way, discover and express personal agency that contributes to resilience. Young people need to be capacitated to develop and facilitate peer-led interventions to act for their well-being because peer support improves resilience and well-being (Flannery et al. 2021:739; Pavarini et al. 2020:187). They should reach out for support (Lougheed 2019:342). Williams (2020:320) says the following: 'Messages about overcoming struggles and being resilient are even more relevant for young people throughout these times'. Staying positive and focusing on strengths and capabilities can help young people not to lose hope in an uncertain present and an even more uncertain future.

■ Resilience and support groups

Resilience helps with self-care (Newell 2020:66). But what is resilience? From the literature search for a definition of resilience, it is evident that there is no single universal definition. Newell (2020:66) describes resilience as an adaptive reaction to stressful external stimuli and the use of coping skills as barriers. Resilience acts as a buffer that protects the individual (David 2012:34). Van Breda (2018:2) refers to definitions of resilience as a personality trait, thus something inherent to the individual and resilience as positive functioning in the face of difficulties. Van Breda (2018:4) defines resilience as 'the multilevel processes that systems engage in to obtain better-than-expected outcomes in the face or wake of adversity'. Ray et al. (2021:445) describe resilience as 'a dynamic process of positive adaptation following a significant trauma'. The authors acknowledge the move from resilience as a personality trait to resilience as the development of specific skills such as self-competence, flexibility and emotional adjustment that allow for

modified coping. Gitterman and Knight (2016:449) refer to resilience as overcoming adversities, yet as the ability to sustain competence and to grow.

Resilience is seen as the capacity to bounce back or recover from a challenge, a process of learning and growth (Giacomucci 2021:169; Newell 2020:66). David (2012:34) refers to resilience as accessing adaptive processes and coping mechanisms to survive and grow, while Giacomucci (2021:169) adds that resilience also is bouncing forward into new growth. Clements (2017:18) and Lashewicz, McGrath and Smyth (2014:189), in their discussion on using mask-making, refer to risk-taking through arts-based activities to result in personal change and growth. Linking this to the previous discussion on resilience as a process of growth, creative arts-based activities can be seen as contributing to resilience. Resilience may thus not only be to adapt successfully to disruptions but being able to move forward with greater confidence and skill.

Van Breda (2018:9) emphasises that resilience interventions should focus on the social environment and not on the individual alone. It is thus safe to reason that social structures and services, such as online support groups during COVID-19, are powerful resilience resources. *Ubuntu*, an African philosophy, refers to interconnectedness and dependence on others. The principles of *ubuntu* in social work with groups fit the aim and the value of group work, namely, to support each other through mutual aid, to connect and for social justice. In this way, *ubuntu* contributes to building resilience. Social relationships and connections to others are important, but as Geyer (2021:3), Newell (2020:67) and Van Breda (2018:8) reiterate, it is not the connection per se but the interaction between the individual and the social environments that can build resilience. Newell (2020) uses the ecological systems theory to illustrate a holistic self-care approach to emotional well-being, while Geyer (2021) uses the ecological systems theory to explore resilience in homeless older persons. Perone (2021) applies the ecological systems theory in her study to explore the survival and coping of students during the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The interconnectedness and reciprocal influence of the systems in an individual's life influence resilience as an outcome (Hepworth et al. 2017:269; Ray et al. 2021:445). Group interventions can encourage resilience by emphasising personal growth and creating an awareness of capabilities (Lougheed 2019:338). The online support group for young adults during the harsh conditions of social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic provided this reciprocal influence and interactions.

■ Online support groups

The COVID-19 pandemic, with the resultant lockdown regulations, stole one of the most important contributors to coping with stressful events, namely group interaction (Marmarosh et al. 2020:125). Humans need contact with others

and working together in groups provides that contact. Gitterman and Knight (2016:457) argue that group work is the most natural and effective method to boost resilience. Human beings are, in essence, social and need to gather with others, especially in times of stress, to secure emotional support (Marmarosh et al. 2020:125). The relationship between groups and members' well-being has been studied and used in fields such as psychology, social work and psychiatry (Marmarosh et al. 2020:125). Dunn-Snow and Joy-Smellie (2000:125) refer to group work as the treatment of choice because it is cost-effective and the group allows its members to connect immediately and to discover similarities. Group work thus suggests that one is not alone in the world; 'I am alone in this' is a very prevalent experience during the isolation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social work with groups distinguishes between two primary types of groups, namely treatment and task groups (Hepworth et al. 2017:280; Toseland & Rivas 2021:35). Treatment groups focus on helping group members to attend to personal challenges, change unwanted behaviours, cope with stress and improve quality of life (Kirst-Ashman 2013:143). Groups with the specific aims of support, mutual aid and building trust and cohesion are ideal for identifying, enhancing and using the skills and capacities of their members to address challenges (Cabiati 2021:686; Prinsloo 2019:11). Groups thus offer a safe space where group members can receive support from one another. Groups foster mutual aid by promoting support in the group context (Flannery et al. 2021:740; Loughheed 2019:336; Prinsloo 2019:10; Wang et al. 2021:252). Several benefits such as efficiency, the experience of commonality, the availability of more viewpoints and resources, having a sense of belonging, practising skills, receiving feedback, vicarious learning and commitment are associated with individuals helping each other in a group (Jacobs et al. 2016:3-5; Knight 2017:236). Any treatment group can have elements of support, growth, socialisation, education and a therapeutic influence.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions that prohibited social contact and interaction necessitated innovative ways for interaction and connection. Social isolation can trigger anxiety and depression, as evidenced in the mental health state of the world (Perone 2021:200; World Health Organization [WHO] 2020). Online treatment groups emerged throughout the world based on connectivity and resources. Internet-based interventions for sociol-emotional support to curb the isolation that resulted from the lockdown were facilitated by social workers, mental health care service providers and more (Cabiati 2021:676; Wang et al. 2021:253). Participants in these interventions build a collective sense of support and hope and fulfil the need for support, empathy and direction during the COVID-19 pandemic (Marmarosh et al. 2020:133). This type of online intervention creates productive possibilities for outreach, building trust and identifying risks.

Marmarosh et al. (2020:129) underscore the value of group treatment options to reduce depression, anxiety, loneliness, grief and stress. Online groups help people improve their psychological well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions. Although group sessions are virtual and not face-to-face, group dynamics are real with cohesion, interaction, communication, social integration and building a unique group culture (Cabiati 2021:677; Flannery et al. 2021:740; Toseland & Rivas 2021:84). Flannery et al. (2021:741) motivate the use of online groups in a climate of social isolation and people experiencing a sense of being disconnected. Online groups can provide mental health care and support to reduce isolation and connect people, as is evident in the case study under discussion.

■ The use of creative activities to build resilience

Therapeutic interventions using creative art-based activities can prompt solutions and positive change (Kelly & Doherty 2016:223; Knight 2017:236; Kreuter & Reiter 2014:13; Manship 2017:297). In addition, sharing narratives of survival, coping and resilience in a safe group context highlight strengths (David 2012:37; Lougheed 2019:337). Huss and Samson (2018:2), Goicoechea et al. (2014:70) and Muthard and Gilbertson (2016:18) indicate that people have always used the arts for voicing the self and in the process to build resilience through self-expression. Ikonomopoulos et al. (2017:496), Lougheed and Coholic (2018:172) and Manship (2017:297) confirm that improved confidence gained through collective creative arts activities builds resilience and has an empowering effect.

■ Colouring as a therapeutic activity

Flett et al. (2017:409) remark that colouring was previously seen as an activity for children; however, colouring activities for adults have become very popular because of the psychological benefits. Colouring a mandala can significantly reduce anxiety through the structured and controlled nature thereof (Flett et al. 2017:410; Muthard & Gilbertson 2016:18; Sandmire et al. 2016:566). Colouring a mandala can furthermore create a meditative state to reduce anxiety and negative emotions (Muthard & Gilbertson 2016:18).

Young adults, thus including undergraduate students, experience stress and anxiety originating from several sources (Flannery et al. 2021:739). Studying, time management, pressure to succeed academically and coping with the developmental tasks of young adulthood are but some of the sources (Sandmire et al. 2016:565). Anxiety and stress became even more prevalent when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and teaching moved from face-to-face to online.

One of the first activities of the CCCC group was to colour mandalas from an online resource (colormandala.com). Mandalas are mostly circular spaces that contain other geometric shapes or patterns. According to Vocabulary.com (n.d.), the word 'mandala' means 'circle' in Sanskrit. A mandala is a type of spiritual art, symmetrical and balanced and has significance for many people. The experience of drawing them or simply colouring them in is a relaxing process. The aim of this activity was to destress and just have fun with colour. Group members all had the same limited range of colours, yet all mandalas were different and unique to the individual group members. Group members expressed themselves differently through their chosen colours. They reported that they coloured much more than was needed just because of its calming nature. After completing this activity, the group presented their completed mandalas in a group session and discussed what the colours meant to them or specific reasons as to how they chose those colours.

But how did this contribute to cohesion? One of the group members experimented with her technical skills and was able to cut every mandala into six equal triangular pieces. These individual pieces were combined to form one mandala that included all the members' coloured products portraying diversity yet accentuating unity. They chose this as the group's logo. Looking closely at the logo, one could see functionality and unity in the fact that it was one mandala and the differences in the fact that every piece was made up of different colours. They discussed the benefits, such as bringing mindfulness, relaxing, focusing, increasing creativity and awareness and improving self-confidence because they could choose the colours that they liked and were not prescribed. As echoed by Flett et al. (2017:413), Muthard and Gilbertson (2016) and Sandmire et al. (2016:566), colouring the mandalas reduced anxiety.

■ Mask-making for self-expression

With the necessity of wearing protective face masks in public to prevent the spread of the virus, one of the activities in the online group focused on how humans wear metaphorical or emotional masks in interaction with others. The group leader introduced an activity where each group member was to create a mask, a mask that reflected their struggles and infirmities and that metaphorically bared all. Between meetings, group members made masks that depicted their functioning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they were able to express their emotions tangibly. Group members related to the activity because of the regulation of wearing masks. But what was behind the mask? A mask behind the visible mask?

Creating masks using tangible items provides a means to self-expression without using words (Dunn-Snow & Joy-Smellie 2000:126; Lashewicz et al. 2014:189). Making the masks uncovers the roles that people play in their different systems and aids in projecting emotions and demonstrating coping

mechanisms (Lindsey, Robertson & Lindsey 2018:289). The use of colours and images with colouring, painting, glueing, cutting and more reveals aspects of the self. The response of one of the group members highlighted that people:

‘[/]Interact with others every day and it comes second nature to want to fit in, to be understood, or to keep unity and peace with others, and so sometimes people unknowingly use masks.’ (Female young adult, 20-years-old)

People wear masks to protect themselves, thus as shields (Dunn-Snow & Joy-Smellie 2000:126). The group member added:

‘Although we wear COVID-19 masks, we also wear emotional masks; although suffering the pain of loss and uncertainty, we keep on smiling and appearing as coping to the people around us.’ (Female young adult, 20-years-old)

Groups provide a safe space to explore the masks that people carry. It is in the group’s safety net that group members can take off the mask and bare their true selves and true emotions (Lindsey et al. 2018:292). Individuals are placed in a vulnerable position when making a mask and having to share it (Dunn-Snow & Joy-Smellie 2000:127). In the safety of a bonded group, such as the online support group under discussion, it is possible because they trust each other not to be judged (Corey, Corey & Corey 2018:300; Toseland & Rivas 2021:38). There is a support system to safeguard a group member if the experience of exposing underlying hurts and struggles becomes too overwhelming.

Group members explained their masks to the rest of the group. A group member responded that through the experience of making the mask and sharing the meaning, they were ‘[...] able to share our biggest fear and pain but also receive encouragement, empathy, and support all because we spoke about the masks we wore daily’. The masks were seen to express who they are creatively (Lashewicz et al. 2014:193). Group members were able to express themselves differently and share it in the group. It gave a voice to every group member. Group members were reminded to often look at their masks to remind them of what they learned in the group and how they grew by learning new coping skills (Lindsey et al. 2018:295). The mask-making activity supported being mindful and relieving stress and anxiety. Mask-making helps to heal and calm the psyche (Goicoechea et al. 2014:74). Through reciprocal relationships and mutual aid, sharing the masks and their meaning in the supportive context of the online group aided in building resilience.

■ Poetry and building resilience

Although Tegnér et al. (2009:122) refer to poetry therapy in their work with cancer patients, their conclusion that poetry provides emotional healing and builds resilience through using words is relevant. Using words and writing activities has healing benefits and helps with therapeutic conversations through trust, support and sharing (Giacomucci 2021:130;

Goicoechea et al. 2014:70; Hafford-Letchfield, Leonard & Couchman 2012:686; Ikonomopoulos et al. 2017:497). By collectively creating a poem as an arts-based activity that depicted emotions and experiences, group members accessed creative capabilities (Kelly & Doherty 2016:223; Loughheed & Coholic 2018:172). Becoming aware of creativity and then getting involved in a creative activity may already be an indication of resilience, according to Kreuter and Reiter (2014:14). Putting experiences and feelings into poetry may lead to an awareness of needs, thus creating the opportunity for acknowledging the needs that may perhaps not have been expressed earlier (Moxley 2013:250). Seeing the tangible product, such as the poem that was developed, creates a sense of accomplishment and specialness (Ikonomopoulos et al. 2017:497). Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2012:684), Manship (2017:301) and Wong (2019:214) underscore the value of art, not only as a fun and superficial activity but used for a deeper focus, as support for several aspects of emotional well-being.

Emotional resilience can be improved by activities such as poetry sessions that are non-invasive and enjoyable, especially so in a supportive group atmosphere (Tegnér et al. 2009:128; Zastrow 2012:439). Participation in this art form can elicit emotions and experiences (Moxley 2013:241). Wong (2019:209) mentions that in the face of uncertainty, memorable activities that are emotion-affecting, such as some forms of art, are gratifying. Expressive art projects can increase resilience and a sense of connection (Goicoechea et al. 2014:75).

The CCCC group created the poem to reflect the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on them as a country and as a group. The essence of the poem was to express how, even though they were experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, they could become resilient and overcome its challenges. The group members started with one line: '1 January ...' Through asynchronous participation between group sessions, members added their words and emotions on a shared online Google document. The words of the poem started flowing and, at some point in the process, the word 'resilience' surfaced. Resilience and what it meant to group members were discussed as a topic in more than one session. Group members responded that the support, bonding, encouragement, positive reinforcement and sharing of daily struggles with social isolation slowly helped them to be resilient. The support in the group assisted with coping with social isolation and breaking the challenge down to something more manageable by knowing that they were not alone. Group membership enabled them to connect to sources of resilience in themselves and others (Giacomucci 2021:169). This correlates with the views of Geyer (2021), Newell (2020) and Van Breda (2018) that resilience is built through interaction and reciprocal connections with others and the environment.

■ A resilience poem for coping with COVID-19

1 January ...

the year of 2020 started as bright as orange
bright-eyed and excited, filled with courage
dreaming and wishing

Only to find out it was scheming and twisting.
This is the story of a virus existing
but through faith and hope, we're still persisting

Be strong we were told,
those words sounded so cold ...
The lockdown got imposed, we felt that we had lost all control
We needed to once more feel whole,
be strong we were told

Hope appeared and we persevered.
Now we are fine,
if anything, like stars we shine,
even though darkness of uncertainty surrounds us;
we are still shining bright
and while using every ounce of our might,
we are putting up a grand fight

Oh COVID-19,
how you have been so mean,
you kept our pockets lean
and brought isolation to the scene:
From overwhelmed systems of health to raging politics,
you were accompanied by terrors unseen

Our fears were real, and our pain felt deep
with our loved ones lost and interaction at a cost.
A second pandemic was at hand.
anxiety and depression made an entry unplanned
but please do understand:
it's not defeat we sing, but our ability to withstand
it's through resilience that we stand
RESILIENCE IS OUR CHANT

Lockdown was met with Zoom
our proof that in confinement
connections were at bloom.
Now our masks are not a hard ask

our proof that adaptation is in the room:
Perfumes and concealer, but don't forget to sanitise as part of your groom;
this is our proof that resilience is our groove
Ain't nothing going to break our stride
because we as a Rainbow Nation are filled with so much hope and pride
that you will never be able to extinguish the flame that radiates from our passionate
souls (Female young adult, 20-years-old)

Poetry can create a bridge in treatment interventions (Kreuter & Reiter 2014:22). The poem built a bridge between the group members and contributed to the bonding. The poem furthermore created a bridge from social isolation to social connection. Group members felt extremely proud of their collective poem. The focus on strengths and abilities in the face of adversity contributed to group members' resilience. The need for and the ability to adapt to the curveball that life threw through the COVID-19 pandemic surfaced in the poem that the members developed. The feedback of one of the group members confirms the value of developing the poem: 'By writing this poem, we felt that we could overcome the uncertainties that the COVID-19 pandemic has on us and focus on the positive (coming out stronger)'.

■ **Group members' experiences of the online support group**

During the group, one of the group members articulated their membership of the online group as follows:

'We decided to join this group, which we now consider family, because there has been nothing to lose but everything to gain from this experience as we identified key values that resonate within each group member and allow us to form a safe space where trust is built and we are encouraged to express ourselves, including our thoughts and opinions on various subject matters.' (Female young adult, 20-years-old)

In the termination phase of a group, the members review and summarise the group experience, assess their growth and change and provide feedback, also on a sense of loss because of the separation (Jacobs et al. 2016:392; Malekoff 2014:222; Toseland & Rivas 2021:411; Zastrow 2012:419). The group members of the online support group reflected that they received support from one another but also gave support. They felt that the support in the group was a mutual aid experience (Giacomucci 2021:169; Steinberg 2014). They bonded very closely – to such an extent that they continued with their online contact through regular check-ins and sending messages of hope, positive reinforcement and encouragement. The group members reflected that they felt secure sharing their challenges, coping mechanisms, feelings of fear and

anxiety, worries about their families' and friends' health but also of their own, uncertainty about the future and general feelings of disappointment in not being able to do and participate in the social aspects of the phase of young adulthood.

The encouragement from fellow group members motivated them to 'hang in there' despite the uncertainty of the here-and-now and the future. It was good to see how group members positively reinforced each other for every small achievement. Although the initial goal of the group was to give and receive support in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and the hypothesis was that problems and challenges would be the priority, the atmosphere soon changed to one of hope, motivation, perseverance and focusing on the strengths of the group as a system and the strengths of each group member.

