

RELIGION,
MIGRATION, AND
IDENTITY

*Methodological and
Theological Explorations*



Edited by
Martha Frederiks
and Dorottya Nagy

THEOLOGY AND MISSION IN
WORLD CHRISTIANITY

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Religion, Migration, and Identity

Theology and Mission in World Christianity

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Introduction

Dorottya Nagy and Martha Frederiks

Migration. The word conjures up images of countless Syrian refugees *en route* to a safer place, of young Africans trying to cross the Mediterranean, of Indian and Nepali construction workers slaving in Qatar, of Mexicans risking their lives to cross the border with the USA and of German Pegida supporters protesting against the presence of Muslims in Europe.

Migration-related issues regularly make the headlines, and seldom in a positive way. But migration has many different faces: Chinese entrepreneurs in Mali boost the local economy, Indian nurses meet the demands for personnel in British hospitals and nursing homes, while the remittances sent home by Sikh taxi drivers in Norway, Filipino domestics workers in Kuwait or Polish immigrants to the USA are of vital importance to the economies of their countries of origin. However, migration dynamics do not only have social, political and economic implications; they also bring about changes in the religious landscape, in religious beliefs, and practices and in the way people understand themselves, each other, and the world around them.

The essays collected in this volume intend to raise and illustrate a range of issues on identity and religion, as encountered by people affected by the dynamics of migration. Human beings, be they as individuals or organized in communities, take the central stage in this volume; their experiences of migration, their faith, and their quest for identity formation form the focus of the reflections in this book. Published in Brill's *Theology and Mission in World Christianity* series, the volume addresses questions pertaining to migration, identity, and Christian belief, which originate in various geographical locations and which demonstrate new modes of interconnectedness; thus the volume aims to contribute to the ongoing academic discussions on the meaning of mission, theology, and the Christian tradition in general, and does so in a worldwide perspective.¹

The authors of this volume are theologians, missiologists, anthropologists, religious studies scholars, American Studies scholars who work in and reflect

1 The articles collected in this volume were previously published in the thematic issues of the journals *Exchange* 43 (2014) and *Mission Studies* 32 (2015). The contributions were first presented as papers in the study group "Migration, religion, and identity" during the International Association of Mission Studies' Toronto Assembly in August 2012 and have been reworked and expanded since.

on diverse settings; they cover a wide range of scholarly enquiry. They offer exercises in scholarship, which balance systematic and empirical research, in order to articulate methodological challenges in studying migration. By doing so they affirm that the study of migration needs to be conducted in ways that seek to address and reveal the complexity and fluidity of migration phenomena.

The title of this volume connects identity, religion, and migration as three increasingly important keywords within the social and human sciences, but also keywords that are problematic to define universally. The juxtaposition of these three concepts (as also created by e.g. Hämmerli and Mayer 2014) aims at creating open spaces, where innovative approaches in studying migration may be formulated. After reviewing a large body of literature touching upon religion, migration, and identity, we, the editors of this volume, formulate the following initial observations:

1. Much of the research on migration, religion, and identity works with theoretical biases originating from North American contexts. While the importance of researching migration dynamics within North American contexts remains patent, migration needs to be researched at a similar level of intensity in other socio-geographical contexts, thus generating empirical data and theoretical insights from different contexts and facilitating studies from a comparative and synchronous perspective.
2. Researching the religious within migration dynamics seems to have a preference for the exotic and the more spectacular cases. This is especially noticeable in Europe. Here again, undertaking research on less exotic but more common phenomena related to migration would bring more balance in the present research agenda. For example, we argue that next to favoring the study of African Pentecostal communities in Europe, the cases of African mainline churches' presence in Europe should also be explored.
3. While much of the research refers to integration, little attention is given to questioning the role of religion within integration paradigms and policies. It seems to be a tacit expectation that through integration processes migrants' religion will eventually withdraw into the so-called private sphere. We argue that such expectations need to be readdressed through research that focuses on the importance of religion for identity formation in contexts affected by migration and on the role of religion in the public sphere.

4. Methodological nationalism continues to prescribe research on migration, identity, and religion, resulting in research mainly defined through the lenses of ethnicity, land of origin, and nationality. It is a challenge for theology-missiology to find new categories and elements for demarcating plausible research units, especially in view of carrying the contextualization debate further.
5. While much of the research studies religion and identity through the lenses of immigration, little attention is being given to the communities in the contexts of departure. There are indications that migration affects the departure contexts in such a way that the issues of religion and identity in those contexts require renegotiations.

The above described initial observations led us to collect a number of papers which through empirical research and theoretical reflection explicitly broaden the horizon of researching migration. The premise of the editors is that the study of migration in its close relation to identity and religion will result in changes in how people (such as policy makers, taxpayers, religious leaders, members of the faith community, researchers) think and act in relation to migration dynamics at numerous levels of everyday life.

The chapters in this volume address the dynamics of migration processes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, characterized by an intensification of human mobility through voluntary or enforced decisions and also improved means of communication and travel. Thus, the realm of living of individuals as well as groups has expanded, with many having the experience of living in more than one geo-political or cultural territory and with large numbers of people living as individuals or as groups in places different from their country of birth.

Theory building on novel dynamics of migration has resulted in new conceptualizations of “interconnectedness” (Castels 2002, 2010; Castels *et al.* 2015; Anthony McGrew 1992; Held and McGrew 2002), such as transnational (Nina Glick-Schiller *et al.* 1992; Glick-Schiller 1995, 2015; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007) or globally-stretched (Vertovec 2007) networks and their relation to localities. In reflection on localities such terms as “deterritorialization” (in a whole range of attempts for its conceptualizations from Appadurai 1996, still referring back to Deluze and Guattari 1972, 1987; Tomlinson 1999, and Rockefeller 2011), “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2007; Meissner and Vertovec 2015) and “multiple belongings” (Portes 2000; Christiansen and Hedetoft, eds. 2004) entered the academic discussions. This vocabulary addresses the complex relationship between

locality, territoriality and nation states when it comes to migration. Different migration patterns illustrate how people involved in them create multiple belongings in terms of religiosity, socialization, or employment.

By coining the term “superdiversity” Steven Vertovec (2007) has stressed, that though groups of people may share similar experiences of migration, migrants—even when they come from the same ethnic background (see Stanley in this volume)—form a highly diverse group of people and interpret their migration stories in different ways; the superdiversity approach underlines that migrants are and remain connected to real localities and territories. The concept of “superdiversity” was meant to function also beyond identifying and describing new phenomena and it has searched to offer a tool in opening up ways for new methodologies in the study of migration, in order to produce change at the level of policy making.

The above-mentioned theoretical approaches and the developments they refer to, pose profound questions to key missiological concepts such as “inculturation” and “contextualization”. What are the worlds, the cultures, the contexts in which people who have a migration (hi)story live? How do the actual locations of residence and former locations of residence interact with each other? Do they coincide or partly overlap? How does locality shape migrants’ experiences and transnational connectivities? And how do these developments shape Christianity and fashion individual and communal religious identities? What is the meaning of terms like “inculturation” and “contextualization” in relation to migration? Do they lose their validity? Do they need reconceptualization or do alternate terms need to be developed? The urge for the present volume originates in unsettled discussions around the questions formulated above.

Religion within the contributions of this volume is researched in terms of Christian identities. The volume is organized in such a way that chapters with an explicit methodological question form a frame around chapters with a more explicit case-study approach, highlighting unfamiliar and surprising constellations, created through the condition of migration, also in terms of becoming and encountering refugees.

Martha Frederiks’ contribution opens the volume by surveying and assessing some of the theories developed so far. By doing so, the chapter creates space for further theoretical explorations of the religion-migration-identity juxtaposition. The chapter explores the often taken-for-granted concepts “migrant” and “migration”, maps theories which connect migration and the significance of various aspects of religion in coping with migration, and identifies areas for further research.

Dorottya Nagy explores methodology; she demonstrates how a lack of reflection on academic presuppositions results in the propagation and protraction of methodological nationalism in much academic work on religion, identity, and migration. She argues that methodological precision is required, in order to better describe, analyze, and understand identities and representations. She exhorts scholars not merely to explicate their assumptions and methodology but also advocates that the field of religion and migration should venture into more multi-, pluri- and intradisciplinary approaches.

Hironi Chiba's contribution is the first case-study in this volume. Chiba addresses the role of the protestant church in the US Refugee Resettlement program during the early Cold War era. She takes the reader back to the 1940s and 1950s, when following World War II and the rise of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, hundreds of thousands of displaced Europeans sought resettlement in the United States. Based on thorough archival work, Chiba describes how American protestant churches—and the American Methodist Church in particular—took a leading role in responding to the influx of refugees. Chiba demonstrates how churches, moving beyond denominational and even religious differences, became actively engaged in the 'resettlement' of displaced people. Chiba also hypothesizes that it was during the post-war period that American protestant churches, urged on by a missiology of 'good neighbourliness' and against the grain of their time, began to develop their role as promoters of ethnic tolerance and religious pluralism within the society. Chiba's article is an invitation to missiology's further engagement in the study of religion, migration, and identity formation from historical perspectives.

Pavol Bargár examines the oft-repeated claim that Nigerian-initiated churches in Europe fail to attract a membership beyond the West African community. By analyzing the strategies used by three Nigerian-initiated churches in Prague (Czech Republic) to move beyond their ethnic origin, Bargár demonstrates that this claim needs modification and draws attention to the complexity on the ground, by pointing to aspects such as situational knowledge and experience of the pastors, language politics, worldviews, styles of worship, and outreach strategies when addressing the triad of migration, religion and identity. Bargár's research emphasizes once again the wide socio-political and religious diversity of the European contexts, highlighting that the story of African migrants in the Czech Republic (and possibly also in other Central and Eastern European countries) differs distinctly from Western European experiences.

Stanley John presents a case-study of Kerala (India) Christians in Kuwait. In his contribution John describes the divergence in social and legal position of short-term contract-laborers on the one hand and well-established

middle-class Indian migrants in Kuwait on the other. John observes that these two groups in Kuwait rarely interact and demonstrates how the disparity in social status of these two groups profoundly affects their potential of religious expression and community formation. Thus, John's case-study problematizes homogenization of migrants on the basis of ethnicity and spells out the importance of social diversification in processes of identity formation.

Deanna Womack takes the reader to communities of Arab Christians in the United States. Womack's paper displays that by moving to the USA, Arab Christians seem to exchange their religious minority status in the Middle East for an ethnic minority status in America. She especially highlights how second generation migrants contest these identity constructions based on ethnicity and language, resulting in intergenerational tensions and power struggles within Arab Christian communities in New Jersey. Womack also remarks that Arab Christians in the USA suffer from the negative imagery produced by the "war on terror" discourses, which associates Arabs with Muslims, leading to feelings of alienation and non-belonging among Arab Christians in the USA.

Stephen Pavey and Marco Saavedra introduce the reader to world of the so-called "undocumented youth activists" in the USA: mainly young adults who arrived in the USA as children accompanying their undocumented parents. Because these young people lack a social security number they cannot legally work or vote and are subject to arrests and deportations. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, activism and experiences of friendship, Pavey in dialogue with activist Marco Saavedra discloses the callous world of American immigration regulations and its impact on the lives and human dignity of these undocumented youth. In the second half of the article, the authors explore the challenges that the reality of undocumented youth poses to faith and theology and then cautiously seek to articulate words of hope and human dignity amidst the fear and despair. By coauthoring of the chapter, Pavey and Saavedra give an example of innovative ways in exploring identities and representations.

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu's contribution bridges the more case-study focused chapters with those explicitly dealing with theoretical issues. Asamoah-Gyadu explores the pastoral challenges of Ghanaian migrants' churches in relation to the often murky waters of issues related to visa, residential permits and other forms of documentation. Asamoah-Gyadu describes how many Ghanaian immigrants interpret their documentation problems in terms of attacks from supernatural forces and envious witches at "home" in Africa and demonstrates how this framing in turn informs the approach of the leadership to care and counselling, leading at times to dubious practices. Asamoah-Gyadu widens the discussion on life narratives as forms of interpreting migration experiences. Interpreted life-stories addressed through the

migration-religion-identity juxtaposition become primary sources for revisiting ethics also from the point of systematic theology.

The final chapter of this volume has been written by the late Ross Langmead, who passed away in June 2013, before he could submit the final version of his text. Langmead was in search for a theology of mission in the context of refugees and asylum seekers and identified “hospitality” as being central for such a theology and one which leads towards friendship as a safe form for human interaction. By identifying Gustavo Gutierrez as one of his dialogue partners, he suggests that a theology of mission which advocates the case of refugees and asylum seekers necessarily becomes another form of liberation theology, this time realized in the socio-economic and political complexities of Australia.

With Langmead’s contribution the circle is complete. The reader arrives back to the beginning in order to start the next circle, because this is what the editors of the present volume invite their readers to do: to join in the work of making a difference by revealing, addressing and interpreting the complex yet fascinating areas where migration, religion, and identity appear to be meaningful only in their interrelatedness, spelled out in the everyday life of ordinary people.

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Religion, Migration, and Identity

A Conceptual and Theoretical Exploration

Martha Frederiks

1 Introduction

Over the last decades a wealth of literature on religion and migration has been published. Initially, anthropologists and sociologists spearheaded the debate but soon researchers from religious studies and theology, including missiology, also joined the arena. Key questions in the reflection on religion and migration include whether the present conceptual toolbox is adequate; whether the concepts used are distinct and precise enough to enhance comprehensive reflection and whether theories developed in one context can be extrapolated to others.

Thus far, the missiological debate seems to have focused mainly on theory-building pertaining to migrants (and especially Christian migrants). Researchers have investigated and continue to investigate the transformation of religion and religious communities in the context of migrants' experiences; more specifically, they have researched how migration has influenced the faith, practices and community formation of people who migrate and what significance faith and religious communities hold for migrants when coping with the stress, insecurities and challenges of migration (see e.g. Adogame and Weissköppel 2005; Adogame 2013; Hanciles 2008; Schreiter 2009; Simon 2010; Stepick 2005; Währisch-Oblau 2009). Relatively little attention has been paid thus far to the fact that migration also impacts the religious traditions and beliefs and practices of "non-migrants".¹ Yet in many areas, migration has profoundly changed the religious landscape, both in terms of multi-religious diversity and in terms of intra-religious diversity (see e.g. Henkel and Knippenberg 2005; Gallo 2014).

Although in no way attempting comprehensiveness, this article aims at giving a representative impression and appraisal of some of the insights and theories developed thus far. It begins by looking at theories that focus on how the experience of migration affects the personal and communal faith

1 I recognise that the labelling of people in broad categories such as "migrant" and "non-migrant" is problematic. Also, I am aware that these terms imply a whole range of underlying assumptions of belonging and non-belonging, nation states, etc. (see below and the contribution by Dorottya Nagy in this volume).

expressions of people who migrate. Because this is an extensive field, I distinguish three different levels of theory: (a) theories about personal faith as spiritual and social resource for people actually crossing borders; (b) theories that study the role and significance of religious communities for people who migrate; and (c) theories that focus on migrants' transnational networks, leading to conceptual reflections what notions like "context" and "locality" might actually entail for migrants and migrants' religious communities. Then, having surveyed the field of religion and migrants' experiences, I turn to the second, far less explored field of how migration affects the beliefs and practices of those who have not physically moved, but whose landscape has changed due to migration.

Before embarking on this scheme, the contribution begins with a conceptual excursion, exploring those often-used but seldom-defined terms "migrant" and "migration".

2 Migrants and Migration

"Migrant" and "migration" are—obviously—two central concepts in the research on religion and migration. Surprisingly however, these terms are usually employed without explanation or stipulation, presuming that the reader will understand what the concepts entail. Attempts at definitions—even working definitions—are rare, also in the wider field of Migration Studies. The International Organization for Migration provides a rather general but widely-used definition of migration, describing migration as "a definite physical move from one location to another" and adding that "[f]or international migration the locations involved are clearly two distinct countries" (IOM 2003: 295). An often quoted definition of the term "migrant" is the 1998 United Nations definition which stipulates that a long-term international migrant is "a person who has moved to a country other than his/her country of usual residence for at least a year, so that the country of destination effectively becomes the new country of residence" (UN 2002: 11).

Reflecting on these and similar rather general definitions of the concepts migration and migrants, Harald Kleinschmidt (2003: 12) concludes that "[a]t present migration is predominantly a social science term", one that was developed to serve "the practical needs of administrators"; the term "comprises of all sorts of movements that involve a change of residence. The period of one year or longer has often been understood to mark the difference between ordinary movements from place to place and migration". While terms like "migration" and "migrants" may have their administrative use, as academic categories

these concepts are rather problematic. Researchers of migration have indicated as much, pointing out that governments, policymakers and researchers use a variety of criteria, such as length of residence, nationality, country of birth or the country of birth of parents, to determine who is a migrant and who is not (e.g. Schoorl 1995: 7–8; Anderson and Blinders 2013: 2–5). There is no standardization or across-the-board consensus on the criteria that determine whether a person is a migrant or not. On the contrary, it seems that some of the stakeholders are rather served by a certain fuzziness of the concept; governments and individual politicians use the terms at their own expediency, in order to advance their own cause.

In the UN definition, like in most definitions, demographic criteria—in this case residence and duration—form the decisive factors that determine whether a person is a migrant or not, leading to an immensely diverse category of people, all being called “migrants”. Attempts have been made to propose alternative definitions. Kleinschmidt, a historian by background, has suggested a less demographic-oriented definition of migration; he stipulates migration as “a relocation of residence across a border of recognized significance.” (Kleinschmidt 2003: 17). This “recognized significance”, according to Kleinschmidt, can consist of language, culture, and so on. Kleinschmidt’s alternative is helpful in that it disentangles the term migration from the phenomenon of nation-states and describes migration as relocation across a variety of borders of difference. Also, Kleinschmidt’s definition opens up the possibility to identify a change of residence across a variety of borders, such as geographic, linguistic, political, cultural, religious borders, as migration. Yet Kleinschmidt’s definition does not aid in for example narrowing down the subject group “migrants”.

Others have attempted to refine the concepts by dividing the category “migrant” into subcategories, such as privileged migrants, migrants from former colonies, temporary labor migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, undocumented migrants, and the like (Castles and Miller 2009: 4). But there is no consensus on these sub-categories or their usefulness and scholars have been quick to point out that the distinctions between these groups are fluid (Faist 1995: 182).

Generally speaking missiological literature has tended to adopt the concepts “migrant” and “migration” without much query, neither attempting to coin alternative definitions or terms nor formulating additional criteria or showing an awareness of the hazards implied by using such politically charged terms. Also, the question presents itself, whether for missiological (and theological) purposes the present social science conceptualizations of the terms “migrant” and “migration”, which are based solely on demographic criteria,

are sufficiently distinct to enable meaningful missiological reflection. Neither demographic delineations of the concepts nor Kleinschmidt's alternative definition of "relocation across a border of recognized significance" takes into account the experiential dimensions of migration, which seem pivotal to much missiological/theological endeavor. Contemporary missiological reflections mainly seem to converge around the question whether and if so how the migration experience affects personal and communal expressions of the Christian faith.

The efficacy of the terms for missiological reflection can be questioned even further. Let me make my point by giving a personal example. I myself have spent nearly a quarter of my life living outside the country where I was born, the Netherlands. Though my period "abroad" has profoundly shaped my outlook on life, I do not and have never conceived myself as a migrant. Yet by the standards of the UN definition as well as other social science definitions, I was classified as a "migrant" for a substantial part of my life. However these social science categorizations do not correspond with my self-perception or the way I assess the years I lived in West Africa. I may have demographically fitted the categories of migration and migrant, yet personally I construe this period of my life differently.

Having said this, I hasten to add that I realize that my "story of migration" may be profoundly different from a Mexican who has crossed the USA border without official papers; it also may be profoundly different from a Philippine domestic worker in Qatar, a Ghanaian studying in the UK, a Chinese businessman working in Hungary or an Indonesian boat refugee attempting to reach Australia.

Stanley John, in his contribution in this volume, has pointed out that even persons coming from the same country and the same state within that country may have quite diverging experiences. Studying Kerala Christians in Kuwait, John describes on the one hand the hardship and exploitation of low-skilled Kerala contract workers living in Kuwaiti labor camps and on the other hand the quite comfortable lives of highly trained Kerala upper-middle-class migrants, working as professional doctors, dentists and engineers in Kuwait.

Case-studies like John's not only problematize the general category "migrant", but also critique the tendency in migration research to homogenize migrants on the basis of ethnicity or nationality. The well-known theorists of migration Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick-Schiller use the term "methodological nationalism" for these over-simplifications and homogenizing tendencies; the term endeavors to disclose and critique the fact that many researchers seem to (have) work(ed) with the unvoiced postulation that nations are homogeneous cultural and social-economic units, that ethnic groups always live within the

confines of a nation state, that national identity can be essentialized and that all migrants from a certain country are similar and behave alike (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002; see also Smith 1978: 1155). In this volume Dorottya Nagy further explores the subject of methodological nationalism.

In an attempt to capture the vast diversity among migrants, Steven Vertovec has coined the term “super-diversity”. The term aims to stress that within this seemingly lucid and uniform category of “migrants”, stories of migration differ, because the duration of migration and people’s goals, aims, reasons and experiences of migration differ (Vertovec 2007: 1044–1049). Migration dynamics and experiences may also differ, when not just mere individuals migrate but whole groups of people coming from the same village or the same region settle communally in a new destination country.

These reflections about the conceptualization of the term migrant inevitably lead to the conclusion that “the migrant” does not exist. The seemingly simple and self-evident word “migrant” covers a highly diversified group of people, who have very different biographies and migration stories. The diversity in migration trajectories and migration experiences may result in different assessments as to whether people consider migration an event (or series of events) in their biography or a profound identity-shaping experience. As early as 1978 Timothy Smith observed that when (and only when?) migration involves intense and at times even traumatic experiences of separation, disorientation, uprooting and resettlement, migration is a “theologizing experience” (Smith 1978: 1175).

This diversity of trajectories and experiences may also be a determining factor as to whether—and if so, to which extent—people actively experience what Alejandro Portes and Dag MacLeod have called a “sense of multiple belonging” and “multiple identities” (Portes and McLeod 1996: 527–528). These varied experiences may also determine whether or not people continue to identify themselves as—and want to be recognized as—migrants. And it is exactly this identity-shaping aspect of migration that is not, and cannot, be captured by definitions based on mere demographic criteria.

3 Religion in the Context of Migrants’ Experiences

Researchers have made it abundantly clear that religion plays an important role in the lives of many migrants, both at the individual level and at the communal level (Stepick 2005: 13; Schreiter 2009). As noted above, already several decades ago Timothy Smith spoke about migration as a “theologizing experience”. According to Smith, when migrants grapple with the bewildering

experiences of loss, separation and disorientation, faith provides them with a vocabulary to express these experiences and construe meaning, while religious communities offer structure, support and intimacy (Smith 1978: 1181–82).

In 2009 Robert Schreiter listed some of numerous reasons why religion can be of significance for individual migrants: religion can be the reason for migration, religion sustains people in times of difficulty, religion can serve as an identity marker in a new context or as a source for reconciliation and healing in cases where the story of migration and the migrant's experiences have been humiliating, hurtful, violent or demeaning. Religion can also aid a person in giving meaning to his/her migration experiences or function as a resource in resolving adjustment issues (Schreiter 2009).

Smith observed that migrants also seem to turn to religion to ensure continuity with the past (Smith 1978: 1161). Prema Kurian goes a step further than Smith, arguing that in situations of migration migrants seem to rediscover the importance of religion and intentionally embrace religion as an identity marker, thus becoming more religiously active in the new destination country than they were before migration. Using the example of Indian Hindu migrants to the USA, Kurian demonstrates how for Indian-Americans, religion (in this case Hinduism) has become a key symbol of both identity and difference in the American society (Kurian 1998: 40).

There is no doubt that many of the observations made by academics like Stepick, Smith, Schreiter and Kurian are astute and pertinent; yet a word of caution seems called for. Most theory building on migration and religion arises from qualitative research conducted in the North American context. Very little systematic comparative research has been done to cross-check whether these findings can be extrapolated to other contexts such as South-East Asia, Africa, the Gulf or even Europe. Nancy Foner and Richard Alba's research for example seems to underscore the need for cautiousness in this respect. They have demonstrated that where immigrant religion in the USA is generally considered a bridge to integration, immigrant religion in secular Europe is regarded far less favorably; at times immigrant religion is even considered a barrier to integration in European societies (Foner and Alba 2008; see also Frederiks 2014: 221–222).

In addition, recent quantitative research does not seem to substantiate the claim that immigrants turn to religion in situations of migration, even in the USA. In an article with the telling title "God Can Wait", Diehl and König argue that recent empirical evidence from Canada, the USA and Germany indicates that religious participation seems to decrease rather than increase in the pre- and post-migration period. They attribute earlier findings regarding an increase in religious participation to a focus on pioneer migrants, who according to

Diehl and König were disproportionately involved in establishing religious communities; later cohorts seem to experience different religious dynamics. Among other reasons, Diehl and König point to migrants' limited opportunities for religious participation to explain their findings: nowadays, migrants seem to give precedence to "secular" priorities such as finding a house, a job, and so on; in addition, they may lack the time and infrastructure to attend religious gatherings or find that religious facilities are not easily accessible, especially for religious minorities (Diehl and König 2013: 9–11). Also, nowadays, the availability of religious programmes on the internet may offer a convenient alternative to the personal attendance of worship. Diehl and König acknowledge that migrants, for whom migration is a disruptive experience (e.g. due to a hostile environment of racism, discrimination and exclusion) are more likely to maintain their religious practices than those who do not have such experiences (Diehl and König 2013: 11; see also Connor 2010: 381–382).

It has also been widely recognized that not only personal faith but also religious communities play an important role in the lives of migrants. In research on religious migrant communities two intersecting yet distinct trends can be distinguished. One trend has what I (for lack of a better expression) call a "context-of-arrival-oriented" research focus. Scholars working on this study how migration to a new context impacts the religious beliefs, practices and community formation of migrants; they also investigate what role religion and religious communities play in this process of settling. The other trend takes a transnationalism-oriented research approach. Scholars working on this focus on the implications of the fact that migrants—as individuals and as communities—maintain networks of relationships (religious and otherwise) that keep them connected to their country/region/culture of origin and to kindred communities around the world. They investigate what this implies for migrants' interaction with and loyalties to the new context of residence and reflect about the significance of locality, geography and context for migrants.

I am aware that the above distinction is to some extent artificial as the two trends—in research as well as real life—are intertwined; migrants and migrants' communities interact both locally and transnationally and often simultaneously. Its main purpose is to outline the different trends in theory-building. In the text below I first survey the context-of-arrival-oriented debates and theories, after which I turn to the transnationalism-oriented research, reviewing some of the theories as well as some of the challenges transnationalism poses to current theological endeavor.

Stephen Warner has postulated that religious communities in general and ethnic-based religious communities and religious minority communities in particular, often function as a "home away from home". According to Warner,

religious communities oftentimes serve as a safe haven, a place of physical, spiritual and emotional support in a strange land as well as a secure space for initiating and extending social and business networks (Warner 1993: 1059–1063; Warner 2005: 88). In those situations where migrants experience marginalization in the destination country, religious communities also serve as sheltered spaces where people’s dignity and self-worth is affirmed and where their talents are appreciated, where people with no option but to work as cleaners and garbage men in their new country of residence, may serve as pastors, leaders and elders (Warner 2005: 237). This spiritual and social capital role of religious communities has been widely recognized (Stepick 2005: 20; Berger and Redding 2011: 1–5). Although not of exclusive relevance for migrants only, the social capital represented by religious communities, is particularly valuable for migrants who have to start as it were from scratch in a new environment.

Yet the significance of religious communities for immigrants is not limited to the “home away from home” role identified by Warner. Marie Friedmann Marquardt, working with undocumented Mexican-Americans in Doraville, Georgia, has demonstrated that religious communities take on a wide array of roles. In addition to the well-known roles of the “safe haven” and “home-away-from-home”, religious communities often function as guides to the new society; they serve as “training ground” for public participation and integration, a place where immigrants in a relatively safe environment can “learn the rules of engagement with the broader society”. Other religious communities, according to Marquardt, operate as places of resistance, which critique the dominant social order and encourage people to draw on their spiritual and cultural resources to “collectively formulate oppositional interpretations of the values of the dominant society” (Marquardt 2005: 191, 208–211; see also Hankela 2014: 343–387; Ebaugh and Salzman Chafetz 2000: 15). When culturally or ethnically more-or-less homogenous, religious communities often serve as sites of cultural retention and reproduction, linking the past, the present and the future (Smith 1978: 1168–1174). However when cultural retention and reproduction become core-activities, migrants’ churches² may lapse into religious nostalgia, risk ethnic or cultural captivity or may cultivate an “other-exclusive” identity, that disallows those who are different (Belousek 2012: 590).

In an interesting comparison of two rather dissimilar case-studies—comparing Korean Presbyterians and Indian Hindus in Queens, New York City—Pyong Gap Min explored how processes of cultural retention and reproduction take shape. Min observed that in the case of the congregationally-structured Korean Presbyterian Church the religious community life functions as the locus

2 I owe the term migrants’ churches to Dorottya Nagy (2009: 69).

of cultural retention and reproduction. He describes how the Korean church functions as a surrogate family where children are taught Korean etiquette, language and culture, where Korean festivals are celebrated and Korean food is consumed (Min 2005: 106–107). In the case of the Indian Hindus however, there was no structured congregational life. Religion was first of all “domestic religion”, taking the form of rituals at shrines in the home, of observance of food and purity regulations and occasional visits to the temple for rites of passage and the celebrations of festivals (Min 2005: 116–117). Min concludes that the Korean Presbyterians use participation in community life rather than the content of their religion as the means for cultural transmission; Indian Hindus on the other hand retain their culture mainly through the content of their religion, namely the ritual practice at home and at the shrines. Min also concludes that groups coming from a context where religion and culture are interwoven have an advantage when it comes to preserving the culture of their country/region of origin through religion (Min 2005: 118–119).

Min’s cross-religious comparison underscores the need for cautiousness in extrapolating findings and theories based on research among Christian migrant communities to other religious traditions. Christianity with its membership system, its religious hierarchy and its organized religiosity has distinct organizational and ritual features. Other religious communities may have rather different structures and qualities; hence the impact of migration on the religious dynamics of Christian communities may differ substantially from other religious traditions.

Generally speaking researchers seem partial to the positive role that religious communities play in the lives of migrants. Relatively little research seems to dwell on the fact that migrants’ religious communities are also contested spaces, as is for example evidenced by Deanna Womack’s contribution in this volume. Womack highlights how generational and language issues result in tensions in Arab-speaking Protestant churches in New Jersey (for similar examples see Warner 2005: 244–48). Robert Schreiter has pointed to changing perceptions about gender roles as a potential source of conflict (Schreiter 2009: 166–69). Also the continuous influx of newly-arrived migrants can create tensions in religious communities (Ebaugh and Salzman Chafetz 2000: 13). Robert Calvert, in an ongoing Ph.D. project at Utrecht University, has documented how some migrants’ churches in The Netherlands suffer from incessant power struggles among the leadership, resulting in break-away communities. Not only over-ambitious religious leaders turn religious communities into arenas of conflict; churches at times also suffer from ethnic rivalries amongst groups of parishioners. Calvert witnessed a Cape Verdean take-over of the Portuguese-speaking Roman Catholic Church in Rotterdam, when a group of

Cape Verdean parishioners imposed a predominant Cape Verdean expression on the liturgy, thus marginalizing all other groups.³ These, and similar findings, caution against tendencies to romanticize the phenomenon of migrants' Christian communities. They evidence that migrants' churches are not merely "safe havens" and "homes away from home". Migrants' churches are also places of intense contestation, where power struggles, generational clashes, gender conflicts and ethnic rivalry are ubiquitous.

Researchers have not merely investigated the significance and dynamics of religious migrants' communities in their new context of residence. There is also a growing body of literature that focuses on the transnational relationships of migrants and migrants' communities. Researchers are in unison that religion seems versatile in moving along these transnational networks, crossing borders and migrating alongside its adherents (Hüwelmeier and Krause 2010). This is aptly summarized by Peggy Levitt in her book titled *God Needs No Passport* (Levitt 2007).

Many of the challenges linked with migration in the era of globalization are intimately connected with the emergence of nation-states, of borders, citizenship and passports, of permits and conceptualizations of land as owned by either groups or individuals or states. However migration researchers like Stephen Castles and Mark Miller have pointed out that the increased interconnectedness in the global era (caused by migration movements, social media, etc.) challenges those very conceptualizations of the world as consisting of semi-autonomous units called nation-states (Castles and Miller 2009: 3, 45). This is not to say that borders, permits and passports do not represent very real impediments in the lives of many migrants. But it is equally true to say that individuals and communities, despite all these hurdles, interact and maintain relations across cultures and borders of nation states.

Since the early 1990s, researchers have pondered upon the question of the significance of the fact that, enabled by modern means of communication, individuals and communities increasingly establish and intensively maintain what have become known as transnational or globally stretched networks. Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller, and Christina Szanton Blanc, who have published extensively on this phenomenon, define transnationalism as "the processes through which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded relations that link together their countries of origin and settlement"; they add: "[w]e call

3 Robert Calvert is a Ph.D. student at Utrecht University and I am grateful to him for sharing his insights.

these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders” (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 2013: 8). And indeed, many people (known as migrants) who have actually moved—and may continue to move—across these borders, maintain in their daily lives relationships between and across geographic or cultural or political entities. Moreover, their lives seem to encompass several “worlds” simultaneously; they actually seem to *live* in more than one geo-political or cultural territory at the same time. They are, for example, in heart and mind present in the lives of their families in Manila or Jakarta or Cairo, while at the same time living and working in the Gulf states. Simon Coleman and Katrin Maier take these reflections even one step further; they eloquently argue, in an article on the Redeemed Christian Church of God in the United Kingdom, that migrants do not merely build social fields across political and cultural borders but that in the mind and imagination of London-based Nigerian migrants, territorial spaces as widely diverse as London and Lagos conflate into one imagined landscape or geography, where London influences decisions and acts in Lagos and vice versa, and where the two (or more) become one imagined joined geography, literally *one world* in the minds, the lives, and actions of people (Coleman and Maier 2011: 453–454).

The implications of this phenomenon of the ever-increasing global interconnectedness and the similarly increasing density of transnational networks are numerous; transnationalism poses a number of profound questions about the realities in which people conduct their daily lives. With regard to migrant religiosity, transnationalism for example redresses the conceptualization that the prime landscape with which migrants’ religious communities interact is the local landscape of residence. Research findings indicate that many contemporary migrants (individuals as well as communities), facilitated by modern communication media, maintain dense relationships with religious communities in their countries of origin (nationally or spiritually) as well as with kindred religious communities across the globe; today more than ever before (Min 2005; Nagy 2009; Coleman and Maier 2011; Pruiksma 2011). To give an example: the highly mobile membership of the London-based Nigerian Redeemed Christian Church of God interacts on a regular basis with the mother church in Nigeria as well as with sister RCCG churches in the UK, in Europe, and across the globe (Coleman and Maier 2011: 455–59). Via facilities like streaming video or skype-connections RCCG communities worldwide can tune into services at the RCCG church headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria, virtually attend ceremonies in sister-churches or interact live with the RCCG General Overseer Enoch Adeboye from any locality in the world. Thus, they constantly

engage in what Peggy Levitt has called “transnational religious practices” and at times even maintain “dual memberships in spiritual arenas” (Levitt 2004: 2).

The RCCG is just a random example of how religious communities shape their transnational relationships. Levitt has listed numerous ways in which migrants engage in “transnational religious practices”:

They contribute financially to these groups, raise funds to support their activities, host visiting religious leaders, seek long-distance guidance from them, participate in worship and cultural events during return visits, and are the subject of nonmigrants’ prayers. Other migrants participate in religious pilgrimage, worship certain saints or deities, or engage in informal, popular religious practices that affirm their enduring ties to a particular sending-country group or place (Levitt 2004: 5).

Levitt has argued that while all religious migrant groups seem to engage in transnational religious practices, groups shape their transnational relations differently, depending on their organizational structures. Studying the transnational interactions of a number of North American migrants’ churches, she distinguishes between what she calls “extended”, “negotiated” and “recreated” transnational churches respectively (Levitt 2004: 7–14).

While it is evident that on the one hand many migrants’ Christian communities are actively involved with and contribute to their local vicinities (Sar and Roos 2006; Castillo Guerra, Glashouwer, and Kregting 2008), it is on the other hand equally plain that most migrants’ churches seem to invest much time, energy and finances in their transnational networks. This evokes the question what the prime religious landscape is with which migrants’ religious communities engage. There seem to be sufficient indications to hypothesize that for at least some of the migrants’ churches this might not be the local religious landscape (e.g. Sarró and Santos 2011; John 2016 in this volume).

Globalization, migration, modern media, and transnational networks have each in their own way contributed to an experience of “deterritorialization” (Tomlinson 1999: 106–113). This is not to say that locality is inconsequential. Nienke Pruiksma (2011: 405) has argued that the myriad of individual and communal relationships always takes its starting point in a particular locality and place. In addition, the locality imposes rules and regulations (in the form of legal or political systems) on its residents that provide the boundaries within which residents need to enact their relationships. Further research is required to investigate what role—understood against the background of transnational networks—locality and place play in the religious lives of migrants and migrants’ communities and whether, in some instances, the inference is

justified that, while locality may not be trivial, it may be interchangeable and is neither conceived to be essential nor the prime location of performative religious acts.

Globalization, migration and transnationalism also pose profound queries to some of the key theological foci of the last decades, such as the quests for inculturation and contextualization. John Tomlinson (1999: 141) has pointed out that globalization has led to “a dissolution between culture and place” and coined the term “deterritorialization” for this. Less and less are culture and context bound to a specific locality. Where in the past “cultures were clearly demarcated and differentiated in time and space, now ‘the concept of a fixed, unitary and bounded culture must give way to a sense of the fluidity and permeability of cultural sets’ ” (Morley and Robins 1995: 87). David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995: 87) summarize the consequences, by saying: “Places are no longer the clear supports of our identity.”⁴ While these developments affect all global citizens, they are true in particular for migrants whose social fields encompass several cultural, political and/or geographic territories simultaneously. As discussed above, Coleman and Maier have argued that in the lives of migrants multiple locations conflate into “one imagined geography”, producing a landscape that is unique (irreproducible) to a migrant’s particular biography, his/her migration story and his/her multi-stranded transnational networks. This leads to the question: what does “context” mean when people’s social fields seem to stretch across the globe and people seem to live simultaneously in a particular identifiable locality as well as in several other “imagined” locations? What does “culture” entail when large “super-diverse” groups of migrants have settled in a new destination country, leading to a hybrid cultural mosaic? What does the concept “culture” embody when numerous migrants live in what Coleman and Maier have termed “imagined geographies” that coalesce London and Lagos, Manila and Dubai, San Antonio and Mexico City into one reality, one world?

And which implications could these questions about culture, context and locality have for the quest for contextual theologies? Should contextual theologies continue to take geographical territories or units as their point of departure? Should they analyze power structures as they are exercised in a particular locality in the world (Wimmer 2013: 113–139)? Should they inculturate religious traditions in neatly defined integrated cultures that seem as much a product of imagination as the imagined landscapes of contemporary migrants? Or are

4 In recent research the concept of “deterritorialization” has been critiqued for overlooking the importance of locality and for ignoring the power exercised by transnational agents such as multinationals (Kofman and Youngs 2008: 16–18).

contemporary contexts and cultures always hybrid, a concoction of local and global (Schreiter 1997: 1–14)? What are the contexts and cultures that shape Christian traditions and theologies in an age of migration? Are migrants' contexts and cultures mainly the networks, the transnational relations of individuals and communities and the power structures these represent as Pruiksmā (2011: 399–405) has suggested? Are the methodologies and the terminologies we have developed so far and the approaches we have taken, not in need of re-conceptualization? And is it not mandatory to work out alternative terms and approaches in order to capture the complex realities that globalization and migration produce?

4 Migration Changing the Religious Landscape

Migration affects and transforms the beliefs, practices, and community formation of people who migrate. That much might be clear by now. But migration also affects “non-migrants” and the worlds they live in. In some regions of the world, migration has profoundly changed the religious landscapes. Reinhard Henkel and Hans Knippenberg (2005: 7) have stated that migration to Western Europe has resulted in an expectancy modification and has queried the predictions that Western Europe was to become an increasingly and irreversible secular sub-continent, where religion was relegated to the private sphere. Migration and migrant religiosity, Henkel and Knippenberg maintain, have firmly repositioned religion into the public domain and debate (Henkel and Knippenberg 2005: 7).

Migration has at times brought religions to a destination country, that were not or only marginally present in the context before the event of migration; such is the case with Kerala and Philippine Christians in the Gulf region, with Muslims in Western Europe or with Sikhs and Hindus in the UK or Canada or the USA. Similarly, in some instances migration has profoundly changed the religious landscapes, transforming previously predominantly religiously homogenous areas such as the Gulf states, into religiously plural territories. Elsewhere in this volume Stanley John has described the profound effect migration has had on the religious landscape in Kuwait, with Christians now forming 14 per cent of the population, and Buddhist, Hindus, Sikhs accounting for another 11 per cent.

Scholars such as Grace Davie, Vicente Bedmar, and Verónica Cobano-Delgado Palma have evidenced that these changes at times have led to frictions, tensions and heated public disputes about rights of migrants to express

their religiosity in the public domain (Davie 2000; Bedmar and Palma 2010; Hüwelmeier and Krause 2010; Frederiks 2014). The presence of migrant religiosity has generated debates about the role of religion in the public domain (e.g. veils, halal slaughtering, or homosexuality) and spearheaded discussions about the freedom of speech, of expressing religiously motivated behavior and opinions, of propagating one's faith and the freedom of conversion. Do female Muslim migrants for example, if they so wish, have the right to demand treatment by a female doctor? Should Sikhs on religious grounds be exempted from security rules and allowed to wear a sword? Are religious immigrants entitled to recognition of their religious calendar or transform the physical landscape by building mosques or *mandirs* or churches? The debates are still raging in many countries around the world.

At other times migrants have brought along forms of a religious tradition that was already present, but adhere to a different cultural or denominational manifestation of that tradition (Warner 2005; Stepick 2005; Währisch-Oblau 2009). This has also given rise to tensions. For the North American context Yvonne Haddad, Jane Smith and John Esposito have argued that African and Hispanic migrants have not felt welcomed or at home in the destination country's religiosity, leading to the establishment of separate migrants' religious communities (Haddad, Smith, and Esposito 2003: 7); Claudia Währisch-Oblau (2009: 308) and others have made a similar observation for Christian immigrants to Western Europe. Again this evokes a series of questions. How do and should local Christian communities interact with Christian migrants who have divergent religious beliefs and practices? Though spoken in a different time and context, Martin Luther King's words that 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week still seem to describe the reality in most countries (King 2010: 203). Very few migrants seem to find a "home away from home" in parishes of indigenous mainline churches in the destination country; many seem to agree with Währisch-Oblau's informant who stated: "If you cannot pray in your mother tongue, it just doesn't feel right" (Währisch-Oblau 2009: 308).

Peggy Levitt has argued that extended transnational churches such as the Roman Catholic Church seem more flexible and have more resources available to accommodate migrants and diversity than negotiated transnational churches such as Protestant churches (Landeskirchen) whose very identity is often linked to a certain area, a certain language, and a certain history (Levitt 2004: 7). Extended transnational churches, Levitt asserts, can draw on a wide variety human resources and cultural expertise from their dense transnational networks to accommodate linguistic or cultural diversity. Yet Martha

Frederiks and Nienke Pruisma (2010: 149–151) have argued on the basis of studies conducted in the Netherlands that few parishes of either two categories of churches seem to attain a cultural and/or racial mix or a parish configuration that includes both newer and older residents.

What does the (somewhat problematic) concept of hospitality, that is gaining more and more currency in theological and ecclesial circles mean in situations such as these (e.g. Nagy 2009: 237–243; Sutherland 2010; Langmead 2014)? Is the hospitality of non-migrants limited to soup-kitchens and polite intercultural or interreligious exchanges while their religious communities continue to cling to their privileges or does the migration context also lead to profound reflections among non-migrant indigenous churches about identity and inclusiveness and how to create an open identity that welcomes, embraces and celebrates diversity?

Migration not only affects non-migrants in destination countries, but also non-migrants in the countries of origin are affected by migration. So far little research seems to have been conducted into the “feedback loop”, investigating how migrants’ experiences, beliefs and practices in their new country of residence via transnational networks influence and change religious practices and beliefs in their country of origin (see e.g. Grodź and Smith 2014). A possible exemption is formed by those cases where transnational religious practices have had explicit political implications. Prema Kurian has argued for example that the nationalist Hindutva movement thrives on the support and remittances of Indian-American Hindus (Kurian 2003: 157), whilst David Mittelberg (1999: 6–7) amongst other has shown how American Zionist Jews, through funds and lobbying, wield major political influence in support of the state Israel. Yet in those cases where the influence is less politically charged and possibly more subtle, research findings into the impact of migration on religious beliefs and practices of sending countries seem virtually non-existent; this is a research field still awaiting exploration.

5 **Setting a Research Agenda**

Rather than formulating a conclusion, I would like to end this exploration by making some observations, in an attempt to formulate a research agenda for the years to come. The first observation I would like to make, is that there is a need to clarify some of the key terms in the field. Much work has been done and is being done in the intersecting fields of migration, religion and identity, yet seemingly self-evident terms like migrant, migration, context, and culture

continue to obscure discussions. Highly politically charged and administratively malleable terms like migration and migrants cannot be utilized naively or without a thorough inquiry; rather they require a precise stipulation or additional criteria in order to be of use in theological and missiological explorations. The second observation I would like to make is that there is a need to conduct comparative research in the field of religion, migration, and identity in contexts other than the Western world. Current theory is to a large extent based on qualitative research conducted in the United States and to a lesser extent in Western Europe. A cross-check is required in order to verify whether these theories can be extrapolated to other contexts. Therefore it is vital that comparative research be conducted in Western and non-Western contexts alike. My third observation concerns the research object. Most research projects to date have focused on migrants and how migration transforms their religious beliefs and practices. Far fewer studies have investigated how migration affects the beliefs and practices of “non-migrants”, both in destination- and sending countries. There are still major lacunas in our knowledge of how religion “migrates” along transnational networks to new destination countries and why some religious beliefs and practices change, whilst others seem to endure. Even greater is the void in our knowledge whether, and if so how, religion “revisits” sending countries along those same transnational networks and whether, and if so how, this leads to the transformation of religious practices and beliefs and possibly religious landscapes “back home”.

My fourth and final observation concerns the current theological quest for contextualization. Globalization and migration have rather profoundly changed the way people perceive, experience, and shape culture and context. Culture and context have more than ever before become fluid, diffused, and hybrid concepts. If the assumption is correct that Christianity needs to be contextualized in order to be relevant and meaningful, theologians in general and missiologists in particular still face a major task in exploring what the terms context and culture mean in our present day and age. This “task” comprises the development of a conceptual and methodological toolbox that enables meaningful reflection on the contextualization processes of the Christian faith, amidst the complex realities that globalization and migration produce, thus attempting to keep the Christian tradition relevant and germane.

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Minding Methodology

Theology-Missiology and Migration Studies

Dorottya Nagy

1 Introduction

Minding methodology within academic research calls attention to tensions in understanding the role and the place of academic research done by human agents and its relation to discourses key-worded with objectivity and scientific method. A growing corpus of contributions within the wide spectrum of academic disciplines calls for awareness regarding methodology, emphasizing the need for intellectual integrity and improved research assessment. Acknowledging that the academic setting is but one of the numerous interrelated settings out of which and within which theology-missiology operates, the present chapter focuses on the academic setting, where theology-missiology is identified as a discipline which also relates to migration studies.¹ The hyphenated form of theology-missiology visualizes the assumption that the two components are integral to each other; when one is used alone, it implies the other as well.

The present chapter understands methodology as the total sum of the “*assumptions* that underline any natural, social or human science study, whether articulated or not” (McGregor and Murnane 2010: 420; emphasis mine) which then translate into research questions, methods and research design. Methodology starts with the researcher’s ontology, epistemology, and logic. It is the way of being in, looking at, and understanding the world that at the ground level prescribe *what* to research and *how* to research. Research questions, designs, and methods all depend on the epistemological dimensions of methodology.

The present chapter assumes that theology-missiology as an academic field of inquiry is relational and therefore must be dialectical and should aim at conversation. The attitude of listening and initiating dialogue between and conversation among disciplines and researchers fosters a double benefit: it allows the comparative principle to do its work and it acknowledges that even within the same discipline, multiple methodologies are at work and are at the heart

1 At this place the author thanks the students and colleagues of UNISA’s Master of Theology in Missiology program launched at the former Central and Eastern European Institute for Mission Studies (Budapest). Their critical questions and inspiring remarks enriched the argumentation of this article.

of knowledge creation. Too often, like other disciplines, theology-missiology interprets the application of scientific methods as a means to achieve objectivity (objectivist reductionism, “pure” realism). By doing so it stimulates an immediate unnatural detachment between researcher and research, leaving the core components of methodology unarticulated, in a particular epistemology. As the quote below illustrates, confining research in discourses to theory seems to be safer than epistemological disclosures.

... migration is too diverse and multifaceted to be explained by a single theory. Efforts at theory building should be rather evaluated by their potential to guide research and provide cogent hypotheses to be tested against empirical evidence, and by their contribution to a better understanding of specific facets, dimensions and processes of migration (Arango 2004: 15).

Methodology, when not efficiently addressed, may lead to repetitions of the dominant pattern of research design in the study of migration and to the use of “the classical recipe” of one-sidedly perceived action research aimed at finding immediate solutions to immediate problems. To paraphrase and further enrich Nina Glick-Schiller’s classic methodological nationalism recipe (2008: 2) for the field of theology-missiology, one could prescribe the following: take a city, or a town, in any case a politico-geographically identifiable location, choose a group of (im)migrants, if possible one with a clear ethnic identity, formulate a research question which touches upon the problematic relationship between church, Christian communities and society (e.g. problem of integration, illegality, criminality, exclusion, human rights), read some theoretical publications on migration, try to understand what the Bible has to say about migration and migrants, reflect a little while and surely you will come up with plausible research results. If the researcher eventually happens to be a (im)migrant herself, this increases the credibility of the research, because the academic world of migration studies is longing to see the appearance of migrant theologians-missiologists doing research on migration.

The conversing and dialoguing epistemological attitude of the present research however does not allow such behavioural irony, because irony itself might be the result of interpretative assumptions originating in tacit research epistemologies. Therefore, without delegitimizing modes of research, the present chapter seeks to mind methodology by addressing the problem of methodological nationalism. The core of methodological nationalism lies in the assumption that the nation-state is the most natural and necessary

representation of society and therefore the most logical unit of analysis in social sciences and humanities (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002; Glick-Schiller 2007; Wimmer 2007; Beck 2007). The chapter further assumes that ongoing conversation and dialogue does not seek a nuanced understanding of the complexity of the topic of dialogue and conversations but rather it creates a “fusion of horizons” (in Gadamerian terminology) “an achievement of shared understanding in which the inadequacies and limitations of each participant’s initial understanding become transparent and what is valid and valuable is retained within a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of the situation under discussion” (Carr 2006: 430).

The present chapter, inspired by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek’s and Louise O. Vasvári’s understanding of the comparative cultural studies, interdisciplinarily addresses issues related to methodological nationalism. Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári insist on a methodology which calls for interdisciplinarity “with three main types of methodological precision: intra-disciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity and pluri-disciplinarity” (2011: 17). To be precise, intra-disciplinarity in this chapter means methodological considerations regarding research on migration within theology-missiology at large, multi-disciplinarity means seeking dialogue and conversation with the disciplinary other (including epistemologies!). Intra-disciplinarily this chapter problematizes two theological conceptualizations of migration: migration as *locus theologicus* and migration as context. It argues that revisiting meanings attributed to “locus” and “context” may lead to a more relevant theological praxis related to migration. Multi-disciplinarily it focuses on ethnicity and introduces the models of boundary making (Wimmer 2007) and structuration (Morawska 2009) as means of combating methodological nationalism. Pluri-disciplinarity means addressing the viability of teamwork and it calls for collaboration between scholars who are theologians-missiologists and those who are not.

2 Methodology is More than Method

Awareness for methodological issues in migration studies is growing, but more reflection and conversation is needed in order to be able to adequately discuss methodology and to find new and innovative ways that take the complexity of migration into consideration. Stephen Castles, one of the leading voices on migration in the social sciences, for example, has explicitly returned to the issue of methodology, even after building up a solid scholarship on human mobility. His research project *Social Transformation and International Migration in the 21st Century* proposes to “re-examine the theoretical and methodological

basis of international migration research”.² Claudio Canaparo (2012) addresses the issue of methodology and migration studies as a philosopher, proposing a “radical constructivist epistemology” built on axioms. Recent theological publications show a similar tendency. Daniel Groody aims at exploring “new ways in which we might examine the theological territory of migration and even challenge some of the underlying philosophical, if not ideological, presuppositions behind the debate about migrants and refugees” (2009: 642). In his review essay on how migration has been dealt with by theologians in the last fifty years, Gioacchino Campese (2012) points to scholars such as Pieter de Jong (1965), Giacomo Danesi (1980), Orlando O. Espin (2000; 2006), and the already quoted Daniel Groody, as scholars who touch upon the question of methodology.

Campese expresses the need of developing a “proper methodology, beginning with a thorough scientific analysis of the reality of migration, which entails an ongoing collaboration with the social sciences that study this phenomenon” (Campese 2012: 9). This quote in itself could be taken as a starting point to address methodological issues because it touches the major nerve of the problems connected to methodology: *assumptions*. Campese’s claim, for example, suggests that the social sciences would provide the most beneficial interdisciplinary collaboration for theology in order to scientifically analyze migration. Throughout the disciplines there is much misunderstanding on methodology. One of the major confusions is caused by the interchangeable usage of the terms “methodology” and “method”. For example, Castles uses theories and methodologies in the title of his project; this suggests that methodologies do not necessarily compound theories. Confusion also arises when sections on methodology immediately step into assessing the presuppositions of others instead of first clarifying the presuppositions of the research(ers). Caroline B. Brettell’s and James F. Hollifield’s edited volume *Migration Theory* (2000) illustrates how tempting it is for researchers to simply ignore methodological issues by either only dealing with ‘theories’ or using the term methodology for methods. For example, while Brettell and Hollifield aim at creating “cross-disciplinary conversation about the epistemological, paradigmatic, and explanatory aspects of writing about and theorizing migration in history, law and social sciences” (2000: 2), through the short cut of a schematic matrix they claim that research questions are discipline driven in the first instance and therefore each discipline formulates its own specific questions. The question of methodology is then abandoned and the focus is on theories, methods and

2 Description from Castles’ website. http://sydney.edu.au/arts/sociology_social_policy/staff/profiles/stephen.castles.php. Accessed 25 May 2013.

tools instead. A careful look at the questions they bind to each discipline reveals that all the questions they formulate, could be asked by all the disciplines listed in their matrix. Questions such as “how does law influence migration?” or “how do we understand the migrant experience?” are not unique to a single discipline. While scholars from different disciplines may have the same or similar questions, the issue of methodology will arise as a point of significant difference. The second edition of the book in 2008 with two additional chapters continues to further illustrate struggles with methodology. Adrien Favell’s article, without explicitly using the word methodology, addresses the issue of obstacles to interdisciplinary dialogues (Favell 2008: 259–278). Through the concept of postdisciplinarity he questions the mono-methodological disciplinary vision previously made by the volume’s editors. Postdisciplinarity, for Favell, is an epistemological claim that dismisses the opposition between realism and constructivism. He states “*all* social sciences . . . should be constructivist in their self-understanding” (268–269, emphasis his) but/and meanwhile, when perceiving migration one cannot dismiss “the material fact that migration is something that happens when a real (physical) person moves in real (physical) space.” (269). A postdisciplinary approach, then, means one that

begins to question and dismantle some of the fixed points and conceptualizations provided by our standard definitions of international migration in the international state system. These, clearly, are political constructions of the modern world, exhaustively carved up as it is into distinct nation-state units. This world should, in our migration theory, be subject to political and historical deconstruction. Yet nearly all chapters *assume* that we know what migration is, and that we can accept the units—from which people move to which they move—given by the political world we live in (269; emphasis mine).