Being involved in creative and expressive art activities during the group revealed abilities, coping, strengths and resources. These aspects, according to Knight (2017:239), attest to resilience. The relationships and interconnectedness brought by the online support group further enhanced members' resilience (Manship 2017:296). Ray et al. (2021:445) purport that resilience involves behaviour and skills that can be learned over time. The group members of the online support group responded that they learned that creative activities could assist in being mindful and relaxing when they feel stressed, frustrated and anxious. Rhyming and poetic writing, colouring mandalas, dancing to the rhythm of music, writing down emotions and connecting online to engage in a creative exercise confirmed that they own coping skills that could even be strengthened. One of the group members responded:

'[7]his is a great way to describe group work! People of diversity coming together. We may have not been all the same, but we were able to connect and meet ends at the end of the day.' (Female young adult, 20-years-old)

Most importantly was that group members said they looked forward to meeting online once per week synchronously and staying involved between meetings asynchronously by responding to each other's written messages (Toseland & Rivas 2021:85). They experienced fun and relaxation. Giacomucci (2021:135) refers to playfulness and *joie de vivre* to restore resilience. When group members experience enjoyment and have fun, the group remains attractive and beneficial because they believe it is an investment in themselves (Lougheed & Coholic 2018:166; Prinsloo et al. 2017:136). The arts-based activities generated discussions, deepened the focus and provided an opportunity for experiential learning (Jacobs et al. 2016:225).

■ Conclusion

Currently, there is an increase in online connection through group work because of the social distancing and isolation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Research is slowly contributing to the growing body of knowledge about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how new approaches and methods are undertaken to address issues of anxiety, fear, depression, frustration and feeling out of control, to name but a few. Supportive professionals know that human beings need social interaction and that lockdown regulations immediately negatively affected group contact. The need for contact resulted in exponential growth in online groups, especially for support, coping and building resilience.

All age groups have experienced stress and anxiety ever since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Young people are particularly affected because of the uncertainty of the future and the loss of social contact with their peers. The online support group discussed in this chapter firstly demonstrates the need for young adults to connect, give and receive support and share concerns as well as coping mechanisms. Secondly, the mutual aid that developed in the online connection showed to improve resilience. Group members encouraged each other with positive reinforcement and motivational communication. Thirdly, the use of arts-based activities, even if not done in person, indicates how art, such as colouring mandalas, making masks and creating a collective poem, assists in expressing needs and emotions without having a verbal conversation. To connect with creativity creates an awareness of skills and capabilities and already indicates aspects of resilience. Group cohesion is an important factor in face-to-face groups for reaching individual and group goals and facilitating mutual aid. Although research and publications on online groups for improving well-being are limited, evidence slowly appears that cohesion in online groups is possible. Connecting synchronously once per week and asynchronously between group meetings brought a deep bond between group members.

Exploring the value of online support groups is a rich new field. Using arts-based activities in an online context proves to be attainable. Increased mindfulness, emotional awareness and regulation and optimism are prevalent in online support groups facilitated by skilled group leaders who are prepared to participate in a congruent way showing their vulnerability in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Modelling aspects of resilience already paves the way for group members to become aware of their own skills and capabilities to cope with the present and to grow in resilience. The worldwide challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and supportive professionals and researchers should continue to explore treatment options, such as technology-based interventions to curb isolation.

As explained in the chapter using arts-based exercises such as poetry and rhyming, mask-making and colouring of individual and collective mandalas can easily be integrated into online group work. In a time of uncertainty, creating a tangible product brings satisfaction and a sense of control. Art products can focus discussions and deepen the focus. The cohesive and collective functioning of a group provides the ideal medium to facilitate adjustment, change and building resilience.

It's not defeat we sing, but our ability to withstand
It's through resilience that we stand
Resilience is our chant (Female young adult, 20-years-old)

■ Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the group members who participated in this online journey of support, growth and mutual aid. Their positivity helped me in building my resilience and to curtail isolation. The reciprocity of the relationships helped to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and to grow by learning new skills and new ways of adjusting. When I think of resilience, I think of you!

Fieldwork practice for social work students during the COVID-19 pandemic

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■ Abstract

Hugenote Kollege is a private higher education institution (HEI) in the Western Cape, South Africa, offering degrees in Social Work and Theology and various Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) courses for social service professions and theology. The year 2020 brought along many challenges for teaching and learning in tertiary education with the coronavirus

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disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and various restrictions, including a three-week national lockdown and numerous restrictions on teaching activities for the remainder of the year. While online teaching could continue for theoretical modules, creative methods needed to be applied with the practical modules to ensure that students received the necessary fieldwork experience. The aim of this chapter is therefore to explore the fieldwork practice of social work students at Hugenote Kollege during the COVID-19 pandemic.

■ Introduction

On 05 March 2020, it was confirmed by the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize, that COVID-19 had spread to South Africa (Department of Health [DoH] 2020). On 15 March 2020, a National State of Disaster was declared by Cyril Ramaphosa, the president of South Africa, and various measures were announced to delay the infection rate in the country (Ramaphosa 2020a). One of these measures was a three-week 'lockdown', which was effective from 26 March 2020 (Ramaphosa 2020b). The implications of both the lockdown and the restrictions that followed had a tremendous impact on higher education in South Africa and various changes needed to take place for the academic year to continue.

The emergence of COVID-19 in South Africa and the implications thereof on higher education occurred unexpectedly, leaving limited time for planning and devising alternative methods for teaching and learning (Azman, Singh & Isahaque 2020). Students had hardly started their academic year in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme at Hugenote Kollege when all HEIs and schools in South Africa were closed for a three-week national lockdown (Ramaphosa 2020b). From the onset, it was clear that traditional teaching was not feasible for most of the academic year, and it was only in June 2020 at Hugenote Kollege that students were allowed to return to campus to resume face-to-face teaching. In essence, this meant that all theoretical and practical modules for the BSW programme in the first semester had to change in approach and method.

The practical component of the BSW training plays a pivotal role in teaching students how to integrate their knowledge, understanding and skills into practice (Azman et al. 2020; Kourgiantakis & Lee 2020; South African Qualifications Authority [SAQA] 2006). The COVID-19 pandemic, however, brought about great challenges in the feasibility of this component of the training, with students neither able to conduct site visits to social work organisations nor to complete their group work and casework modules within organisations and schools. This required the redesigning of the fieldwork modules by lecturers within the BSW programme responsible for this specific component and management to ensure that students still were provided with the required practical experience regardless of the eminent limitations because of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and realities.

This chapter aims to reflect on the fieldwork practice of the first and second-year BSW students at Hugenote Kollege (henceforth ‘the Kollege’) during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides a description of the BSW programme offered at the Kollege and how the practical component was adapted amid challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter further reflects on how ethical considerations as prescribed by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) (2007) were considered in the design of the modules, followed by a brief reflection on the resilience of staff and students in managing the various changes.

■ The Bachelor’s in Social Work programme at Hugenote Kollege

Hugenote Kollege is a private HEI registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to offer a four-year BA degree in Social Work (Hugenote Kollege [2020] 2021). The BSW degree is registered with the SAQA with the SAQA qualification ID: 105031 on National Qualification Framework (NQF) Level 8 with 540 credits.

The aim of the BSW degree at the Kollege is to provide students with a comprehensive education that prepares them to engage with individuals, groups and communities in various contexts (Hugenote Kollege [2020] 2021). The programme is designed to provide students with the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills to work in collaboration with others while maintaining the ethical principles of human dignity, transparency, social justice and harmonious relationships.

The prescribed curriculum for the BSW degree in South Africa requires students to master nine core areas and the relevant associated assessment criteria (SACSSP 2021). A core area refers to the outcomes a student needs to accomplish for the achievement of the BSW qualification.

These core areas are as follows (Hugenote Kollege [2020] 2021):

1. The development and consolidation of a professional identity as a social worker.
2. Application of core values and principles of social work.
3. Holistic assessment and intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities.
4. Demonstrated competence in the use of codes of ethics vis-à-vis the moral impulse.
5. Working with a range of diversities.
6. Ability to undertake research.
7. Knowledge, practice skills and theories.
8. Policy and legislation.
9. Writing and communication of professional knowledge.

The core areas, together with their associated assessment criteria, demonstrate the interrelationship between theoretical and practical training and the necessity for exposure to fieldwork practice. Fieldwork placements occur throughout the BSW learning programme in a variety of settings that include observation, laboratory sessions and physical service delivery within a social service organisation (SAQA 2006). All placements are under the supervision (fieldwork practice) of a registered social worker at the organisation and a registered social worker (contracted by the Kollege) or a lecturer at the Kollege for academic supervision.

■ Fieldwork practice during the COVID-19 pandemic

Fifty students were registered as first-year students for the BSW degree in 2019, with another intake of 80 first-year students in 2020. This section will reflect on the fieldwork practice for the first and second-year BSW students registered with the Kollege during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

■ First-year fieldwork practice

The first-year practical module for the BSW degree, 'An Introduction to Practical Training', is presented in the second semester of the academic year. The purpose of this module is to provide first-year students with a basic ability to integrate knowledge, understanding and skills pertaining to the following aspects (Hugenote Kollege [2020] 2021):

1. Human behaviour and the social environment with particular emphasis on the person-in-environment transaction, life-span development and the interaction amongst biological, psychological, socio-structural, economic, political, cultural and spiritual factors in shaping human development and behaviour.
2. Service beneficiary assessment, intervention processes, methods and techniques to render social support and preventative, protective, developmental and therapeutic interventions with individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities.
3. The various fields of service such as child welfare, youth work, statutory social work, mental health care, corrections, health care, HIV and AIDS, social work in occupational settings, gerontology, forensics and disability.
4. Management, administration and supervision.
5. The ethical requisites of the profession through knowledge about an appropriate range of ethical theories and the complexities of ethical decision-making in day-to-day practice.
6. A range of pertinent national policies and legislation.
7. National, provincial and local structures.

For exposure to the various fields of social work as prescribed in the purpose of the module, social work students are usually presented with the opportunity to conduct site visits to social work organisations. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, first-year social work students visited an old age home, a child and youth care centre and a facility that cares for adults with intellectual disabilities. This provided students with the opportunity to observe both clients and social service professionals within their respective contexts while also offering an opportunity for students to reflect on a deeper level because of their experience. Furthermore, regular class discussions were facilitated to encourage students to reflect on their experiences, challenge their perceptions and thought processes and, in so doing, learn from one another.

On account of the limitations that existed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, site visits were not possible in 2020. As an alternative, social workers from various fields of social work, such as child protection, disabilities, treatment centres, adoption agencies, etc., were asked to film videos sharing their knowledge and experiences with the students. In addition, a video was compiled that reflected on the experiences of social workers in South Africa from various fields within social work sharing their experiences of working during the COVID-19 pandemic. These videos were shown in class and were also made available from the electronic student portal at the Kollege. Once the restrictions were lifted, some social workers did come to the Kollege to share their experiences in person.

■ Second-year fieldwork practice

For the second-year practical module, students were required to conduct both group work and casework sessions in the community. Group work here refers to a (Toseland & Rivas 2012):

[G]oal-directed activity with small treatment and task groups aimed at meeting socioemotional needs and accomplishing tasks. This activity is directed to individual members of a group and to the group as whole within a system of service delivery. (p. 11)

Casework, on the other hand, assists individuals through a process of problem-solving to solve their psychosocial problems and adjust their environments (Chukwu, Chukwu & Nwadike 2017:45). Group work sessions were scheduled and completed in the first semester of 2020 while casework was scheduled for the second semester. The goal of the practical modules in the second year is to provide social work students with a basic experiential learning opportunity in case – and group work. Towards this goal, the following outcomes are defined (Hugenote Kollege [2020] 2021):

1. Students must demonstrate the ability to use principles, values, techniques, methods, roles and skills of social work.

2. Students must demonstrate the capacity to apply and integrate theory into practical activities.
3. Students must demonstrate professional and ethical awareness by applying social work values and ethics.
4. Students must demonstrate an understanding and develop the capacity to engage in the social work process when working with individuals (casework) and groups (group work).
5. Students must demonstrate competence in communicating professionally, both verbally and in writing.
6. Students must demonstrate evidence of personal growth.
7. The fieldwork coordinator and field practice supervisor ensure that adequate and appropriate opportunities are provided for students to achieve these competencies. These experiential educational opportunities include appropriate fieldwork placements, tutorials and group/individual supervision.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, various adjustments need to be made to the curriculum to ensure the safety of students and clients. Although the second-year students were able to conduct two group work sessions in local schools, these group sessions were terminated in March 2020 because of the national lockdown. Videos, assignments related to the various elements of group work and class discussions via social communication applications, such as Telegram and MyNotes were initiated as replacement strategies to provide students with some exposure to the group work experience. Supervision was facilitated via WhatsApp and Telegram, and assignments and feedback related to assignments were emailed back to students.

Casework for the second-year students was scheduled for the second semester. While many restrictions implemented by the government to manage the COVID-19 pandemic were lifted during the second semester, students were still not able to engage in casework. As an alternative to traditional casework, students assessed relatives, friends and staff at organisations to master the skills required to complete the various assessments prescribed by this module. The different assessment tools were used with different clients to enhance the exposure of the students to a variety of situations and could, therefore, contribute to their development. This has always been done in this way; however, some adjustments, with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic protocols, had to be made. Furthermore, the supervisor made use of a one-way mirror, which the Kollege is fortunate to have, to assess the skills of students as students were not allowed to do their practicals at organisations.

■ Specific challenges

Although the Kollege does have an electronic platform designed to support and facilitate student interaction, this platform was found mostly inaccessible

because of the limited ability of students to purchase data. The alternative platforms employed as teaching mediums used fewer data and therefore proved more accessible than the institutional alternative.

An aspect that required careful consideration was the fact that the BSW course at the Kollege is designed and marketed as a residential course. Thus, students registered for face-to-face education and were thus not organised for nor within a physical and mental space that is conducive to online teaching. Many of the students were not able to make a smooth transition to online teaching, struggling with self-discipline, time management, technical issues, lack of proper devices (i.e. laptops/computers) and limited data. The Kollege did, however, make an effort to address this issue by providing the students with data bundles.

■ Supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic

Supervision plays a pivotal role for social work students during their fieldwork practice. It provides students with the necessary support and creates an opportunity for reflective learning. This section will discuss the role of supervision during fieldwork practice and then reflect on how supervision was conducted for first and second-year BSW students in 2020.

■ The role of social work supervision

The South African Department of Social Development (DSD) and the SACSSP highlight the necessity of supervision of student social workers during their fieldwork placement in their supervision framework for the social work profession (DSD & SACSSP 2012). The main objective of the fieldwork placement for student social workers is to provide them with the opportunity to integrate the theory learned with the practical experience under the supervision of a registered social worker (DSD & SACSSP 2012). Supervision in the fieldwork placement is therefore vital and aims to facilitate the following:

1. applying acquired theoretical knowledge to concrete problem-solving situations
2. applying professional values and ethical standards of practice
3. and acquiring knowledge of organisational policies, procedures and intervention modalities.

In addition, the *Social Service Professions Act* (RSA 1978) provides a mandate for the supervision of student social workers (DSD & SACSSP 2012). According to Section 17A(1) and 18B(1) of the *Social Service Professions Act* (RSA 1978),

student social workers may be registered with the SACSSP as student social workers if they are studying at an approved HEI. Student registration with the SACSSP is imperative as it regulates the conduct of students and ensures that they practice ethically and professionally within their scope of practice. Subsequently, all second-year social work students at the Kollege were registered with the SACSSP in 2020 before commencing their fieldwork placements.

While the same guidelines that apply to the supervision of practitioners apply to the supervision of student social workers, the placement supervisors also work in collaboration with the HEI's practicum coordinator (DSD & SACSSP 2012). The student social worker, therefore, receives supervision from the fieldwork placement supervisor as well as a supervisor at the HEI. Supervision, therefore, has three functions; administrative, supportive and educative, to ensure that student social workers develop the necessary skills to practice as social workers in the future.

■ **The functions of supervision in the fieldwork practice**

Supervision in social work is a structured process whereby the reflection of the supervisee's progress and learning needs is addressed (Kadushin 2002). The fieldwork placement of social work students occurs under the supervision (fieldwork practice) of a registered social worker at the organisation and a registered social worker (contracted by the Kollege) or a lecturer at the Kollege for academic supervision. Both supervisors are responsible for the educational, supportive and administrative functions (of supervision) that are necessary for the development of competent social workers in the field (DSD & SACSSP 2012). The student social worker and supervisor enter a professional relationship whereby each has certain responsibilities to fulfil to ensure that the objectives of the fieldwork placement are achieved (Carelse & Poggenpoel 2016). The responsibility is associated with the 'mutual participation and accountability for learning and development of the supervisee as a professional practitioner' (Carelse & Poggenpoel 2016). Guttman, Eisikovits and Malucci (1988) maintain that there are three elements of competence that is capacities and skills, motivation and quality of the environment. Thus, if the competence of the relevant knowledge and skills in social work practice is the primary goal of the BSW curriculum, then it is crucial that supervisors have the necessary knowledge and skills to do the necessary planning and preparation for students for practice and to establish a conducive learning environment for the student (Carelse & Poggenpoel 2016).

■ Fieldwork practice supervision for first-year students

First-year students of the BSW programme are not involved in fieldwork placements. The module, 'An Introduction to Practical Training', merely provides students with exposure to the various fields of social work and allows them the opportunity to reflect on diversity in and ethical principles of social work. Placement supervisors are therefore not utilised on this level. In-person group supervision did, however, take place on a weekly basis, facilitated by supervisors appointed by the Kollege. During these sessions, the COVID-19 pandemic safety protocols were implemented to ensure that the supervision sessions were safe for both students and supervisors.

Supervision activities and discussions allowed students the opportunity to reflect on the various fields of social work and to discuss issues related to diversity, ethical principles and social work skills. Supervision furthermore provided students with the necessary emotional support that was especially needed in coping with the stresses associated with studying at an HEI during a pandemic. Weekly feedback on assignments was provided to students during supervision to encourage continual academic development.

To ensure the competence of students in knowledge and skills pertaining to social work, supervisors with the required qualifications and experience were appointed to supervise students. Supervisors were also provided with weekly support and training from the practicum coordinator to ensure that they were equipped to provide an appropriate learning environment for students during supervision.

■ Fieldwork practice supervision for second-year students

Second-year students had weekly group supervision. During these sessions, the necessary safety measures were put in place to minimise risks associated with COVID-19. Practical modules had to be adjusted and the COVID-19 restrictive environment placed additional strain on lecturers and supervisors. In addition to having to find new and creative ways in which to teach theory and provide opportunities for integration of theory into practice, lecturers and supervisors also now had to be available for longer hours, be accessible online and provide emotional support and motivation to students.

Supervision posed a major adjustment for the students during the hard lockdown. They needed to get used to talking to their peers and supervisor via a computer screen or even mobile phone, instead of the familiar face-to-face supervision. Students struggled with the transition from being on campus as residential students to having their classes and supervision remotely via an

online platform. To support students in this transition, lecturers circulated articles and guidelines providing guidance on how to make this shift and adapt to the new reality of online learning.