To question conceptualizations and deconstruct theories is minding methodology. The word “mind” (recalling both the noun and the verb) is primarily implied here not for the sake of alliterating the title but because it encompasses such complex processes as thinking and feeling, the conscious state of thought, and remembering, and at the same time it underlines the importance of its object.

Within theology-missiology, the question of methodology should be addressed not for the sake of fashion (as Bevans observes to be often the case 2009: 135–136) but because there is a real need to re-discuss and reveal the nature of research. Within theology-missiology, it is important to question the conceptualizations and theories, to look at the level of assumptions

and try to observe and understand what is going on. The question of methodology cannot be simply erased by using denominational labels as defensive covers because denominational labels too need further elaboration and a denomination is not necessarily identifiable with one single epistemological stance. It is not sufficient to say that one uses a Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran or Pentecostal methodology because these terms do not clarify in a satisfactory way the ontological, epistemological and logical components of research. Especially in the case of migration studies, denominationally labelled methodologies might too easily be associated with institutionalized forms of Christianity, with so-called “national churches” which in turn seem to be perceived by governments as NGO’s and become partners or enemies of the (nation) state in addressing the problem of migration.

It is important to keep in mind that methodologies are neither fully denominational nor discipline bounded, and unless made transparent in research they more often misinform than inform. “Methodologies shape the diversity of the entire body of knowledge” (McGregor and Murnane 2010: 420) but in order to create dialogue and conversation within the body of knowledge (Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári 2011: 16) one needs to be able to profoundly get to know the other and therefore a researcher should be ready to methodologically introduce and expose his/her research. Methodology cannot avoid self-positioning through which crucial categories of identification and identification of the other become verbalized, which in turn will influence the academic dialogue on same topics by researchers of different methodologies using the same or similar methods.

3 Methodological Nationalism

The question of identification and identity as a methodological matter is central in migration studies. Categories of identification come forth from the research unit through which researchers study migration phenomena and its actors. The most obvious and easily adaptable research unit is the state, and more precisely the nation state. The nation state paradigm dominates research on migration in all disciplines. There is research on Mexican migration in the USA (Chiquiar and Salcedo 2013), Polish migrants in the UK (Burrell 2009), Romanian migrants in Spain (Bleahu 2004), Moroccans and Turks in the Netherlands (Bevelander and Veenman 2006), Turks in Germany (Sirkeci *et al.* 2012) to name a few.

The nation state unit and its components prescribe identification of people who experience migration phenomena either as “migrants” or “non-migrants.”

In the last two decades, a growing number of social theorists have started to question the validity of the nation-state paradigm and started to talk about methodological nationalism within migration studies (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002; Wimmer 2007; Glick-Schiller 2007). The term itself was coined in the seventies but gained popularity together with the rise of globalization theories (e.g. transnationalism). The term encompasses questions about the interrelatedness of history, nation state and modernity (Chernilo 2011). Two definitions capture the core of methodological nationalism. One from migration studies describes it thus:

Methodological nationalism is an ideological orientation that approaches the study of social processes and historical processes as if they were contained within the borders of individual nation-states. Nation-states are conflated with societies and the members of those states are assumed to share a common history and set of values, norms, social customs and institutions. [...] it reminds us that conventional “objective” social theory harbors a political position and that researchers routinely identify with the concerns and discourses of their own nation-state (Glick-Schiller 2007: 6).

This definition reminds theologian-missiologists of the large number of dissertations based on the methodological nationalism pattern. Another definition underlines that whenever nation-state and (modern) society mean the same thing, methodological nationalism is present because of “the equation between the idea of society and social theory’s key conceptual reference and the historical processes of modern nation-state formation” (Chernilo 2011: 99). This phenomenon seems to penetrate all levels of human inquiry (both academics and the social world itself) and results in “the paradox [...] that no one admits being committed to it, and yet its presence is allegedly found in every corner of the contemporary social scientific landscape” (Chernilo 2011: 100) and even beyond.

The critique of methodological nationalism does not deny the importance and the role of the nation-state in the contemporary world but questions its conceptualizations and the power attributed to it. It is indeed “the irony” as Glick-Schiller calls it that while migration scholars are engaged in the study of globalization phenomena, in the study of the flow, mobility and motion of people and materials worldwide, they continue to use “concepts of society and culture that reflect essentialist and racialized concepts of nation” (Glick-Schiller 2007: 5). In spite of the fact that much of the theological-missiological

scholarship on migration criticizes politics and governments, the power and centrality of nation-state remains uncontested. In this way, churches are seen as major tools for promoting “national integrity and unity”; churches may run programs called repatriation and/or integration. By the same token, even the multicultural theory of society, quite favoured within theology-missiology, turns out to operate with methodological nationalism either because the so-called “non-migrant” party claims the right to decide how long national and ethnic labels can be used for a certain “migrant” group or because “migrants” themselves continue to identify themselves through national and ethnic categories. In the case of Moroccans in the Netherlands, for example, even “the third generation” can still be labelled as Moroccan, which in many cases has a negative connotation, implying that Moroccans are secondary to Dutch. But the self-identification as Moroccan may imply the same, namely, that Dutch and their culture is secondary to Moroccans and their culture.

Methodological nationalism is more complex than the hidden competition of nations and nationalities. It works in two directions, creating larger groups and creating smaller groups of identification. In the case of enlargement or boundary extension, it operates through patterns of relational identification, meaning that group identification is practiced in order to clearly set up boundaries between *we* and *they*. Two cases are fascinating examples in migration studies when it comes to theology and migration. The first one is the so-called Asian-American theologies which implies a whole set of negotiations of identities and identification. For example an Asian-American identifier is adopted after a long row of resetting and extending boundaries: a Hong-Kong person is a Hong Kong person when she encounters a citizen of the Peoples’ Republic of China, but when they together encounter a Vietnamese they adopt the Chinese identifier, again when this group, outside Asia, encounters a non-Asian, the Asian label becomes the group identifier. Asian-American means setting boundaries in two directions implying being Asian in America and being American in Asia and meanwhile also extending boundaries in two directions: being Asian and being American. It is through such relational identity formation that most various migration trajectories come together at the level of the largest identification possibility. It is at this level of identification that Asian-American theologies are articulated. The second example is an imagination of Africa as the highest identification category and this then combined with understandings of migration may result in programs and theories such as “Bringing back the Gospel to Europe” (Währisch-Oblau 2009) and “Transforming Christianity through African migrations” (Hanciles 2008).

When shrinking boundaries of identification, methodological nationalism distinguishes between two boundary markers: citizenship and ethnicity. The arguments above already demonstrated that nation states are about boundary making in terms of belonging. It is through the political management of belonging that the categories of citizens and non-citizens make sense; by the same token people who share the same locality can be divided into migrants and non-migrants. Ethnicity connects to nationalism in the sense that “[n]ationalism is rooted in, and is one expression of, ethnic attachments, albeit perhaps, at a high level of collective abstraction. The ‘nation’ and ‘national identity’ or ‘nationality’ are, respectively, varieties of ethnic collectivity, and ethnicity, and are likely to be historically contingent, context-derived, and defined and redefined in negotiation and transaction” (Jenkins 2008: 148). Within theology-missiology, ethnicity is a much valued category of identification and an element of the classic understanding of mission and of doing contextual theology. Based on classic understandings of ethnicity as a “matter of ‘cultural’ differentiation” (Jenkins 2008: 169), theology-missiology, in its encounters with migration studies, continues to “reify ethnic groups and their boundaries” (Jenkins 2008: 169). Focusing on ethnicity through (artificially) creating homogeneous groups as research units may result in the oversimplification of the ongoing complex negotiations of identity at the level of individuals. It is important to note that, as Jenkins puts it, “[s]ocial groups are not ‘things’” (Jenkins 2008: 169). The flip side of the argument is also noteworthy: researchers should not be misled by collective self-identifications. The purpose of this discussion is not to contest the authenticity of a group e.g. which identifies itself as Asian-Americans but it is legitimate to ask how, based on which patterns, socialization, and categorization such identification happens. Listening to individual voices might help verifying the validity of the ethnic label attached to a group.

Another dimension of methodological nationalism is that its core concepts such as nation-state, ethnicity, citizenship, and nation are strongly connected to land and owned territory. Localities in this way become nationalized and ethnicized. Historiographies of nation states, although dominated by immigration stories, underline the occupation of the land, and legitimize the ownership of the land. Here again homogeneity in terms of nationhood and/or ethnicity dominates the discourse. Following this logic, migration processes then create the categories of “locals” and “non-locals” where the latter mean migrants as if they were not part of the locality where they live. Theories of assimilation, integration, marginalization, acculturation, and multiculturalism are based on the perception of the social world through methodological nationalism implying that “it is made up of different kinds of peoples, each

characterized by a unique culture and, at least initially, a separate social universe" (Wimmer 2007: 10), implying an owned territory, a piece of land.

The arguments presented above clearly demonstrate that the present chapter does not question the legitimacy of identity formation through the national and ethnic lens. It calls attention, rather, to the danger that these identity markers create social fields of power which compete with each other and are often used through politics (in its broadest sense) to create and maintain inequality in the sense of "We are better than the others", "We are the owners of this land not they." After all, dealing with migration means dealing with the perception and assessment of the Other. In what follows, the article focuses on two conceptualizations of migration within theology-missiology, and explores to what extent these contain traces of methodological nationalism.

4 Intra-disciplinarity: Locating Migration

There are two significant, and, again, interrelated statements on positioning migration within theological studies which influence theory formation: one looks at migration as a *locus theologicus*, the other perceives migration as context and makes it into an entry for constructing so-called contextual theologies. Both views focus on the human experience related to migration and nurture a whole spectrum of dichotomies such as local–non-local, native–non-native, stranger–non-stranger. At first glimpse, both discourses lack methodological nationalism yet on examining them it seems that these too allow space for methodological nationalism. The article proceeds by problematizing these discourses for the sake of combating methodological nationalism.

Making human experience central to theological reflection is intrinsic to church history and regained emphasis particularly in discourses of mainly Roman Catholic scholars on theological method and methodology especially around and after Vatican II which caused a methodological shift and created new settings for theology in which lay people could also participate (Imbelli and Groome 1992). Acknowledging the diverse and contradictory character of human experience, however, implies a methodological presupposition that attribution of meaning cannot be reduced to any single interpretation generated by direct human experience. This connects back to the horizon widening task of theology and the methodological assumptions of the present paper that through listening, questions never raised before might become important for theological reflection. In this sense positioning migration both as *locus theologicus* and context for theologizing call for further discussions on methodology.

5 Migration as *Locus Theologicus*?

Understanding migration as *locus theologicus* comes from viewing migration as “a sign of the times” and works with the assumption that a proper reading of this “sign” will lead to a deeper understanding and knowledge of God, God’s nature, and God’s relationship to the world. Writings which call for seeing migration as a *locus theologicus* on the one hand leave the question open as to whether this call has anything to do with the *loci* method through which the term itself entered into the theological vocabulary and praxis (Breen 1947). On the other hand, migration seen as a *locus theologicus* is being used as a metaphor and developed into sets of metaphors that transform the theological-missiological reflection on the social phenomena of migration into theological inquiries about God’s nature and into theological anthropology. “The theology of migration has also just begun to interpret the mystery of God from the experience of human mobility” (Campese 2012: 21) and again: “The theology of migration, once again in cooperation with biblical theology has rediscovered the migrant as a metaphor of the true Christian believer” (2012: 22), and theologians “have examined the images of the church already existing in our Christian tradition that reflect the experience of migration and could illuminate it.” The “pilgrim church” (2012: 23–24) figures at a prominent place among the images. The logic of this epistemological circle is that because of the dominant experience of migration in the contemporary world, God, humans, and their relations can be spelled out in migration terminology, and since migration is such a profound experience of contemporary people, the metaphoric language derived from migration will provide a better understanding of who God is, who people (Christians) are and from this understanding the ethics of addressing concrete migration issues will also emerge.

The major problem with this logic is that once migration is made into a *locus theologicus* in this way, there is no end to control the metaphoric usage of the migration language. The corpus of those theological-missiological studies in which migration becomes everything will only increase. Furthermore migration metaphors may problematize the taken for granted ordering of the world in nation states but through their abstraction they tend to propose models of spiritual resignation rather than discernment for theological action. The metaphoric usage however might then result in a methodological canonization of (Favell 2008: 261) and “monopolistic” (Canaparo 2012: 188) approaches to migration studies within theology-missiology where especially God as revealed in Jesus Christ is seen as the ultimate migrant, people are migrants on the earth, the church is a pilgrim church, the Scripture is all about migration, church history is all about migration, boundary crossings, being on the way, and even

the classical *loci theologici* (such as creation, incarnation, and redemption) are explained through migration language. Migration metaphors and associated terms become ontological categories: the nature of the BEING—metaphorically speaking is seen in terms of migration (being, becoming, and being on the way). The theological epistemological claim that God, God's relation to the created world, humanity, and the church are anything but static is a legitimate claim in itself. The question should be asked, however, whether the whole migration vocabulary built around it in order to explain really functions as explanatory or on the contrary it causes confusion, catachreses, and even misunderstandings especially when the migration-vocabulary developed at the socio-political level is taking over.

The issue of migration being a *locus theologicus* becomes even more confusing when the *locus theologicus* itself is taken for a metaphor.

The metaphor of place is both rich and suggestive, pointing as it does to geographical and social location and their fundamental importance for both the interpretation and production of theological discourse. However the metaphor has one fundamental limitation that becomes evident when we look at it from the perspective of migrants: its static character. Certainly we need to drink from our own wells, as Gustavo Gutierrez has so vividly written. But what happens when those wells are left behind, in a geographical sense, in a place of origin far away? From what wells should migrants drink? Do we carry bottled water with us—or will the water become stale? Do we drink virtual water using communication technologies—as when we read newspapers from home over the internet? Do we get inebriated on water from our wells when we are able to visit our places of origin? Can we dig new wells, and are they somehow less hydrating by virtue of the water quality abroad? What happens to us when, as a result of globalization and migration our *locus theologicus* becomes blurred in movement, unstable, not easily recognizable as a “place” socially or physically? Where or how can we situate ourselves to speak meaningfully of God? (Bedford 2005: 103–4)

Without questioning the legitimacy of using metaphorical language in theology, without questioning the genre of narrative and storytelling, or understandings of theological method as being “something of an after-thought” (Song 1999: 2), the quote above illustrates that intra-disciplinary misunderstandings might appear when questions of methodologies remain unaddressed.

Another reading of “migration as *locus theologicus*” would immediately connect it to the loci-method, where *loci theologici* (at least in a Melanchtonian

understanding) seen as a method implies that theology means interpretation of the Scripture not through separated topics but in the awareness that the identified topics together form a theological system of relating to the world in which one lives. Therefore, if migration is identified as an additional *locus theologicus*, it needs to be brought in relationship with other *loci* of the theological assessment through the scriptural reading of a more complex “reality.” The *loci*-method by definition is about building up conceptual relations, and creating organic conceptual entities (systems). “The *loci* method tends to compartmentalize (e.g. in the present case only focus on migration metaphors) by design but the method is misunderstood when this compartmentalization blinds its users to the way in which the topics relate to one another” (Kolb 1997: 319).

The major methodological problem of the emerging theological-missiological migration terminology, however, is the unquestioned and favoured usage of the category of “migrant.” There is a hidden assumption in theological-missiological studies on migration which claims that it is normal to capture identities (human and divine) in the “migrant” label but the same assumptions also suggest that it is normal to divide the populated world into migrants and non-migrants. This assumption indeed translates into socio-political engagement of Christians (both as individuals and in various collective forms) that perceive human identity in the essentialized identity markers of “migrant” and “non-migrant.” By making migration into a *locus theologicus*, Gemma Tulud Cruz formulates the following questions to be put on the theological agenda:

But where is God in all this? How does one do theology amidst this more pronounced, if not new, reality? Where does theology figure in the face of the challenge of borders and strangers? How does one articulate Christ’s command to “love your neighbor as yourself,” when the neighbor is a migrant, hence a stranger? How can theology contribute to according dignity to migrant humanity? These are key questions that theology has to grapple with given the problematic conditions inherent in migration (Cruz 2008: 371).

Without questioning the legitimacy of the logic behind these questions, from a methodological point of view, the counter-question which arises is this: is it legitimate to address the contemporary socio-political complexities of migration phenomena by nurturing a theologically recharged terminology which rests on essentializing human identities by using the labels of migrants and non-migrants? It seems that “migration theologies” are closely related to “liberation

theologies” at least in that they use one conceptual entry to address complex socio-political issues. Campese (2012) strikingly mirrors this relationship through the title of his review article on migration and theology: “The irruption of migrants” as analogical to the “irruption of the poor.” Theologizing from this perspective regards migrants as being in need of liberation. Migrants are marginalized, non-citizens, strangers, victims, refugees, dispersed, asylum seekers, illegal, the underside of societies. Susanna Snyder observes that “postcolonial hermeneutics has provided the primary springboard for reading scripture through a forced migration lens. Its appropriatedness stems from two characteristics: the majority of postcolonial scholars define themselves as migrants or exiles [...] and its underlying aim, shared with liberation theology, is to bring about the emancipation of the oppressed” (Snyder 2012: 29). According to this logic, “migration theologies,” then, are indeed the exported forms of liberation theologies. Could it be that questioning and at least partially dismissing the legitimacy of the “migrant”–“non-migrant” dichotomy would become the first liberating act of theologizing on migration for the sake of those directly involved in the complex socio-political phenomena of migration? If migration language dominates discourses on the nature of God, then are longings and aspirations of the so-called migrants to become non-migrants illegitimate? After all, human experiences of migration also contain rhetoric about longing for settlement, new life, creating a new home, becoming citizens, being considered local. Before addressing these questions, the assessment of migration as an experience and “as a rich source of learning about the human condition” and thus becoming “a new context, a new place for doing theology” (Cruz 2008: 368) needs to be briefly addressed. The two can be connected by a statement formulated by Stephen Bevans: “Formally theology was understood as the reflection in faith of two theological ‘sources’ or *loci theologici*: Scripture and Tradition. However, today, [...] theology also considers *present human experience* as a theological source or *locus theologicus*” (Bevans 2009: 165). This present human experience then among others is also called context. It is obvious that this argument is deeply rooted in a Roman Catholic theological tradition and it stirs up the question about the meaning of context.

6 Migration as Context?

Theological-missiological research on migration, mainly associated with the Roman Catholic tradition, seems to develop a theory which could be called theology in the context (experience) of migration, according to which migration can be seen as the context of and experience for theological reflection

(Phan 2003; Bevans 2009; Cruz 2010; Padilla and Phan 2013). In the following, the article focuses on one example, taken from Stephen Bevans, in order to address the issue of potentially allowing space for methodological nationalism in the process of theory formation. Bevans is one of those theologians who expose their methodology and by doing so he initiates dialogue on methodological issues.

Stephen B. Bevans in his *Models of Contextual Theology* (this chapter works with the revised and expanded edition of 2003), following Bernard Lonergan's post-1957 ideas and Karl Rahner's arguments makes the epistemological statement that "[r]eality is not just 'out there'; reality is 'mediated by meaning,' a meaning that we give it in the context of our culture or our historical period, interpreted from our own particular horizon and in our own particular thought forms" (Bevans 2003: 4).

Meaning making seems to happen through a perception of the world (as the object of investigation in this case) dominated by national and ethnic categories and ordered in nation states. Culture, then, too, as one of the major definers of the context, is mainly understood in terms of ethnicity and within the parameters of nation-states. Context here means the present socio-political, geographical and cultural environment, which together with the Scripture and the tradition (both with their socio-political, geographical and cultural environments) present the relevant sources for theological reflection and make theology contextual. It is remarkable to see how national and ethnic labels, dividing the human agents into so called participants and non participants, influence the reflection on contextual theology. Bevans raises the question whether a nonparticipant in a context can do contextual theology (2003: 18) and translates this question as "Can a non-Ghanaian do Ghanaian theology? Can a white U.S. American do black theology? Can a North American contribute to Latin American theological reflection on God's liberating action in history? Can a male do feminist theology?" (2003: 19). Bevans answers this question with a "firm no" because "non-Africans do not know how Africans feel or perceive reality" (2003: 19) but he leaves a small space for people who do not "fully share the experience of the other . . . to contribute to the development of a contextual theology" (2003: 19); nevertheless, according to this logic there will always be participants and nonparticipants and the latter category, mainly based on cultural differentiation made through ethnicity, will never fully become part of the context. It is again remarkable to read Bevans' self-reflection. While putting himself in the category of a *bona fide* nonparticipant, who tried to adapt Filipino and Italian culture, he comes to the conclusion that "I think that my greatest lesson in my contact with other cultures has been

learning what it means to be a U.S. American. In other words, I have found that one very important way to learn who you are is to learn, in encounter with another, who you are not" (2003: 20). Nonparticipants therefore should accept the reality of the "host culture" and together with it the reality that "she or he can never be a real part of it or direct contributor to it" and further "[a] genuine contextual theology, in other words, can indeed grow out of genuine dialogue between the participants in a particular culture and the stranger, the guest, the other" (2003: 21). Reversing the logic of this reflection would mean that the greatest benefit of a "Filipino" or an "Italian" residing in the USA would be that he/she learns what it means to be a "Filipino" or an "Italian".

The example taken from Bevans generates some questions: why do ethnic and national labels remain such core components of theological demarcations of the context? Why does the experience of migration need to be translated into terms of ethnicized and nationalized culture? What do the categories Filipino, US American, and Italian mean within a theological discourse? The question about the meaning of the context remains and it seems that somehow the danger of methodological nationalism is related to it. The growing body of literature in migration studies which has been done as contextual theologies seems to acknowledge the legitimacy of the essentializing ethnic, national and continental lens when proposing titles such as *Developing a Contextual Theology of Postcolonial Filipino American Diasporic Identity*, *Asian Theology of Migration*, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration and the Transformation of the West*, *Korean Diaspora and Christian Mission*, and *Asian-American Theologies*.

Displaying the context of contextual theology however is more complex than its ethnic, national and nation-state related problems. It is remarkable to see that Bevans in his *Theology in Global Perspective*, strongly influenced by David Tracy, exactly after the chapter on his assessment on contextual theology, elaborates on the "Catholic method" of doing theology and states that "the 'analogical imagination' is the most profound assumption of the Catholic epistemology" (2009: 190). The *analogia entis* "is the philosophical concept that is, I believe, the lynch-pin of the Catholic worldview. This is because it asserts the fact that *our* experience, *our* history, and the visible things of *this* creation [...] are nevertheless *clues* to what God and God's action in this world are like. It is the perception of *similarities* in the *difference* between ourselves and God" (Bevans 2009: 190; emphasis his). Similarly to the self-reflection made on the issues of participant and non participant, the logic of the exercise brings one back to a better understanding of the self and from his/her situation to a better understanding of God, but the question of (better) understanding

of the Other remains unaddressed as well as the issue of others of the same context. Socio-political actions built on arguments that migrants enrich “us”, the host society, it is to “our” benefit to have “them” among “us” seem to mirror an egocentric understanding of the context. Again, when transposing this logic to migration studies it would mean that the categories of migrants and non-migrants are taken for granted; the categories are given and imply contexts, and then theologizing on migration is being done by migrants and by non-migrants both individually and collectively, and the danger there is a hidden assumption that these two categories, just because of the assumption that they cannot fully share the same context in terms of experiences, can never fully understand each other (Nagy 2009). The maximum that one then can expect according to this logic are multicultural encounters or even communities where again the unity in diversity principle is mainly being spelled out (even celebrated) through essentialist national, ethnic or continental identifiers.

In Bevans’ rich theological work however the issue of context reappears and especially in his latest publications, he equates it with experience. While arguing for the centrality of experience in doing theology he states that “it is the honoring or testing or critiquing of experience that makes theology *contextual*. What this means is that, for contextual theologians, *anything* can be a source of theology” (Bevans 2011: 9–10; emphasis his). Any sort of experience, anything can become the context for theologizing.³ Context here “points beyond culture or place to include social location (e.g. doing theology out of the experience of women), and social change (e.g. doing theology in the context of migration)” (Bevans 2009: 167). Applying Bevans’ understanding of context to migration studies is challenging. His arguments for the preference of “context” because context widens the focus from culture and place to social location or social change is partially convincing because culture, place, social location and change are interrelated and should not be seen as separate units of analysis. Deterritorialization discourses therefore should be handled with utmost care because theological reflection done in migration studies cannot avoid a minimum understanding of the space (in whatever terms) in which migration-related questions are studied. Similarly, theology cannot avoid addressing the issue of culture but the question is: with what concept of culture is it working?

3 At this stage Bevans argumentation recalls the “contextualism” spelled out by Paul L. Lehmann in his *Ethics in a Christian Context* (1963; Lehman 2006). For Lehmann, the context of contextual theology is the Christian community where Christians and God interact with each other in a concrete situation defined by processes, events, and happenings within concrete time and space. The concreteness and uniqueness of the situations make also the (ethical) questions and the way Christian communities deal with them concrete and unique.

Migration studies stimulate theological reflection to move away from a narrow understanding of culture based on nationality or ethnicity.

While keeping the discussion on methodological nationalism alive, the process of broadening the concept of context generates a shift in focus. When context is equal to experience and migration is seen as an experience, migration as such becomes the context of theology and it is not theology any longer seeking its way in the context of migration. Migration is an abstract noun and conceptualizing it as context might suggest that context in contextual theologies (on migration as well) remains at its informal level meaning “social, political, geographical or economic ‘environment’, ‘situation’, ‘conditions’ or ‘background’ and hardly ever in the specific sense of ‘context of text or talk’” (van Dijk 2008: vxiii). If this is the case, the danger of methodological nationalism reappears.

The challenge of theologically engaging in migration studies in terms of contextual theology and avoiding methodological nationalism still seems to lie in (re)conceptualizing the very notion of “context.” The “context” of contextual theology has been hardly ever conceptualized and therefore it would be misleading to assume that it offers a clear meaning. The question here is whether theology-missiology could revisit the concept of context so that it might have a greater relevance for migration studies and contribute to theory building. It is beyond the scope of the present article to offer a relevant conceptualization of context for migration studies, but it seeks to point to directions which might bring about innovative research.

7 Contexts for Communicating Migration

In their attempt to revisit or even re-conceptualize the notion of “context” theologian-missiologists should be reminded of one of the core tasks of their discipline: communication. In its task to communicate through discourses, translation, mediation, interpretation or hermeneutics, language and therefore linguistics as an auxiliary discipline has always played an important role for the theological praxis. In fact context as a *terminus technicus* entered into the multidisciplinary usage through linguistics. For instance, in developing a theory of context, the linguist Teun A. van Dijk departs from the thesis that it is not the social situation (informally called context, the context of the most contextual theologies) itself that shapes the structures of the discourses (written or oral text) but those components of the communicative situation which the participants of the discourse identify as “systematically relevant” and meaningful (2008: x). These dynamic processes of meaning giving generate

the so-called context models, which according to van Dijk are the “missing link between discourse and society, between the personal and the social, and between the agency and structure” (2008: xi). According to this argumentation, contexts are “not some kind of objective condition or direct cause, but rather (inter)subjective constructs designed and ongoingly updated in interaction by participants as member of groups and communities” (2008: x).

Van Dijk’s conceptualization of context, only superficially sketched here, could refresh theological research on migration in several ways. Firstly, it would call attention to the importance of the ongoing talks, discourses and non-verbal communication related to migration phenomena where the accent is on the ongoing nature of the situations and discourses created by the inter-relatedness of human beings. Questions such as what exactly is being communicated about migration become central to research and how, under which terms does communication happen? To what extent are ethnic or national labels relevant in a given context? The variety of contexts within the same geographical or socio-political area should be sufficient evidence against methodological nationalism.

Secondly, such a conceptualization of context would help understand that Christian communities or other types of communities could be seen as contexts in which discourses on migration happen and they may not need ethnic or national identifiers. Thirdly, focusing on contexts which communicate (on) migration, dismisses arguments which *a priori* label migration as good or bad and instead reveal the complex nature of migration phenomena. The leading questions then will not be: Is labour migration good or bad? Should refugee camps be built or not? Instead of these research will try to map the complexity of migration related issues. Questions such as to what extent is it legitimate to talk about immigrant communities or migrant churches especially versus local churches, what are the implications of migration to communities without parents and how migration phenomena restructure and shape the Church will become important. Questions about self-identification and identification by others will be also asked as well as why certain Christian communities identify themselves through ethnic, national or continental lenses? Such questions need to be asked in the epistemological attitude of “longing to understand the Other” through dialogue and conversation.

Fourthly, conceptualizations of context in terms of dynamic processes of meaning giving dismisses the one locality-one culture paradigm. It is the awareness that within a geographical locality a large number of contexts (communities) are possible, and the cultures and discourses within these contexts are manifold and changing and not necessarily dominated by patterns of ethnic

identification. Fifthly, acknowledging the ongoing, ever changing nature of the context pays attention to the element of time in researching migration. In some contexts discourses on migration might rapidly change where in others the same discourses might remain for a longer period of time.

Context remains a central notion through which theologian-missiologists continue to engage with migration studies. The above formulated thoughts are but initial impulses to keep methodological discussions on the notion of context alive, and to underline the necessity of digging deeper in the complexities created by interrelatedness.

At the level of intra-disciplinarity, thus, dialogue and conversation implies listening to the Other who may be operating from other traditions of inquiry. Theological reflections on migration formulated by biblical scholars, students of practical or systematic theology, church historians, and the countless intra-disciplinary mixtures of these never hermetically closed fields, experts with different training, together will enrich the dialogue and the conversation within the various contexts. Methodologically intra-disciplinarity is a precondition of multi-disciplinarity.

8 Multi-disciplinarity: Anticipating Conversation

Theology-missiology done in a contextual way claims that it is an interdisciplinary field of study by definition. Such an aspiration should first of all address the question of “do we really (intend to) understand the Other”, speaking from another discipline? Or do we simply, without questioning, rely on the results of research done in other disciplines? The fact that numerous theological-missiological research starts with “using” the statistical data gained through quantitative methods by sociologists as taken for granted realities illustrates how research done through hidden methodologies is taken as a starting point for theological-missiological reflection. Here again the simple question arises what kind of epistemology legitimates the division of the world population into migrants and non-migrants, not to speak about the expended terminology on labelling people within the collective terms “migrants” or “immigrants”? What is that theological-missiological epistemology which “simply” goes with the rhetoric of integration theory or theories on multiculturalism? Asking these critical questions and trying to get some satisfactory answers to them would first of all show the desire to understand the disciplinary Other and the care taken in entering into dialogue with other disciplines but would

also stimulate theologian-missiologists to disclose their methodology. In the following sections, the article enters into multi-disciplinary conversation through the concept of ethnicity as connected to theory building.

9 No to Methodological Nationalism: Going Beyond the Ethnic Lens

The concept of “ethnicity”, as previously argued, belongs to the core vocabulary of theological practice throughout the ages. The theological genealogy of the term is too complex and too loaded just to be dismissed for the sake of preventing methodological nationalism. The ethnic lens and ethnicity should figure in theologizing on migration also because people continue to use the ethnic label as primary identifier. Yet, new methodological departures defining new frameworks and units for analysis are needed.

Andreas Wimmer (2013), through his ethnic group formation or boundary-making paradigm offers one such new framework for addressing ethnicity. Wimmer develops his paradigm through critical reading of Johan Gottfried Herder’s philosophical-theological theory of the history of humanity (Herder 1968)⁴ which, in Wimmer’s reading, gives a clear and strict division of the world (through the metaphors of garden and cultivation) where distinct nations belonged to demarcated territories. In this reading, Herder’s perception of ethnicities and nations unproblematically coincide and if they resist migration (uprooting) they mirror the *Genius eines Volkes* (Herder 1968: 234), a unique (ethnic) culture nourished by a shared language, close ties between the members, they share the same memory of the past and the same vision for the future (to make *das Volk* flourish). According to this logic, nationhood defined in ethnic terms constitutes culture. From the field of theology Herder’s worldview as one fuelling nationalism has been challenged, among others, by Karl Barth, who refuses to “explain everything in terms of nationality and the history and distinctive of one’s people” (Barth, CD III /4, 1960: 306).⁵ Noting that the connection between Herder and nationalism grew into a fuelled debate in which various positions exist, readings of the world in terms of

4 Originally written between 1784–91.

5 It is remarkable to note that starting with his Göttingen lectures (1921–1925), Barth continued to develop his theologizing on nationhood and nationalism by first combating the so-called *völkische Bewegung und Theologie*. More on Barth’s approach to nationhood and nationalism see Carys Moseley (2013). *Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

distinguished territories and homogenous cultures defined through ethnicities still exist.

Andreas Wimmer's (2007, 2009, 2013) boundary making paradigm calls caution for applying the so-called Herderian epistemologies to migration studies. The proposed paradigm does not question the legitimacy of ethnicity either in terms of ethnic groups (self identification) or ethnic categories (social categorization) (Jenkins 2008), but seeks to make sense of the complexity around the concept of ethnicity. Wimmer formulates four axioms of the paradigm: ethnic groups are not "objectively" given components of the social world but they are results of boundary making social processes of "reversible" nature; agents of a given group use diacritical markers such as language (also dialects), dress, music, family structures, architecture, customs, or facial features, skin colour and more to create ethnic boundaries. Markers create ethno-linguistic, ethno-religious, ethno-regional, ethno-cultural, ethno-somatic, and ethno-national categories. The agents from both sides of the boundary are actively involved in boundary construction (we and they, we and the others) hence the boundary making paradigm's primary focus is the process of group making, the formation and transformation of the so-called ethnic groups. These axioms provide theology-missiology with the tools to scrutinize its own views of ethnic groups. The third axiom once again touches upon the issue of creating minority and majority groups and, one step further, makes the claim that the world is "legitimately" dividable into migrants/immigrants and nationals. "The boundary-making approach denaturalizes the distinction between immigrant minorities and national majorities on which immigration research is based" (Wimmer 2007: 19). Denaturalization questions the applied terminology around migration phenomena and also reveals that identity markers such as citizen, non-citizen, immigrant and national only make sense and became a problem when the state monopolizes "legitimate means of movement" (Torpey 2000: 6). This goes hand in hand with the state's monopolization of the "legitimate use of violence" (ibid.: 4). Migration phenomena mainly channelled through state politics, then, result in an extended terminology and identification categories of "desired and undesired migrants." Here again, theology-missiology needs to reflect in which ways it aims to address migration as a political question and in what ways it chooses to do so.

Wimmer's efforts in resituating ethnicity for the sake of migration studies result in concrete proposals for research designs. He, like Glick-Schiller and others, proposes to "de-ethnicize" research designs in order "to see both the emergence of ethnic groups and their absence" (Wimmer 2007: 28). Territorial units (regions, localities such as cities, towns, neighbourhoods), individuals with different backgrounds as units of analysis or a distinguished social

class, institutional environments, social dramas (events) as units of analysis, (Wimmer 2007) seem to offer innovation for migration research without contesting the importance of ethnicity in migration processes.

Another stimulus for theological-missiological reflection on migration and ethnicity is the change of the focus from investigating how an ethnic group conserves itself to looking at how ethnic groups are being shaped, constructed, and transformed. This aspect closely relates to Ewa Morawska's concept of "emergence" where the relationship between structures and agents is perceived as "a process of continuous becoming" (Morawska 2011: 7). She speaks of structuration as a process in which

(while the) upper structural layers (economic and political systems, cultural formations, technological civilizations) set the "dynamic limits" of the possible and impossible within which people act, it is at the level of the immediate social surroundings that individuals and groups evaluate their situations, define purposes, and undertake actions. The intended and, often, unintended consequences of these individual and collective activities in turn affect—sustain or transform—these local-level and, over time larger scope structures (Morawska 2009: 3).

Focusing on group processes and taking into account their ongoing transformation means that research focuses on entities "with emergent properties" and looks at "how various parts are brought together in a unique way, to produce properties and outcomes that cannot be explained fully by reference to the separate parts" (O'Reilly 2012: 5–6). Such an entity "emerges out of people's meanings and actions," but once it emerges it begins to live its independent life and becomes authoritarian but always related to the actors (migrants and non-migrants) which constructed it (Stones and Moog 2009). The recognition that migration processes create social structures also connects to Wimmer's proposal for finding and defining new research units and stimulates research on identifying the components of the structures, their interrelatedness, and the role of the human components within it. The interpretation of community as context could be easily studied through the structuration model either as structures of their own or as being components of larger structures.

Both the boundary making paradigm and the structuration model offer multi-disciplinary occasions to innovatively engage in migration research without losing the importance of ethnicity and the reality of nation states as categories of identification and refreshing contextual modes of theologizing on migration. The opportunities of multi-disciplinarity are manifold and if

theology-missiology would like to grow into a more interdisciplinary discipline it would be worth looking for more ways of multidisciplinary research because in this way sustained beliefs, conceptualizations, entities and their relatedness meet and engage with each other, and create “theorized contextual frames” (Stones 2012: 5).

10 Pluri-disciplinarity: Researching Together Across Disciplines

The third aspect of interdisciplinarity according to Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári is pluri-disciplinarity and it means “analysis and research by teamwork with participants from other discipline[s]” (2009: 17). While multi-disciplinarity focuses on the individual researcher’s pioneering and adventuring in other disciplinary fields, pluri-disciplinarity proposes interaction among researchers from different disciplines. Such an approach to research implies a new understanding of theologizing. Pluri-disciplinarity means that next to individually cultivated research, theological-missiological research should be done in team work. This might imply that theology-missiology takes the initiative and invites disciplinary others to create platforms of working together. Practically speaking, forms of working together may vary from conferences, workshops, and edited volumes to initiating a pluri-disciplinary journal for migration studies. The leading methodological imperative of pluri-disciplinarity is the strong conviction that together more can be achieved and done, it assumes inclusion and by it also transformation at the societal level.

Pluri-disciplinarity proposed by theology-missiology in migration studies also calls attention to the need of creating teams where research is not only done but also written in multiple languages. While acknowledging the need of an academic *lingua franca* (in most cases English), it also formulates the need of creating space and facilities for doing research in other languages, respectively cross translating the findings and practicing knowledge valorisation, and thus being beneficial for the larger society.

Pluri-disciplinarity also calls for comparative studies at least in two dimensions: at the level of the variety of disciplines and at the level of the variety of research topics connected with migration. Scholars looking at the same topic from a different disciplinary training and together widening the topics within migration research would create new forms of inter-disciplinary praxis; a praxis with a comparative imperative inherent to it. The present state of research shows that theologian-missiologists have been focusing on collaboration with social scientists, mainly with anthropologists and sociologists but

collaboration should be extended with scholars from other disciplines as well such as political studies, law, economy, literature, psychology, media studies, history, arts and medicine.

At the present, also due to the so-called “uneven agenda”⁶ (Davie 2012: 281) there are only a few themes (e.g. migration from Mexico to the USA, diaspora studies, Islam and migration, Christianity and migration, refugees and asylum seeking) which dominate migration studies but pluri-disciplinarity calls for more, for giving attention to hidden components within the complexity of migration worldwide (e.g. childcare as a form of migration, communities affected by emigration). Still further, pluri-disciplinarity would also bring together scholars of international migration and the so-called domestic migration. Such collaboration would also combat methodological nationalism because different conceptualizations of the nation state and its components may mutually challenge each other.

Finally, pluri-disciplinarity, by asking for epistemological and ontological clarifications is a difficult way of doing research but it implies the creation of innovative research units, designs, and cross-fertilizations regarding research methods. Pluri-disciplinary teams do not mean epistemologically and ontologically homogeneous teams, on the contrary, one of the values of them is that they invite the methodological Other to collaborate; teams which without dialogue and conversation will not work.

11 Conclusion

The present article began with the claim that there is a need to address the question of methodology in migration studies in general and in theology-missiology’s migration research in particular. It started with the observation that methodological nationalism characterizes much of the research on migration. In minding methodology this chapter has called for interdisciplinarity as an epistemological attitude assuming that interdisciplinarity properly understood and practiced nurtures awareness about methodology and helps in formulating/verbalizing research methodology. The chapter has used the concept of interdisciplinarity both by calling for awareness about the growing body of literature on migration within theology-missiology and other disciplines and by arguing for initiating relationships with scholars

6 Grace Davie calls attention to the “uneven agenda” in research which means the concentration of money and focus are concentrated on very limited areas which serve the interests of the instances which generate money for research.

both theologians-missiologists and scholars from other disciplines in order to enrich and further understand the complexities related to migration. By applying the principle of interdisciplinarity, the article has addressed the issue of methodology in order to detect and help prevent methodological nationalism.

The chapter seeks to generate further dialogue and conversation on how theology-missiology researches migration, and how research methodology prescribes and translates into socio-political actions, and together construct ethics on migration. By addressing some of the key concepts, such as context, *locus theologicus* and ethnicity which are applied in theologizing on migration, and in this case, also connectable with methodological nationalism, the chapter seeks to create space for overlooked insights and to connect previously unconnected arguments.

Methodology, with epistemology, ontology, theory, and method as its components, remains a key question to be addressed continuously when theology-missiology researches migration. Consequent displays of methodologies may then create resources for responsible actions at all levels at which theology-missiology informs churches and Christian communities concerned about migration. Minding methodology in migration studies would also translate into interdisciplinarity, together finding ways/paths for research that transcends methodological-nationalism. The present chapter upholds its initial aim of generating more discussion and theological-missiological reflection on migration underlying the claim that through dialogue and conversation we (scholars) can better understand each other and it demonstrates that there is much work to be done in migration studies by theologians-missiologists.

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The Role of the Protestant Church in the US Refugee Resettlement Program during the Early Cold War Era

The Methodist Case

Hiromi Chiba

1 Introduction

In Europe, at the end of World War II, there were approximately eleven million refugees, known collectively as displaced persons (DPS), living outside their nations' boundaries. About one million of these were resettled overseas during the next several years. Specifically, under the Displaced Persons Acts of 1948 and 1950, the United States accepted over 400,000, more than 70 percent of who were refugees from the USSR and Eastern Europe. The Refugee Relief Act of 1953 and amendments to it also authorized the admission to the US of another 200,000 refugees from war-torn Europe and escapees from Communist-dominated countries (Daniels 2004: 98, 109–112, 125–127; US Displaced Persons Commission (DPC) 1952: 243; Dinnerstein and Reimers 2009: 118–119; Holman 1996: 5). Thus, by the early 1950s, the groundwork had been laid for the granting of asylum to millions of additional refugees from various parts of the world in the years to follow.

The early postwar years were also a time when the active involvement of religious agencies, especially Christian churches, in the resettlement program originated and evolved in America. Indeed, refugee relief and resettlement, as part of foreign aid, was an instrument of America's Cold War strategy, since escapees from the 'oppressed' Eastern bloc to the 'free' world were perceived by the West as political and ideological 'assets' which had propaganda value both at home and overseas (Nichols 1988: 79–87; DPC 1952: 238–240). Recognizing this role, recent scholarship has highlighted the integration of religious agencies into Cold War diplomacy, where the superiority of the American Way of Life was promoted (Schäfer 2006: 175–193). At the same time, the humanitarian and missionary impulses of American churches, which were at work independent of the diplomatic cause, provided the driving force for their relief activities. While the state's role was imperative in creating a legislative framework, church groups played a leading part in arranging and implementing resettlement, frequently lobbying and negotiating with government. This

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crucial role of churches in refugee resettlement deserves closer academic attention.

This contribution will first explore how the US refugee resettlement program developed, focusing on non-governmental initiatives, and how the Protestant church became involved (Robert 1997: 382).¹ I will secondly examine the visions and missiology behind the churches' participation in the program, through a focus on the case of the Methodist Church, one of the leading denominations affiliated with the Church World Service (CWS), the Protestant interdenominational body responsible for refugee resettlement. In so doing I will attempt to assess the churches' relationship to issues of ethnic tolerance and cultural diversity, and its contribution to this internationalist endeavor. As Dana L. Robert pointed out, Christian missions have frequently been analyzed in relation to American nationalism and imperialism (Robert 1997: 382).² Such critical analyses, while they have strengths, should not hinder us from studying American missions in their own right and from seeking balanced evaluation of the roles they have played in internationalism. This is an area of research that awaits further historical scholarship.

2 The Early Development of the US Refugee Resettlement Program and the Involvement of Churches in It

2.1 *The Displaced Persons Acts of 1948 and 1950*

The great majority of DPs in Europe were repatriated to their own countries soon after the war. Many, however, were unable or unwilling to return to their homelands due to such reasons as the reshuffling of national boundaries, opposition to Communism, or fear of standing trial for collaboration with the Nazis, while other refugees continued to arrive from the east (Daniels 2004: 98; Dinnerstein and Reimers 2009: 118; Genizi 1993: 20). DPs were forced to endure deplorable living conditions in hundreds of DP camps

1 This contribution, while focusing on the Methodist case, employs the term 'the Protestant church', since it discusses the general attitudes and policies of the Protestant church in the US at large, as expressed in the statements and the actions of the Church World Service as well as the National Council of the Churches of Christ in America, which coordinated the Protestant refugee relief efforts there.

2 Robert (1997: 383) went on to note, 'Unexamined but equally important is the contribution made by missions to internationalism.'

managed by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, which was replaced by the International Refugee Organization in 1948.

While the American public at the end of the war remained largely reluctant to admit more immigrants,³ President Truman took a first step to alleviate the crisis by issuing a directive on 22 December 1945 that gave preference to refugees within US immigration quotas. This directive began the practice of having voluntary agencies (VOLAGS) assume responsibility for resettling refugees, and about 40,000 people benefited from the directive (Daniels 2004: 103; Dinnerstein 1982: 113–114; Gordon 1996: 335; DPC 1952: 7).⁴ On 16 August 1946, Truman also declared his intention to seek the approval of Congress for special legislation authorizing entry into the US of a fixed number of DPs (Genizi 1993: 68). In the following weeks, support for the President's proposal was publicly expressed by the influential Catholic weekly, *Commonweal*, and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, the nation's largest body of Protestant churches. In addition, *Life* magazine, in its 23 September 1946 issue, 'became the first national journal of general interest to urge a new policy' to admit DPs (Dinnerstein 1982: 118).⁵

During the subsequent two years before the enactment of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, various groups sought to influence government policy. In particular, Jewish advocates played a key role. In late 1946, American Jewish leaders from the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the American Council for Judaism (ACJ) started working to bring 100,000 Jews to the US. For tactical reasons, the AJC's goal was legislation to permit the admission of 400,000 refugees, since Jews constituted 20 to 25 percent of European DPs. It was understood, 'it would be easier to get Christian support if the program demanded the admission of 400,000 DPs' without mentioning the Jewish DPs at all. The admission of about a half of the estimated 800,000 non-repatriable DPs remaining in Germany and Austria was also considered to be America's 'fair share' (Genizi 1993: 69–70; Dinnerstein 1982: 117–123).

Following intensive consultations and campaigns to gain support from non-Jewish circles, including prominent Senators, Congressmen, business and labor leaders, and especially Protestant and Catholic church leaders, the AJC and ACJ leaders established in December 1946 the Citizens Committee on Displaced Persons (CCDP), which 'gradually became an effective lobby on

3 According to a Gallup poll in December 1945, when asked whether more European immigrants should be admitted than before the war, or the same number, or fewer, 5 percent said more, 32 percent said the same, 37 percent said fewer, 14 percent none at all, and 12 percent had no opinion (Dinnerstein 1982: 114).

4 While apathy dominated the Catholic and Protestant circles, Jewish DPs received two-thirds of the visas issued under this directives as of 30 June 1947 (Genizi 1993: 37).

5 For other press opinions, see DPC 1952: 9–11.

behalf of DP legislation' (Genizi 1993: 72). The help of Christian leaders was crucial in persuading the public to support the DP bill, which was introduced to Congress in April 1947, and 'collective nonsectarian efforts' led by the CCDP gradually changed the mood of the public and Congress (Genizi 1993: 203).⁶ Consequently, by 1948, 'almost every major American organization, except for the Daughters of the American Revolution, eventually endorsed the goals of the CCDP' (Dinnerstein 1982: 127; Wyman 1998: 194–195). The CCDP thus proved 'the catalyst' for cooperative humanitarian action (Dinnerstein 1982: 267).

In June 1948 the DP Act was finally enacted, which, despite its restrictions and discriminatory provisions against Jews (Smith 1966: 45), became 'a landmark in the history of American immigration policy' (Dinnerstein 1982: 182) by legally recognizing for the first time the country's responsibilities for housing some of the world's refugees and by establishing machinery for processing refugees into the country. It also 'paved the way for the more generous and understanding refugee relief acts of subsequent years' (Dinnerstein 1982: 280). Furthermore, amendments in 1950 eliminated many of the discriminatory provisions of the original act and extended it to run for two more years (Daniels 2004: 109; DPC 1952: 7, 37–39).

One of the main features of the DP Acts was the establishment by Congress of the United States Displaced Persons Commission (DPC), which operated from August 1948 to August 1952. It was the first federal agency responsible for supervising and coordinating refugee resettlement. The most prominent aspects of the DP Acts, however, were the provisions that allowed various VOLAGS to issue 'assurance' of housing and employment, to guarantee that the DPs admitted to the US would not become 'public charges', and to oversee refugee resettlement on a case-by-case basis. Under the DP Acts (and also the Refugee Relief Act of 1953), refugees could not be admitted without assurance from a sponsor, and this system necessitated close cooperation between the DPC and the VOLAGS. By the end of the DP program, the DPC had accredited nineteen VOLAGS, representing religious, ethnic, and welfare interests, and almost 90 percent of the more than 300,000 'assurances' of support filed with the DPC were submitted through the VOLAGS, not by individuals (Daniels 2004: 107–108; Holman 1996: 5; DPC 1952: 268–271). Thus, through sponsorships, the VOLAGS 'pumped life-blood into the program and got it going' (DPC 1952: 271). As the DPC's final report stated, the VOLAGS 'performed services in all the major operations of the program except those relating to security analysis and eligibility determinations', which were the

6 According to Genizi, 'church leaders after 1947 showed sustained interest in the issue, having learned that 80 percent of the DPs were Christians,' although Catholics and Protestants had opposed any relaxation of the restrictive immigration laws during the 1930s.

government's responsibilities, and these private groups, having nationwide networks of affiliates at local levels, 'made an inestimable contribution in this joint effort'. The report concluded, 'The success of the resettlements under the Act are [sic] in large proportion due to their efforts, planning and follow-up. This was an experiment in new relationships between Government and private agencies' (DPC 1952: 267, 294).

Among VOLAGS, religious bodies carried the greatest load. Particularly, more than two-thirds of the over 400,000 persons admitted under the DP program were resettled by only four agencies: as of 30 June 1952, the National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC) settled 151,694; the CWS, representing twenty-three agencies, sponsored 51,010; the National Lutheran Council (NLC) placed about 42,000; and the United Service for New Americans (USNA), a Jewish group, settled 38,524. These figures roughly reflected the makeup of the immigrants under the DP Acts: 47 percent were of the Catholic faith; 35 percent of the Protestant and Orthodox faiths; 16 percent of the Jewish faith, and 2 percent of other faiths (DPC 1952: 248, 267–270, 275–294).

Other important players in the DP program were State DP Commissions or Committees organized in thirty-six states. These were formally established governmental bodies, but consisted of representatives from religious and other VOLAGS, business, labor, consumer groups and leading citizens, who served on a voluntary basis, as well as officials from state and local government agencies. The combination of their official position, their voluntary character and public-private composition was an experiment in 'new ways of accomplishing national objectives' (DPC 1952: 307). Religious agencies, through their participation in the State Commissions, thus played an important role in developing public opinion concerning the program, enlisting local help, and smoothing difficult resettlement situations (DPC 1952: 294–309).

In sum, according to the DPC's final report, 'In Europe, in Washington, and more importantly, in the local communities throughout the length and breadth of the United States, agencies of all faiths were brought closer together, through the resettlement program and the various State and local commissions and committees' (DPC 1952: 275–276).

Finally, the responses of the CWS and Protestant churches toward the DP Acts need to be noted. The CWS was established in May 1946 to unify the various relief and reconstruction efforts of American Protestant agencies, and took over in 1947 the refugee program from its predecessor, the American Christian Committee of Refugees, which had operated since 1934. Under the DP Acts, CWS took responsibility for resettling all the non-Lutheran Protestant and Eastern Orthodox groups (DPC 1952: 276; Genizi 1993: 39). The first phase (1948–1949) of its work was 'characterized by confusion, inefficiency, and lack of moral

and financial support by the denominations', but the CWS and its affiliated denominations 'gradually overcame their earlier shortcomings', and together made 'impressive' achievements (Genizi 1993: 146–147). For example, one of the CWS's cooperating agencies, the Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief (MCOR), which represented the Methodist Church in the field of overseas relief, aided in the resettlement of 5,122 DPs under the DP Acts (MCOR 1954: 11). The church also 'assumed a moral responsibility for guiding the New Americans through five years after their arrival' (MCOR 1953a: Appendix E, 1). Additionally, the transfer of the CWS's services in Europe to the World Council of Churches (WCC) in July 1950 and its merger in January 1951 with the National Council of the Churches of Christ in America (NCC), the nation's largest Protestant body created in 1950, improved its efficiency (Genizi 1993: 146–147).

2.2 *The Refugee Relief Act of 1953*

The major US response to the ongoing refugee problem after the expiration of the DP Acts in 1952 was the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, occasionally known as the 'Church Bill' due to the active support received in Congress from religious refugee agencies (Nichols 1998: 86).

In March 1952, as the DP program drew to an end, the NCC issued a statement urging the continuation of the US refugee resettlement program, and expressed its strong opposition to any Congressional action which would hinder the international refugee resettlement operations or the participation of the US in them. The statement then criticized the government's 'piece-meal' measures, and emphasized the importance of adopting enlightened immigration legislations that would conform to the principles of democracy and human rights, and would remove 'all discriminatory provisions based upon considerations of color, race or sex.' The NCC thus demanded immigration measures to achieve 'a just and durable peace' (NCC 1952).