Supervision also had to be approached differently to support students facing traumatic situations at home because of isolation or being under quarantine or experiencing the illness and loss of a close associate. These students had to be accommodated in between supervision sessions as well as they needed more emotional support. The supervision served as a platform for all students to reflect on their experiences and ensured that everyone was mindful of the realities of the current situation. Many students experienced difficulty with purchasing mobile data because of financial constraints and did not have sufficient mobile data to engage with the group on the online platform. These students notified the supervisor, and arrangements were made to engage with these students when they did have access to the platform, which sometimes only took place late in the evening. Students signed in for class and supervision by using their name, surname and student number at the beginning and at the end of the session. This record served as an attendance register and could be copied to the administration system at the Kollege.

Students also experienced anxiety with all the changes that had to be made to the practical module to ensure that the required learning did take place. They continued to do assignments and reports and received feedback on a weekly basis. Videos and articles were used to cover the discussions related to the group work. Fortunately, the second semester brought some normality with students allowed to return to the Kollege and supervision could be held in groups as well as individually to support their learning needs within the practised safety protocols. However, in the period just before and after students returned to the Kollege, another preparation period unfolded. Students were anxious to return to campus. Within the context of general disruption in family life because of the COVID-19 pandemic realities, students really struggled to find and maintain a balance between their academic responsibilities, family and social life, a challenge that seemed to only escalate during this time. This called for supervisors and lecturers to not only be available on campus for support, but students also continued with engagements online.

■ Ethical considerations and principles

Ethics within the fieldwork practice of social work students is an important component of social work education (Reamer 2012) and is stipulated as a core learning area within the BSW programme. Students should be able to demonstrate their competence in the use of codes of ethics vis-à-vis the moral impulse (SACSSP 2021).

Ethical principles played a vital role in the development of alternative methods of fieldwork practice for BSW students in 2020. It provided guidelines for the social work educators to ensure that students were able to develop the required competencies but also to ensure the clients were not harmed in any way. The following ethical principles were considered in the adjustment of the fieldwork practice module in light of the COVID-19 pandemic: (1) social justice, (2) respect for people's worth, human rights, and dignity, (3) competence and (4) integrity (SACSSP 2007).

Despite the limitations that existed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, students were encouraged to play an active role in ensuring social justice in their communities. Class activities were held regularly to provide awareness about issues such as mental health and gender-based violence (GBV). Furthermore, students worked in collaboration with the South Africa Police Service (SAPS) and child protection organisations in Wellington and participated in a human chain to provide awareness of GBV in the community.

Throughout the fieldwork practice, educators provided students with an opportunity to practice and reflect on the ethical principles of social work. Case studies and videos were used to allow such reflection and to develop the competence of students. Furthermore, ethical dilemmas were presented and explored with students.

One of the major concerns was to maintain not only a trustworthy and honest relationship with the students but also to be mindful and empathic to students' experiences. This was of cardinal importance as the only contact with students was via cellular phone or the Internet. The rights of students and dealing with their experiences with the confidentiality it required was always a consideration. The challenge was to balance the needs of the students with keeping the boundaries of being the lecturer and supervisor intact (Banks et al. 2020:v).

These challenges clearly brought to the fore the threefold framework of ethical practice (Banks et al. 2021:2). This framework defines three aspects of ethical practice, of which the first is to be vigilant of ethics. The BSW lectures and supervisors were vigilant of the ethics in considering not only students and colleagues but also being aware of their own stress and fatigue, as this can sometimes lead to a quick reaction. The second aspect of this framework is ethical reasoning and focuses on rethinking the situation and being patient while processing the experiences. To address this aspect, effort was made to balance the rights and needs of the students, the responsibilities and risks of both the students and the lecturers and supervisors, ensuring that no harm was done and that actions benefit the students (Banks et al. 2021:3).

The last aspect of this framework refers to ethical logistics. This was addressed by realising and considering the lack of resources that existed

amongst students, the time-consuming nature of some of the solutions that had to be put in place and the need to find creative solutions to challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic (Banks et al. 2021:3).

■ Reflecting on the resilience of staff and students

According to Van Breda (2018), there appears to be a lack of agreement among authors regarding the definition of resilience. While some authors argue that resilience is essentially based on a person's ability to 'bounce back', others highlight the importance of the various systems that form part of a person's life having an impact on one's resilience (Fletcher & Sarkar 2013; Kolar 2011). Van Breda (2018:4) provides the following definition of resilience that incorporates both of these aspects: 'the multilevel processes that systems engage in to obtain better-than-expected outcomes in the face or wake of adversity'. This highlights that resilience is an ongoing process of being able to move forward after/during adversity and that the attributes of a person, as well as their system, play a significant part in this.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused much adversity for South Africans in general and given the context of this chapter, for students and educators at HEIs. With minimal time and resources, the Kollege, together with other educational institutions, had to plan for and implement online teaching and learning for students part of the BSW programme with little warning and time for preparation. While the government provided financial support to universities and their students, private institutions were left isolated and forced to develop innovative strategies for both the institution itself and its students to ensure that teaching could continue. Changing a curriculum designed for onsite learning to fit an online approach was particularly challenging for the fieldwork practice of the BSW degree as it entails students being in contact with clients and groups within the community (Azman et al. 2020). In addition, students experienced many challenges, including limited access to mobile data, not having access to a computer or laptop, various personal losses and conditions at home that are not conducive to learning (Azman et al. 2020).

Despite these various challenges for both students and educators, 'a better-than-expected outcome' (Van Breda 2018:4) was achieved. The development of a 'new' fieldwork programme during a pandemic was a stressful experience for educators because of a lack of time and technical skills (Azman et al. 2020). However, they used creative methods to ensure that students were able to achieve the necessary exit-level outcomes required. This was achieved despite the Levels 4 and 5 'lockdown' that was imposed for most of the first semester of 2020. Notable is the fact that most of the students were found

competent in their fieldwork practice in 2020 and were able to reflect on the various skills and lessons that they learned. While students may have struggled initially when starting their fieldwork practice in 2021, it was evident that the foundation laid in 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, was sufficient.

■ Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic caused adverse conditions for all South Africans in 2020. Many challenges were experienced by educators and students at HEIs, especially concerning fieldwork practice. Educators were required to think creatively and ethically to assist students in achieving the necessary level of competency while ensuring the safety of all involved during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students had to draw on their support systems and personal attributes to develop their competencies despite the various challenges. This chapter has reflected on the challenges and creative methods applied in teaching fieldwork practice of the first- and second-year BSW students at the Kollege during 2020. It has highlighted the various ethical principles that were considered when adapting the fieldwork practice and provided a brief reflection on the resilience of both educators and students during the practical module.

Reflecting on remote teaching and learning practices during a pandemic

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■ Abstract

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic required fast, innovative responses across higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure that imposed restrictions and the spread of the virus do not derail the academic year. In an effort to ensure that the academic year could commence, the decision to implement online teaching and learning was the most appropriate response while the long-term effects of the virus on higher education could be established. Although there were many challenges in adopting blended learning approaches, management, teaching staff and students across HEIs showed great resilience in their commitment to continuing the academic project amidst crises. The lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the consideration and

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adoption of online teaching and learning in the future positively and online education offerings will arise from these collective experiences.

■ Introduction

When the World Health Organization (WHO) was informed of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, China, that presented severe symptoms on 31 December 2019, the global impact that the disease would have was not yet understood. By 30 January 2020, the WHO declared that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) constituted a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), which represents the WHO's highest alert level (WHO 2020). By March 2020, as the disease spread to countries outside China, the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic, and the international community had to act fast to ensure that their populations were kept safe. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic permeated all spheres of society and brought international trade, travel, commerce and education to a standstill as governments consulted with their top infectious disease experts on the best ways to curb the spread of the disease.

The effect of the COVID-19 outbreak on HEIs in South Africa was considerable. It delayed the start of the 2020 academic year, affected the scheduling of classes and disrupted assessment timetables and mid-term breaks. Along with the rest of the South African public, HEIs took directives from the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), a team of experts that was tasked with navigating the country through the COVID-19 crisis. By the time the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported in the country on 05 March 2020, the higher education sector was in various stages of the start of its academic year. Some institutions had already started classes, while others were finishing their orientation programme for first-year students. Subsequent to the announcement of the phased approach to a national state of lockdown on 15 March 2020, HEIs across South Africa had to revise their academic calendars as well as the model of their core business – effective teaching and learning – without compromising the integrity of academic programmes.

Institutions had to shift their methods of teaching and learning from face-to-face modes of delivery to remote alternatives. For many stakeholders, the transition was uncomfortable and not without implementation challenges. Although the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the teaching and learning methodologies that HEIs and training had become accustomed to prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it also presented an opportunity to review current practices and expand on existing blended and hybrid learning offerings. This chapter presents reflections from a learning designer that worked with teaching staff and university departments during the shift to online teaching and assessment.

■ Teaching and learning before the COVID-19 pandemic

The measures taken to curb the spread of COVID-19 had an immediate effect on higher education and training globally (Marinoni, Van't Land & Jensen 2020). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the teaching and learning model for many public and private HEIs across South Africa was characteristic of a blended learning model, which consists of a mix of on-campus, in-person sessions with some online components. Blended learning is a 'coherent design approach' that draws on the strengths of face-to-face instruction and online distance learning (Garrison & Vaughan 2008). Of course, some institutions did offer successful distance learning programmes before the COVID-19 pandemic, but these offerings were advertised as such, and students were aware of the online mode of delivery of the course content at the time of their registration. Online teaching and learning have been explored in various forms at HEIs during the last two decades; in this regard, it is not unfamiliar that online components are incorporated into academic programmes.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions used a teaching and learning model that relied heavily on in-person classes or contact lectures for the primary learning experience and complemented this with various online components like online videos, links to useful websites or interactive online assessments. Teaching staff would typically prepare lecture content in advance, usually by preparing a presentation containing the most pertinent information and presenting it to students who attended the in-person lectures. The presentation and other learning materials and other resources would also be made available on the institutions' learning management software (LMS). Learning management software is an online platform used by institutions to disseminate information and learning material to the student body. The LMS is an important feature of online teaching and learning integration within academic programmes as it can be customised to the needs of any particular course and is a platform where students can access the learning material on and off campus (Coman et al. 2020:2). Noting the benefits of LMS's, HEIs have invested heavily in the sourcing and maintenance of robust LMS's before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the integration of this software in academic programmes varies greatly. There has been some resistance by academic teaching staff to the integration of blended learning practices in the teaching and learning environment before and during the COVID-19 pandemic as it challenges traditional approaches to planning and delivering academic content. There are also valid concerns pertaining to maintaining the integrity of academic programmes (Moskal, Dziuban & Hartman 2013:15).

Research shows that blended, hybrid and e-learning models offer great benefits to students. As a student-centred model, it encourages flexibility and has the potential to encourage interaction between teaching staff and students

(Coman et al. 2020:1). There are, however, some factors that require consideration when considering the integration of blended teaching and learning practices into the mainstream teaching and learning model. Unlike emergency remote teaching (ERT), which is the strategy that most HEIs adopted at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, blended learning as a teaching and learning strategy requires sufficient planning and consideration for the student or end-user. To achieve this effectively, the blended learning model must be aligned with the institutions' strategic initiatives, vision and mission, which implies a collaborative approach by management, administrators and teaching staff (Moskal et al. 2013:16). In other words, blended learning is not only concerned with the mode of delivery of academic content, but it should also be considered as a vehicle through which broader institutional values and strategies of the institution can be achieved. For example, if inclusivity and transformation are defined as values at an institution, the blended learning model should mirror these values. In addition, aligning institutional values to the blended learning model becomes challenging and tedious if teaching staff, administrators and faculty personnel are not familiar with or comfortable with integrating online mediums in teaching and learning strategies (Moskal et al. 2013:16).

Again, the planning required to implement a successful blended learning model is considerable and, to ensure it is as inclusive as possible, all areas of the student experience should be considered before it is adopted on a large scale. Considering the level of planning, the cost implications and the training required, it is not surprising that institutions adopted a phased approach to introducing blended learning before the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in some faculties embracing the blended learning approach only once they were comfortable that the use of online technologies would not create undue strain on teaching staff and would not marginalise those students who do not have the capacity, for various reasons, to excel academically in a blended learning environment.

■ The shift to remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, teaching and learning methodologies in higher education conformed to either traditional strategies that prioritised the in-person learning setting or blended learning. These methodologies gave way to ERT at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was the most appropriate response at the time to ensure that some form of teaching and learning could continue while institutions waited on direction from the NCCC pertaining to the lifting of restrictions on meeting in-person. Unlike blended learning, which is the planned integration of face-to-face and digital components, ERT did not allow for sufficient planning or consideration of the consequences of teaching and learning online (Rudman 2021:1).

The COVID-19 pandemic forced teaching staff to reconsider their teaching, learning and assessment practices (Strydom, Sinclair & Coetzee, 2020:2). Content that would typically be presented in the classroom setting and made available on an institution's LMS, accessible to students in computer rooms on campus before the COVID-19 pandemic, had to be adapted and condensed so that students could access it on their personal devices at their respective places of residence. The sheer magnitude of the shift to remote teaching dawned on teaching staff as they prepared to optimise their learning material for online-only use and the first few months of ERT highlighted some of the challenges of remote teaching as a short- to medium-term teaching pedagogy during the COVID-19 pandemic. A report released by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in March 2020 stipulates guidelines and considerations for remote teaching and learning, which includes using existing distance learning platforms, developing new online teaching and learning platforms, partnering with private educational platforms, collaborating with international partners to share and maximise existing educational resources, implementing the use of all electronic software appropriately and providing teaching staff with digital learning opportunities (Reimers & Schleicher 2020).

National lockdowns globally prohibited social gatherings of any kind from continuing and the inability to interact and socialise with others dramatically enhanced separation anxiety, feelings of boredom and suicide (Brooks et al. 2020). In addition, Brooks et al. (2020) found that people who were quarantined for ten days or more 'were more likely to report posttraumatic stress symptoms'. It is within this context that online teaching and learning commenced. As the transition to online teaching and learning loomed, it became apparent that teaching staff and students were ill-equipped to manage the workload and expectations that came with online teaching and learning and there were many barriers to a seamless transition to remote teaching and learning (Strydom et al. 2020:2). These barriers include a lack of digital devices, issues with Internet connectivity, the lack of technological skills and the cost of Internet data (Rahiem 2020). Other challenges that students face include decreased motivation and delayed feedback on assessments. In order to address some of these challenges, 'experience and knowledge about teaching in the online environment are necessary' (Coman et al. 2020:2). In this regard, experienced instructional learning designers are a useful resource in HEIs. The role of the instructional learning designer is to work closely with teaching staff to ensure that the learning content is optimised for online platforms, and they can also advise on software that could assist in making content more user-friendly, for example, converting content into different formats that become easier to use on mobile devices. The need for instructional learning designers highlights a bigger issue in debates around blended learning – the range of professional and technical skills required by

teaching staff for the implementation of a successful blended learning model that goes beyond uploading presentations on an LMS (Moskal et al. 2013:17)

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, learning designers were not regarded as a necessity in teaching and learning at many institutions, even those that implemented blended learning models. As such, large institutions often appointed one learning designer per faculty, which led to large workloads and inefficient strategies. In other words, institutions did not invest in online teaching by neglecting to appoint experienced instructional learning designers. The consequences of this lack in investment became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first few months of ERT, the limited capacity of instructors to convert their existing course content to user-friendly modes for online use became glaringly apparent (Rudman 2021:2). To hold such capacity, teaching staff require adequate training to ensure that they understand how to use online technologies and how to implement such technologies successfully into their coursework. Such training is of course a costly undertaking that some HEIs cannot afford to invest in on a large scale (Brink, Ten Ham-Baloyi & Rowland 2020:2). Subsequently, many institutions lack the organisational capacity to develop blended learning as an integrated teaching and learning strategy, often to the frustration of staff and students who consider blended learning as the future of teaching and learning.

Another factor that influenced the implementation of ERT includes digital and technical infrastructure (Marinoni et al. 2020:11). Although many institutions had already invested heavily in digital infrastructure on campuses before the COVID-19 pandemic, the national lockdown forced institutions to close down, rendering the computer rooms and complimentary Wi-Fi on campuses purposeless during periods of online teaching and learning. With the closing of campuses, students had to return to their homes, exposing the divide between those who were able to engage in ERT and those who were not. Many students were unable to set up a dedicated learning space in their homes because of a lack of space, privacy and resources. If anything, the closure of campuses exposed the digital divide and the extent to which some students depended on the digital resources on campuses for their coursework, assessments and research. In his paper on rural online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dube (2020:138) notes that 'it appears that online learning favours urban, well-privileged learners, thus, widening the gap between the poor and the rich, instead of uniting the nation in the fight against COVID-19'.

As the implementation of online teaching and learning was hampered by the lack of digital devices, some public HEIs and training in South Africa purchased laptops and other digital devices for staff and students. Rates were negotiated with the larger mobile service providers in the country to provide mobile data to the student body. Many private institutions did, however, not possess the budget to accommodate the purchasing of digital devices and

mobile data for staff and students. This resulted in teaching staff at smaller, private institutions having to resort to using social media platforms and messaging software like WhatsApp and Telegram to stay connected to students and to deliver learning content. In turn, students who had limited or no digital devices had to use their mobile phones to access learning material. While using social media and messaging applications on mobile phones was not ideal, the situation warranted innovation and adaptation for teaching and learning to continue, albeit at a slower pace and with relaxed deadlines.

Digital literacy, a pre-requisite to online teaching and learning, is defined by Lankshear and Knobel (2008:18) as the 'ability to understand and to use information from a variety of digital sources'. Merging information and technologies from various sources into the learning experience did not come without challenges. Some students were ill-equipped to navigate online platforms, like Microsoft Teams, Google Drive and Outlook, which caused frustration, stress and anxiety for students who found it challenging to join online classes or struggled to access their course content online. Although some South African secondary schools and universities offer basic computer skills training, some students come from backgrounds where they have very little or no exposure to the digital literacy skills required in an online learning environment. Because students were not required to use these types of software in their academic programmes on such a large scale before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was understandably a steep learning curve. In terms of addressing the challenges of online teaching and learning, the OECD Report (2020) advised that policy-makers should consider ways to balance digital learning components with screen-free activities, consider ways to preserve students' emotional health and well-being, provide access to digital devices and manage access to information technology (IT) infrastructure and support services.