The Refugee Relief Act essentially continued many of the programs of the DP Acts, authorizing the issuance of 214,000 visas over and above the quota system before 31 December 1956, and a total of 189,025 persons entered the US under the act. Most of the visas went to Europeans fleeing from Communism, but several thousand were provided for Asians, including refugees of the Chinese Revolution (Daniels 2004: 125; Gordon 1996: 335–336; Nichols 1998: 84–87). With no DPC under this act, its administrative responsibility was transferred to regular immigration channels. Moreover, VOLAGS, mainly churches, continued to play a vital role in securing resettlement opportunities, receiving and assisting refugees on arrival and assuming responsibility for all aspects of their integration into American community life (MCOR 1953c: 31–33). According to a CWS report, the numbers of refugees settled under the act by NCWC,

CWS, NLC, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Service/USNA were 40,000, 30,000, 15,796, and 3,500 respectively (Migration Services Policy Committee 1958: Statistical Appendix 5).

While the CWS, an organ of the NCC, continued to serve as a coordinating agency, denominations were responsible for the actual resettlement of refugees. The Immigration Services of CWS was a 'link' between refugee and sponsor, as well as between the WCC and the denominations, and its Welfare Section provided advice and assistance to churches and individual their problems with refugees, even offering psychological care (CWS 1960b; CWB 1960c). Within each denomination, not the national church agency, but the local church which sponsored the immigrant or had sponsors among its members, was expected to take the basic responsibility for integration (MSPC 1960).

In the case of MCOR, which accepted responsibility for sponsoring 5,000 refugees, its promotion activities included various methods such as holding one-day seminars in many areas with the help of the respective bishops and district superintendents, making direct-mail appeals to church leaders, appointing area or conference committees to give local guidance, and extensive use of the church press. MCOR's publicity personnel, who had witnessed the plight of refugees by visiting refugee camps, also made energetic speaking tours, presenting the program to local congregations nationwide. Consequently, despite the initial slow reaction, the responses of the churches more than matched the needs of the program. MCOR secured sponsorships for a total of 8,393 persons between August 1953 and December 1956, and 4,350 persons (the largest number of all the denominations in the CWS) actually arrived in America (MCOR 1956: 5; MCOR 1957: 6, 10; MCOR 1958).

With the Refugee Relief Act and the supplemental refugee laws, the US refugee program, though it was characterized by a series of ad hoc bills and executive actions (Nichols 1998: 84), continued through the 1950s, and the basic pattern of the active participation of churches set under the DP Acts also continued. In its 1957 General Assembly, the NCC rejoiced at the contribution of its member churches to the resettlement program during the past decade. It then urged the government to continue its refugee relief, and recorded 'its support of all such governmental and intergovernmental refugee measures motivated by considerations of justice, mercy and sound mutual assistance' (NCC 1957). The NCC also called upon its member churches to 'give public approval' to the government 'in its recognized obligation to support effectively the United Nations programs for refugees without regard to percentage of support by other governments' (NCC 1957).

Moreover, while the UN designated July 1959–June 1960 as the World Refugee Year, the General Board of the NCC adopted at the year's mid-point a

resolution advocating more persistent government action to serve the urgent needs of the refugees. The resolution urged the NCC member churches to 'encourage the members of the Congress to act responsibly for the problems of refugees.' It also encouraged the churches to support through Congress a number of measures including the adoption of permanent legislation providing for the non-quota visa admission of 10,000 refugees and escapees annually, an increase in active cooperation with international agencies serving refugees, and the adoption of a fairer and non-discriminatory immigration and naturalization law (NCC 1959).

Furthermore, in February 1960, the Board of Managers of CWS sent a telegram to the President urging additional refugee legislation (CWS 1960d). An MCOB report of the same month also complained, 'We are agreed on what we want and ought to do. We have the apparatus ready for the operation. Only enabling legislation is missing and the longer we have to wait for it, the more we lose in the promotional effect of the World Refugee Year' (MCOB 1960b).

Church leaders thus pressed for official actions, since governmental support and legislative framework for liberalizing the immigration policy were imperative. On the other hand, the government was eager to obtain the grass-roots assistance of churches in the context of the massive expansion of the federal government after World War II (Nichols 1998: 76, 98–99; Schäfer 2006: 176–177). One might argue that churches were incorporated into the government's Cold War strategies, but it is also true that churches often took the initiative in refugee resettlement and sought to expand their sphere of influence, as the next chapter reveals. Axel R. Schäfer also noted, 'While the state drew upon the resources of religious entities, it also safeguarded their organizational autonomy and effectively sanctioned their faith-based practices' (Schäfer 2006: 176). According to one analysis in 1953, 'fully 90 percent of post-war relief was provided by religious agencies' (Elias 1953: 30–34, cited as in Nichols 1998: 68). With such a dominant role, ethnic and religious groups and their VOLAGS responsible for refugee settlement had become by the 1960s 'the major nongovernmental groups influencing American immigration policy' (Reimers 1985: 12).

As to the financial ties between church and state, the Escapee Program under the Mutual Security Act of 1951 initiated direct government contracts with the VOLAGS including religious bodies, for refugee services abroad (Nichols 1998: 86, 208). However, it was the Cuban refugee crisis of 1960–1961 that marked a drastic change in the government's refugee policy, ushering in 'new federal funding streams for the resettlement work of religious agencies' (Schäfer 2006: 181). Thus, 'the device of a contractual partnership' emerged 'that would, in time, be institutionalized between the federal

government and the private agencies in the domestic resettlement of refugees' (Zucker 1982: 156).

3 The Visions and the Missiology: The Methodist Case

3.1 *Refugee Relief as a Living Testimony to the Power of Faith*

This section, through a focus on the Methodist experience, will explore the visions and missiology of Protestant churches that motivated their efforts to assist refugees. MCOR, established in 1940, was the first American denominational relief committee (MCOR 1942: 2), and its task 'focused on studying the most urgent needs and pressing problems around the world, reporting these needs to the local churches, and administering the necessary funds to 'the least of these' through partner agencies and ecumenical networks' including CWS and WCC (UMCOR 2009; Lee 1958: 20). Its mission was to 'be ever ready to fulfill the injunction' of Christ (MCOR 1960a: 2), to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and care for the homeless, which was considered to be 'an essential part' of Christian faith (MCOR 1960b: 5).

During World War II, as the role of the government expanded in America, a sense of crisis and an urge to exert greater influence over society grew in the Methodist Church, 'the leading Protestant denomination of the richest country on earth' (MCOR 1942: 2). In justifying the cause of overseas relief, a statement of MCOR in July 1942 argued:

[T]his [an emphasis on overseas relief] is necessary in order *to maintain the proper place of the Church in this confused age...* Greater political, economic, and social changes are in process around us than have ever been witnessed on earth before. Government—our Government—is taking into its hands in an unprecedented way the lives of the people. Recreation, education, social welfare, medical care—are being lifted out of the hands of private agencies and being fostered by governmental or semi-governmental bodies. What is to become of the Church in this jostling world? Unless the Church seizes the day of its opportunity in some competent and adequate way, it may be rudely pushed aside as irrelevant or at most negligible (MCOR 1942: 3). [emphasis in the original]

The document went on to stress that the church, 'as the Church of the Living God, the habitation of the Mighty Spirit,' should 'prove daring and sacrificial in the great day,' and 'create the spirit of goodwill' (MCOR 1942: 3). An MCOR report in the following year also indicated its readiness to undertake a postwar

reconstruction program (MCOR 1943: 2). Before the end of the war, MCOR was thus ready to embark on refugee relief programs.

After the war, an MCOR document of October 1948, referring to the Methodist Church's responsibility to sponsor 5,000 DPS, argued that the government, 'however large its investments under the Marshall or other plan,' could not meet the needs of 'the time of crisis beyond all precedent,' since it was 'neglectful of the individual' and lacked 'the personal touch.' Foreign aid by a church group, by contrast, was 'more effective' and 'motivated solely by love for mankind,' and carried 'a spiritual force' that did 'not exist in the dispensing of relief by Governments.' Perceiving refugee relief as an area of vital importance in which the church had a special mission, MCOR called on the church to 'fill its place in the plan of God and the needs of men' (MCOR 1948b: 5). In a changing world in which competing secular forces, particularly government, expanded their spheres of operation, MCOR asserted the Christian church's unique place and spiritual mission.

The Cold War tone was evident in MCOR and NCC documents with their references to 'the victims of totalitarian tyranny' (MCOR 1952b: 3; NCC 1952: 1). At the same time, a strong humanitarian impulse undoubtedly provided the driving force for the churches' sponsorship of refugees. An MCOR report of 1952 stated, 'Seldom have the Christian churches of America had a clearer opportunity to show their faith and power. . . . We are persuaded that our Methodist Church has been engaged in a piece of glorious Christian idealism—humanitarianism of the highest order' (MCOR 1952a), which was 'a living testimony' to the power of faith (MCOR 1952b: 5). Another report in 1952 rejoiced over 'the greatest blessing' of seeing people 'beaten down by years of camp life and dependence upon others' slowly regaining self-confidence. The author closed the report by focusing on 'the way of Love' as Christ's way (MCOR 1953c: 12–14).

'The Good Samaritan' was the Biblical example frequently mentioned in MCOR documents as evidence of Christian principles in support of overseas relief. Summarizing the pressing needs in various parts of the world and the work of MCOR during the last four years, its report in 1948 asserted, 'From them all, the helping hand of the Good Samaritan, who once rescued a stranger and an alien, cannot yet be withdrawn.' Additionally, regarding refugee resettlement, the report declared, 'The call for Christian overseas relief has not thus died away during these four years, but rings out louder than four years ago' (MCOR 1948a: 1).

Likewise, in a 1958 article, 'Is the Good Samaritan Outmoded?', Gaither P. Warfield, the Director of MCOR from 1952 to 1966, who also served as vice-chairman of CWS and was the American representative on Interchurch Aid, an organ of WCC, affirmed that Christian charity still had a place in a

world where government and large secular organizations spent millions annually to succor the needy. According to Warfield, 'Christian charity says that needy people, even panhandlers, are personalities, loved by God and precious in his sight,' and 'the concern for the individual and necessity to recognize his value at all times is the distinctive mark of Christian giving' (Warfield 1958: 2).

Warfield also argued against those citizens who hoped to 'buy friendship for the USA by shipping surplus commodities to underfed peoples' (Warfield 1958: 1). While providing US surplus food for distribution abroad under the Agricultural Act of 1949 and the 1954 Food for Peace legislation was evidently a part of the US Cold War programs (Schäfer 2006: 181), Warfield attempted to distinguish between such foreign policy and Christian giving, even stating that the former approach was 'futile'. He stressed the disinterested nature of church work as follows: 'When we aid those who are needy, hoping to help them to become self supporting and independent, then indeed we have a good chance of success. This result is our ample recompense' (Warfield 1958: 1).

Meanwhile, church leaders were not so naïve as to disregard the political meaning of US foreign aid including refugee relief, but worked closely with government in order to pursue their religious cause. In 1957, an MCOR report on the Methodist program under the Refugee Relief Act affirmed, 'We have helped our country to assert once more its position of international leadership.' It added, however, 'An act of Government alone cannot provide the heart, which makes all the difference in a large scale resettlement program and which is missing in some migration schemes' (MCOR 1953b: 1). In other words, claiming its special spiritual role, the church leaders accepted the 'complementarity' of religiously based programs to government policies (Nichols 1998: 81). The report stated that the refugee problem had become 'a chronic disease of the present day's world in unrest', and it was 'unthinkable' for them 'to stay out', since 'such a program would be a most worthy and stimulating project for the life of the church' (MCOR 1953b: 5).

Relief programs were thus conducted in a framework of missionary enterprise to manifest God's love by practicing good neighborliness. It was hoped that MCOR's 'humble efforts to succor the needy' would 'at the same time create a desire to learn more about the Lord' whom they served (MCOR 1955: 2).

3.2 *Multiculturalism in the Missiology*

This section will explore the Methodist Church's attitude toward the issue of ethnic tolerance. While most European refugees during the early postwar era shared Judeo-Christian traditions, their cultures, of predominantly Eastern European origin, were quite different from American mainstream culture. Sponsoring them, therefore, involved accepting those with different cultures,

ethnicity, and creeds into the local communities. In addition, a close look at the makeup of the refugees sponsored by Methodists reveals that the majority were not coreligionists. According to an MCOR report, members of the Orthodox faith represented two-thirds of those resettled by MCOR under the DP Acts (MCOR 1954: 11). Methodists accounting for only a small portion of European refugees, less than 5 percent of those assisted through MCOR under the acts were members of this denomination (MCOR 1952b: 4). Methodists were also proud that they took 'some mixed marriages, family groups which were not acceptable to the representatives of other sectarian agencies' (1952c: 12). The Methodist Church thus sponsored many people of different creeds and traditions, a policy in line with the MCOR Charter of 1940 that focused on 'the relief of human suffering without distinction of race, color, or creed' (MCOR 1940). An NCC statement of March 1952 likewise demanded that immigration and naturalization laws be amended so that 'all discriminatory provisions based upon considerations of color, race or sex would be removed' (NCC 1952: 2).

In the case of refugees who entered the US under the Refugee Relief Act, 3,087 persons (71 percent) out of a total of 4,350 persons resettled by the MCOR were Protestant. Of the remaining 1,263 persons (29 percent) who were non-Protestant, 489 persons (11.2 percent) were of Catholic faith, 365 (8.4 percent) Orthodox, 270 (6.2 percent) Muslim, 108 (2.5 percent) with no religion, 24 'unclassified' Christian, 4 Buddhist, and 3 Jewish (the last three accounting for less than 1 percent). Furthermore, among the Protestants, only 77 (1.8 percent) were Methodist. The largest Protestant group consisted of 1,231 persons (28.3 percent) who were Lutheran, while the second largest group of 488 (11.2 percent) belonged to the Reformed Church (MCOR 1953b: 11). These figures indicate that Methodists were fairly open to those of other denominations, even other faiths. Warfield reiterated this position as follows:

Christian charity expects us to help the suffering without regard to nationality, race or creed. Men naturally look after their own and in this way Christians are not different. But our hearts must be bigger and our visions wider than others, so that with equal joy we can share with those who are of a different faith. This principle is so generally accepted, at least in theory, that it is not necessary to labor the point further (Warfield 1958: 2).

The promotion of tolerance toward other cultures and faiths marked the writings of Elizabeth M. Lee, the Promotion Secretary for MCOR's refugee resettlement program under the Refugee Relief Act. Having formerly served as a missionary to Japan (1915–1924) and also as Executive Secretary for Latin America, of

the Woman's Division of Christian Service of the Methodist Board of Missions (1940–1954), Lee had warned against ethnocentrism (Lee 1929a: 101, 109; Lee 1929b: 234; Lee 1945: 11; Chiba and Furukawa 2010: 289–290, 299–300, 319–339). After assuming the MCOR position in 1954, she toured many refugee camps in Europe, and presented the resettlement program to the Methodist Church in order to secure assurances of support, by speaking at the Church's area conferences and numerous local churches across the country, and by contributing articles to the church press (MCOR 1956: 5–6; Chiba and Furukawa 2010: 324). For example, in an article for the *Methodist Women* of September 1954, she wrote:

In the process of welcoming refugees, sponsorship . . . is not alone a giving process. These liberty-loving people, who have withstood oppression and overcome hardships in slave-labor camps, have something to give us. Aside from being an example of devotion to freedom, *they can share with us their European culture* (Lee 1954: 9) [Italics mine].

Thus, in addition to seeing the 'liberty-loving' refugees as America's political assets, she described their culture in a positive light, as something that could enrich local culture. In other words, she highlighted the presence of mutuality in the sponsorship of refugees.

In fact, according to Lee, the procurement of sponsorships was delayed partly because too many church people were too 'choosey' about the kind of refugees they would welcome. Thus, in May 1955, writing for *World Outlook*, another Methodist magazine, she appealed to the readers to sponsor any kind of family that was in need, 'regardless of nationality or religion, regardless of work skill, or number of children, or educational attainments' (Lee 1955b: 227). As she wrote in an article for the *Christian Century*, a magazine for mainline Protestantism, of February 1955, one prospective sponsor asked for "a Methodist family, either Dutch or Scandinavian," but there were actually "no Methodists in Holland and no refugees in Scandinavia." While it was understandable, she stated, that most Protestant sponsors preferred a Protestant family, they needed to help some Orthodox refugees, for whom the CWS carried responsibility. Lee then called out to church members to sponsor any family in need "without prejudice" and without expecting "to meet employment needs or to increase the membership" of their particular church (Lee 1955a: 202–204).

In promoting the need for openness to those of other cultures and faiths, Lee too made good use of the example of the Good Samaritan. She stated: "The Good Samaritan apparently never stopped to question whether the half-dead pilgrim across the road was of his own race or creed. He just

went over and bound up his wounds, and brought him into the inn, and paid his bill for that day, and promised he would pay more upon his return' (Lee 1955b: 227). 'Homeless Muslims who seek freedom from persecution in America have a right to expect us Christians to be good Samaritans' (Lee 1955a: 204). Lee thus challenged her readers to surround refugees with Christian good neighborliness, not merely by giving money but by welcoming refugees 'into their communities, their churches, even their homes' (Lee 1955b: 227).

In reality, however, notwithstanding its non-discrimination policy, churches had to act in the framework of government immigration policy and be guided in principle by the limits set by legislations. The immigration quotas for various areas were prescribed by the Refugee Relief Act, and the resulting disproportionate distribution of visas could not be corrected due to the lack of Congressional action (Methodist Program 1953: 2, 8).

Moreover, regarding the integration of refugees into American society, an MCOOR report on its resettlement program, which Lee coauthored, affirmed cultural tolerance, by quoting from a report of a UNESCO Conference on Cultural Integration of Immigrants held in Havana in April 1956, as follows:

The American concept of integration is not that of assimilation—remoulding the newcomer in everything from clothe to ideology. It is, rather, a long process of mutual give and take, a "cultural differentiation within a framework of social unity," a "moving equilibrium of conformity, varying with time and social conditions" (Methodist Program 1953: 1).

This policy, one of cultural pluralism, was also expressed in a 1960 document prepared by CWS' Immigration Services, 'Integration: Melting Pot vs. Cultural Pluralism' (CWS 1960).

Of course, 'integration' did not always proceed smoothly. There were many prospective sponsors who were 'choosy', and some sponsors did not try to understand refugees' alien customs, to surmount the language barrier, or to help them gently to feel at home in America (Lee 1955b: 6). The experiences of the horror of war and of the hardships of concentration camp-life, shortages of funds and skills, and culture shock surely made many refugees' adjustment difficult. However, as various private (especially, religious) organizations and governmental agencies 'stood ready to assist them', most refugees of this era 'probably experienced fewer problems than had nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants' (Dinnerstein and Reimers 2009: 122–123). It was a time when, in addition to a Cold War climate that made most Americans sympathetic to those who had fled Communism, the churches' humanitarian and multicultural

beliefs and motivations, backed by the abatement of ethnic conflict and the general prosperity in postwar America, played a significant role in the promotion of the resettlement program (Dinnerstein and Reimers 2009: 116–117).

4 Conclusion

This paper, with a focus on the Methodist case, has examined how the Protestant church, through its interdenominational network, began its active involvement in postwar refugee resettlement in the US. Despite their initial confusion and inefficiency, the churches made a remarkable contribution to the formation and implementation of the program, setting the pattern for US refugee work in the postwar era. As government and other secular forces expanded their spheres of influence, the churches perceived refugee relief as an area of vital importance in which it had a special mission to demonstrate the power and meaning of the Christian faith by providing personal and spiritual care to refugees. Thus, the church leaders assumed the ‘complementarity’ of their relief programs to government policies. Sponsorship meant a test to follow the example of the Good Samaritan and a call to good neighborliness.

Historical records of the period reveal that church leaders urged the government to take more persistent action and advocated more liberal refugee laws and fairer, non-discriminatory immigration legislation. Furthermore, by sponsoring a sizable number of refugees of different traditions or faiths, the churches encouraged a multicultural attitude leading to a greater diversity within the American population and to a more pluralistic identity. Though surely not all churches practiced what they preached, the contribution of church policy to the growth of cultural tolerance in the US deserves recognition.⁷

Later, with the coming of non-European refugees, the churches continued to expand their services, maintaining a basic doctrine of non-discrimination. As the areas of the relief program broadened and the sum of government subsidy to the churches increased, however, the church-state partnership grew complicated, and the tension between national security concerns and humanitarian needs have thereafter continued (Nichols 1998: 15–18).

Churches basically shared the anti-Communist framework with the government during the Cold War era, and America’s religious morality has often been associated with ethnocentric self-portrait of Americans as a chosen people

7 A recent paper prepared by CWS staff (Eby, Smyers and Kekic 2010) reports that most churches in the CWS network today ‘agree to co-sponsor a refugee family regardless of their religious or ethnic background.’

and resulting self-righteousness. At the same time, this study points to the churches' post-war role—and hence future potential role—as a contributor to ethnic tolerance and pluralism, instead of a government's collaborator merely accommodating itself to America's narrow national interest. For me, observing these developments from Japan, a country that has largely resisted any major inflows of refugees, this solid basis for voluntary cooperation and multiculturalism deriving from the belief in human brotherhood is notable indeed.⁸ Meanwhile, good neighborliness remains to be a challenge and the key element for successful resettlement work of churches today. It further requires a contextual approach for understanding refugees and meeting their needs, and the repudiation of a condescending attitude toward the newcomers.

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All archival documents referred to in this contribution can be found in the Records of United Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief (UMCOR), General Commission on Archives and History, Drew University Campus, Madison NJ.

Nigerian-Initiated Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in the Czech Republic

Active Missionary Force or a Cultural Ghetto?

Pavol Bargár

1 Introduction

Today, Pentecostal/charismatic forms of Christianity have come to represent the second largest community of Christians worldwide, after the Roman Catholic Church (Working Group on Mission and Ecclesiology 2012: 110). Within this Christian tradition, Nigerian and Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches have received much scholarly attention especially with respect to the context of (Western) Europe, not least due to the strong presence of Nigerian immigrants, including Nigerian Pentecostal/charismatic Christians, in many countries of the region (Asamoah-Gyadu 2006: 73–75; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 301–302; Währisch-Oblau 2009: 36–39).¹ The phenomenon of the Nigerian Pentecostal/charismatic missionaries and communities led by them has been fairly well documented with respect to some Western European countries (Adeboye 2007; Hunt 2000; Olupona 2003; Wilkinson 1986; www.glopent.net). Moreover, this phenomenon has also been explored in Eastern Europe, particularly with regard to Sunday Adelaja's Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations in Ukraine (Adogame 2008; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005; Asamoah-Gyadu 2006; Asamoah-Gyadu 2012). However, much less attention has been given to the presence and ministry of Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches in Central Europe. The present chapter will seek to fill this lacuna by exploring the ministry of three Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches in the city of Prague, the Czech Republic. These are 'The Mountain of Fire & Miracles Ministries',

1 In the scholarly discourse it has proven as helpful to distinguish between 'Nigerian' and 'Nigerian-initiated' churches. While acknowledging this distinction, due to the extent and focus of this chapter we cannot elaborate further on this distinction. While the author of the present paper acknowledges the differences between the terms 'Pentecostal' and 'charismatic', for the purposes of the chapter it is not necessary to distinguish and elaborate them in detail. Therefore, the form 'Pentecostal/charismatic' will be used consistently throughout the chapter. For a detailed discussion see the bibliography.

'Covenant Parish Prague' of 'The Redeemed Christian Church of God', and 'The Holy Ghost End Time Ministries Intl.' respectively. The present article will analyze different strategies the three case-study churches use to move beyond their ethnic origin. Special attention will be paid to the role of indigenous elements (the context of the present-day Czech Republic) in the mission of these churches. On these particular case studies, the paper will test a thesis, suggested by the research done by various scholars with respect to the Nigerian Pentecostal immigration in Europe and, especially, Great Britain, which claims that Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches in Europe fail to appeal to the population of non-Nigerian and non-Pentecostal/charismatic backgrounds. This contribution will suggest taking a more complex approach to the phenomenon by considering aspects such as contextual knowledge/experience of the pastor, language politics, worldview, worship style, and outreach policy. It will demonstrate how the three case-study churches represent three various models for and expressions of Nigerian-initiated and -led Pentecostal/charismatic ministry in the local (Czech) context. It will be suggested that sheer numbers and demographics are not to be perceived as the main or even sole indicator of whether or not a specific church represents an active missionary force, but rather a multiplicity of factors should be taken into consideration.

The material for this writing was gathered during fieldwork conducted in the period of March to July 2012 and August 2013. The fieldwork was ethnographic in approach. The field research was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with the religious leadership of the case-study churches and supplemented with participant observation during worship services as well as informal interviews with church members.² In addition, the websites and other materials (booklets, worship service leaflets, flyers, etc.) were analyzed.

2 Nigerian Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Migration Contexts: A Way to Build a Cultural Ghetto?

While recent scholarship has studied various aspects of the phenomenon of Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches, the focus of this chapter is to explore whether Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches in the Czech Republic represent a dynamic and active missionary force which

² I am very grateful to all the interviewees as well as the other people who helped me accomplish this research.

addresses and receives response from the local society, or whether they represent a closed space that seeks first and foremost to foster a particular Nigerian identity.

In a recent article, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu argues against those who interpret the mission of African migrant churches 'one-sidedly in terms of survival strategies within hostile diaspora environments' and suggests taking into account 'very powerful, aggressive and strong evangelical witnessing strategies' which the African Christians adopt 'with the intention of re-making Europe and Europeans in the image of Christ' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2012: 26). Even if one acknowledges this clear missionary intention, however, the question remains, to what extent are these churches able to reach majority (non-African immigrant) population?

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu seems to be aware of this issue when he observes that the Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations (or, shortly, God Embassy), founded by the Nigerian pastor Sunday Adelaja in Kyiv, Ukraine, is very different from other African-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches in the diaspora in that it is 'not predominantly African in membership', thus inferring that the majority of African-Initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches have a predominant non-white/African membership (Asamoah-Gyadu 2006: 73).

Researching the mission of African-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches in Europe in general and that of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Britain in particular, Steve Hunt argues that these churches 'have largely failed to win over white converts' in their quest to evangelize the 'dark continent of Europe' (Hunt 2002: 16). Rather, Hunt goes on to suggest, 'They provide the focus of identity and the source of inspiration for primarily Nigerian immigrants' (Hunt 2002: 16).

Based on his research on the ministry of Nigerian Pentecostal/charismatic churches (predominantly) in south-east London, Geoffrey Walker of Roehampton University says that there is little evidence that Nigerian Pentecostalism attracts non-religious Africans, the white British population or even black majority church Christians of earlier waves of immigration. Moreover, trying to find an answer to the question whether Nigerian Pentecostalism translates into local contexts of the West, Walker asserts that its 'theological dissonance creates a sense of religio-cultural ghetto that operates within a self-defining and legitimating hermeneutic' (Walker 2011).

The remainder of this chapter will test the aforementioned thesis for the case of Nigerian-initiated churches in Prague. However, before doing this, it briefly introduces some relevant features of the peculiar Czech context.

3 Mapping the Context

3.1 *Religious Scene*

The Czech Republic has been notoriously known as one of the 'most atheistic countries in the world'. However, an increasing number of (especially Czech) scholars point out that the situation may well be more complex than this. They point to various parallel developments within Western European countries, such as the significance of out-of-church movements, anti-clericalism, de-traditionalization, but also the rise of new spiritual outlets (Nešpor 2004). Nevertheless, the number of people who publicly declare to profess a faith, let alone ecclesiastic forms of Christianity, has been constantly decreasing. According to the last census (2011), some 2.17 million out of ca. 10.5 million people living in the Czech Republic claimed to be believers (www.scitani.cz/sldb2011/eng/redakce.nsf/i/home).

Since the early 1900s there has been a permanent Pentecostal/charismatic presence in the area of what is the present-day Czech Republic. Yet, the numbers of Pentecostal/charismatic Christians have always been modest. During the Nazi occupation, Pentecostal/charismatic forms of Christianity were prohibited in the region. During most period of the Communist regime, Pentecostal/charismatic Christians were forced to join other established Christian churches. Only in the late 1980s, the government officially acknowledged the existence of the Czech branch of the Assemblies of God (www.scitani.cz/sldb2011/eng/redakce.nsf/i/home; Bubík 2005).