■ Reflections on teaching and learning

Teaching and learning at HEIs had to move online at short notice at a time when there was uncertainty about the spread and effects of a highly infectious virus (Hofer, Nistor & Scheibenzuber 2021:1). The thought of teaching online created anxiety for some teaching staff for a number of reasons; they did not feel prepared or lacked the digital acumen; some teaching staff were worried about the cost implications for themselves and their students and others were completely unwilling to even consider teaching online. As many teaching staff, especially those that have been working in teaching positions for some time, present the same or similar modules year after year, it would not be incorrect to assume that for most modules, there is existing learning material that is more or less recycled each year. Herein lies perhaps the biggest frustration and challenge for teaching staff in the shift to online teaching and learning, in that it required staff to revisit their learning material and repackage it to suit

a new mode of delivery – online teaching. In addition, they had to do this with very little support and guidance in a very short time. In practice, this meant that learning material had to be condensed into presentations. For some, short video or audio clips should accompany such presentations, all of the aforementioned required a lot of work and for some, this work was within a domain with which they were completely unfamiliar.

The concept ‘community of practice’ (CoP) was first introduced by cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in their book *Situated Learning*, published in 1991. The concept is defined as ‘a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognisable as competence’ (Lave & Wenger 1991:5). As it relates to teaching and learning, becoming part of a CoP implies competence over time, something that many teaching staff had mastered before the COVID-19 pandemic, but this was severely disrupted as their knowledge of their subject matter was no longer the primary prerequisite for meeting individual course outcomes. Engaging in teaching in learning could only be successful if teaching staff had a reasonable level of digital competence or if they had someone to assist them at home. Lack of the aforementioned caused anxiety and frustration, especially if one considers that many teaching staff had by that time (March 2020) already prepared learning material that could be presented during in-person class meetings.

After working remotely for months, many staff across divisions at HEIs and training started experiencing the effects of burnout because of the demands of online teaching and learning, implementing and maintaining effective communication strategies to keep students engaged while working and studying remotely. All of this needed to be negotiated while also keeping themselves and their families safe and protected from COVID-19. Mheidly, Fares and Fares (2020:1) define burnout as a syndrome that is ‘brought on by chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed’.

Factors that may contribute to experiences of burnout include overwhelming feelings of exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment (Mheidly et al. 2020:2). The shift of the workplace setting from on-campus office and lecture halls to the home had a significant impact on the ability of teaching staff to continue with their work, their levels of productivity and motivation to complete tasks. Staff, particularly those who live with and care for other family members within their households, found working remotely challenging. The boundaries between family responsibilities and office hours became blurred, adding to the stressful experience of working from home.

Also contributing to burnout is the inability to step away from a dedicated (remote) workspace and the perception of being and having to be always accessible, most only online. Although the national lockdown created physical distance between teaching staff and students, teaching staff have never

before been as accessible to students as during the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort to stay connected, some teaching staff created WhatsApp and Telegram chat groups for students where they could engage in discussions related to course content. The challenges with these chat groups are, however, that it becomes difficult to maintain strong boundaries with regard to when lecturers are available to answer questions and also what are appropriate points of discussion and what not. Another aspect that added to a feeling of constant availability is the fact that many lecturers have their work email accounts linked to their mobile devices. This contributes to the expectation by students and management that teaching staff is accessible at all times to compensate for working from home.

Burnout can also be brought on by a sudden increase in workload. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this was particularly relevant for academic staff when in-person learning material had to be converted to online-only content within a very limited time frame. As it is, the transformation of academic material to online content is a tedious task, and it can take many hours to complete if learning designers are not available to assist. The effects of burnout can be addressed by creating support structures within the online teaching and learning environment. In addition, there are some practical considerations that include taking breaks between online lectures or online conferences, requesting the assistance of a learning designer or other suitably trained professional, maintaining boundaries between office hours and leisure time and stipulating hours for online question-and-answer sessions with students (Mheidly et al. 2020:3).

■ Fostering resilience during a crisis

Teaching and learning in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic were challenging, and it required innovative approaches to facilitate suitable teaching methodologies, but there were many lessons learned thus far and greater resilience developed among staff and students alike. The only other comparable threat to teaching and learning in recent South African history would perhaps be the 2015–2017 student protest movements across universities in the country. At the time of the student protests, campuses shut down and university management mandated teaching staff to implement blended learning approaches (Czerniewicz, Trotter & Haupt 2019:5). Unlike during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, blended learning did not continue for an extended period but was merely a measure implemented while student leaders and university managements negotiated the issues that gave rise to the protests.

Similar to the student protest movement, the COVID-19 pandemic fostered resilience in a time of crisis. Staff and students alike learned to adapt and respond to the crisis with innovative learning approaches while exercising

concern and care for all stakeholders involved. Strydom et al. (2020), in *Responding to the necessity for change: Higher Education voices from the South during the COVID-19 crisis* (2020), propose an ethics of care perspective for 'students and staff in educational institutions in relation to the use of digital technologies during a time of continuous online engagement'. This is an important aspect to consider and address in the fostering of resilience in higher education during a pandemic, as it contributes to an individual's capacity to address and recover during uncertain times. In this regard, HEIs and training should be cognisant of mental health and well-being and exercise care in its expectations, demands and the overall programme outcomes (Baker et al. 2021:500). Adopting perspectives of care in this context goes a long way in ensuring that staff and students feel seen and heard during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Management structures within HEIs showed great resilience in how they addressed student and staff concerns pertaining to online teaching and learning. This was achieved by providing digital devices and digital support services, providing mobile data, extending deadlines for new student intakes, funding and grant applications and increasing personal support services that include mental health and well-being services. In addition, the teaching staff, which included academic tutors and mentors, led the way in easing the anxieties of students that had challenges with connecting to online classes and submitting assessments for grading. Some teaching staff offered emotional support as well because students often shared personal and home-life circumstances that contributed to their inability to complete their coursework (Rudman 2021:4). In general, the COVID-19 pandemic required all stakeholders to exercise more care and sensitivity given the threat of the virus having a tangible impact on the mental well-being of all.

As it relates to online teaching and learning, the COVID-19 pandemic forced higher education to consider the role of online teaching and learning in existing programmes and supported the consideration for more online-only offerings (Cattell-Holden et al. 2020:95). In this regard, the COVID-19 pandemic opened possibilities that were previously considered to be too expensive, labour intensive and challenging. Perhaps it is only through developing resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic that these new possibilities became tangible, and without the COVID-19 pandemic, many new online offerings would have stayed in the conceptualisation phase for a prolonged period.

The move to online teaching and learning, albeit quickly, also illustrated the resilience of teaching staff in having to learn and implement new teaching methodologies in a short space of time (Rudman 2021:2). The willingness to learn and adapt within one's profession displays a great commitment to higher education and students' academic progression. Teaching staff showed great perseverance and should indeed be commended for their hard work and dedication towards the academic project.

Furthermore, academic instructional learning designers delivered a tremendous effort to ensure a seamless transition to online teaching and learning and showed immense resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic (Burger, Pegado, Solari & Talip 2020:62). Many learning designers were tireless in their pursuit of excellence while creating practical and user-friendly solutions to ensure that online content met the learning outcomes of courses across a range of disciplines. Perhaps as one of the more forgotten but critical roles in online teaching and learning realities within higher education, instructional learning designers suddenly had a wealth of employment opportunities at their disposal. This is indeed one of the positive outcomes of the shift to remote educational methodologies.

Another positive outcome is the wealth of knowledge and digital skills that were acquired by teaching staff and students alike. This will serve us well in the future as we look to the implementation of more technologies because of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) that looms in higher education in South Africa.

■ Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges to higher education in South Africa. Challenges that can yet not be comprehended adequately as the country remains amid a crisis in managing infection rates and preventing new waves of infections. HEIs have, to a large extent, learned and are continuing to learn how to adapt to this new normal. Academic offers have changed to suit the needs of the current context brought by the COVID-19 pandemic while working hard at maintaining the integrity of the academic project. In this regard, the COVID-19 pandemic created opportunities for innovation while exposing focus areas that needed greater attention in terms of access to digital devices and the need for digital skills that complement remote teaching and learning. The COVID-19 pandemic, furthermore, fostered great resilience within higher education, which represents one of the positive outcomes of working together during crises to ensure that all stakeholders are supported and respected within their work and study environment.

Theme 4

The resilience of philosophical questions

Carl Schmitt as a resilient phoenix: The surprising returns of an (in)famous jurist

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■ Abstract

This co-authored chapter of Vanhoutte and Lombaard explores the reception of the German legal scholar Carl Schmitt's ideas, especially with regard to his religio-juridico-political project. The authors argue for the resilience of Schmitt's ideas on the state of exception. Carl Schmitt has had a wide influence on philosophers and modern thinking, but he is a worrisome figure on many levels. For as much as Schmitt's legal theory was developed for and then aided in developing political and legal theory on what is now generally understood as

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the extreme right-wing of the political spectrum, Schmitt and his theories have, however, over the past decade or two become core discussion materials, also on the opposite side of the legal and political spectrum. This peculiarity of reception should not go unnoticed. It is precisely on this thorny question that the authors encounter the first form of resilience relating to Schmitt's ideas. The authors indicate how some central ideas of Schmitt's became more strongly and widely resonant because of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) management by authorities internationally, how it was represented by opposite ends of the political spectrum and the surprising hardiness of Schmitt's ideas. This unusual resilience of thought is then explained and extended by means of three brief excursions, on aesthetics, from literary history and in comparison with a thesis of Max Weber. Schmitt's limited understanding of the exception as purely bellicose constitutes one more problem of his name and theory returning; that is, of their surprising and recurring resilience.

■ *Mur* too

At the time of completing this contributing chapter (September–October 2021), almost all nation-states in the world had gone through or are still living in (e.g. Italy, South Africa) either what is explicitly called a 'state of exception' or something similar under a different name. Even though some philosophers have argued in favour of the importance of a nominal difference,²¹ it seems as if only ideology can argue for a significant difference in functionality and operativity of the 'state of exception' – on the one hand – and the 'state of emergency' and other similar legal devices – on the other hand (e.g. France has a 'state of emergency' or '*état d'urgence*'; Switzerland has an '*Ausserordentliche Lage*', a 'situation extraordinaire' or a '*situazione straordinaria*', as this is referred to in its three official languages; these states of affairs function in an almost identical way). Even more ominous is the commonly employed expression 'lockdown', which resonates recognisably with the 'state of exception' idea and related terminologies: it conjures up imaginings of prisons and chains and subjugation (which certainly occurred in countries such as South Africa, directly related to at times cruel and even fatal COVID-19 policing), with all the existential and dystopian literary associations that present themselves. These associations include, for instance, Sartre's *Le mur* in 1939 and Orwell's *1984* published in 1949, a decade later.

21. See, for example, the discussion by Giorgio Agamben on the supposed difference between the 'state of exception' and the 'state of emergency'. As he states, 'from a legal standpoint', the suspensions at stake in both operations, are 'essentially identical [...] given that both states resolve into the pure and simple suspension of constitutional guarantees' (Agamben 2021:83). If there is a difference between them (and other such 'states of [...]'), then this distinction is political or sociological (or should one say, ideological?). Even though a clear differentiation between the legal, political and sociological spheres in such matters easily fade away, in this contribution, the diversities are maintained.

If there is one name associated with this muscular kind of juridico-political operation, it is that of the 20th-century German legal scholar Carl Schmitt.²² This is, therefore, a good time once more to turn to this interesting and (in) famous²³ figure and his theories, to focus again on the surprising resilience of Schmitt and his theories, even more so as we find ourselves in the dire situation of a global pandemic as COVID-19 has proven to be.

In this respect, the present contribution is a further development of insights in the article 'Weighing Schmitt's political theology anew: Implicit religion in politics' (Lombaard 2019:1-6), which had on its part been an extended version of a paper presented at the 'Pious radicals? Strong religion and politics in modern Europe' Conference, Universität Siegen, Germany, 14-15 March 2019. That contribution was intended as the first article of two, with the later publication, the present one, co-authored with Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte,²⁴ herewith to indicate the recent reception of Schmitt's ideas, particularly on the interstices of Schmitt's religio-juridico-political project. Considering the context of the first paper, some aspects were there left aside as they fit better in a more philosophical discussion. This present study attempts to articulate that continuity.

Considering the vastness of, firstly, the possible linkages between the various religious, juridical and political fields, and, secondly, the broad reach of Schmitt's work, we intentionally here do not limit ourselves to the more famous and somewhat sloganesque affirmations of Schmitt. For as much as we will comment on the two most quoted phrases of Schmitt - which are: 'Sovereign is he who decides on the exception' (Schmitt 2005:5) and: '[A]ll significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts' (cf. McCormick 1997:163-187; Schmitt 2005:36) - 'standing alone', these phrases are, however, as Kahn (2011:1) accurately remarked, 'as puzzling as they are shocking'.

On the other hand, this same double expansiveness of Schmitt's work also, of necessity, limits us here too in dealing with the available variety of topics and thematics. Covering all of Schmitt's intriguing remarks, even only those that have the religio-juridico-political as a common denominator, and tracing the entire range of receptions of them would lead us well beyond the feasible limits of a contribution with the present scope. We thus restrict ourselves here

22. Although the contiguity of the 'state of exception' and Carl Schmitt is for current scholarship beyond doubt, the 'origins' of this concept are to be found well before Schmitt became Hermann Göring's temporary protégée. For a good short history of the 'state of exception' and geographical differences in the application of this concept, see Agamben (2005:11-22).

23. We add the negative prefix in this manner, as we do not share the stance of the obnoxious (and always superficial) 'moral high ground' of those who simply condemn. As Steinacher's *Nazis on the Run* (2012) has clearly shown, few nations and institutions can truly wash their hands in innocence regarding the avoidance of justice by many a Nazi war criminal.

24. The authors also herewith acknowledge the continued collegial encouragement of the *small circle* interdisciplinary philosophy group meetings and exchanges.

to discussing some of the problems related to the concepts of 'secularisation' and of the miracle.

Considering these topics within the context of an investigation dedicated to 'resilience' allows us the focus to discover some particularly interesting and paradoxical aspects of present societies, specifically with a clear eye on the COVID-19 pandemic. Although a pandemic – and similarly, any other all-embracing (i.e. *pan*-embracing) crises – would quite naturally have guided some people to the work of Schmitt, that, as we will see, remains in some respects surprising, as a clear mark of, precisely, the resilience of his thought. As interesting, Schmitt's contribution seems to be a possible point of reference and understanding both for those who have tried to manage us (quite disastrously so) through this COVID-19 pandemic and for those who radically oppose such forms of governance employed (deployed?). Opposing schools of thought thus draw on the same authority. Such a kind of over-presence of this marginal(ised) German and, later, Nazi jurist should give us pause seriously to ponder our current state of affairs.

To precise the unfolding of our argument here on the resilience of Schmitt's ideas on the state of exception:

1. Earlier, it was stated that some central ideas of Schmitt's, already recurrent before the COVID-19 pandemic, became more strongly and widely resonant because of COVID-19 management by authorities internationally.
2. Later, we indicate the surprising hardiness and pliability of Schmitt's ideas: (1) in being retained, (2) by representatives of opposite ends of the political spectrum, no less and (3) who then come to roughly equivalent positions.
3. This unusual resilience of thought is then explained and extended by means of three brief excursions: (1) on aesthetics, (2) from literary history and (3) in comparison with a thesis of Max Weber.
4. Regarding the latter, Schmitt's understanding seems to be more valid, historically and phenomenologically, than Weber's on the concept of secularisation.
5. In closing, these matters are drawn together around the concept of the miracle, considered from different angles.

■ For WHO the bell tolls

To be sure, even before the World Health Organization (WHO) defined the new strain of viral pneumonia, which would later become known as COVID-19, as a pandemic (the declaration of which was issued on 11 March 2020; cf. Ghebreyesus 2020), a somewhat lapsed name had started to be heard more frequently in sections of academia. That is the name of the German legal scholar Carl Schmitt.

The reason a philosopher of law such as Schmitt had since gained ever wider circulation again is now perhaps best attributable to most countries in

the world reacting to the dramatic rise in the number of infection cases with this virus (in its various incarnations) by declaring a State of Emergency, thereby placing their citizens in policed lockdown. Before this COVID-19 pandemic, however, the generally unexpected rise to power of what is often referred to as right-wing governments in a number of countries had already prompted interest in Schmitt's thoughts. Such newly right-wing governments included countries such as the United States of America (USA), Brazil and Hungary, with, for example, China and several African countries also fitting into this mould, albeit less neatly. In all such cases, the declaration by the Italian philosopher Agamben (2005:1) (whose name shall return numerous times in this text) in the opening lines to his study dedicated to the concept of the 'state of exception' remains valid: 'The essential contiguity between the state of exception and sovereignty was established by Carl Schmitt in his book *Politische Theologie*. To expand slightly the meaning of that statement within the 2020–2022 virus crisis frame: by taking the 'sovereign' decision in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic to declare a State of Emergency, the majority of the world leaders (kings, prime ministers or presidents) were enacting and, often unwittingly giving new life to, that juxtaposition indicated by Schmitt.

For a number of reasons, this (re)turning to Schmitt is problematic and worrisome (cf. Teschke 2011:179–227). Firstly, there is the problem of Schmitt himself. As with, for instance, perhaps most famously in this regard, Martin Heidegger and the perennial difficulty of disentangling his philosophical insights from his collaboration with the German Nazi regime, Schmitt too had in a similar manner tarnished himself with the Nazi stain (cf. e.g. Rütters 1991). Furthermore, his (temporary) closeness to Hermann Göring and the later guilt that accompanies his refusal to repent after World War II render any return to him and his thoughts a difficult act of balancing or perhaps of imbalance.²⁵ That Schmitt, furthermore, was perfectly aware that his work as a legal scholar was not just that of compiling or neutrally interpreting existing legal systems but that it actively served in the elaboration of new law(s) gives further pause in turning to his insights. As Schmitt (2017; emphases added) himself wrote:

The academic work of a scholar of public law, his writings themselves, place him in a particular country, among specific groups and powers, and in a particular time period. *The material he assembles his concepts from and relies upon for his scholarly work binds him to political situations* whose favor or disfavor, good or ill fortune, victory or defeat also encompasses the researcher and teacher and decides his personal fate. (p. 47)

If these were the practical conditions for Schmitt, how far can one return to Schmitt without binding oneself (and one's own political situations) to Schmitt's political situations and to parallel political situations of the present?

25. Once again, however, we indicate here as we did earlier, that very few nations and institutions can wash their hands in innocence regarding the avoidance of justice of many a Nazi war criminal.

Interestingly, it is precisely on this thorny question that we encounter the first form of resilience relating to Schmitt's ideas. For as much as Schmitt's legal theory was developed for and then aided in developing political and legal theory on what is now generally understood as the extreme right-wing of the political spectrum, Schmitt and his theories have, however, over the past decade or two become core discussion materials, *also* on the opposite side of the legal and political spectrum. This peculiarity of reception should not go unnoticed.