Today, Pentecostal/charismatic Christians represent a small proportion of the aforementioned number of the people who claim to be believers with ca. 18 thousand members in nine officially registered churches. Yet it must be stated that almost all Pentecostal/charismatic churches have been constantly growing throughout the last over twenty years, unlike most of other Christian denominations in the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, their influence on the Czech society, including the Christian *oikumene*, still remains marginal.

3.2 *(Nigerian) Immigration to the Czech Republic*

According to the Czech Statistical Office, in 2011 there were some 436 thousand foreigners living in the Czech Republic (www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci.nsf/kapitola/ciz_pocet_cizincu). However, a vast majority of them come from other Central and East European countries, especially Ukraine, Slovakia, Russia and Poland. There are not significant numbers of immigrants from Africa or Asia (with the exception of the Vietnamese minority). This situation has various reasons. The Czech Republic never had any colonies. In addition, it is a country without access to the sea. Moreover, the forty years of the Communist regime

had isolated the country to a large extent. Finally, even today it is not a country of choice for most immigrants, unlike some economically more thriving countries of Western and Northern Europe.

In 2006, the Czech Statistical Office registered 333 Nigerian citizens in the territory of the Czech Republic. Most of these people are college students who come for a limited period of time. Having finished their studies, they either return to Nigeria or move to Western Europe to live there. They come from various tribes and in most cases profess Christianity (Bittnerová, Moravcová et al. 2005: 315).

4 Three Types of Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Prague

Unlike in some other European cities, the number of Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches in Prague is small. As a matter of fact there is only one other Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic congregation in addition to the three explored in this chapter (The Church of Pentecost, founded by the Nigerian pastor Ikena Chukwubuiko). The three churches discussed here represent different ways of interaction between Nigerian Pentecostalism and the local Czech society.

4.1 *Mountain of Fire and Miracles*

The Czech branch of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM—Czech: Hora ohně a zázraků) was established by Pastor Yomi Akinyemi in 2009 which makes it the first branch of the larger MFM in a post-socialist country (<http://www.mountainoffire.wz.cz/>). In the past, Pastor Akinyemi used to live in Prague (in what used to be former Czechoslovakia) as a student; he studied at the University of Economics in Prague between 1979 and 1985, taking his degree (M Eng.) in international trade. Having left civil service in Nigeria upon his own request, he returned to the Czech Republic together with his wife Yinka (also Nigerian) and three children in 2007 to start a ministry in Prague. Indeed, the Prague MFM was formally founded on the first Sunday (4 January) of 2009. As Akinyemi says, his long-term experience with the Czech society has helped him understand the context better; this, in turn, enables him to address some issues and challenges peculiar to the Czech people more effectively in his ministry and to be more relevant when proclaiming the gospel. To Akinyemi's mind, examples of such issues are a high divorce rate, depression, drug abuse, and prostitution. He says:

Even though the message of the gospel is the same for the Czech Republic and Nigeria, there are different problems in different places that Christian ministry and mission need to tackle. Examples of such problems are poverty in Nigeria, suicides and murder in the USA, and depression, psychiatric problems and divorces in the Czech Republic (Interview with Yomi Akinyemi, 16 April 2012, Prague).

Although the Prague MFM keeps close contacts with both the headquarters in Nigeria and other MFM churches, especially in Europe, its main objective is to serve the Czech people through its prayer and deliverance ministry. As Pastor Akinyemi emphasizes, the Prague MFM does not seek to be an African church; quite the contrary, it first and foremost reaches out to Czechs, while not forgetting other people either. By 'other people' Akinyemi refers predominantly to immigrants of African origin. In addition to Czechs and Nigerians, its members come from Angola, Ghana, Uganda, Guinea-Bissau, Poland etc. Unlike other Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal and charismatic churches around the globe, however, the Prague MFM can with its up to thirty regular members (among which the pastor, his wife and their three children) be by no means regarded as a mega-church, the tendency which is not likely to change in the near future. Of those thirty members, about a half is of the Czech origin, the fact which makes the Prague MFM an interestingly multicultural and, for the Czech conditions, rather unusual Christian congregation.

The relatively small membership, however, does not seem to bother either the pastor or the MFM-members. They view their mission as a faithful presence in the Czech environment with steadfast prayers for God's blessing, healing and deliverance of the Czech society. 'The Czech Republic is a second home,' says Pastor Akinyemi and adds that he often prays for his new home-country.

'Being there' for the Czech people also translates into the way the Prague MFM pursues its ministry. According to Akinyemi, the church tries to de-emphasize the features of Nigerian (or, generally, African) culture as much as possible since he believes that the diversity in cultural expression can lead to disunity in the proclamation of the gospel. Avoiding the use of any local African languages, Czech and English only is spoken during the church events. Interestingly enough, even when only African worshippers are attending a certain event, Czech songs will still be included and, furthermore, the sermon (preached in English by Pastor Akinyemi or his wife) will also be translated into Czech (again, by the pastor himself or his children who speak excellent Czech). In addition, it is worth mentioning that the Prague MFM writes its own hymns, both in Czech and English. Therefore, the Prague MFM can in no way be regarded as a platform for Nigerian immigrants to foster their cultural and/or ethnic identity.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the efforts to be as embedded in the Czech context as possible, the elements of Nigerian culture and Pentecostal/charismatic expressions of faith still come into play. For example, some African musical instruments are used to accompany the singing during the worship. Also, hymns are sung with vibrant bodily expression, while standing, clapping and moving one's body in the rhythm of the music, the matter rather atypical for Czech mainline churches. In addition, and more importantly, certain theological accents of the Prague MFM show signs of African Pentecostalism. In particular, it concerns a phenomenon which Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu observes in the context of the God Embassy in Ukraine and the Kingsway International Christian Center (KICC) in London. He describes it as 'the ardent belief in the existence of territorial demons' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2012: 31) within African Pentecostal/charismatic circles which finds an expression in so-called Jesus Marches (also known as Marches for Life). The latter are symbolic re-enactments of the biblical Jericho March, recorded in Joshua 6. These Marches, Asamoah-Gyadu argues, 'amounting to enchanted "noises", that is screaming, shouting, stamping of feet and clapping of hands, have been reinvented in churches like God Embassy and KICC as ways of fighting enemies and taking control of spaces illegally occupied by the "enemy"' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2012: 31). Even though the Jesus Marches/Marches for Life are not part of the Prague MFM ministry, the belief in demons and evil spirits which can 'illegally occupy' various spaces and the need for spiritual warfare are numbered among the most important emphases of the church. Therefore, as Pastor Akinyemi states, he was very sad to discover that Christians in the European, post-Enlightenment milieu do not admit the existence and power of demons and witchcraft. Part of his mission here in Europe, then, is to make the Europeans aware that there are different types of witchcraft in different contexts, which are, nevertheless, still mighty and harmful, and to help them fight these witchcrafts in the name of Jesus. He puts it quite illustratively:

In my ministry here [in the Czech Republic] I have been trying to teach people that there are various kinds of black magic and witchcraft all around. However, God gives us a way to fight them through the power of prayer. So, I try to teach the members of my church how to pray when they sit on the bus next to a person with tattoos and piercing, when they have bad dreams or when they are trying on some clothes in a C&A [clothing store].

Thus the MFM contributes to the overall picture of Christianity in the Czech context with the emphasis on the reality of demonic powers. The latter are

believed to have an impact on human life even in ordinary everyday situations, such as through people ‘with tattoos and piercing’ or when trying on pieces of clothing which might have been ‘infected’ by the touch of an evil wizard. However, Pastor Akinyemi admits that it is very difficult to talk to Czech people, including Christians in his church, about the issues related to supernatural powers. Still, he does not seem to be discouraged by these difficulties; for him, it is important to be in Prague and pray for the Czech society. The MFM ministry of prayer and deliverance thus has a certain ‘vicarious significance’—the members of the church pray for people at large to deliver them from evil powers.

4.2 *Covenant Parish Prague (The Redeemed Christian Church of God)*

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is one of the most widely-established Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches in Central and Eastern Europe, with churches in Russia, Poland, Romania, Belarus or Hungary. Covenant Parish Prague (CPP), the Czech branch of the RCCG was started in April 2006 by Pastor Innocent Eddo, who moved to Romania in December 2006 to missionize there (www.rccgprague.cz). Since then, the CPP has been ‘under the leadership of the Holy Spirit with Pastor Augustine Otekhile as the undershepherd’ (www.rccgprague.cz/story.php).

Pastor Augustine Otekhile came to the Czech Republic with his family in 2006 and has lived there ever since. In addition to serving as a pastor to the congregation, Otekhile, like Pastor Akinyemi of the Prague MFM, also studied at a Czech university. He majored in natural resources and environment and took his graduate degree (M Eng.) from the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague in 2008. His residence and experience enabled Pastor Otekhile, to his mind, to get to know the Czech context well. He enumerates the challenges the proclamation of the gospel faces in the Czech society:

Well, there are quite many challenges. First of all, coldness of the [Czech] people must be mentioned. They are quite low in responsiveness and they do not like organizations of any kind. Then there is also a challenge of language and culture. Understanding the context makes one deliver the message better. For example, I have noticed that the Czechs do not like noise as we do in Africa, but they like to drink beer and eat pork.³

3 This is an interesting remark given the fact that Pastor Otekhile is not a convert from Islam. He comes from a Christian background but, as he puts it, ‘in the real context of Christianity (i.e. a total surrender of my life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ), I became a devoted Christian effective April 1992.’

It is part of their culture. Therefore, I do not mind these things (e-mail communication with Augustine Otekhile, 5 August 2013; Interview with Augustine Otekhile, 15 May 2012, Prague).

Pastor Otekhile nevertheless admits that most of his sermons are on salvation and right living and the level of contextualization does not need to be very high. Yet, there is an awareness that one needs to 'get into the environment' before trying to proclaim the gospel. That was one of the reasons why the members of the CPP decided to conduct a self-learning Czech course. Pastor Otekhile comments this decision as follows: 'English unites, but Czech opens to the environment, to the people.' Being a congregation of ca. 75–80 members, mostly students and working people, coming from various backgrounds—Nigeria, Botswana, Zambia, Namibia, Ghana, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic—English has become the language of communication for the members of the CPP. And yet, holding strong to their missionary vision, they also realize the need to study Czech in order to reach out to the Czech people. As Pastor Otekhile says, Nigerian elements are intentionally discouraged to maintain cordial relationships between members of different cultural backgrounds within the congregation. In spite of the fact that the language policies of the two churches are quite different, this would, in theory, make the CPP very similar to the Prague MFM.

However, the reality is rather more complex. As the visitor is coming to the CPP place of worship, he or she makes note of African music coming out of the speakers. There are no worship songs in Czech; a vast majority of hymns is in English, interspersed with some songs in African languages. The music—of a very good quality, one must say—is performed vividly. The sermon is preached in English; no translation into Czech is provided. In the prayers at the end of the worship there are included prayers for Africa, Nigeria, but also for the Czech Republic. The way these prayers are phrased is very intriguing. With regard to Nigeria, the members of the congregation ask God to protect southern [sic!] Nigeria and to weaken the power of its enemies as well as to destroy every weapon that would like to destroy the peace and prosperity of Nigeria. With regard to the Czech Republic, the members pray to the Lord to manifest His power in the Czech Republic and to the Czech atheists so that they may come to know Him.

The demographic composition of the CPP is most interesting as well. A vast majority of the congregation is black with whites being almost exclusively the wives or girlfriends of the African members. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that a substantial number of African female members—not males—are wearing their traditional African clothes to church. The picture the visitor to

the CPP worship gets is the one of a predominantly black African congregation consisting of younger people who cherish their African/Nigerian identity, while strive to integrate into their 'second home', i.e. the Czech Republic. While it cannot be asserted that the CPP would intentionally try to create a cultural-religious ghetto, its case seems to support the thesis mentioned in the beginning of this paper in its claim that Nigerian Pentecostalism does not seem to attract the indigenous white and non-Pentecostal/charismatic population of Europe.

4.3 *Holy Ghost End Time Ministries Intl. (the Oasis Church)*

Afe Adogame suggests that there are at least two main 'genres' of African-initiated churches around the world: those operating as branches of mother churches with headquarters in Africa, and those started by African immigrants in migration contexts as brand new churches, often developing an active missionary outreach back to Africa and elsewhere (Adogame 2008: 310). Holy Ghost End Time Ministries Intl. (HGETMI) represents the second genre. Founded by Pastor Festus Nsoha of Nigeria in 1993, HGETMI is based in Prague and from there it is involved in missionary endeavors to many parts of the world, including Africa and the USA. Pastor Nsoha became Christian in 1985 and after his conversion spent five years of missionary work in Cameroon before moving to former Czechoslovakia in 1993. Unlike Pastors Akinyemi and Otekhile, Nsoha did not come as a student, but for religious purposes only.

According to its mission statement published on the HGETMI official website (trilingual: English, Czech and Russian), the organization pursues 'preaching the full message of the Good News, bringing healing and restoration, establishing churches and Christian groups' (www.holyghost.cz). In addition to its main Oasis Church ('Církev Oáza' in Czech) in Prague,⁴ HGETMI have founded churches and home church groups in other five towns of the Czech Republic so far (www.holyghost.cz/About-HGETMI.html).

In comparison with the other two churches discussed above, HGETMI seems to be best established in the Czech context in terms of membership and contextualization. First of all, it has over 100 active members. It is very interesting to note that Pastor Nsoha, his wife and three children are the only Nigerian or, for that matter, African members of the congregation. Otherwise, the Oasis Church mainly consists of the people of the Czech, Russian and Ukrainian origin. In addition, there are many members coming from the

4 The congregation used to meet in the premises of a hotel near the center of Prague. Recently, it bought its own premises in the village of Nebužice, a few kilometers from Prague. As of the end of July 2013, all programs and meetings of the church take place there.

Roma ethnic background. The languages used in the congregation are Czech, English and Russian; when one of those languages is used for sermons, prayers, announcements etc., translation into the other two is always provided. Czech, Russian and Roma members are also intensively involved in leading the services (hosting, prayers, announcements, songs etc.) and various other activities of the church, with Pastor Nsoha being responsible mainly for preaching and lecturing.

In addition, the aspects of Nigerian Pentecostalism of the Oasis Church are least visible if compared to the Prague MFM or the Covenant Parish Prague. As a matter of fact, it is virtually absent. No African songs are featured during the worship; the hymns sung by the congregation are either in English, Czech or Russian. The same is true for the use of African musical instruments; the accompanying music style and instruments resemble usual contemporary services known from (especially) Evangelical and Pentecostal churches around Europe and North America. Interestingly enough, there are no Black African members in the ensemble 'Gospel Singers' which is in charge of the music during worship services.

Also, sermons of Pastor Nsoha do not betray any particular features of Nigerian Pentecostalism. This could be possibly explained by a relatively long time Nsoha spent pastoring and preaching outside his African context. However it must be stated that his sermons are not specifically contextual either. Pastor Nsoha emphasizes that the gospel is universal, 'the same for everyone', no matter whether it is proclaimed in the Czech Republic or Nigeria or the USA. And indeed, if not for an African pastor, one would barely notice that one is worshipping with a Nigerian-initiated congregation. As a matter of fact, in its theology and expression the Oasis Church resembles American Pentecostal/charismatic communities more than Nigerian or even Czech ones. A possible explanation points to the fact that HGETMI was initiated by a Nigerian in the Czech context and not initiated in Nigeria by a Nigerian. Since HGETMI is not a daughter congregation of a famous Nigerian church, like RCCG or MFM, it is not necessarily a primary place of worship and spiritual life for African immigrants to Prague. This leaves more space for Czech and other European members to exercise influence on the formation and activity of HGETMI. Nevertheless, the shaping power of Pastor Nsoha is decisive. Being formed by his close contacts with the US context, Festus Nsoha moulds the 'face' of the church accordingly. For instance, the HGETMI (Oasis Church) worship service is thus characterized by its centeredness around a simple message with several practical steps to be implemented in the believers' life, an informal style of speech seasoned with jokes and anecdotes, the employment of up-to-date gadgetry, and contemporary popular music.

5 Analysis

We have seen that the three churches under research represent different examples of Nigerian-initiated and -led Pentecostal/charismatic ministry in the local Czech context. It has also become clear that these churches employ various, both converging and diverging strategies to pursue their mission. I will now discuss some aspects of these strategies, including contextual knowledge/experience of the pastor, language politics, worldview, worship style, and outreach policy. Such analysis will help us realize the complexity of the approaches Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches take in order to move in their ministry beyond their ethnic and cultural origin. First, all of the pastors in the case-study churches show considerable knowledge of and experience with the local Czech context. While Pastor Nsoha of HGETMI has the advantage of having spent the longest time in the Czech Republic (since 1993), Pastor Akinyemi of the Prague MFM and Pastor Otekhile of the CPP can benefit from their studies at Czech universities, the experience which exposed them to the local Czech environment. Unlike Otekhile and Nsoha who came to the Czech Republic after it had been established as an independent country, Yomi Akinyemi experienced living not only in the former Czechoslovakia (on January 1, 1993 Czechoslovakia ceased to exist; from it emerged two countries: the Czech Republic and Slovakia), but also within the political reality of Communism, which came to an end in November 1989 with the Velvet Revolution. This experience, I believe, gives him even better understanding of the Czech context. Moreover, Akinyemi speaks the best Czech out of the three pastors.

Second, all three churches realize the importance of language in their ministry. While they all discourage the use of African languages in their worship as well as other church and missionary activities, their respective language policies otherwise differ significantly. Both the Prague MFM and HGETMI put a great emphasis on addressing people in the vernacular. In their language policy, the Prague MFM is very serious about their mission statement of having a ministry, first and foremost, to the Czech people. The aforementioned interpretation strategy at worship services and Bible studies, provided by Pastor Akinyemi, his wife or one of their children, is a case in point. And it apparently bears fruit as there are a modest, yet stable number of Czech (and non-English-speaking) members of the congregation.

Similarly, HGETMI also consistently pursues a policy of interpretation. However, it adds another language, Russian, to English and Czech as many church members come from countries of the former Soviet Union. In contrast to the Prague MFM, HGETMI employs the service of skilled interpreters and the

use of modern technologies (overhead projectors, interpreting devices etc.). Moreover, small group meetings ('home churches') are held in the language of the majority of its members (either Czech or Russian), whereas translation to the other languages, including English, is available. Again, such a strategy obviously proves to be successful as the majority of the church members comes from either Czech- or Russian-speaking background.

The CPP with its actual language politics represents a contrast to the other two churches. The CPP in theory acknowledges the need to master the Czech language in order to reach out to the indigenous population more effectively. Therefore, many members of the church study Czech in a language course. However, one tends to question the effectiveness of this language course as it is self-organized and self-taught by the members of the CPP. Moreover, one also wonders about the actual intention to put Czech into practice in the life of the church since all of the CPP's events and ministries as well as public presentations (the website, published leaflets etc.) are in English only. Even though it seems that there is no need for using Czech as the church members from the Czech (and other European) background are well versed in English, one cannot help thinking that the CPP would be more effective in its publicly proclaimed cross-cultural ministry in the Czech context if it addressed the local population in the vernacular.

Third, the worldview of the respective churches plays a significant role in their ministries. The leadership of all three churches recognizes the importance of understanding the context as well as possible. For example, Pastor Akinyemi of the Prague MFM identifies depression, psychiatric problems and a high divorce rate as problems typical of the Czech situation. And yet, the churches do not actively seek to produce contextual theologies relevant to their ministries. Quite the contrary, it is claimed that the gospel message is the same for all the people and should be preached accordingly; this statement, needless to say, is in tension with the aforementioned observation on the importance of contextual identification and understanding. As a result, sermons, addresses and prayers, be they by the pastors or other members of the churches, are quite uniform with a focus on salvation and right living of an individual. Individual vices, such as smoking, drinking, gambling or inappropriate sexual behavior, are often criticized, while the social and structural dimensions of sin are virtually neglected. This fact brings the case-study churches very near to many Czech Pentecostal/charismatic or Evangelical churches. This proximity is even more evident in case of HGETMI due to vivid contacts and cooperation of Pastor Nsoha with American churches.

Despite the identified struggle for de-Africanization, the churches are not completely free of the African worldview. This is especially true for the Prague

MFM with their belief in the existence of territorial demons and witchcraft. As we have seen, this worldview often clashes with the worldview of even Prague MFM members of Czech origin, not to mention the Czech population at large. Nevertheless, this fact does not seem to bother the Prague MFM leadership much as this congregation understands its mission primarily as a prayer and deliverance ministry for the sake of the Czech people in general, thus assuming a certain kind of vicarious priestly presence in the society.

Fourth, the worship styles of all three case-study churches bear both resemblances and unique traits. The resemblances include a high degree of involvement of church members in organizing and facilitating worship services, vibrant and energetic music, or a strong emphasis on prayer and adoration. However, there are also elements peculiar to the respective churches. For example, the CPP conducts its services in English only, including sermons and hymns. This fact, along with the reality of employing some hymns in African languages, not only sets the CPP apart from the Prague MFM and HGETMI, both of which use Czech (and, in case of HGETMI, even Russian) in their worship, but also diminishes the CPP's ability to reach out to the Czech population.

While the Prague MFM seeks to have a consistently bilingual, Czech and English worship services, its style betrays the biggest degree of African traits. These are apparent especially in music which makes abundant use of traditional African instruments. Yet, it seems that such a style is appreciated by the Czech church-goers, not least due to the fact that they are able to understand everything what is going on and participate actively at the worship service.

Unlike the two aforementioned churches which make use of several preachers and every member is in principle welcome to deliver a sermon, Pastor Nsoha is the main and most influential preacher for the HGETMI Oasis Church. While such a practice encourages authoritarian leadership as well as certain uniformity, it also gives the members certainty in what they can expect. The observation of the congregation indicates that such a style is appreciated.

And finally, all three churches make use of various outreach strategies. The Prague MFM is involved in street evangelism, helping homeless people and visiting patients in hospitals. The church has also been active in prison ministry and now considers reaching out to immigrants living in Czech immigrant camps. In addition, the church members invite their friends to worship services, Bible studies, and prayer meetings. The church occasionally cooperates with some Czech churches of Pentecostal/charismatic orientation when organizing some evangelistic or prayer events. All these examples indicate a good potential for crossing the cultural and ethnic boundaries and engaging in effective ministry. A possible hindrance is represented by the fact that there are few members on the 'mission team'.

The CPP makes use of three particular outreach methods. The first two include the Internet and brochures and flyers distributed in shops or on streets. According to Pastor Otekhile, however, the third method, involving one-on-one encounter, is the most effective by far. Since the CPP believes that such evangelism on individual basis is preferable to large-scale events, such as crusades or stadium evangelizations, it hardly ever engages in cooperation with other churches or missionary organizations, including Czech ones. This might possibly lead to their isolation and a 'cultural ghetto'. Another potential hindrance to their ministry is language, as very few CPP members speak Czech at an adequate level.

In its outreach, HGETMI focuses on different groups of people, including the youth, children and women. The church is also actively involved in ministry abroad. The examples include Pastor Nsoha's 'preaching tours' in the USA and mission trips to Ukraine and Poland. The church music group Gospel Singers represents another missionary tool as it seeks 'to use music and worship as an instrument of blessings, salvation, healing and deliverance for all who listen to it' not only in the course of worship services, but also at conferences and concerts in different halls and in the open air (<http://www.cirkevoaza.cz/>). To a much larger degree than the Prague MFM and CPP, HGETMI cooperates with Czech and international churches and missionary organizations in missionary events on different occasions. These include conferences and stadium-, tent-, street-, or open air evangelizations. HGETMI also makes use of technology in order to reach out to people. For example, its Sunday worship services are broadcasted live via *Oaza TV*, a channel operated by HGETMI. In addition, a video archive is available on the HGETMI website, containing materials from various camps and conferences (www.holyghost.cz/Video-Archive.html). It is obvious that HGETMI is interested in cross-cultural ministry in the Czech Republic and beyond. Such a varied outreach policy can help the church become an active missionary force in the Czech context in the future.

6 Conclusion

Unlike some Western or even Eastern European countries, there are no Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic mega-churches in the Czech Republic. This is largely due to historical reasons, including the Czech Republic being a country with no colonial history and no access to the sea and the isolation during the Communist regime. Even though it is difficult to estimate exact numbers of Nigerian immigrants to the Czech Republic, all of them

came to the country as individuals, mostly students; there were no major immigration waves.

In addition, Pentecostal/charismatic forms of Christianity have never taken really deep roots within the Czech society. Even though there has been over a hundred year history of Pentecostal/charismatic presence in the Czech Republic (or its predecessors), its influence—even within the Christian circles—must be deemed as marginal.

The phenomenon of Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal/charismatic churches in the Czech Republic needs to be considered with these actualities in mind. The present chapter has explored three of such churches, based in Prague, in pursuit of an answer to the question, how and to what extent are these churches able to cross ethnic and cultural barriers in their ministry in the local Czech environment? The three churches were interpreted as three models of various answers to this question. In the ministry of the Oasis Church (HGETMI) the Nigerian Pentecostal/charismatic element is least prominent and visible as the church shows more European and American features. The fact that it does not have any ties with a mother church in Nigeria, being a church originally founded in the diaspora, might play a role in this development. In addition, the status of the pastor and the role of his personal development are also of major importance in this respect.

The Prague MFM makes much effort to discourage possibly all (religious and cultural) Nigerian and, generally, African elements since it perceives its *raison d'être* in being a church with the primary focus on the Czechs. Yet, some of its emphases show typically African Pentecostal/charismatic provenience. Most notably, it is the preoccupation with the spiritual warfare against demonic powers (witchcraft) as the Prague MFM seeks to become a ministry of prayer and deliverance, with a certain kind of a vicarious presence in the Czech society for the sake of its people. This observation indicates, *inter alia*, that the factor of numerical growth is not to be viewed as the only sign of success of Nigerian-initiated churches in migration contexts.

The Covenant Parish Prague (RCCG) gives an impression of a Black African church for Black African people, despite the painstaking effort of the leadership as well as members to be as open to the society at large as possible. There might be various reasons for this situation. General disinterest or ignorance of the Czech majority society could come into the picture. On the other hand, the idea of having their 'own' church might represent an attractive platform for immigrants living in a completely foreign environment to foster their religious as well as cultural and/or national identity. After all, there are examples of other 'national churches' in the Czech environment whose members, while

being better integrated in the Czech society than Nigerians, still tend to view ‘their’ churches in the same manner.

The mere fact that the three analyzed Nigerian-initiated churches in the Czech Republic do not statistically show large numbers of members coming from a European background is not enough to claim that they would not represent an active missionary force. This chapter has introduced and analyzed different strategies these churches use to move beyond their ethnic and cultural origin. It has suggested that a complexity of factors needs to be taken into consideration when exploring a missionary potential of Nigerian-initiated churches (and, indeed, any churches in migration contexts). For these particular cases, the chapter has shown that there is both a positive (active missionary force) and a negative (cultural ghetto) missionary potential. It will be exciting to observe, what the ministry of these churches will look like in the future.

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Conceptualizing Temporary Economic Migration to Kuwait

An Analysis of Migrant Churches Based on Migrant Social Location

Stanley John

1 Introduction

More than 215 million people, or 3 per cent of the world's population, are international migrants living in a country other than the country of their citizenship (World Bank 2011: 18). This article is interested in a specific type of international migrants who travel for the purpose of work and remain in their host countries for a limited period of time. This phenomenon, called temporary economic or labor migration, is characteristic of the system of migration employed in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.¹ These migrants travel with their faith, establishing churches and religious communities in their host countries. This chapter will seek to understand the diversity and complexity embodied by the temporary economic migrants and the churches they form in Kuwait.