Not just is it, however, worth noting that *avant-garde* humanist scholars such as Agamben, Jacques Derrida, Ivan Illich, and other less famous and influential ones have taken up discussion with Schmitt. That these interlocutors, moreover, almost all come to the same basic deduction in reading him is startling. This conclusion is that the state of exception has become the main paradigm of Western(-ised) democracies (cf. e.g. Agamben 2005; Benjamin 2003:392; Hardt & Negri 2004:7) or that Schmitt's political reading of the state of exception should even be expanded, so as to embrace the whole 'professionalisation' of Western(-ised) societies (cf. Cayley 2021:153). Not only has the work of this 'shady' legal scholar ('shady', because he had for a while pursued large ambitions within Nazi structures) proven resilient in also contributing to the downfall of that same regime; his body of work also went on now to trespass the borders of political partisanship. According to some of the most important interpreters, this could be cast as Schmitt's ideas having invaded what is often in our time called liberal politics. This while, for Schmitt, national socialism had but an extremist form of democracy (cf. Agamben 2012:27–28).²⁶ Talk about unpredictable resilience!

Schmitt's core thoughts had thus become part of the culture, that is, of what is assumed by most people to be a standard, expected way of going about things. This has happened in much the same way as our present ideas have come about on, for instance, what constitutes beauty. Many people may not be aware of how these ideas had developed; who the influentially constitutive figures were; what the important movements in this regard had been. Apart from art historians and probably artists themselves, for the most part, people tend simply to accept beauty 'as is', as a given. To a substantial extent, we remain oblivious to the full contingency of perceptions of aesthetics. This is valid for many, perhaps even most parts of our existence: clothing, food, culture, religion, architecture, sport, etc. – some of us may be aware of developments past and present and of some diversities involved. However, for

26. This is one of Schmitt's fundamental contradictions. For as much as he could understand 'fascism' (which national socialism is too) as an extremised form of democracy (liberalism), that same liberalism (democracy) is for him more or less everything that is bad for the political arrangement of life and hence for the state. For Schmitt, liberalism constitutes a dissolution of the genuine democratic state, as argued and informed opinion and discussion now have to give way to secret and private will, and hence to resentment (cf. Meier 2011:139).

the greatest part, we tend simply to accept that ‘it is what it is’, somehow accepting that current practice is usual, in a sense logical, and is thus prescribed by circumstance, naturally or almost naturally. In this sense, Schmitt’s ideas on the ‘state of exception’ seem now to have attained such stature as ‘normal’ culture or practice.

An example of this is perhaps a case where the analogous method²⁷ of Schmitt may help further to illustrate this kind of interpretation: the accusation of anti-Semitism that had at times been made against the influential early 20th century (and thus a contemporary of Schmitt’s) British author, GK Chesterton. The merits of said accusation aside (cf. e.g. Ahlquist 2008b; Chesterton 2008:8-10; Terry 2019), Chesterton had, in some of his writings against Nazism, pointed out the irony of one of the central tenets of Nazi thinking at the time, that Germans/the Germanic peoples/the Aryan race were a group specially chosen by God for a specific role in the world (quoting here from Chesterton 1933):

HITLERISM is almost entirely of Jewish origin. This truth, if inscribed in the noble old German lettering on a large banner and lifted in sight of an excited mob in a modern German town might not have the soothing effect which I desire. This simple historical explanation, if written on a post-card and addressed to Herr Hitler, might not cause him to pause in his political career, and reconsider all human history in the light of [*this*] blazing illumination. These words may not be wholly comprehended or connected with their true historical origins; but they are none the less strictly historical [...]

Then came the more modern and much more mortally dangerous idea of Race, which the Germans borrowed from a Frenchman named Gobineau. And on top of that idea of Race, came the grand, imperial idea of a Chosen Race, of a sacred seed that is, as the Kaiser said, the salt of the earth; of a people that is God’s favourite and guided by Him, in a sense in which He does not guide other and lesser peoples. And if anybody asks where anybody got that idea, there is only one possible or conceivable answer. He got it from the Jews [...]

People like the Hitlerites never had any ideas of their own; they got this idea indirectly through the Protestants, that is primarily through the Prussians, but they got it originally from the Jews. (pp. 311-312)

The closest parallel that can be observed to this idea of special divine election, Chesterton submits, is from the Old Testament, of Jewish people being specially chosen by God (on which, cf. e.g. Kaminsky 2006:594-600). This is one of the central themes running through especially the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, variously referred to as the TaNaCH, the Pentateuch or the Moses Books. The irony lies therein, Chesterton had pointed out, that while rejecting all things Jewish, Nazism had (inadvertently, as it were by osmosis) appropriated a central idea from Judaism (via the role of the Old Testament in

27. The cautionary note by Salzani (2021), that parallels or similarities should not always be taken to constitute analogous sameness, but could be instances of opposites, is here taken to heart.

Western culture).²⁸ This sounds like an insight that Schmitt, given his ‘all significant concepts [...]’ claim, ought to have had!

An additional strand of unintended, parallel resilience, therefore, lies in this kind of insight into the conceptual Jewish indebtedness of Nazism. The value of the concept of Schmitt that all-important political concepts have their counterpart in religion is therefore that it gives perspective on other matters, as this example illustrates.²⁹ So much for the example illustrating the worth of Schmitt’s ideas in identifying or interpreting instances in culture and history as unfolding in unexpected parallel ways to what is found in biblical and other religious literature.

A final reason for a (re)turning to Schmitt is the as-yet unresolved question of secularisation. Although the concept of secularisation had become central in the history of ideas through the famous thesis by Max Weber (most recently, Horii 2021), of capitalism being an extra-religious application of Protestant (specifically Calvinist) ethics, Schmitt’s was a rather different thesis; in a sense, almost an opposite to Weber. Religion is with Schmitt, significantly, not disposed of, but remains fully operative, albeit now behind the curtains – and for that reason, potentially all the more powerfully efficient.³⁰ If one then allows for the easy substitution of science for religion, as Agamben has held to be the case with the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. Agamben 2021), then it becomes all the more difficult to ignore the importance, anew, of Carl Schmitt for these dire times.

■ Weber – Schmitt – Agamben

‘Alle prägnanten Begriffe der modernen Staatslehre sind säkularisierte theologische Begriffe’ (Schmitt 1922:49) – ‘[A]ll significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts’ (Schmitt

28. The matter is summarised with helpful clarity by Ahlquist (2008:26) as: ‘In 1936 [*sic*], in a jarringly entitled essay, “The Judaism of Hitler”, Chesterton argued that Hitler’s ideas of a superior race were derived from German Protestantism, which was obsessed with Old Testament ideas about “a chosen people” rather than New Testament ideas about a universal church. Protestants tried to make themselves the “chosen people”, and though Protestantism continued to splinter and degenerate into a multitude of sects and strange nineteenth-century philosophies that could hardly be recognized as Christian, the idea of “a chosen people” remained. It was present in Nietzsche’s theory of the Superman. Hitler took the concept of the “chosen people” and applied it to a nebulous grouping called the Aryan race. Chesterton found it grimly ironic that Germans would try to eliminate the Jews, to whom they were so culturally indebted’.

29. It is, however, noteworthy that Chesterton – as noted: a contemporary of Schmitt’s – seems not to have been aware of the 1922 publication by Schmitt (cf. ed. Sprung 1966), which is easily forgivable, since the wheels of writing turned much more slowly a century ago. Schmitt also did not pick up this idea from Chesterton in his 1970 volume, but given the anti-Nazi sympathies portrayed in this piece by Chesterton, and given Schmitt’s implication in that ideology (numerically the second most murderous of the previous century, after Communism), he would not likely include reference to it, even if he had been aware of it.

30. For a defense of sorts of the greater accuracy of Schmitt’s understanding of secularisation and the ironic turn against the Weberian one, cf. Vanhoutte (2020:1-9).

2005:36) – is, as indicated, one of Schmitt’s most quoted provocations.³¹ Unfortunately, all too often it is referred to in an unqualified way.

As already noted, it is generally understood that the concept of secularisation became central via Weber’s famous thesis on the origins of capitalism. Valid as this thesis is in its own right, it, however, draws on a certain understanding of the concept of secularisation that should be made explicit. The basic claim (cryptically) implied in Weber’s thesis, and in many of the scholars that have worked on the meaning of secularisation, is that secularisation implies historical hermeneutics. Secularisation, understood in this context, is thus (Wilson 1987):

[7]he process in which religious consciousness, activities and institutions lose social significance. It indicated that religion becomes marginal to the operation of the social system, and that the essential functions for the operation of society become rationalised, passing out of the control of agencies devoted to the supernatural. (pp. 159-160)

Schmitt, however, firmly disagrees with a similar understanding of the process or the operation of secularisation. As he writes immediately after the sloganistic sentence with which this section opened, the most significant concepts of the modern state are secularised theological concepts, not ‘only because of their historical development [...] but because of their *systematic structure*, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts’ (Schmitt 2005:36; emphasis added). Secularisation is thus, above all, operative as a structural process; it is not only (and certainly not mainly or primarily) the result of a historical process. For Schmitt, therefore, *analogue* is the kind of relationship that best describes the conceptual linkage of theology and modern state theory (Vanhoutte 2018:108). Although one can study the state historically, its sociological importance, that is: its importance as to its functioning within wider society lies in it being a structurally operative process.

Agamben has tried to explain Schmitt’s peculiar understanding of the process of secularisation by comparing it to what he calls the ‘signature’.

31. In a more current formulation than Schmitt’s own, this key insight of his is that, implicitly and inescapably, ‘[...] metaphysical discourse [...] determines the possibility for the conditions of the ideological acceptance of a particular form of political organisation, e.g. parliamentary democracy, absolute monarchy, commissary dictatorship and so on’ (Hoelzl & Ward 2008:6). This perceptive intuition, after being further explored, led to the conclusion on the continued value of Schmitt’s central contribution (quoting here from Lombaard 2019:6): ‘Recognising this in our present political climate would lead to a greater form of authentic living, if society would acknowledge more fully who we are – not only who we superficially present ourselves as being, but rather how we are foundationally constituted, or more passively formulated: how through socio-political-religio-economic forces of our times we have been construed. What Comte had done for social structures, Marx for economic structures and Freud for the structures of the human mind, Schmitt (albeit on a much more modest scale than these three formative minds of the modern era) does on religiosity: he asks for the candid appreciation of what has for long remained broadly unrecognised, that this aspect of our humanity too is acknowledged as an inescapable, core driving force’.

'Secularisation', Agamben writes in this regard, 'acts within the conceptual system of modernity as a *signature* [...]' (Agamben 2009:77; 2011:4; [*author added emphasis*]). For Agamben, a 'signature' means – here explained all too briefly – that 'what displaces and moves it [the sign] into another domain, thus positioning it in a new network of pragmatic and hermeneutic relations' (Agamben 2009:40). Secularisation (the declaration that something is being secularised), to state it rather harshly (but for the reason of making the point more clearly), is a device of power that, by pretending to leave behind what it has defined as secularised, in reality, preserves all its effectiveness, albeit now in a displaced way. Put differently: the power of the religious is usurped by what pretends to be non-religious and, by this pretence, assimilates the capacities (of religion) while disavowing their provenance (religion). Now camouflaged, the powers connected to religious consciousness, activities and institutions (its forces, amongst which one can naturally count coercion and the capacity towards installing or maintaining social cohesion, as two examples) do not lose social significance, potential, proficiency or capacity but are merely displaced into another domain, where they keep and apply their operative powers. This is the subterfuge of unacknowledged or unwitting appropriation.

To describe this in the provocative words of the philosopher and social critic John Gray, '[O]f all modern delusions, the idea that we live in a secular age is the furthest from reality' (Gray 2004:41); this, because '[*m*]odern politics is [*merely*] a chapter in the history of religion' (Gray 2008:1). The supposedly suppressed religion; at least of its forces, efficiencies and required faithfulness are anything *but* that: suppressed. These named dynamisms are, rather, perfectly operative but have been rendered unrecognisable by being displaced into another domain.

Where Schmitt understood the modern theory of the state as secularised in the way he presented it – which thus meant that the power and operativity of religion had been displaced or replaced into the domain of state power, rather than that politics had been fully weaned from religion – we could, once again with Agamben, claim that a substitution of religion by science in this COVID-19 pandemic seems to be operative along the same lines of Schmitt's understanding of secularisation. Here too, it thus seems that Schmitt's theories are resistant to extinction, remaining resilient against the harsh times we have been living.

What is more, insofar as our argument here is valid, it seems almost impossible to go beyond this aspect of the insight by Schmitt. The latter could then lead to some disconcerting questions. Could the demagogues of doom be correct? That is: are we on the brink of an unfortunate return to fascist regimes that assume unto themselves recently almost inconceivable powers (because of their 'secularly' assumed forces)? Once again, the matter of resilience here poses itself – no longer just regarding Schmitt's theory, but now also related to the persistence of fascist regimes.

■ Mere miracles

‘Jesus is my vaccine’. This statement, as with many of its parallels (such as ‘the blood of Christ is my vaccine’ or ‘spoiler alert, Jesus wasn’t vaccinated’, etc.)³² has – in an ironical turn of phrase if ever there was one – gone viral. Without intending here to enter into the all too polarised polemics that surround such claims,³³ it does bring us to a further elaboration of Schmitt’s earlier-mentioned statement, that ‘all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts’ (Schmitt 2005:36). This further elaboration brings the question of the state of exception (which we considered in the second section) into relation with that of secularisation (as discussed in the immediately preceding, third section).

‘[T]he exception in jurisprudence,’ Schmitt (2005:36) claimed, ‘is analogous to the miracle in theology’. As is the case with the concept of secularisation, also regarding the concept of the ‘miracle’, all is not at ease. There are, in fact, many aspects to the concept of miracle, and Schmitt only refers to one of these readings. A miracle, at least according to the way Schmitt understands it – in the rather traditionally religious (Christian) way – stands for the sudden eruption of an extraordinary intervention by the divine into normality (i.e. by breaking the normal laws of nature). This can be considered as almost a violent interruption or imposition (by a rupturing force) into normalcy and a suspension of the ordinary course of things. Bleeding crucifixes, crying statues of saints and irregular movements by otherwise predictable cosmic events have all been seen and recognised by some as instances of miracles of this interruptive and suspensive type. These examples are the most eruptive events and are probably cognisantly (though not experientially) quite familiar to most people, but they are certainly not the only events that have been thought of as miraculous. Neither is such a rupturing power a necessary requirement of miracles. That Schmitt prefers the eruptive and interruptive extreme power of this particular interpretation of the miracle should not be surprising, given his strong orientation within Roman Catholicism, the tradition of which strongly carries this kind of conception of the miraculous. Translated into the political sphere, the ‘state of exception’ operates with the same kind of interruptive, excessive power that reaches into the field of normal daily governing. Hence the state is held as enabled to exercise powers beyond earlier expectations in a situation that it deems to require such extraordinary measures.

32. We draw here rather haphazardly, for the sake of concretising the aforementioned, from social media posts that had recently circulated widely (and are hence not directly attributable) across various online platforms during the COVID-19 vaccination debates.

33. The authors of this text certainly do not deny the merits of faith, but we do disagree strongly with the logically inconsistent claim present in statements that hold, for instance, that Jesus equals a/my/whoever’s vaccine.

Multiple voices, contemporaries of Schmitt but also earlier voices, for example, of church fathers, have opted for a different interpretation and operativity of the category of miracles. The Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, a contemporary of Schmitt's and probably also one of Schmitt's imaginary interlocutors in his positioning of the miracle as an analogy to the state of exception,³⁴ makes the absence of the rupturing power one of his basic points (Rosenzweig 1971):

[T]o us today miracle seems to require the background of natural law before which alone it can, so to speak, be silhouetted. Herewith, however, we fail to see that, for the consciousness of erstwhile humanity, miracle was based on an entirely different circumstance, [...] not in its deviation from the course of nature as this had previously been fixed by law. (pp. 94–95)

Miracles, for Rosenzweig, have nothing to do with suspension or interruption but relate to prediction and elevation within (everyday) life. The true astonishment of the miracle is thus, for example, not the simple parting of the waters in front of Moses. The way the miracle can achieve its effect lies for Rosenzweig almost exclusively in the powers of the human being. This is so, as Rosenzweig says in rather dense, somewhat eschatological language, because 'the miracle is that man succeeds in lifting the veil which commonly hangs over the future, not that he suspends predestination' (Rosenzweig 1971:95). Human beings have to lift the veil; that is: human beings have to be receptive to the miracle that has always been there, lying in waiting, as it were, to be 'seen'.

A similar understanding of the miracle, but one that also overrides the almost purely individualistic nature of the more common interruptive view of miracle, was already present in the late sixth century, elaborated by Gregory of Tours. This was presented mainly in his *Libri septem miraculorum* (the *The seven books of miracles*; at times this collection is described as eight books, depending on whether *The Lives of the Fathers* is added to this series). For Gregory, as Brown (2015:174) states, 'miracles were not only private benefits bestowed by the saints on individuals but public portents that proclaimed the restoration of peace and concord in society at large'. Even if the miracle was bestowed primarily on an individual, it was still supposed by all to be a sign for

34. Rosenzweig probably also battled with his own imaginary Schmitt. Otherwise comments like the following would make less sense than they do in such an interpretative light (Rosenzweig 1971:95–96): 'Thus the idea of natural law, as far as it was present, comported excellently with miracle. Later that idea assumed the modern form of immanent legality in which it is familiar to us. From here too, at first, no shattering of the belief in miracles ensued as a result. On the contrary: the circumstance that the laws of nature fix only the inner interconnection of occurrence, not its content – in other words, that by saying that everything happens naturally, nothing is said about what exactly it is that "happens naturally" – this circumstance, which has virtually disappeared from today's common consciousness of natural law, was taken remarkably seriously by that epoch. Even there, then, miracle by no means appeared to contradict the unconditional validity of natural law as yet. From creation on, so to speak, miracle had been laid out along with everything else, to emerge one day with the inevitability of natural law'.

the whole of the community. The miracle thus operated as a mirror, reflecting the single event but casting its light on the whole communal body. 'Miracles had a public dimension. They could be regarded as living metaphors for the restoration of social order' (Brown 2015:176).

Although Gregory did not deny, as we just saw, the personal event, he also did not refuse the potential of the more widely interruptive force of miracles. However, the eruptive suspending powers of the miracle, just like the purely personal aspect, were considered to be only the superficial part of the miracle. For Gregory, miracles primarily brought release: they relieved not only individual people but entire communities from restraining bondages. The possibly violent eruption of the miracle was thus only a possible means for bringing about the miracle's more central operativity of affording release. For a member of the church, the highest and most important miracle that could occur was the inauguration of peace. No more cords; just concord. In this ideal, the 'earthly' and the 'heavenly' were not separated, either in how that peace came about or in how it would play out. The distinction between the holy and the secular was not held to, as would be the case with modern conceptions of the category of the miracle. The above-human had not been strained from the this-worldly; human life had not been emptied of the metaphysical.

■ Schmitt unrevived?

If, as we have just come to discover, miracles have at least two possible and quite different readings (the one relates to God's intervention; the other relates to people's receptiveness), then Schmitt's limited understanding of the exception as *purely bellicose* constitutes one more problem of his name and theory returning; that is, of their surprising and recurring resilience.

This muscular aspect of Schmitt's theory has come to the fore anew in the current COVID-19 pandemic. What is problematic is that this call to the eruptive and suspending miracle – which for Schmitt is fundamentally related to the secularising powers of the state of exception – also comes from those who oppose the forces in power (forces that have, ironically, imposed the state of exception on almost the totality of the world population). What is the call for Jesus to be a vaccine, if not a desire to interrupt the normal state of affairs that would, in time, favour so-called herd immunity? (Cf. the uncomfortable almost parallel with Matthew 18:10–14, the parable of the lost sheep.) What is the refusal to go beyond the personal miracle, if not the refusal to recognise that communal call or cry for the miracle? What is the distress about technology that is portrayed as too new to be trusted but a refusal or incapacity to unveil the future *à la* Rosenzweig, summarised earlier?

Not only are we here dealing with another of those historical ironies (a particularly gloomy one this time round) where antagonists paradoxically

stand firm on the *same* historical figure and theory, but we also have here an improbable sign of the resilience of Schmitt's central ideas. Schmitt's central thoughts could, especially in moments of profound insecurity, conquer – almost as would a virus out of control – all sides of the discourse, thereby leaving everyone involved in that discourse within the banal dichotomy and dualistic vision of friend and enemy, in which all enemies are somehow friends too ('frenemies'), as the opposing rhetorics draw on the same grounding concepts.

Would it serve a good purpose to try to disrupt the dissonance of such resilience? Or should we simply accept that some of Schmitt's central thoughts have now, disembodied (loosened from his personage), dissolved into popular culture? Our ideas on how societies work and should be ruled often hail from sources to which we remain blind. Those ideas have attained a life of their own – a resilience beyond the understanding of most.

By trying to lay bare such grounding impulses to whom we are and what we do, we, however, hope to understand ourselves a little better. With Socrates in mind, a life examined ...

The resilience of the nature-nurture dispute: Nominalism and anti-nativism in the cultural anthropology of Daniel Everett and its tentative implications for theology

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■ Abstract

In this chapter, the author delves into the ongoing nature-nurture dispute by engaging the tenets of one of the currently most innovative cultural

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anthropologies as proposed by the United States of America (USA) cultural linguist Daniel Everett. Above all, the author intends to shed light on the nominalist streak of Everett's anthropology, which has transposed into a strong anti-nativist tendency. Drawing on his sojourn of many years with an Amazonian tribe of the Pirahã, Everett questions some of the generally accepted, well-entrenched linguistic and cultural theories of modern days. Of special note is Everett's denial of the existence of any manifestable form of religion or spirituality among the Pirahãs, which contradicts the assumption of a natural religious disposition inherent to human beings. The author contrasts Everett's claims with the upsurge of nativism rekindled by the co-operation among the academic disciplines of religious studies, neuroscience, cognitive science and psychology during the past 20 years. In addition, the author critically engages a strong nativist current in Reformed epistemology from its inception up to contemporary times. In the author's view, the cultural anthropology of Everett, emphasising the decisive role of culturing in human ontogeny, may well fall on receptive ears in postliberal theology.

■ Realism, nominalism and the Cartesian anxiety

This book, titled *Resilience in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain complexity and ambiguity) world: Reflections on teaching, learning and health in turbulent times*, invites us to not only reflect on manners in which human beings cope with adverse situations marked by uncertainty or even an existential threat such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic that has been keeping its devastating grip on human communities all over the world for the past two years, but it may also be calling upon us to broaden our search and dwell on wider philosophic and cultural ramifications forming the cohesion of our *Lebenswelt* at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century.

It goes without saying that contemporary Western society has been predominantly moulded by what one can vaguely describe as a postmodern trend in philosophy and culture, which has lasted for half a century. Postmodern thought has undoubtedly left a significant imprint on us, among others, by its epistemology encouraging us to boldly embrace the non-essentialist and non-foundationalist perspective of knowledge, emphasising the contingency, context dependency and uncertainty of knowledge. While Modernity has aspired to create reassuring epistemological modes that have expressed themselves in belief in ours possessing privileged access to cognitive certainty, the linguistic turn in philosophy, deconstruction and neo-pragmatism has taught us to surf on the waves of the ocean of epistemological groundlessness (Susen 2015:40–47). In their reaction to the presumed postmodern assault of 'arbitrariness' or even 'irrationality', some contemporary thinkers, such as John Searle have rushed to protect the modernist epistemological project in which the world possessed a kind of universal intelligibility and could have been

accessed by the steadily growing amount of knowledge and understanding. Invoking a moderate epistemic certainty, Searle has come up with a theory attempting to recreate the unity of the human mind, language and reality or of nature and culture, which has been disjoined by postmodernism (Searle 1999:1-20). We can also see much scientific realism around in the scientific and lay communities, cherishing the belief that successful scientific theories truthfully represent reality. This belief is justified by the so-called 'no-miracle argument' or an inference to the best explanation. However, this justification is contingent on unjustified belief presupposing the reliability of the inference to the best explanation (Lyons & Vickers 2021:1-7).

Contemporary forms of epistemological foundationalism, even the moderate ones, undoubtedly reflect on a phenomenon for which Richard J. Bernstein has coined the term 'Cartesian anxiety' because Descartes' *Meditations*, as Bernstein argues, represent a classic example in modern philosophy of the metaphor of 'foundation' and the urgency for the quest of an Archimedean point to base our knowledge on. Cartesian anxiety bears cognitive and psychological implications translating themselves into the patterns of human thought and behaviour seeking to establish an epistemological certainty. This anxiety also feeds an array of philosophical conflicts that have sprouted in the recent several past decades (Bernstein 1983:16-19). One of these conflicts concerns the question of whether nature has ontologically firmly fixed joints – substances and properties along which we can confidently carve out pieces of knowledge, or maybe, our carving hand is uncertain, context-dependent and contingent as the postmodern paradigm insinuates. It is noteworthy that in early modern times, the former was widely supported by theistic beliefs seeing in nature a 'ready-made' product coming straight out of God's creative hands.

In view of this, we can find contemporary philosophers of science bicker over whether natural kinds are truly 'natural' or, perhaps, they are an outcome of the knife of science carving the flesh of nature in a way that has no real footing in outer reality. Some essentialists, such as Richard Boyd, argue that natural kinds 'must possess definitional essences that define them in terms of necessary and sufficient, intrinsic, unchanging, ahistorical properties' (Boyd 1999:146). One can refute this statement and similar statements by claiming that such historical, unchanging and intrinsic properties may relate to chemical substances, though, while in biological species, these properties are extrinsic, historical and changing in the progress of evolution. According to Bence Nanay, this is not a satisfying refutation of essentialism in the philosophy of science, though. We can say that essential properties (essential property types) do not exist as extramental entities while still ascribing reality to trope properties, which is an endeavour resulting in explanatory trope nominalism (Nanay 2011:179-182). This debate in the community of philosophers of science divided into 'essentialists' and 'anti-essentialists' can remind us of the strife

between realism and nominalism that has wound its way through much of medieval and modern philosophy. However, the person that apparently begot realism, planting it as a default position in philosophy, was Plato, who used the aforementioned metaphor of carving as an analogy for the reality of forms that renders the world pre-divided like an animal (*Phaidros* 265e). Therefore, the most successful theories are those that carve nature properly at its joints (Slater & Borghini 2011:1-6). Nominalism has assumed the role of an *enfant terrible* spoiling the masterpiece of this butchery of nature by attributing only an explanatory role to essences (kinds) and properties of material objects, denying their real existence. In its contemporary modification, strengthened by idealism and neo-pragmatism, nominalism has unfolded the notion of *flatus vocis* at full stretch, dissociating both the subject and the predicate occurring in sentences from extra-experiential reality and turning them into mere noises made by humans in their pursuit of social practices (Rorty 1992:373). As we are going to see in this chapter, the nature-nurture debate raising, among other things, the question of whether the idea of a transcendent deity is naturally wired into our brains or whether it is a product of culturing also goes along the line of realism-nominalism debate.

■ Nominalism and theology

It was Ockham's metaphysical minimalism that dispensed with most of this scholastic realism. Ockham's answer to the problem of universal natures was deflating them to *termini concepti*, that is, notions that signify individual entities and represent them in propositions. He ruled out the external existence of universals, pointing out that only individual entities can exist in the proper sense. A thing exists only by the very fact that it is individual (Coplestone 1993:56-58). Ockhamism spread to German universities to later influence the Reformation and become one of the epistemological pillars of British Empiricism (Sepkoski 2007:54-82). In the 20th century, nominalism thrived only on the periphery of Western thought, especially among some North American analytical or neo-pragmatic thinkers, such as W.V. Quine (Goodman & Quine 1947:102-122), Nelson Goodman (Oliver 1993:179-191), Wilfrid Sellars (Brandom 2016:19-46) or, most well-known, Rorty (1986:462-466). Despite having played a significant role in paving the road to the so-called 'linguistic turn' (Rorty 1992), nominalism had been assigned the place of 'pariah' in modern thought. In North American philosophy, Charles S. Peirce, William James and John Dewey combatted the compromising influence of nominalism on empiricism. Barry Allen (Allen 2020:88-102) has decried the 'higher nominalism' espoused by Richard Rorty in the recently published *Cambridge Companion* dedicated to this outstanding representative of American neo-pragmatism. Rorty's 'higher nominalism' was an extension of Sellars's 'psychological nominalism', which on its part followed Ockham's agenda of curtailing the categories of intentionality to semantic categories that find

their expression in verbal performances. Having drawn upon his colleague Richard Brandom, Rorty did not accept either innate ideas or experience as the source of knowledge, tying knowledge instead to discourse as social interaction in the 'space of reasons' that provides a justificatory framework for our beliefs.

Nominalism has not been well received in theology either, especially because of its presumed threat of scepticism or because of the lingering bitter aftertaste of some religious movements, such as, for example, Jansenism, that had been branded as the legacy of Ockhamism (Courtenay 2008:3-4). In his contribution to the topic related to Richard Rorty and religion, D. Stephen Long finds methodological nominalism of the 'linguistic turn' unsuitable for healthy theological work. Although not denying that nominalism has had salutary effects, too, in freeing us from foundationalism, Long still argues that theological discourse cannot be locked into the cages of sentences and semantics. In his opinion, the 'linguistic turn' had spun into an 'overturn' by believing that metaphysical issues such as 'being' or 'transcendentals' can be downgraded to problems of language. Theology cannot speak truthfully of the Holy Trinity on a nominalist basis. Long believes that Aquinas' divine ideas are necessary, even as theology may subscribe to the 'linguistic turn'. It is doubtful, however, whether one can sit on the fence and firmly hold both positions. While giving some credit to philosophies that have arisen from the 'linguistic turn', Long pledges his allegiance rather to theological realism (Long 2012:35-45). Dennis Costa, for his part, points out that whenever a Christian declaims the Nicene Creed, in particular, its first part proclaiming belief in one God, the Governor and Fashioner of visible and invisible things, subscribes to, mostly unawares, the ontology of the Church Fathers that was definitely a realist. All states of nature participate in immensurable energies that are disseminated on behalf of creation by God. Disparate entities throughout the space-time continuum yearn for each other and the world is glued together by cosmic *Eros*. This love has also manifested itself in God's moving into the matter and taking on flesh in the Incarnation. Costa levels criticism against hermeneutics operating strictly within the limits of text, arguing to the effect that to interpret text is not about establishing a notional meaning based on the analysis of grammar, syntax and the tropes, but to reach out beyond the text to a 'really existing event of meaningfulness'. Also, while alluding to Beatrice's instruction given to Dante-the-pilgrim who has been entrapped by a nominalist-like approach in the heaven of the moon when seeing the faces of the saints as portrayed in *Paradiso*, he encourages readers to listen and believe to real substances. A Catholic realist cannot help but see the perichoretic dance of Trinitarian life reflected in the manners human beings 'choreograph' reality – that is, as finite events of temporal, linguistic and mathematical conventionality. These musings finally lead Costa to a positive evaluation of critical realism as adopted by John Polkinghorne (Costa 2016:20-22). Contemporary attempts to introduce radical nominalism

and anti-essentialism into the theological agenda, as has been the case with the religious philosophy of Don Cupitt (e.g. Cupitt 1995), have been met with fierce opposition. In his reply to Cupitt's expressivist conception of Christianity, in *The Ocean of Truth: A Defence of Objective Theism*, Brian Hebblethwaite (1988:45) makes the case for the plausibility of the objective existence of God, arguing that only theological realism can carry the essence of the religious seriousness of Christianity.

In this chapter, however, the author intends to question the ingrained prejudice against nominalism in theological tradition and elsewhere in the humanities, asking honestly how much realism one can uphold or relinquish while still being able to sustain the integrity of (religious) beliefs. We ought never to forget that the measure of reality ascribed to conceptions holds sway over communication in society and politics, providing sustenance to various kinds of ideologies and political agendas. One of the possible ways to dismiss the standpoint of one's opponent is to decry their conceptions as pure *flatus vocis* while augmenting the realism of one's own conceptions. Reality is instituted as the result of a political process. The political does not constitute a special realm of social reality; social reality is its very precondition. Politics, thus, is about the struggle over the institution and disclosure of reality (Oksala 2010:446).

I also anticipate addressing the problem of nativism in the discipline of theology, in particular, the assumption that the idea or awareness of God (gods) is etched into the minds of all humankind. Such questioning is not contained solely in the inner workings of theology – its notions and conceptions – but it affects the debate in almost all disciplines of humanities. The realist-nominalist debate is an ongoing topic in feminist and gender studies. While in the 1980s, much of the feminist theory was committed to gender realism in Plato's sense of universal womanness, in the 1990s, the pendulum swung towards the nominalist approach. Currently, it seems that the interest in feminist studies bounces back to realism because of the interest in the application of progressive models of realism, such as 'uni-essentialism', for example (Witt 2011:11–25). In a recently published study, Deborah Goldgaber has critically engaged anti-nativist and anti-realist assumptions in feminist theories leading to the erasure of the body's biological substance. The very materiality of the gendered bodies has been obliterated by the assumption that the gendered bodies are predominantly formed by cultural forces within almost negligible limits of biological constraints. Goldgaber argues that the anti-realist accounts of the gendered bodies, often associated with the works of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, have never represented the mainstream of feminist theories that have allied themselves with the ontology and epistemology of realism (Goldgaber 2020:193–213). A similar trend can be observed in the treatment of the concept of race. Sharp ontological lines have been drawn in the debates surrounding genomics and race in the past 50

years. While some studies have claimed that human races are real biological entities, others have committed themselves to an anti-realist perspective, while still others favoured constructivist conventionalism (Kaplan & Winther 2014:1039-1052).

This study undoubtedly wades into the turbulent waters of the nature-nurture strife, which as the other side of the realist-nominalist debate, continues to rock humanities with unrelenting intensity. The nature-nurture dispute proves to be one of the themes in Western thought marked by considerable resilience, traceable to antiquity. In approaching this subject matter, I want to sketch the basic tenets of the cultural anthropology³⁵ of one of the staunchest spokespersons of nominalism and nurture-philosophy in a said discipline in the most recent time, a former American missionary and current cultural linguist, Daniel Everett, with a view to reflecting on the tentative implications for theology. To the best of my knowledge, no substantial reflection on Everett's cultural anthropology has yet been offered either in theology or in Spirituality Studies.

■ Brains, bodies, individuals

Daniel Everett, a Trustee professor of cognitive sciences at Bentley University in Waltham (Mass.), started his career as a missionary working for an evangelical organisation called The Summer Institute of Linguistics (today SIL International), which sent him to the Amazon rainforest in the late 1970s to study the language of a small indigenous tribe called the *Pirahã* with a view of estimating the possibility of translating parts of the New Testament into their language. According to Everett, the strategy of The Summer Institute of Linguistics had been to evangelise indigenous people by providing them with a translation of the Gospels, thus trusting in the power of the Word of God to communicate its message by itself (Everett 2009a:263). Everett intermittently spent 30 years among the *Pirahãs*, while the interaction with these indigenous people, as well as the professional study of their language and culture, left a deep imprint on his mindset and anthropology. Everett collected his impressions, gathered during his multiple stays among the *Pirahã* in an autobiographical book entitled *Don't Sleep, There are Snakes: Life and*

35. The reference here is to the academic discipline of cultural anthropology, namely as developed within the broader humanities discipline of anthropology, along with social anthropology. The reference here is therefore not to the way the term 'anthropology' as traditionally used within the disciplines of Theology (cf. Oviedo 2013), with the intention to convey how God, or the Bible or Christianity would foundationally view humanity, its nature and relationship and its destiny. Usually such considerations are found within dogmatology/systematic theology, for example, Cortez 2010, but it is also a theme of investigation within the Bible or exegetical disciplines, such as Janowski 2019; Maston & Reynolds 2018. For the latter, theological use of the term, Lombaard (2019:213-238) recently proposed the terminology 'view-of-humanity', precisely in our increasingly interdisciplinary area to avoid confusion with the humanities disciplines understood under the term anthropology.

Language in the Amazonian Jungle (Everett 2009a). He earned his PhD in Brazil, with a thesis on the syntax theory of the *Pirahã* language. Everett's academic star started to rise when he published an article in which he challenged the conception of universal grammar propagated by several renowned linguists, above all by Noam Chomsky (cf. Everett 2005:621-646). In this article, Everett pointed out that features of the *Pirahã* language do not conform to this nativist conception, especially when it comes to Chomsky's linguistic theory of recursion. Everett elaborated his criticism of nativism in the field of linguistics in three books, in which he also relates his observations on the relation between language and cultural anthropology, outlining his own theories on the nature-nurture debate, as well as on the origin and the evolution of language in the Palaeolithic Age, placing the beginnings of advanced speech capability as early as the era of *homo erectus* (Everett 2017).

As already noted, Everett's cultural anthropology bears a starkly nominalist mark, which comes to the fore, especially in his book *Dark Matter of the Mind: The Culturally Articulated Unconsciousness* (Everett 2016). In it, Everett lays out his theory of human unconsciousness as 'shaped by individual apperceptions in conjunction with a ranked-value, linguistic-based model of culture' (Everett 2016:1). The unconscious shapes our cognition and the sense of self, but it does so not as a result of our instincts or based on human nature, but as a result of learning because humans are above all cultural beings. The *a priori* of Everett's musings over 'dark matter', as he has punned the unconscious, is as individual human beings, represented not only by their minds but also by their emotions, hormones and even by the bacteria inhabiting their bodies. Everett argues that the word 'mind', denoting the cognisant and thinking substance in human beings, is a worn-out metaphor that ought to be replaced (or at least used interchangeably) by 'brain', as the most vital organ in human holistic adaptation to the world through continual learning.