The purpose of this chapter is to conceptualize temporary economic migrants in Kuwait with attention to the key determinants of migrant social location and to discern how these factors shape Christian ministry and missions in the migrant context. The premise of this chapter is that an adequate understanding of the specific type of migrants and migratory system that functions in a particular geographic space is essential for understanding all aspects of migrant life, including the practice of faith. This chapter appropriates the case of temporary economic migration from Kerala, India to Kuwait and the Kerala Pentecostal churches formed by these migrants in the diaspora.

We will begin with a brief introduction to economic migration to Kuwait with a demographic analysis of the ethnic and religious composition of the region. Next we will situate temporary economic migration within the broader migration paradigm. We will discuss current typologies, definitions of diaspora and transnationalism, and engage with Gardner's theory of the two-types of migrants in the Gulf (Gardner 2010: 24). This then will allow us to raise several critical questions that will help to conceptualize temporary economic

1 The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) comprises of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates.

migrants in Kuwait and the determinants of migrant social location. We will employ this framework to analyze the worship, community and service of the Kerala Pentecostal churches in Kuwait.

2 Understanding the Context: Economic Migration to Kuwait

Economic migration to Kuwait and the surrounding GCC countries began in the latter half of the twentieth century and continues unabated into the twenty-first century. With the discovery of oil in the 1930s, Kuwait underwent stupendous economic transformation, from a sparsely populated desert into a thriving metropolis. The region soon became the hot spot of economic development and nation building. The major limitation, however, was the lack of a native labor population sufficient to meet the demands of the high rate of economic development (see Kapiszewski 2001: 37). To meet this need, the nations of the Arabian Gulf turned to the labor-rich countries of Southern Asia, Southeast Asia, and other Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

The type of migratory system that characterizes labor migration to Kuwait follows a *kafala* or sponsorship system that links residency in the country directly to an employment contract with a particular employer who is the *kafeel*, or sponsor. The system finds its roots in the traditional custom of bonded-labor relationships wherein “workers labored against a debt previously incurred instead of receiving wages” (Human Rights Watch 2010: 36). The migrant’s tenure in the country is limited to the duration of the employment contract, which at its conclusion, requires renewal of the contract, a search for a new employer, or the migrant’s departure from the country. The multiple facets of the *kafala* sponsorship system and the context of employment are key determinants of migrant social location as will be demonstrated later in this contribution.

One of the significant changes that took place as a result of the economic boom was the transformation of the Gulf countries into a highly differentiated population between nationals and expatriates. Expatriates now account for the majority of the population in nearly all of the Gulf countries.² In 2008, Qatar had the highest proportion of migrants to the overall population with

2 The two exceptions to the case are Saudi Arabia and Oman with expatriates accounting for 2 per cent and 31.4 per cent respectively in 2008. The expatriate population surpassed the nationals in Bahrain in 2008. Although nationals outnumber expatriates in the overall population in Saudi Arabia, the country receives the highest number of expatriates, 6.6 million, amongst the GCC countries (Baldwin-Edwards 2011: 11).

87 per cent. United Arab Emirates followed with 81.3 per cent while Kuwait and Bahrain had 67.9 per cent and 51.4 per cent respectively (Baldwin-Edwards 2011: 11). These proportions are accentuated when we consider the labor force in the GCC countries. Migrant workers outnumber nationals in each of the six Gulf countries. They account for 94 per cent of the total labor force in Qatar and 85 per cent in United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia follow with 76.7 per cent, and 50.6 per cent respectively (Baldwin-Edwards 2011: 11).

Labor migration altered the ethnic demography of the region. Among the expatriate labor population in Kuwait, non-Arab Asians account for the highest proportion of the labor population with 65.3 per cent followed by Arabs from Middle East and North Africa (MENA) accounting for 30.95 per cent. Migrants from Europe, America and other regions comprise the remaining 4 per cent of the labor population (ILO 2009: 19). The top migrant sending countries in 2003 were India (300,000), Egypt (260,000), Bangladesh (170,000), Sri Lanka (170,000), Pakistan (100,000), Syria (100,000), Iran (80,000), Philippines (70,000), and Jordan/Palestine (50,000) (Kapiszewski 2006: 10).

Migration also altered the religious composition of the region. When people migrate, they migrate with their faith. There are no accurate statistics on religious adherents in the census data in Kuwait and the estimate varies significantly depending on the source. The Pew Forum's Global Religious Landscape (Pew Forum 2012) estimates that nearly 74.1 per cent of the population of Kuwait is Muslim, although other reports claim as high as 85 per cent.³ Amongst the Kuwaiti nationals, apart from 200 Christian families and a few Baha'i citizens, the population is overwhelmingly Muslim. The majority, about two-thirds, of the Kuwaiti Muslim population, including the royal family, is Sunni, while one-third is Shia. Christians account for 14.3 per cent of the total population (Pew Forum 2011).⁴ These include the Roman Catholic Church (300,000), the Coptic Orthodox Church (70,000), the National Evangelical Church (40,000) and other Christian denominations (30,000). Hindus (300,000), Buddhists (100,000),

3 There are no accurate statistics regarding religion in the Annual Statistics of the Central Statistical Bureau of Kuwait. These figures are the author's approximation based on Pew Forum 2012 Global Religious Landscape project and International Religious Freedom Report (IRFR) 2011 from the Department of State. The World Christian Database (WCD) estimates a significantly lower Christian population of 8.81 per cent and a Muslim population of 86.18 per cent.

4 The IRFR (U.S. Department of State) estimates slightly higher, with 450,000 non-citizen Christians in 2011 or 16 per cent of the country's 2,818,042 population (population estimate World Bank 2011).

Sikhs (10,000), Baha'i (400) account for 11.6 per cent of the population (U.S. Department of State 2010).

Our picture of the Gulf countries must be informed by the reality of a context that is radically shaped by migration. This demographic analysis of the population of Kuwait reveals an ethnically and religiously diverse context.⁵ However, the presence of diverse ethnic and religious communities must not be mistaken for an integrated society. This principle will prove essential in the next section as we consider the appropriate taxonomy for this group of migrants.

3 Understanding Temporary Economic Migration

Temporary economic migration is a facet of the global phenomenon of migration. In this section, we will attempt to situate temporary economic migration within the broader discussion on migration by first engaging the current typologies of migrants and then discussing the phenomenon of migration. Next, we will employ Gardner's two types of migrants to analyze the Kuwaiti context, after which I will propose the key determinants of migrant social location.

Several proposals have been made to conceptualize the different types of migrants. Ted Lewellen, author of the *Anthropology of Globalization*, identifies nine types of migrants (Lewellen 2002: 130). Those who move within the country usually for employment are *internal migrants* and are contrasted with *international migrants*, who, as the term suggests, travel to different countries multiple times and return without making a significant long-term social investment. *Immigrants*, on the other hand, are those that leave the country of citizenship to live permanently, or for a long term, in another country. Those among the immigrants that continue to maintain contacts in both the country of origin as well as the host country through social, cultural, economic, and political networks are called *transnational immigrants*. *Diaspora*, for Lewellen, refers to a group that is dispersed from a homeland to multiple countries. *Refugees* are those that are dispersed through war or political repression, and by extension, famine, and earthquake. *Step-migration* refers to a migratory pattern usually from rural to urban; similarly, *migratory chain* refers to the formation of a complex network so any migrant can follow the network. *Circular*

5 The diverse ethnic and religious context functions as enclaves and must not be mistaken for integrated society.

migration refers to routinized migration away from and back to the home community usually for agricultural or labor purposes (Lewellen 2002: 130).

Stephen Castles, professor of sociology at the University of Sydney, outlines the different types of migrations involved in the migrant enterprise. These are highly skilled workers, low-skilled workers, forced migration, family reunion, and a few others such as astronaut phenomenon, return migration, retirement migration, and even posthumous migration (Castles 2002: 1143–1168).

The benefit of these terms lies in their ability to incorporate a broad range of migrants into simple heuristic models. These categories, however, are unable to capture the complexity of the migrants in Kuwait and the other Gulf countries. We begin to move in the right direction with the specific terminology of temporary economic migrants. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines temporary economic migrants as “[s]killed, semi-skilled or untrained workers who remain in the receiving country for definite periods as determined in a work contract with an individual worker or a service contract concluded with an enterprise” (IOM 2004: 66; notice that the term temporary is from the perspective of the host country). Christian Dustmann, professor of economics at University College London, specifies four types of temporary migration: circulatory migration, transient migration, contract migration, and return migration (Dustmann 2000: 8). Temporary economic migrants in Kuwait fit the model described by Dustmann; however, it is inadequate to capture the diversity embodied by various types of temporary economic migrants.

Migration to Kuwait is characterized by its transience, rarely transferring into a permanent resident status as assumed by the term immigrant. These migrants are neither immigrants nor visitors. They encompass varying durations from a short-term of two to three years or long-term with up to two or three generations in the diaspora. They represent a highly complex group of people from skilled to non-skilled labor, single migrants to migrants with families, limited labor contracts to extendable contracts, and their tenure in the Gulf is brought to an end either on their own volition, personal or familial commitments, or unanticipated emergency. Thus, we need to expand our current categories to include temporary economic migration.

Another approach to understand migrants is to describe the phenomenon of migration. This approach is essentially descriptive in nature and stems from an anthropological thrust in contrast to sociological categories, such as the ones described above. The two key terms in this set of anthropological literature are diaspora and transnationalism. We will discuss briefly how these terms might be useful in conceptualizing temporary economic migrants in Kuwait.

There are a variety of definitions associated with the term diaspora. Stéphane Dufoix, in his seminal book *Diasporas*, observes, “Diaspora has become a term that refers to any phenomenon of dispersion from a place; the organization of an ethnic, national, or religious community in one or more countries; a population spread over more than one territory; the places of dispersion; any nonterritorial space where exchanges take place, and so on” (Dufoix 2008: 2).

The appropriateness of the term for analysis depends on how one might define a diaspora. Dufoix provides an overview of the types of definitions (Dufoix 2008: 21–25). An open definition opts for broad criteria, is inclusive in nature, and less restrictive regarding specific characteristics.⁶ The second type involves categorical definitions. These specify characteristics based on an ideal type and often have the Jewish diaspora as the model. In as much as communities match up to these criteria, they qualify as “true” diaspora.⁷ The third type of definition is what Dufoix calls oxymoronic. These react to the previous definition types’ insistence on a point of departure or imagination of homeland, opting instead for a nuanced approach characterized by the multiplicity of factors or “paradoxical identity” such as diversity, heterogeneity, and hybridity.⁸

An open and oxymoronic definition of the term diaspora recognizes that a categorical definition can no longer capture the complexity embodied by diasporic people. Thus, I would argue that the diaspora nomenclature applies to the temporary migrant context in situating the communities in a geographical context other than their place of origin. Furthermore, the multiple identities embodied by the second-generation of temporary migrant workers that are born in the migrant context yet retain citizenship in their parents’ place of

6 Dufoix cites Armstrong’s definition of diaspora as an example of the open type: “any ethnic collectivity which lacks a territorial base within a given polity, i.e. is a relatively small community throughout all portions of the polity” (Armstrong in Dufoix 2008: 21).

7 William Safran proposes six characteristics in this regard (Safran quoted in Dufoix 2008: 22): (1) dispersion from a “center” to at least two peripheral foreign regions; (2) persistence of a collective memory concerning the homeland; (3) certainty that their acceptance by the host society is impossible; (4) maintenance of an often idealized homeland as a goal of return; (5) belief in a collective duty to engage in the perpetuation, restoration, or security of the country of origin; (6) maintenance of individual or collective relations with the country of origin.

8 Stuart Hall writes, “I use this term metaphorically, not literally: diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, imperializing, hegemonizing form of ethnicity . . . the diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (Hall 1990, quoted in Dufoix 2008: 24).

origin hints at the type of heterogeneity and hybridity captured in the oxymoronic type of definitions.

Closely related to the notion of diaspora is the phenomenon of transnationalism. Rather than being a term that describes a type of migrant, the term describes a phenomenon of migrant life. It refers to the ways in which migrant communities maintain relations with their countries of origin. Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton define transnationalism as, "The process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies or origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographical, cultural, and political borders" (Basch *et al.* 1994: 7).⁹ It is often contrasted with popular ideologies of assimilation which presumed that new migrants shed their socio-cultural and linguistic identities for that of the dominant community. Transnational migrants go beyond the confines of the borders of nation-states, establishing social relations and structures that transcend national boundaries.

Temporary economic migrants in Kuwait orient their lives toward the homeland by creating and maintaining transnational ties with their families and friends in the home country. These migrants are shaped by the transient nature of their tenure, the marginality associated with being a migrant worker, and in many cases social discrimination and exclusion. These, among other factors, affirm the transnational ties and the anticipated return homeward.

4 Two Ends of a Spectrum

Now we turn to an anthropological thick-description to help us understand the complexity embodied by the temporary economic migrants in Kuwait. Andrew Gardner, author of *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain*, proposes a two-fold typology of migrants in the Gulf states, namely, transnational proletariat and diasporic elite, based on the bifurcation between the working and professional classes (Gardner 2010: 24). I will employ the two types here as an organizing tool to provide thick-descriptive

9 Lewellen outlines the characteristics of transnational communities (Lewellen 2002: 152): (1) lives lived across borders with a high intensity of ongoing social and economic interaction; (2) made possible as a result of the flexible job market and internationalization of capitalist production and finance; (3) creates a novel type of identity; (4) over time transnationalism becomes independent of its original conditions; (5) transnationals develop new modes of resistance such as diaspora communities and interstate institutions.

data. However, these ought not to be viewed as dichotomous categories. Rather, these two types occupy the two ends of a spectrum with migrants occupying multiple positions along the continuum.

At one end of the spectrum are transnational proletariats. These are the “Indian foreign laborers in the working class, usually men, alone, with families behind them in India. Their gaze remains fixed on their home in India, and they are transnational in the sense that their social fields, collectively and individually, are spread between two nations but free of neither” (Gardner 2010: 25).

The vast majority of the non-skilled labor force travel to the Gulf states to work in the labor-intensive fields of construction, domestic work, or service industry. In most cases these expatriates are unable to bring their families with them and come for the duration of two years, although the contract can be renewed in some circumstances. The discrimination by the dominant society, the constant threat of deportation, and the ‘structural violence’ fostered by the *kafala* sponsorship system affirms the marginal position of these workers in the society (Longva 1997; Gardner 2010; Human Rights Watch 2010).

Even in cases where the circumstances are not as dismal and perhaps even favorable, the lack of opportunities to renew the employment contract and the lack of a system for permanent residency serves as a constant reminder of the brevity of their sojourn in the country. All of these factors foster the imagination of the homeland and the desire to return upon meeting their financial goals of building a house, saving for a child’s education, paying for a family member’s wedding, or securing sufficient funds to start a small business. For them, maintaining relations with the homeland is never an afterthought—it is their very lifeline and purpose for their journey to the desert. The connection to the homeland is strong and an anticipated outcome upon the conclusion of their employment.

The other end of the spectrum is occupied by the diasporic elites who are the middle and upper classes of the migrant community in the Gulf. Gardner writes, “Their long standing presence in Bahrain, and the disparate ties they maintain with points around the globe, doesn’t necessarily make them less transnational than their impoverished countrymen on the island, but it does conform to the basic pattern of a diasporic, if not cosmopolitan, existence” (Gardner 2010: 25).

The highly skilled workers, too, are exposed to similar vulnerabilities of deportation, lack of adequate recourse to justice, and ethnic discrimination. However, their circumstances are far less dismal than for the transnational proletariat. The duration of their employment and length of stay is significantly longer, even extending up to several generations, albeit in a temporary status.

These are engineers, health care professionals, educators, and businessmen who are typically able to meet the minimum salary requirement to bring their families with them to the diaspora. The duration of their stay varies. Zachariah observes that among the migrants from Kerala, the average length of stay in the Gulf was seven years (Zachariah 2011: 25).

To mitigate these vulnerabilities, the diasporic elites develop strategies and competencies in their diasporic experience. They adopt a simple lifestyle in the Gulf to save up money to remit back home, reminding themselves of the transient nature of life in the Gulf. They invest in real estate, such as rubber plantations, opulent villas, and apartments in the cities far away from the banks of the Middle East. They attempt to restrict interaction with the citizenry outside the arena of employment, developing enclaves and ethnic social networks that provide avenues for social, cultural, and religious identity formation. They also develop what Gardner calls strategic transnationalism, wherein they build transnational networks that span the globe to insure them against the vulnerabilities prevalent in the Gulf states (Gardener 2010: 89).

5 Conceptualizing Temporary Economic Migrants in Kuwait

With reference to Kuwait, we discussed the transnational proletariat and the diasporic elite as two ends of a spectrum in conceptualizing temporary economic migrants. In reality, migrants cannot be neatly categorized into these two categories of workers and elites. They occupy multiple positions along the continuum defined by a set of interrelated and mutually informing factors.

The list of questions below are not intended to be comprehensive, but rather capture the key factors that are determinants of migrant social location along the spectrum of temporary economic migration to Kuwait.

1. *Skill level*: Does the migrant belong to the highly skilled or low-skilled bracket of employment qualification? The skill level determines the type of employment possibilities, the length of tenure, salary, living conditions, and the overall migrant experience.
2. *Tenure*: How long is their tenure of employment or how long have they lived in the diaspora? The length of their tenure determines the migrant's social capital and knowledge accrued. The initial contract is limited to two-three years; however, the migrant is able to stay longer if he/she had the opportunity to extend the contract or seek another employer.
3. *Employer*: Who is the employer or sponsor for the migrant? Comparisons regarding employers can be made on multiple levels: sector of

employment—whether private or public; company ownership—whether local owner or multi-national corporation; individual employer character—whether benevolent or exploitative. These factors are critical to assess the migrant employment experience.

4. *Type of visa*: What type of visa do they hold? There are multiple types of visas issued based on type of employment and industry. These vary from driver/domestic worker visa (Article 20), regular work visa (Article 17—public sector; Article 18—private sector), and so on. Some migrants opt for a driver visa for the benefit of receiving a driver's permit; however, this might prove restrictive if the individual hopes to change visas in the future.
5. *Migration network*: How did they arrive in the country? Migrants arrive in the country through either migrant agencies or individual social networks such as family members or friends. Functioning as middlemen in the recruitment process, migrant agencies recruit workers from the home country. With the lack of monitoring mechanisms this process has a high potential for exploitation. Personal migrant networks ensure migrant knowledge competence and provide a social support network.
6. *Family reunification*: What is the marital status of the migrant and what are the possibilities for the family to join the migrant in the diaspora? The government mandates a minimum salary requirement for migrants in order for them to apply for their family to join them in Kuwait. The government requires a minimum salary of KD 250 (\$875) for a migrant to apply for a visitor visa; the amount increases to KD 400 (\$1,400) if the migrant is seeking a dependent visa for their family.
7. *Ethnicity and religion*: What is the ethnicity of the migrant and what is his/her religious affiliation? These two aspects are required on every official application. A large-scale survey of low-income migrant workers sponsored by the Qatar National Research Fund, the first of its kind, found Arab Muslim migrants earned slightly more, worked fewer hours, and had fewer roommates in their shared living space than their Hindu South Asian counterparts (Gardner 2013).

Let me briefly illustrate how these dynamics work in the life of the migrant. The social and cultural experience of migrants will be significantly different based on their length of tenure. Most low-skilled workers come on a contract of two to three years, which are sometimes renewed upon extension of the contract. Others, who are highly skilled, are known to stay in the country even up to the second and third generation albeit in a transient state. Closely related to their length of tenure is the nature of labor each group occupies. If their

tenure in the diaspora is limited to the three to four years stipulated in the initial contract, the migrant's experience is solely shaped by his/her relationship to the initial employer. If the migrant has the opportunity to stay in the country for a longer period, he/she could seek better employment opportunities and thus secure a better experience. Any attempt at conceptualizing migration to the Arabian Gulf must take seriously the transient nature of employment, and the skill-level of the migrants, which are the two key features of temporary economic migration to the Gulf.

6 Understanding the Migrant Church in Kuwait¹⁰

The dynamic factors of temporary economic migration outlined above manifest themselves in a migrant religious context. In this section, I will discuss briefly how these realities shape the migrant churches in Kuwait. I will reflect on three aspects of worship, community, and service as manifest among the Kerala Pentecostal migrant churches in this context.

The congregants of the Kerala Pentecostal churches come from the south Indian state of Kerala. Similar churches composed of migrants from various parts of India, Philippines, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nigeria, among many others, gather for worship on the National Evangelical Church compound in Kuwait City. When the earliest migrants from Kerala began to arrive in the 1950s, they formed the Kuwait Town Malayalee Christian Congregation (KTMCC), which served as an ecumenical gathering of all Christians from Kerala united by the common language of Malayalam. With the growth of the migrant population, churches began to form in keeping with the denominational affiliation in the homeland, whether it be the Church of South of India, Mar Thoma Church, Pentecostal churches, and so on. There are currently at least thirty Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches from Kerala that worship in various parts of Kuwait.

The realities of employment and the vulnerabilities of the migrant context become the recurring points of prayer and intercession by the community. Churches reserve time in the worship service for congregation members to share their testimonies. Prayers for employment, visa complications, and difficulties with employers remain at the forefront amongst these requests. Other requests relate to the needs of the families in the homeland or illness or reports of travel to the homeland. These become the themes of daily prayer amongst the migrant churches.

10 Details of the research on which these observations are based are found in John (2014).

The church communities are comprised of migrants who arrive in the diaspora for varying lengths of tenure. Those migrants with longer tenure in the diaspora become the senior leaders of the churches, with some having lived in the diaspora for more than thirty years. These senior migrants play a critical role in the administration and oversight of the church, managing the finances and transnational ecclesial ties with the homeland. Veterans in the diaspora serve as hosts to the newer migrants. These come to the church in Kuwait as referred by their churches in the homeland; others come to the church upon the invitation of a friend. The church, then, functions as a place of hospitality to the new migrants. The personal networks become indispensable for new migrants that come to the country without an employment contract. Employing their rich social networks and social capital, the senior members and relatives try to secure employment along with other necessities such as housing, food, cell phone, and driver's license for the new migrant. They function as the local experts and guides for the new migrant in the new diasporic location.

The senior congregants must return to the homeland upon termination of their employment contract or once they reach the mandatory retirement age of 65 years. Not all migrants in the church stay in the diaspora this long; some return to the homeland at the completion of their employment contract lasting three to four years or upon meeting certain financial goals. Others may migrate to countries in North America, Europe or Australia to join other family members. Thus, there is a steady stream of migrants returning to the homeland, but also new migrants coming to the diaspora.

Migrant churches reach out to their fellow migrants in benevolent service of compassion and care. Some migrants experience difficulties with lack of employment, which then places their visas and residency in jeopardy. Some face economic exploitation, with salaries being withheld or, in worst cases, even physical abuse. Not all migrants experience this level of exploitation. The church ministers to these migrants by providing for their needs, lending money, taking up a special collection, and through spiritual and emotional support. The benevolence is not limited to the diaspora context; the majority of their service is oriented toward the homeland. The Kerala Pentecostal churches send remittances to the homeland to help the poor, build homes for widows, support for marriage, education of children of clergy, and support orphanages.

The unique circumstances of temporary economic migration shape the life and practice of the religious communities in the diaspora. These key determinants of migrant social location shape and inform Christian ministry and mission to migrants in Kuwait.

7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to conceptualize temporary economic migration to Kuwait with attention to the key determinants of migrant social location and to discern how these factors shape Christian ministry and missions in the migrant context. We began with an introduction to the migrant context in Kuwait. Through a demographic analysis, the chapter demonstrated that migration has altered the ethnic and religious composition of the region resulting in a diverse context. We can no longer think of the Arabian Gulf as being ethnically homogenous and religiously Islamic.

Our discussion of migration must specify the type of migrants we refer to, whether refugees or asylum seekers or economic migrants, and the migration system at work within that geographical area. In the Arabian Gulf, temporary economic migration facilitated by the *kafala* sponsorship system is the norm. Hence, we can begin to understand migrants in this context only with attention to unique contextual factors. This article identifies seven determinants of migrant social location; these are: skill level, length of tenure, employer, type of visa, migration network, family reunification, and ethnicity and religion.

We employ the analytical lens developed in the previous section to understand the migrant religious community reflecting on three aspects religious life, namely, worship, community, and service. We noted that the vulnerabilities of migrant life are key themes in the prayers and intercession of the migrants. The senior migrants extend hospitality, drawing on their rich social networks to find housing, employment, and community to the new comers. Lastly, the churches reach out in benevolence to their fellow migrants as well as those in the homeland. The transnational flows of remittance support various benevolence ministries and missions of the church in the homeland.

The chapter demonstrates that in order to understand the migrant churches we must consider the particular geographical context, the migratory phenomenon at work, and the unique social location of the migrants. This socio-cultural lens provides us the exegetical tools to understand a congregation of temporary migrant workers and informs how Christian ministry and mission take place in the migrant context.

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Transnational Christianity and Converging Identities

Arabic Protestant Churches in New Jersey

Deanna Ferree Womack

Global migration is transforming the character of American Christianity, prompting recent studies of Asian, African, and Hispanic/Latino(a) Christian diasporas in the United States. The relative inattention to Arab American Christian communities, however, reflects the mistaken perception that Christianity is stagnant in the Middle East and of little importance among Arabs in the US. In reality, the continuing presence of vibrant Christian communities has enriched Middle Eastern society, and Arab Christians have remained an active part of intellectual, cultural, and political life in the region (Sharkey 2012: 7,15). Although the percentage of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa has declined relative to the majority Muslim population, Christianity in this region has charted consistent numerical growth for centuries. Its Christian population tripled in size between 1910 and 2010 (Johnson and Chung 2004: 181; Pew Forum 2011). In addition, more than a century of emigration from the Middle East and North Africa has resulted in a significant Arab Christian presence within Europe and the Americas. The majority of Arab Americans are Christians, but the uncritical association of Arabs with militant Islam has overshadowed this fact, doing an injustice to Arab Christians and Muslims alike. In order to gain a deeper understanding of Arab American Christianity as a lived reality, this study examines the histories, relationships, and experiences of Arab Christians in the United States. Addressing Arab Protestant churches specifically, it answers the following questions: What do the transition experiences mean for immigrants who join Arabic speaking churches in the US? What reference points help them reformulate a sense of identity?

This chapter focuses on Arabic churches in New Jersey as a window into the wider Arab American Protestant experience. The designation “Arabic churches” indicates Protestant congregations that worship in the Arabic

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language.¹ This is a worthwhile subject of investigation because little scholarship exists on Arab American Christians and their churches' role in the resettlement process (Suleiman 2010: 54). In particular, academic publications on Arabic speaking Protestant churches are missing within the small body of literature on Arab American Christianity, most of which focuses on Orthodox and Catholic communities (Suleiman 2006: 332–333).² By providing new information about immigrants in Arabic Protestant churches, this essay challenges stereotypical representations of Arabs and points to the reality of Arab Protestant communities in the Middle East and in the US. It also reminds American and European Protestants of their churches' historical ties to Middle Eastern Protestant churches founded by missionaries.

After taking account of historical and demographical information on Arab immigration to the US and addressing questions of methodology, this chapter presents a study of five Arabic Protestant churches in New Jersey. These churches include the two Presbyterian Church (USA) congregations in the state, another Presbyterian affiliated congregation, one United Methodist church, and one non-denominational congregation. The oldest of these churches dates to the late 1960s, while the youngest was formed in 2011. Reflecting state demographics, the members of these Arabic speaking congregations in New Jersey are primarily Egyptians (Arab American Institute 2015). Most have lived in the US for fewer than twenty years and are either first or second generation immigrants. Considering that most studies of Arab American communities focus on the Lebanese populations in New York and Michigan (Suleiman 2010: 51), this chapter contributes a more diverse view of Arab American experience as it examines the challenges and opportunities Arabic speaking Protestant congregations face in New Jersey.