Everett's individual human being is an entirely embodied entity whose brain cannot escape the conditions given by its body (sleeping patterns, hormones, illness) or those given by the environment (diet, climate). Everett refuses all the nativist ideas that have sprung up in philosophy, anthropology or linguistics in the past 200 years, considering them superfluous for human cognition and behaviour. There is no external substance such as the 'psychic unity of mankind' - a notion coined by Adolf Bastian, which exerted influence on the thought of such well-known intellectuals as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Franz Boas and Joseph Campbell.

The belief that there are properties universal to all human beings has found its way also into modern linguistics, above all into Chomsky's concept of universal grammar that presupposes that people dispose of an innate grammatical structure that enables them to acquire their first language. Therefore, language skills are not learned but acquired in a way that resembles

Plato's *anamnesis* by activating the innate endowment of universal ideas common to all humans (Everett 2016):

Through Noam Chomsky (b1928), Platonic rationalism was revitalised and given a huge boost from the late 1950s. Chomsky has long supported the Platonic idea that we have access to knowledge without need for experience or sensory input. We can use reflection and intuition alone to 'retrieve' truths from our minds because our minds are born with them (or born with access to them in some other place, e.g., heaven or a previous existence depending on a particular philosopher's theology). As Plato did, Chomsky seems to believe that much, if not all of the important knowledge that we humans draw upon to distinguish our character and lives from those of other animals is based upon our possession of inborn dark matter. This matter may be the result of evolution, physics, God, or whatever, but it is taken to be inheritance of all homo sapience. (p. 47)

In his own anthropological outlook, Everett seems to draw upon the tradition of American pragmatism, and given its language-oriented and semantic streak, also to a large extent upon analytic and neo-pragmatist philosophy, as, quoting Clifford Geertz, Everett understands 'man as an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun' (Everett 2016:78; Geertz 1973:5). Moreover, Everett accentuates his allegiance to the anthropological linguist Edward Sapir, who saw human cultures not in terms of homogeneity but rather as colourful variety. The 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' holds to the view that the so-called 'real world' is, to a large extent, unconsciously built upon the language habits of a group. For example, while English-speakers have no difficulty distinguishing green and blue colours because they are allowed to do so, English-speakers from North Mexico will encounter difficulty in setting these colours apart because they use just one basic term, *siyóname*, which means green or blue (Kay & Kempton 1984:66).

Everett hence builds his anthropology from below, placing individuals and their idiosyncrasies in the centre. Two people may share many similarities, but they are never identical – even though they can participate in the same 'abstract network', as Everett has called culture, overlapping values, social roles or knowledge structure. In this manner, culture dwells exclusively in individuals, understood as brains and bodies and reaches the surface in artefacts, tools, rituals or literature (Everett 2016:79).

As mentioned, Everett distrusts any form of nativism, including the notion of instinct as a sort of innate source of knowledge for the human species, in addition to apperception and culturing. Acknowledging the existence of such a body of innate knowledge goes strongly against Everett's belief in the cognitive and cerebral plasticity of humans, emphasising the role of learning that already starts in the prenatal stage of life in the construction of the sense of self and of group identity. Some forms of our behaviour are 'gene-driven', such as a baby's grasping, but most behaviours are 'idea-driven' (Everett 2016:84). Human brains are thus, to a large extent, *tabula rasa*, and the ontogenesis of the individual is predominantly made possible through culturing and learning.

■ *Pirahã*, language, genes

Everett's anthropological nominalism, outlined earlier, has undoubtedly been moulded by his sojourn of many years with the *Pirahãs*, one of a few tribes not only scarcely affected by Western civilisation but also actively resilient to its encroachment. For Everett, a linguist that came to this remote corner of the world equipped with theories that boasted a reputation of unbeatable truths in linguistics, the language of the *Pirahãs* brought many surprises. This language lacks the categories of grammatical numbers, numerals or ordinal numbers. The latter are expressed via body parts or by a succession of participants or events (Everett 2005:623–625). The culture also has no simple words for colours, rather employing composed expressions such as 'blood is dirty' for black or 'it sees' for white (Everett 2005:627–628). However, what Everett has found most impressive about the language and the culture of the *Pirahãs* is the constraint on referring to anything that escapes immediate (or relatively recent) experience (Everett 2009:132). The importance of immediacy of experience had fashioned the verbal system of the *Pirahã* language to the extent that it abounds in as many as 65 536 possible forms, some of which are used to express so-called 'evidentials', the function of which is to indicate the speaker's evaluation of their knowledge. There are different forms of first-hand testimony and for communicating information gathered from hearsay or from deduction (Everett 2009:196). Yet, the most surprising discovery was the absence of the phenomenon of recursion, which, according to the linguistic theory of Chomsky, is regarded as the most universal property of thinking and communication. Recursion renders syntax complex and hierarchical, allowing for the insertion of one sentence into another, for example, in the following complex sentence: 'Ralph said that Irving said that Mary said that John said that Peter said that the moon is made of green cheese' (Everett 2017:95). In standing side by side independently, *Pirahãs*' sentences resemble 'beads on a string', with no requirement to create more complex sentence structures. Everett is convinced that the absence of recursion in the *Pirahã* language is caused by the cultural principle of the immediacy of experience described (Everett 2009:236).

Everett's findings have stirred the waters of linguistics, but, in the end, they have been met with a halting approval among some linguists (Sakel & Stapert 2010:3–16). In this way, Chomsky's conception of formal universals as grammatical principles or constraints shared by all languages in the world has been found falsifiable (Everett 2016:156; Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch 2002:1573–1574). In his criticism of the conception of universal grammar, Everett even suspects that Chomsky may have nurtured semi-religious intentions, especially in his earlier works, that found in linguistic universals an imprint of 'design' rather than of random evolution (Everett 2016:286).

In accordance with this, Everett denies that there exists an *a priori* of language ability that is enscripted in the genes of the human species.

Everett's misgivings concern the belief that there are some genes, especially FOX2, that support our ability to use language. Everett cautions branding FOX2 as a specifically language-related gene, given its multifunctionality that translates into multiple physical and cognitive abilities. Having said that, Everett argues that even if we conceded that FOX2 is a gene that has specialised for language over the past 100,000 years, it could not have acted on its own but specialised in interaction with human culture, as biological evolution is interlocked with cultural evolution (Everett 2012:79–81). A similar negative answer ought to be given to the question of whether there is a region in the brain that specialises in the production of language. Language is not literally hard-wired into human brains (Everett 2010:81). Cultural evolution provided the framework for a variety of linguistic structures. Even when taking with the utmost seriousness the evidence for multiple similarities among the languages of the world, we should not succumb to the idea of nativism. Everett takes up the so-called 'emic' approach, a term borrowed from the anthropologist Pike (1967), which is always culturally specific, addressing one language or culture at a time. Against it, the 'etic' approach treats all languages or cultures at once (Everett 2016:17). The 'emic' approach undoubtedly bears the characteristics of nominalism, as the emic linguistic units are determined during the analysis of a given language, and not predicted beforehand, as it is the case with nativist methodology.

■ The *Pirahã* and religion

During his sojourn among the *Pirahãs*, Everett noticed a relative absence of ritualistic behaviour, as well as of religious beliefs. Everett puts his finding succinctly in the following way (Everett 2016):

[T]he *Pirahãs* have no religion. They believe that you live life as it comes, with no thought of God protecting, killing, or otherwise affecting anything of their daily lives, much less the health of their infants. (p. 125)

The *Pirahãs* seem to lack mythology and stories about gods. Once, a *Pirahã* man asked Everett what the Christian God does. Everett answered him that his God had created Heaven and Earth. The man frowned upon his answer and said: 'Well, the *Pirahãs* say that these things were not made' (Everett 2009:134). This ethnic group is apparently not familiar with the concept of a creator-god. Everett's findings have been confirmed by other missionaries or anthropologists that have lived among the *Pirahãs* and studied their culture (Everett 2009:269). This evidence contradicts Mircea Eliade's deeming cosmogony as the core of all other myths and the creation motive as a universal phenomenon. Eliade argues that creation myths were supposed to teach archaic humans primordial stories, in effect sustaining them existentially. Encouraged by the almost ubiquitous New Year's rituals in ancient cultures around the world, Eliade was convinced of their importance as rituals relating archaic humans to the beginning of the cosmos, evoked in

ritual as a re-enacted time of the renewal of life (Cox 2006:180–181; Eliade 1987:80–87).

Daniel Dubboison engages the problem of universalist pretensions in modern religious studies on a deeper level, criticising the very concept of religion that has crystallised in the West into a timeless, disincarnate, quintessential abstract entity of which every culture represents only a specific hypostasis. He asks who is authorised to determine that religion is unconditionally supposed this or that, or that its essence is made of such and such features and permanent characteristics. The concept of religion has thus become an *a priori* universal object established by the discipline of religious studies (Dubuisson 2003:10–11). Everett explains that the lack of a creation myth springs from the *Pirahãs*' worldview hinging on the immediacy of experience. The *Pirahãs* possess stories that stem from their daily routine. Besides fishing, hunting and family matters, they can also relate to encounters with spirits taking on various embodiments, but we can doubt whether these encounters have a genuine quality of the numinous, although, as Everett relates, the spirits instil fear in the *Pirahãs* and, in general, are viewed as malicious beings. Everett never mentions that the *Pirahãs* would worship or appease these spirits with sacrifices or ask for their assistance. The *kaoáíbógi*, the most common kind of these spirits, seems to populate the *Pirahãs*' world as a 'bloodless' breed of humanoids coexisting alongside the *Pirahãs* as 'bloods' (Everett 2009:137).

The immediacy-of-experience principle among the *Pirahãs* also hampered Everett's efforts to convey the Christian message to them. Assisted by a *Pirahã* man, Everett made a recording of the Gospel of Mark. While the *Pirahãs* listened to it, some of them recognised the voice on the tape as belonging to Everett's assistant who, of course, had never met Jesus – a fact that for the *Pirahãs*, in effect, disqualified the validity of the message (Everett 2009):

'Hey Dan, who is on that tape? It sounds like Piihoatai.' 'It is Piihoatai,' I answered. 'Well, he has never seen Jesus. He told us that he does not know Jesus, and he does not want Jesus.' And with that simple observation the *Pirahãs* signalled that these tapes would have little or no spiritual influence. They had no epistemological grip on their minds. (p. 268)

On another occasion, Everett attempted to communicate the Christian message to the *Pirahãs* by giving a personal testimony, telling them how unhappy he had been in his life before his conversion and that his anguish was at its worst when his stepmother took her own life. When he finished relating these events, the *Pirahãs* burst out in laughter. When Everett inquired what had amused them, they answered: 'She killed herself? "Ha, ha, ha". How stupid. *Pirahãs* do not kill themselves' (Everett 2009a:265). As Everett acknowledged himself, the strategy à la, 'you've gotta have them lost before you can Ge'm saved' (2009a:266), imparted to him in the school for missionaries had misfired. The *Pirahãs* did not perceive any substantial lack in their lives that

would lead them onto this kind of path of conversion. *Pirahãs*' unwillingness to show a greater interest in the Christian religion could at least partially derive from their cultural reluctance to speak about things that they cannot place within the context of their own world. Everett, for instance, points out that the *Pirahãs* will not talk about building houses with bricks because this is not the way they construct their houses (Everett 2016:236). Similarly, Sakel and Stapert (2010:9) were astonished over the *Pirahãs*' almost non-existent knowledge of the Portuguese language, even though the tribe has been in contact with Portuguese-speaking strangers for 200 years.

Everett is far from depicting the *Pirahãs* as 'noble savages'³⁶ living in the dwindling Amazonian rainforest, presented as a contemporary Garden of Eden. Compared with Western standards of living, the *Pirahãs* have a short life expectancy, with high morbidity and infant mortality rates. In spite of all of this, Everett writes about the *Pirahãs* with the utmost admiration, respecting their pragmatic, down-to-earth and transience-accepting way of life – which Don Cupitt would probably describe as ecstatic immanence: 'a state of being completely immersed or embedded within one's world, without pretending to be able to jump clear of it in any way' (Cupitt 2012:27). Sometimes, Everett comes close to depicting the *Pirahãs* as something akin to anonymous secular humanists (2009a):

They have no craving for truth as a transcendental reality. Indeed, the concept has no place in their values. Truth to the *Pirahãs* is catching a fish, rowing a canoe, laughing with your children, loving your brother, dying of malaria. Does this make them more primitive? Many anthropologists have suggested so, which is why they are so concerned about finding out the *Pirahãs*' notions about God, the world and creation. (p. 273)

As hinted at in the quotation, Everett's claim about *Pirahãs* not having a religion, especially his argument to the effect that the *Pirahãs* possess no creation myths, has indeed been contested. An article published by a collective of authors in 2009 objected to almost all arguments, both linguistic and anthropological, made by Everett. This article also attempted to prove that the *Pirahãs* have a cosmogony in the form of a story about the re-creation of the world by a demiurge named Agogai by avoiding a total cataclysm (Nevins, Pesetsky & Rodriguez 2009:392–396). In his response, however, Everett refuted the claims of his opponents (Everett 2009b:431–432). This dispute and other ones that have put Everett and his critics onto something of a warpath have been sparked not only by differences in linguistic or anthropological methodologies and interpretations of collected data among the *Pirahãs* but also by Everett's very attack on nativism in linguistics and anthropology.

36. The notion of the 'noble savage' is referred to here in its probably most common meaning, namely, as a literary *topos* created in the 17th century, indicating humans endowed with innate goodness and not corrupted by Western civilisation. Cf. Ellingston 2001:11–20.

Everett's accounts of the *Pirahãs*' life, published in his books and articles, can nevertheless raise certain hermeneutical questions. It is no secret that Everett had undergone a gradual process of deconversion from Christianity to atheism (2009a:271; Else & Middleton 2008). He has found quite an enthusiastic audience among members of agnostic, atheist or secular humanist organisations, such as the Freedom from Religion Foundation (Everett 2010). Therefore, one can legitimately question Everett's interpretation of the *Pirahã* culture as perhaps being determined by a cluster of mostly unacknowledged hermeneutical assumptions, preconceptions and expectations (Kalaga 2015:80), which mirror Everett's personal intellectual history. Some of Everett's depictions of *Pirahãs* indeed seem to substantiate this suspicion (2009b):

The *Pirahãs* are firmly committed to the pragmatic concept of utility. They don't believe in a heaven above us, or a hell below us, or that any abstract cause is worth dying for. They give us an opportunity to consider what a life without absolutes, like righteousness or holiness, and sin, could be like. And the vision is appealing. (p. 272)

These lines could probably have appeared in any book fostering the idea of living outside the realm of religious concepts and abstractions and celebrating the this-worldliness of human life, for example, in Martin Hägglund's *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom*. Hägglund conceives of human life as an entirely mundane project that is fragile and has to be sustained through social commitments in the form of mutual care and development of institutions, thus securing social justice and material welfare (2019:8). Given that Everett's language explicitly favours a non-religious perspective, the jury is still out on his findings on the *Pirahã* culture, with the discussion among cultural anthropologists yet to bring more insights.

■ God, genes, *sensus divinitatis*

To my best knowledge, no theologian has undertaken a serious reflection of Everett's anthropology and his claim that the *Pirahãs* are what Max Weber had called 'religiously unmusical' people (Pfändtner 2014:3-11). The dispute along the nature-nurture lines has left its imprint on theological discourse, too, especially on the question of whether religiosity or spirituality is anchored in human nature. These days, it is often behavioural geneticists or neuroscientists that hasten to extend their hand towards theology and religious studies by establishing a connection between science and religious and spiritual phenomena. The geneticist Dean Hamer, for instance, argues that spirituality in the sense of metaphysical yearning is a ubiquitous phenomenon, presupposing that it has been hard-wired into our species since its dawn. In effect, Hamer (2004) sees in spirituality an advanced form of instinct, rounded off by culturing:

I do not contend that spirituality is a simple instinct like blinking or nursing. But I do argue that it is a complex amalgamation in which certain hard-wired, biological patterns of response and states of consciousness are interwoven with social,

cultural, and historical threads. It is this interdigitation of biology and experience that makes spirituality such a durable part of the fabric of life - a rich tapestry in which nature is the warp and nurture is the woof. (p. 7)

Hamer (2004:75) has identified a 'God gene' that codes for a brain receptor that regulates serotonin, dopamine and noradrenaline, engendering feelings of transcendence. Having found a source of inspiration in the social biology of Edward O. Wilson (1975), who forged a unity of natural sciences and humanities, Hamer (2004:85) is convinced that religious belief has a genetic basis that turns it into a universal phenomenon, having a continuation from hunter-gatherer societies to the post-industrial age. Given the chemical background of spirituality, Hamer (2004) sees spirituality as in a way resembling the position of Friedrich Schleiermacher, namely as a niche of human life that is entirely moved by emotions, with just a little intellectual involvement:

This is why feelings of spirituality are a matter of emotions rather than intellect. No book or sermon can teach one person to use a different monoamine transporter are another to ignore the signals emanating from his limbic system. It is our genetic makeup that helps to determine how spiritual we are. We do not know God; we feel him. (p. 139)

The metaphor of 'wiredness', stemming from the area of computer technology and which has a strong nativist load, has become increasingly common among popular writers about natural sciences and religion or even among some psychologists. The natural endowment for religiousness and spirituality manifests itself predominantly on an experiential level (Foster 2011; Jennings 2013). Some scholars choose a more moderate tone to express their nativist convictions, especially when facing the reality of agnosticism and atheism. This can be an anomaly caused by individuals holding no religious or spiritual beliefs being situated at the end of a bell curve of the disposition towards belief in a deity. However, the decisive factor disabling this disposition to believe is culturing, not nature. Accordingly, the innate tendency to believe can still retain some universality (Exline et al. 2017):

Yet, even if not all people believe in a deity, there still remains the possibility that a disposition toward god belief is innate, depending on how innateness is framed. For example, an innate sense of religiousness might be distributed along a bell curve, like many other heritable human traits, implying that one would expect some people to fall on the low end of that bell curve, potentially exhibiting no observable religious tendencies at all. In such a model, the presence of atheists would not in itself disprove an innate tendency toward god belief among other humans. As with phenotypic characteristics such as eye, skin, or hair colour, psychological characteristics such as personally traits and attitudinal tendencies (e.g. political orientation) stem partly from heritable (innate) influences, but do not manifest as universally uniform across individuals, much less across regions of the world. Whether through personal experiences or through the socialising influences of family, authority figures, peer groups, or one's broader culture, people may be able to override the hypothesised dispositions. (pp. 389-390)

We cannot leave this topic without briefly mentioning some views of Andrew Newberg, whose scientific pursuits have led him to connect neuroscience with theology. Although sympathising with the nativist position (Newberg 2018:106-107), Newberg has also recognised the role that religion and spirituality play in cultivating that part of the brain labelled as the 'new brain', which is different from the old reptilian part of the brain that selfishly fights for survival. As if through trial and error, humans developed contemplative exercises that strengthened neural circuits responsible for consciousness, empathy, compassion and social awareness, tempering in this way the compulsive workings of the reptilian part of the brain (Newberg & Waldman 2009:17-18). So even though Newberg sees, not unlike his aforementioned colleagues, the strongest manifestation of spirituality in the realm of scientifically describable experience, he has also gone on to recognise the relevance of ethics and doctrinal concepts.

Nativism has gained a strong stake also in cognitive science and psychology. Justin L. Barrett seems to be surfing on the same nativist wave, claiming that the belief in God (gods) is an almost inevitable consequence of the minds we have. Gods are ubiquitous in human societies because of the ways our cognitive system operates. One of them is the perceptual and conceptual tendency to intuit human-like agency everywhere by attributing mental beliefs, desires or personalities to movements that seem to be goal-directed (Barrett 2011:100). Another naturally-driven impetus for postulating gods is of teleological nature, enabling us to see a purpose or design in the natural world (Barrett 2011:102). Yet, another factor to make human beings believe in the divine agency is, according to Barrett, 'world reasoning': deeming wrong actions punishable by a higher force. Concepts of the divine agency are thus based on an intuitive epistemological basis. However, the conception of the divine becomes more contra-intuitive once the idea of the divine gains a significantly more elaborate shape, as is the case with Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Barrett 2011:132). Barrett also forges his own understanding of the notion of natural religion. He builds it on the analogy of Chomsky's universal grammar, which is also informed by the human cognitive system. Similarly, natural religion breaks down to a range of natural tendencies that encourage belief in God (gods). Just as a specific language conforms to the parameters of natural language, so various forms of religion dispersed among individuals and across cultures are rooted in natural religion. Accordingly, natural religion can be viewed as a relatively permanent substance, and various cultural expressions of religion can be viewed as accidents that subsist on this substance (Barrett 2011:32).

Turning our attention to the discipline of theology, it goes without saying that theology has been predominantly in favour of nativism across the board of Christian denominations, with nativism assuming a strong position also in Reformed epistemology. McGrath (2008), for example, welcomes the renewed

interest in natural theology as a means of providing a framework for the quest for God:

We invoke the so-called 'Platonic triad' of truth, beauty, and goodness as a heuristic network for natural theology. When properly understood, a renewed natural theology represents a distinctively Christian way of beholding, envisaging, and above all *appreciating* the natural order, capable of sustaining a broader engagement with fundamental themes of human culture in general. While never losing sight of its moorings within the Christian theological tradition, natural theology can both inform and transform the human search for the transcendent and provide a framework for understanding and advancing the age-old human quest for the good, the true, and the beautiful. (p. 19)

It is well-known that John Calvin embraced a mediate form of natural theology, invoking the notion of *sensus divinitatis* as universal awareness of God or a natural instinct of rudimentary piety (Hoitenga 1991:150). The meaning of the Latin word *sensus*, in Calvin's usage, is close to the English term 'sensation'. Our knowledge of God is supposed to be as immediate and direct as our sensation of physical objects. Such immediate knowledge is set against the *a posteriori* knowledge derived from certain *a priori* propositions, as is the case in Aquinas' Five Ways. Human beings possess natural knowledge of God because (Calvin 2006):

[T]hat there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and it is fixed deep within, as if it were in the very marrow [...] From this we conclude that it is not a doctrine that must be first learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget. Although many strive with every nerve to this end. (p. 46)

Accordingly, the knowledge of God is, in Calvin's opinion, universal, immediate-experiential and not acquired by learning. A modified version of Calvin's nativism has been taken up by Alvin Plantinga. He argues that belief in God is properly a basic belief (Plantinga 1981:44-46). And not unlike in Calvin's case, Plantinga refuses the evidentialism of natural theology that regards belief in God as a non-basic belief that has to be supported by more basic beliefs. He claims that the absence of reasons for belief in God necessarily renders such belief groundless. Belief in the existence of God stands on its own without the justificatory procedure. Yet, in a psychological twist, Plantinga (1979:25-27) also says that belief in God rests in the end on the commitment of a mature theist that has embraced this belief and accepted it as a basic belief. Basic beliefs, including belief in God, come to be under special circumstances. A perceptual experience of a tree enables us to state that the belief that there is a tree is properly basic and not groundless. Drawing on Calvin's notion of *sensus divinitatis*, Plantinga mentions the perception of various parts of the universe, guilt, gratitude, danger, a sense of God's presence or the sense that God speaks, as circumstances of or grounds that enable belief in God (Plantinga 1981:45-47). They accompany us in the same way the grounds of perceptual beliefs do (Hoitenga 1991:207).

If a *sensus divinitatis* is supposed to be a permanent trait of human nature, even in a presumed weakened form after the fall of humanity (Calvin 2006:47–48), then the *Pirahãs*, at least according to Everett’s interpretation, seem not to have been stirred by its workings. Although, living in the bosom of nature, they do not seek a creator, to say nothing of being gripped by gratitude or guilt.

■ Implications for theology

Everett is not the only scholar to question nativism in humanities or natural sciences in reaching out to humanities. The philosopher of mind Jesse Prinz shares quite the same sentiments with Everett. He, too, finds most humanities disciplines to fall short because of their allegiance to nativism and their disregard for cultural variety. While pursuing their research, anthropologists tend to conduct their study by using research participants from among the members of their own cultural group. The same holds true for linguistics of other cultures erroneously presupposing that language has no sway over human minds. Psychology has a penchant for constraining its studies to university students, extrapolating the results to minds all over the globe. Neuroscientists avoid studying the brains of individuals hailing from other cultures, presupposing that all brains are prewired in the same way (Prinz 2012:2–3). Moreover, individuals participating in these studies are predominantly middle-class Caucasians. Prinz is convinced that the rhetoric based on terms such as ‘innate’, ‘genetic’ or ‘hard-wired’ is potentially harmful, as it seeks to curtail the cultural variety of humankind. Moreover, nativism also has social and political implications. Presupposing that human nature is biologically or metaphysically fixated, people who question this assumption might be viewed as defective. The relative non-religious character of the *Pirahã* tribe serves as a good example of this. When it comes to genetics, Prinz (2012:17) speaks in favour of putting the genome back into the bottle, seeing that the so-called gene talk has recently grown so common that public opinion has become mistakenly comfortable with the idea of genetic determinism.

From a strictly nominalist position, Rorty, in his day, pointed out that everything is a part of everchanging cultural politics, including science and metaphysics. He argues that, while there are people who believe that using words such as ‘race’ or ‘genes’ should be removed from our language practices, there are others who argue that inherited differences really exist and, therefore, matter. Rorty’s rejoinder is that the talk about genetic transmission and inheritance should be used only for medical purposes (Rorty 2007:3).

Rorty’s anti-realism has been ridiculed by scientific realists; however, it has found support, for example, in Hilary Putnam’s pessimistic meta-induction (PMI). According to Putnam’s argument, many alleged entities referred to by theoretical terms either turn out not to possess the properties they were

ascribed or they turn out not to exist at all. With some understatement, Putnam asks whether all the theoretical entities postulated in one generation, such as molecules, genes or electrons, will invariably 'exist' from the standpoint of the next generation (Wray 2018:69-70). Indeed, the contemporary postgenomic era proves that an epistemological shift has taken place in this niche of the natural sciences, with the gene becoming a pragmatic tool that enables different experimental systems and research programmes (Holmes et al. 2016:49-68; Perbal 2015:777-781).

Rorty takes up a similar approach in relation to religion, modelling it at William James's pragmatism. Subscribing to a utilitarian ethics of belief, James postulated that the most proper belief to assume is always the one that fosters human happiness. In Rorty's own words: '[...] all questions, including questions about what exists, boil down to questions about what will help create a better world' (Rorty 2007:5). In an essay entitled 'The Will to Believe', James (1992:445-452) argues that one has a right to believe in the existence of God, provided this belief makes one happy. Rorty makes a case for the ontological primacy of the social, which instead of invoking the non-human sphere, turns to human culture and its language practices (Owens 2019:81-85; Rorty 2007:8-9). We do not possess epistemological tools to claim that belief in God is natural while disbelief in him is not. Some theologians may, however, argue that this culturally conditioned pragmatism flies in the face of the universal experience of humankind, for example, Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*. James's pragmatic attitude towards belief in God (gods) as something that may, but not necessarily must, give a rounded-off shape to a person's life can help us approach in an even-handed way the 'religious unmusicality' of the *Pirahãs*, attested to by Everett, that continues to bother some anthropologists, while others, mostly secular humanists or life coaches, heap praise on the lifestyle of *Pirahãs* without religion, focused on immediate presence, elevating such an orientation to the position of a rediscovered 'Holy Grail', of the most genuine and authentic way of living that is worthy of following (cf. Oattes 2020:112-114).

By the way, it was Rorty who resurrected Max Weber's notion of 'religious unmusicality' (Rorty 2005:29-30). Just as there are people who have never appreciated music, so there are individuals who are 'tone-deaf' to religious matters. Rorty refers to a segment of Western society, mostly well-educated like himself, who have never been attracted to metaphysical questions and have found their happiness in poetry and art. Rorty finds the attempt to brand such an attitude as a dangerous 'spiritual illness', deplorable.

However, Rorty's application of tone-deafness as an analogy to the lack of attunement to religious or spiritual matters has a shortcoming. *Amusia* - or tone-deafness - seems to have natural causes. Impairment of melodic perception is believed to be caused by right-hemisphere brain lesions, and defects in the representation of rhythm are found in the left brain hemisphere

as well as in other parts of the brain. Other forms of *amusia*, such as the impaired ability to perceive dissonance, seem to have a neural origin too. Forms of culturally acquired *amusia* and *arrhythmia* seem to occur to a lesser degree (Sacks 2007:109). Nonetheless, Rorty's religious tone-deafness bears clear cultural marks. The religious tone-deafness can be thus a result of a non-religious and spirituality-free upbringing, in which the child's home, educational institutions or a broader culture become what Brown (2017:44) has labelled 'the locus of de-religionisation' or of a deliberate decision to wean oneself of religious beliefs. The latter is predominantly the case with secular humanism, which in its 'orthodox' forms decries religion and spirituality, predominantly in their fundamentalist forms, as self-indulgent navel-gazing and idling, while secular humanists eagerly lay their eyes on real problems of the world, motivating social awareness and working for social justice (Kitchner 2014:116–120). Eventually, the *Pirahã*'s religious tone-deafness can be described as culturally conditioned, too, as emphasised by Everett.

It would be naïve to expect theologies across denominations to give up the nativist ideas that underpin their doctrines, especially that of a 'God-shaped vacuum' in human hearts. We can see that the opposite view has been pushed forward, with natural theology now finding its place even in the precincts of evangelical theology (McGrath 2008). At first glance, viewing religious beliefs through the lens of a *tabula rasa* epistemological model can be seen as inappropriate. But the idea of acquiring religious beliefs as a result of the exclusive action of culturing is not going against the grain of Jewish or Protestant traditions that give special importance to the perpetuation of religious belief and practice by continual in-depth education. For example, the so-called British educationalism, inspired by John Locke's educational ideas, that saw a *tabula rasa* in the child, found whole-hearted reception among evangelicals at the end of the 18th century, providing them with a powerful justification for their educational agendas (Stott 2016:55). Seeing all Christian beliefs as a product of the process of culturing and learning is neither in conflict with the biblical approach emphasising education as an entrance ticket to the membership in the believing community (Dt 6:1–9; Mt 28:19). From among moderate contemporary theologies, it has been above all postliberal theology, the agenda of which is post-foundationalist and particularistic to the very core, that has proved itself to be a 'nativism-slayer'. It did so, for example, by levelling criticism against the liberal understanding of religion as an immediate self-consciousness that has universal validity, with the feeling of absolute dependence on the Infinite presented as the ground of religious talk. This has been believed to be the universal essence of human experience shared by all religions. As a result, this 'experiential-expressivist' approach has diminished the particularity of religions and cultures, smoothing away their differences into one substance (Knight 2013:21–25). In the same breath, postliberal theology has also refused the doctrinal cognitive

propositionalism associated with the epistemology of metaphysical theism held by conservative branches of theology, which consider their doctrines to be an isomorphic representation of divine, cosmic and human realities. In this way, Christian doctrines have been presented as providing informative propositions on certain objective realities. Postliberalism has opted for a third model of religion that treats respectfully the richness of forms of life and the variety of projects in which human beings are involved as individuals or groups. The outlook of postliberal theology has certain nominalist undertones too. It is not the doctrines as such that refer to something as if they existed in abstraction, but humans as ‘agents that refer themselves and all things to God by means of the language and in worship and witness’ (McCathey 2009:51). Yet, most postliberal theologians do not subscribe to a thorough theological non-realism. For example, Robert A. McCathey has embraced Hilary Putnam’s pragmatic internal realism that provides an alternative between metaphysical realism and postmodern versions of non-realism. Putnam’s pragmatic internal realism insists on a kind of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences, which, for their part, are represented by our system of beliefs and not by correspondence with mind-independent states of affairs (McCathey 2009:49–50).

The agenda of postliberal theology has turned to the semiotic universe encoded in scriptures and to the study of the role of scriptures in shaping the complex relationship between language and culture (Pecknold 2005:5). The scriptural narrative has thus become a means of providing believers with a frame of reference that generates a distinct culture and a particular way of being and communicating with the world. In their religious practice, believers are dependent rather on doctrines than on religious experience. Doctrines serve as a grammar that represents the rules governing the language practices of religious communities. Postliberal theology could thus easily accommodate within its precincts the *a priori* of Everett’s anthropology, seeing in human beings a *tabula rasa*, receiving their distinct characteristics by culturing and learning. Identities are a result of learning, which, in the religious context, translates itself into catechesis, the study of canonised writings, preaching and living and identity-forging dogmatics.

■ Conclusion

Although having concluded the previous section on an optimistic note, seeing a way for the accommodation of Everett’s and similar nominalist, non-foundationalist anthropologies in the realm of theology, we will probably encounter more publications making an appeal to nativist conceptions of natural religiosity or the idea of a transcendent deity ‘hard-wired’ in our brains than those invoking the model of culturing in the nearest future. One of the reasons tentatively explaining this trend may be the Cartesian

anxiety mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter. The sheer thought of the world out there having no pre-given joints our cognition could carve along with confidence may have a threatening effect on many of us. With the view of this, all kinds of realism will always be resilient and offer a soothing default position. There is no doubt that cognition is engaged in representing-construing the outer reality, but as a semantic undertaking: our speech-acts are always about something. Our representations are a sort of construals as 'nothing is about something else without construing it as being some way' (Varela Thompson & Rosch 2016:136). This is a 'weaker' form of representation devoid of the presumption of carrying strong epistemological or ontological commitments. A sentence can represent a set of conditions without having to establish them as facts in the world existing outside the language. We can better explain these construals as beliefs resulting from the causal interaction with the non-linguistic world. Nativism, however, makes itself fully epistemologically and ontologically committed, presupposing that the world and its features are pre-given and, as such, exist prior to any cognition. One cannot rule out, though, that this presupposition is only a meta-representation.

The nativist approach has certainly evolved in dependence on the rising interest in natural theology among philosophers of religion and theologians. Helen de Cruz and Johan de Smedt maintain that natural theology is a captivating niche of thought propelled from nature towards transcendent reality, as a large part of a philosophy of religion pays attention to such themes as the arguments for the existence of God, the compatibility of God's existence with moral and natural evil or the relationship between human free will and divine omnipotence. Moreover, debates on natural theology have gained traction among non-professionals, reaching a wider public, too. Both theists and atheists have started blogging on topics dedicated to natural theology on the Internet. In de Cruz's and Smedt's opinion, this comes as a surprise because the natural theological arguments rarely lead to the adoption or maintenance of religious beliefs (De Cruz & De Smedt 2015:7-10). Nativism has also received support from critical realism attempting to build a bridge between foundationalist realism of positivism and postmodern non-realism. In critical realism, the world has an ordering that is independent of human cognition. Using their hermeneutical tools, human agents thus reflect upon the world, the structures of which have been firmly set and their epistemic activity take place amid constraints that have not been created by humans (McGrath 2006:xii-xiii). The assumptions of critical realism have been adopted above all in the works of Alister McGrath, mentioned in the previous section. Under the influence of the philosopher Roy Bhaskar who has significantly contributed to the planting of naturalism in human sciences (Bhaskar 2011), McGrath (2006:116-117) has composed his three-volume *Scientific Theology*

that ventures to mitigate the ingrained aversion of Barthianism towards natural theology. To its credit, McGrath's theology has a post-conservative colouring for swearing any foundationalist pretensions, though, as according to McGrath, foundationalism is dead, both in philosophy and in religion (Sherman 2008:79-84).

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Chapter 1

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This book, *Resilience in a VUCA world: Reflections on teaching, learning and health in turbulent times*, discusses how humans cope with adversity, especially when faced with uncertain and tumultuous situations such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic. This book aims to engage critically with resilience theory as a scholarly debate from the unique vantage point of social work and theology. This specific aspect of ingenuity contributes to the generation of original knowledge in the broad social sciences and humanities fields.

This book offers original insights into resilience during the pandemic from social work and theological perspectives.

The first three chapters are rooted in theoretical exploration. The volume editor and author Annette Potgieter opens the book by focusing on rethinking God's images by drawing on the Song of Moses to exemplify the diversity of ideas about God. Marileen Steyn further argues that liturgy is a vehicle through which resilience is cultivated. Authors Christo Lombaard and Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte discuss the resilience of Carl Schmitt's legal theory regarding 'a state of exception' within the context of global management of COVID-19.

The four successive chapters are rooted in practical examples. Nioma Venter focuses on the local ecumenical action networks that originated as resilience in the Dutch Reformed Church during COVID-19, arguing that the global pandemic formed an opportunity for transformative action with long-term benefits for the church and local communities. Luc Kabongo reflects on the consequences of COVID-19 within Soshanguve in conversation with Emmanuel Katongole's book, *Born from lament: The theology and politics of hope in Africa*. Jacques Beukes focuses on children and youth as a vulnerable and marginalised population in South African society, exploring resilience from an autoethnographic perspective. David Biernot discusses the 'resilience of the nature-nurture dispute', drawing on Daniel Everett's anthropological study of the Piraha people.

The final three chapters in this scholarly book are rooted in online teaching resources as a creative response to the pandemic. Reineth Prinsloo focuses on online support groups to cope with the pandemic. Jessica C. Johannisen and Sandra T. Bredell discuss how fieldwork practice for social work students was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside online teaching of theoretical modules. Finally, the author Melissa C. Siegelaar acknowledges the cost of teaching staff adjusting to online learning, drawing on psychological literature concerned with professional burnout.

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