1 Arab American Christianity: History and Demographics

The first wave of Arab immigrants to the US arrived from Ottoman Syria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ninety percent of these immigrants were Christian, and they established the first Arabic speaking churches

1 This contrasts with the ethnic and cultural term "Arab" and the general designation of "Middle Eastern." The church leaders in my focus group used the terms "Arabic church" and "Protestant" to refer to their own congregations, and this essay employs the same terminology.

2 Michael Suleiman's comprehensive bibliography of Arab American experience lists five sources on Arab Protestant churches. The only academic study is Ablahat 1937.

on American soil (Kayal 1983: 46,48; Marvasti and McKinney 2004: 27). Syrian immigration peaked in 1914 and came to a near halt after the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 limited immigration into the US, especially from non-European countries. A second wave of Arab immigrants from more diverse religious and national backgrounds began in the 1940s, and their numbers rose dramatically after the US repealed the quota act in 1965. With this easing of restrictions, many Arabs immigrated from Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, and Yemen for economic and political reasons (Holsinger 2009: 27,37; Suleiman 1999: 1–2,9). In 1980, when the US Census Bureau first collected statistics on the Arab American population, 610,000 Americans reported Arab ancestry (Brittingham and de la Cruz 2003: 1). This number included recent immigrants and descendants of earlier Arab immigrants.

The US Census Bureau is limited in its ability to reflect the self-identification of Arab Americans because “Arab” is not one of the designated categories for “race” on the standard census form completed by American households every ten years. Up through the 2000 census, estimates for the Arab American population were based on the long census form, which included an additional question about ancestry and space for respondents to write an answer. Just one out of every six households received this longer form (Marvasti and McKinney 2004: 32). The standard form asks only about race, and the Census Bureau expects most Arab Americans to select the category “white,” which it defines as the race of people “having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa” (Hickson, Hepler, and Kim 2011: 2). Since the form does not give an option to write in specific ethnic origins under this category, the census cannot accurately measure the Arab American population or determine how many Arab Americans self-identify as white. According to the Census Bureau’s yearly American Community Survey (ACS), which replaced the long census form after 2000, 1.5 million Americans claim Arab ancestry (Asi and Bealeu 2013: 1).³ The Arab American Institute (AAI) disputes this figure, however, because the ACS only surveys a small percentage of US households. AAI estimates that the actual Arab American population is 3.7 million (AAI 2012).

The current religious makeup of the Arab American population is also difficult to determine because the Census Bureau does not ask questions regarding religion. The most recent AAI poll on religious affiliation taken in 2002 shows that 63 per cent of the Arab Americans surveyed self-identified as Christian. Of the survey respondents, 24 per cent identified themselves as Muslim (Sunni,

3 The most recent census of 2010 used only the standard census form.

Shi'a, and Druze).⁴ According to this survey, the Arab American Christian population is 35 per cent Catholic (Roman Catholic, Maronite, and Melkite), 18 per cent Orthodox (Antiochian, Syrian, Greek, and Coptic), and 10 per cent Protestant (AAI 2002). The majority of Arab American Protestants are affiliated with either the Presbyterian Church (USA) or the Southern Baptist Convention (Haddad 1994: 72).

In 1899 Syrian immigrants affiliated with American Presbyterian missions in Beirut formed the first Arabic speaking Protestant congregation in the US in Falls River, Massachusetts. It became part of the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1934. Two other Arabic speaking Presbyterian churches were founded in the early twentieth century in Brooklyn, New York, and in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Presbyterian Church 2011: 3; Haddad 1994: 73). Following the second wave of immigration in the mid-twentieth century, Arab Presbyterians founded a number of new churches in the US. In 1969, Egyptian immigrants from the Evangelical Church of Egypt (Presbyterian Synod of the Nile) established the first of these Arabic churches in New Jersey. According to Victor Makari, in response to the growing number of Arab and other Middle Eastern Presbyterian immigrants, in 1981 the Presbyterian Church initiated the Advisory Committee for Ministry with Middle Easterners in the USA. Makari, the original chair of this committee, explains that it organized several Arabic and Persian speaking worship communities across the US. This work eventually led the Presbyterian Church (USA) to create an Office of Middle Eastern Ministries (Makari 2011). The office was founded in 1993 and currently provides spiritual and organizational support to more than 60 Middle Eastern Presbyterian congregations and fellowships, the majority of which are Arabic speaking (Presbyterian Church 2011: 3).

Since the US Census Bureau began reporting statistics on Arab Americans in 1980, New Jersey's Arab American community has tripled, and it remains one of the fastest growing Arab populations in the US (AAI 2015). The Arab presence in New Jersey began in the late nineteenth century in Paterson, which was known as the "Silk City" of America. Syrian migrants who were weavers in their homeland headed the state's silk industry and owned large mills until the Great Depression (Kayal 1977: 22). In the late 1960s, New Jersey's Arab American population underwent demographic change with the arrival from Egypt of large numbers of Coptic Christians and a smaller number of Muslims. The Coptic Orthodox Church established in Jersey City in 1970 was the first of a number of Coptic churches founded in major cities across the US (Abdelsayed

4 While the AAI survey classifies the Druze as Muslims, differences of opinions exist on the relationship between the Druze faith and Islam. See Haddad 1991: 111–112.

1977: 121–122,125). New Jersey’s Egyptian population continued to grow, and by 1977 Coptic Christians had become the largest segment in Jersey City (Kayal 1977: 22; Holsinger 2009: 47). Today, Egyptians are the largest Arab group in New Jersey’s estimated Arab American population of 85,956 (AAI 2015).

Existing historical scholarship and demographical data on Arabs in America reveal two critical points for consideration. First, despite the common tendency to associate Arabs with Islam, the majority of Arab Americans are Christians. Arab Muslims are the minority within both Arab American and American Muslim populations (Salaita 2006: 9). Second, Arab Christians have deep roots in the United States. In particular, the history of Arab American Protestantism stretches back to the late nineteenth-century relationship between American Presbyterian missionaries and Protestant churches in Syria and Egypt. This information is important for combatting the prevalent view of Arab Americans as dangerous outsiders. According to recent studies, this institutionalized prejudice has resulted in increased acts of anti-Arab racism in the US since September 11, 2001. After nearly a century and a half of Arab American presence in the United States, exclusive expressions of “Americanness” in the media, politics, the business world, and daily American life perpetuate a sense of disenfranchisement among American Arabs (Marvasti and McKinney 2004: 12; Salaita 2006: 4,13; Suleiman 2010: 50,55).

2 Methodology: Studying Congregations

As a short-term investigation of Arabic speaking congregations, this study is limited in scope. It does not offer an exhaustive description of Arabic Protestant churches in New Jersey, but it aims to provide a basis upon which future studies might build. In order to add to the small amount of existing scholarship on Arabic American Protestant churches, I adapted the sociological methodology in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, edited by Nancy Ammerman (Ammerman *et al.* 1998). Rather than focusing on one congregation, I compared the experiences of transition and identity formation in five Arabic speaking churches. I conducted my fieldwork between March and May, 2011.

In a focus group interview with five pastors and elders from these churches, I drew upon the handbook’s framework for studying congregational *ecology* (the particular socio-political, economic, and religious contexts of churches as living organisms) and *culture* (a congregation’s unique rituals, stories, and ways of understanding communal life; Ammerman *et al.* 1998: 14–15). I used the handbook’s Timeline and Social Network Map activities to gauge conceptions of congregational history and to discover how leaders and members of

Arabic speaking churches spend time in relationships inside and outside their local congregations (Ammerman et al. 1998: 43–47, 50–55). By beginning my investigation with church leaders, I gained a pastoral assessment of members' concerns and broad insight into their churches as a whole. Recognizing that leaders' views may differ from the perspectives of church members, however, I supplemented the information from this focus group with visits to church worship services, follow-up interviews, and informal conversations with members.

My main source of information on inter-generational issues in Arab immigrant churches is another focus group discussion with eighteen youth at the Arabic American Evangelical Church in Jersey City. This is the largest and longest-operating youth group in the five churches I studied. While these youth in Jersey City cannot speak for their peers in other New Jersey churches, the information they provided is corroborated by the pastors I interviewed and by conversations with parents and youth in other churches. As I present the outcomes of my research on congregational ecology and culture in the following section, I take a comparative approach that focuses on the important commonalities and distinguishing differences between the churches studied.⁵ In the research findings below, the names of my focus group participants are anonymized.

3 Research Findings: Congregational Ecology and Culture

Three of the churches in this study are located in northern New Jersey in close proximity to New York City. The oldest of these, the Mideast Evangelical Church (MEC) of Jersey City, began in 1969 when a small group of Egyptian Presbyterians organized house church meetings. As the congregation grew, it was given a worship space in Jersey City's Old Bergen Church, a united church of the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States. The congregation joined the Presbyterian Church in 1976 and bought its own building in the late 1980s (Faragalla 2011).⁶ MEC's membership is around 100 and most members are immigrants from Egypt (Focus Group 2011). The Arabic American Evangelical Church of Jersey City split from MEC in 2008. The great majority of its 50 members are Egyptian and a few

5 I drew upon my knowledge of Arabic during church visits but conducted all interviews in English.

6 At the time of this interview Joseph Faragalla, Executive Presbyter of the Palisades Presbytery, was assisting MEC with worship while the church conducted a pastoral search.

come from Jordan (Marzouk 2011).⁷ Rivers of Life is an Arabic speaking United Methodist church in Bayonne. Since the church began in 2003, its membership has risen to 60. Most members are Egyptian and a small number come from Jordan and Syria. In central New Jersey, the non-denominational Christian Arabic Church in East Brunswick came into being in early 2011. Nearly all of its twenty-five members are Egyptian immigrants. The Arabic Evangelical Church of South Jersey located in Moorestown began as a church of the PC(USA) in Narberth, Pennsylvania, in 1971. Many of its thirty members are Egyptian, but others are Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian, and Israeli Arabs. In all five churches, the majority of adult members are first generation immigrants. These members include recent immigrants and those who have lived in the US for ten to twenty years. In each of the three Presbyterian affiliated congregations, a small number of members have resided in the US for more than twenty years (Focus Group 2011).

3.1 *Ecology/Congregation in Context*

During the focus group discussion of their churches' historical timelines, pastors and church leaders placed differing emphases upon the memories they recounted. As a worship leader and founding member of his church, Magdy measures his time in the US according to the changes in worship music since he arrived in 1995. His story overlaps the history and frequent divisions of at least six churches in New York and New Jersey. Magdy's current congregation formed after 80 percent of the members of his previous church separated from their pastor. It was without a name, pastor, or building at the time of our focus group meeting. Within the next month, however, the congregation began renting a worship space in a Korean American church and chose the name Christian Arabic Church in East Brunswick. Magdy stresses his new church's need for a carefully crafted governing structure. "We're going to make bylaws," he says. "We're going to make a constitution, and then I believe . . . if we have an agreement between us, that would avoid any conflicts" (Focus Group 2011). When I attended this church's first worship service and congregational business meeting in its rented space, the church elders expressed a similar conviction. At this formative moment in the congregation's history, they discussed adopting a faith statement and rules of participatory government, and they

7 Safwat Marzouk, pastor of AAEC, was unable to attend the focus group meeting, but I interviewed him privately. The fifth member of the focus group, Ayad, had assisted with worship at AAEC and remained involved in the church.

decided to delay their pastoral search for a year in order to develop a solid church structure.

Eid, pastor of Rivers of Life in Bayonne, describes how his career as a United Methodist minister began when his non-denominational Arabic congregation rented a worship space from a Methodist church in 2003. The United Methodist Church (UMC) soon incorporated his congregation into its denomination and sent him to seminary. In 2005, the UMC made him senior pastor over the “American church” that shared the building with his Arabic congregation. Some members of this church initially hesitated to have an Arab pastor, and Eid believes that the September 11 attacks influenced such views. Eid’s authority as a pastor was later validated at a UMC annual conference that recognized his preaching and outreach to Muslim families who attended his Arabic service and ended up joining the church (Focus Group 2011).

Amin, a Presbyterian Church (USA) pastor, emphasizes his church’s denominational affiliation and the way denominational standards help balance church leadership and safeguard against divisions. Amin explains, “I am the leader and yet I am limited in my ability to go beyond my boundaries in making decisions.” With its Presbyterian polity, his church has remained united since 1971 when a group of Egyptian immigrants founded the original congregation in Narberth, Pennsylvania. In 2006 the congregation relocated to southern New Jersey to become part of the First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown, where Amin is the member of the pastoral staff responsible for the Arabic congregation. In June 2010, the church accepted twenty-five members as founding members of the Arabic Evangelical Church of South Jersey. While the church recently formed its first task force for international mission, it has been involved in local outreach since the beginning. Amin recalls that the church in Narberth encouraged the establishment of the Mideast Evangelical Church (MEC) in Jersey City in 1976 and provided the church with Bibles and hymnbooks (Focus Group 2011).

Fouad, an elder at MEC, does not focus on his congregation’s early history but describes the services it currently offers. He views the church as a welcoming place for people who have just moved from Egypt, like he did in 2005. The worship and preaching are also significant attractions for him, and he emphasizes the congregation’s plans to sponsor summer mission trips to San Francisco, Haiti, and Egypt (Focus Group 2011). Despite this ability to welcome new immigrants and to reach out beyond its walls, the church was split in 2008. The members who left MEC established the Arabic American Evangelical Church, which is not a congregation of the PC(USA) but has looked to Egyptian Presbyterian pastors for leadership. The congregation worships in a local Lutheran church

and has instituted a hybrid form of worship that brings together the church's Arabic speaking adults and English speaking youth (Marzouk 2011).

This focus group discussion of congregational timelines did not provide a comprehensive historical account of any of these churches, but it revealed what was initially important in the church leaders' memories. Notably, the participants focused more on internal congregational actions rather than local or national events, economic concerns, or political realities that affected their church members. With regard to external matters, Eid and Amin emphasized important denominational relationships that connected their Arabic congregation to an English speaking church, and the focus group discussion revealed that all five congregations had shared a building with another local congregation. Magdy compared worship music styles in Egypt to his experience of praise music in the US, and Eid mentioned September 11 as a concern for his English speaking congregation. When I asked directly whether anything in Middle Eastern or American history had affected their churches, Amin quickly responded, "September 11." He explained the stigma attached to a person's physical appearance as an Arab in America, whether Christian or Muslim, saying, "There is a suspicion that you are not a good person, which is really painful, but that's the truth" (Focus Group 2011).

The Social Map activity also reflected the importance of these churches' congregational and denominational connections. Church leaders drew maps of their personal and pastoral relationships, and all of them highlighted links with churches in the New Jersey and New York City areas. The Arabic Evangelical Church of Moorestown, for example, is strongly related to other members of the Presbytery of West Jersey and to the Mideast Evangelical Church in Jersey City. Eid, who has national ties within the United Methodist Church, was the only participant to list church connections in areas of the US outside of New Jersey and New York City. Magdy's map included previous churches he has attended and churches whose pastors are advising his current congregation. Fouad's map reflected his experience of working in an area with a high immigrant population. His relationships include Muslim and Hindu coworkers, Egyptian housemates, and other Egyptians who attend a nearby Coptic Orthodox Church. Living in Jersey City, he is in frequent contact with other Arabic speakers, and although he speaks English he is most comfortable in Arabic. The situation for Arabs in southern New Jersey, Amin explains, is different. His church members do not live in close proximity to one another, and some come from an hour away to be a part of the congregation. Because the Arabic speaking community is spread out, daily life necessitates stronger relationships with Americans of all backgrounds and a higher proficiency in English. Amin explains that his congregation is also unique because "unlike

churches in north Jersey, they come from many different countries” (Focus Group 2011). Ayad, a Presbyterian pastor from Egypt, has maintained ties with all five Arabic congregations while pursuing graduate studies in theology. He points out the interconnected nature of Arabic speaking Protestant churches in New Jersey and notes that most Arab pastors he knows “are working among multiple congregations in one way or another.” Ayad himself assisted the Arabic American Evangelical Church in Jersey City and the Christian Arabic Church in East Brunswick when both churches were without a pastor. Stressing his connection with the seminary in Cairo where he plans to teach after his graduation, he was the only participant in the focus group who listed Egypt on his social map (Focus Group 2011).

My visit in Jersey City with the Arabic American Evangelical Church youth group, whose members range from sixteen to twenty-eight years of age, offered a different perspective on congregational memory and social relationships. The youth group marks its time according to the location of their group meeting, which moved from their original Mideast Evangelical Church attic to a Catholic school to house meetings and then to a local Lutheran church. They also describe their activities outside of the weekly youth meeting: joint worship with a local Arab Methodist youth group, food pantry volunteering, outreach at Bayonne Park, Vacation Bible School, youth retreats, and family conferences. These young people recall the two splits the group experienced in 2002 and 2008, and the various pastors and speakers who have led their youth meetings. Partly as a result of church divisions, they have not had a consistent youth leader, and some of the youth noted the confusing variety of theological teachings passed on by their numerous leaders. Nevertheless, they see progression from their earliest meetings to the emergence of a youth-led praise band and the regular attendance of the entire group at youth meetings. Some of them also describe tuning in to events in Egypt and praying for the political situation there. Their Social Map activity reveals these youth spend the greatest amount of time with family, church, friends, and school. Only one participant listed anything outside of the local context, and he included extended family in Egypt as well as international mission trips to Haiti and Panama. In contrast, the map created by an Egyptian graduate student who joined the group that evening but is not a regular member shows a different set of social connections. After one year in the US, his social network includes international and Egyptian graduate students, two New Jersey churches he has visited, and his wife, daughter, and friends who are in Egypt. The youth group members, however, are part of a close-knit community that has settled in the US. They describe the church and youth group as their family and explain that in fact many of the church members are relatives (AAEC Youth 2011).

3.2 *Congregational Culture and Identity*

Interviews and church visits revealed other influences upon identity formation not included in the timelines and social maps. During these two activities, church leaders and youth focused on internal congregational concerns and relationships within the US, but this does not necessarily indicate they have cut ties with their roots. Immigrants carry their native cultures with them, and their past experiences become reference points for evaluating new situations. In the area of music, for example, Magdy points out that the quiet, reverent approach to worship in the Coptic Orthodox Church has influenced Egyptian Protestant views of worship, especially for those who come from Orthodox backgrounds. He notes the changes in Christian worship music he has experienced since moving to the US in 1995, and he expresses a preference for new dynamic styles of praise and worship. Although worship styles are also changing in Egypt, he believes it is more difficult there for Protestant worship leaders to prompt their congregations to react to contemporary Arabic worship songs. The strong influence of Coptic tradition makes some Christians hesitant to embrace “secular” sounding music within the church. Magdy concludes, however, “In America you don’t feel that” (Focus Group 2011). This sense of musical freedom in American worship settings does not mean copying contemporary American churches. In Magdy’s church and the other congregations I visited, a worship team, music leader, or pastor led the singing, accompanied on keyboard or guitar. Worship songs were in Arabic and followed the popular and folk music tempos Magdy refers to as *baladī* or *maqsūm* (Focus Group 2011).

Beyond the influence of its traditional worship style, the Coptic Orthodox Church as an institution is a significant reference point for Egyptian Protestants in America and in Egypt who grew up in the Coptic tradition. Some Muslim families have joined the New Jersey congregations I studied, but more new members come from Orthodox backgrounds. Some of these members continue to attend Coptic churches on holidays, while others no longer identify themselves with the Coptic Orthodox Church at all (Focus Group 2011). One woman in the Christian Arabic Church in East Brunswick explained that she used to be Coptic until she became involved in a Protestant church in Egypt and “got saved.” While she now believes that Coptic Christianity is too focused on rules, she recognizes that her mother, who is a member of the non-denominational church in East Brunswick, remains attached to the Coptic Church because it represents her roots.

Two other women in the Christian Arabic Church describe themselves as committed Coptic Christians. Both mentioned the size of the Coptic Orthodox Church in their area as a reason they joined this smaller Protestant church, which they consider to be more like a family. Beyond the need for community,

they emphasized the spiritual connection they find in the non-denominational group, which encourages personal devotion, prayer, and Bible study. For one of the women, the denominational differences do not matter, although she disagrees with the Protestant view of the saints. Nevertheless, she says, both churches nourish her faith. Attending the Coptic Church is important because she wants her children to grow up with a sense of their roots. Her friend, who gave a brief overview of Coptic history, agrees. The church has persevered through many struggles and has remained strong, she says. She hopes her children will retain this connection to the church's long history and deep tradition. While the Coptic tradition is important for some Egyptians in Arabic Protestant churches, others look to American Protestantism as a reference point instead. One young couple in the same East Brunswick church explained that they are also members of an "American church." They took this step because they are expecting a baby who will grow up speaking English and may not understand Arabic well. The non-traditional afternoon or evening service time for most Arabic congregations that rent a worship space allows members to take part in other Sunday morning services, whether they prefer the Coptic Orthodox or American Protestant worship setting.

Members of Arabic churches may locate themselves in relationship to the predominant Christian tradition in their home countries or in the US, but according to Magdy, the Islamic culture in the Middle East also affects their sense of identity. He says many Christians in Egypt grow up learning verses from the Qur'an in their schools. This is a reminder of their status as religious minorities, but Magdy also believes Egyptian Christians internalize the "quiet" Islamic approach to religious practice. For those who grew up as religious minorities, the transition to the American Protestant context can be dramatic. Magdy explains that it takes time for immigrants to adapt to the "new way of culture" they encounter in America, where they can worship freely and feel less constrained by traditional notions about worship, whether Coptic or Islamic. In the beginning, he says, "You think like how you used to think [in Egypt]. You try to worship in a very quiet way" (Focus Group 2011). Magdy's reflections are rooted in his desire to move Arab Christians towards a more dynamic praise and worship experience, but his comments also indicate a subaltern mentality among Christian Arab minorities that does not simply disappear after immigration to a non-Islamic society.

My conversations with first and second generation immigrants of different ages and backgrounds indicate the internal diversity within their congregations and the critical relationship between a worship environment and Christian identity formation. Arab immigrants who have been in the United States for many years may express a sense of double identity, but the issue of converging cultures is especially key for a younger generation of Arab Americans who

have lived all or most of their lives in the US. The youth at the Arabic American Evangelical Church (AAEC) in Jersey City prefer English, in contrast to their parents who believe Arabic worship is essential. Even those young people who speak Arabic at home do not read the language well, and this limits their ability for Arabic Bible study or singing Arabic hymns. In response to this issue, AAEC created an English language youth service on Friday evenings that includes a sermon and American-style praise music. The church has also instituted what the youth described as a “hybrid service” on the one Sunday each month when the Lord’s Supper is served (AAEC Youth 2011). The service includes an English children’s message, Arabic music, English songs led by the youth praise band, and an Arabic sermon with an English outline projected on a screen. At this service, generational lines are clearly distinguishable by who sings during the Arabic and English songs. Nevertheless, some members of the older generation follow along in English, and children who do not read Arabic can learn the words by ear or clap to the music. Their pastor, Safwat, explains that this is one small effort toward creating common ground, and he hopes it will provide a model for families in their home lives together (Marzouk 2011).

I encountered similar inter-generational concerns when speaking with pastors, parents, and youth at other churches. In order to maintain the primary Arabic speaking church identity and to accommodate youth and young adults who are most comfortable in English, many churches have English language Sunday School or youth meetings during the regular Arabic worship service. Fouad described the situation at the Mideast Evangelical Church in Jersey City where the youth meeting takes place at the same time but is separate from the Sunday worship service. The youth join the “main church” once a month just to receive the Lord’s Supper and then return to their own meeting. Some youth in his church have asked for an “American pastor” to lead them. He specifies that they do not want an Arab American pastor with perfect English but an American pastor. Because of this Fouad believes that the language barrier is not the primary issue for these youth, but rather their sense of identity as part of American culture (Focus Group 2011). The Arabic Evangelical Church of South Jersey takes another approach to these generational differences. In the single Arabic service attended by adults and youth, the pastor offers an English translation of his sermon to anyone who needs it. The youth I talked with after this service explained that they also attend a separate youth Bible study during the week.

Such efforts aim to keep the younger generation actively part of the church. During the focus group discussion with Jersey City youth and in conversations at other churches, youth group members expressed the key role their churches play in their lives. At the Arabic Evangelical Church, I spoke with the youth leader who recently took over the position after his university graduation. He

explained that the youth group formed when he was thirteen years old and that the leadership had passed from one young man in the church to another as they grew older. Of the eighteen participants at the AAEC youth meeting in Jersey City, thirteen had already finished high school but continued to attend youth meetings consistently, and some of them came from homes as far away as Brooklyn, New York. Most of them also marked their church on their social maps as one of the most important aspects of their lives (AAEC Youth Focus Group). Like most of the AAEC youth, youth group members at the Mideast Evangelical Church, Rivers of Life, and the Arabic Evangelical Church of are all between seventeen and thirty years of age. This indicates that unmarried second generation young people remain involved in Arabic churches after high school and college (Focus Group 2011). Some parents, however, told me of their grown children who had joined English speaking congregations, and the churches I visited lacked a visible presence of second generation married couples with children.

4 Critical Issues: Arab American Christianity and Converging Identities

Arabic speaking churches are vital members of the body of Christ that face both challenges and opportunities as their numbers continue to grow in the US. Like other immigrant communities, Arab Protestants are not a monolithic group, and even among Arabic congregations in New Jersey, the internal diversity is apparent. While members of Arabic churches might express a sense of negotiating between Arab and American identities, they encounter various layers of American culture as people whose identities are already shaped by multiple influences. Their transition experiences, therefore, involve a number of converging reference points. This section highlights four significant, interconnected elements that come to bear in this process of identity formation.

First, national, cultural, and religious reference points migrate alongside individuals and shape their transition experiences in a number of ways. Those who immigrate as adults have already developed a strong sense of identity. While expecting their move to America to bring practical, political, and economic changes, they may not be prepared to address the way that their new living environment is altering their sense of self. Whether identity reformation is a conscious process or not, individuals face the challenge of preserving what is most important and finding ways to pass on that heritage to their children. As is generally the case for other immigrant religious communities, Arabic speaking churches may aid in this regard by maintaining members' native language

and traditions in a communal setting (Stepick 2005: 15–16). Even for Arabs who grew up in Protestant churches in their home countries, Islamic and Eastern Christian theologies and practices may shape cultural assumptions and ways of thought. Implicit understandings of processes and negative impressions of majority religions are not easily shed in an American immigrant context. For individuals who still identify with Orthodox churches while participating in Protestant congregations, this situation is even more complex. Whether Arab Christians hold on to their previous ways of life or take intentional steps to embrace American culture, they must negotiate the pressures and influences they carry from their home contexts.

Second, in moving to the United States, Arab Christians exchange their religious minority status in the Middle East for an ethnic minority status in America. Their primary identification may now be Arab American rather than Egyptian Christian, and Arabic language worship is the defining characteristic among their churches. In New Jersey churches with a high Egyptian demographic, Arabic is the tie that binds individuals from rural and urban areas of Egypt who may have differing denominational backgrounds, theological perspectives, and educational levels. The common language also allows Protestants from other Arab countries to find a home in these churches. This linguistic grouping makes multi-national Arabic churches distinct from other immigrant churches whose language identity is attached to a particular nation.

It is important to consider what this ethno-linguistic minority status means for Arab members of the American Protestant majority. Despite historical and theological ties to American Protestants, Arab Protestant immigrants with a high level of English comprehension do not all join mainstream American churches. In Yvonne Haddad's view, the liberal theological stance that many American churches have adopted clashes with evangelical ideologies that missionaries passed on to Protestant churches in the Middle East. Among other reasons for separate "language mission churches," she cites American Christian racism and some Arab pastors' views of the moral breakdown in American churches (Haddad 1994: 72–73). While Haddad is surely correct to question church motivations and relationships between English and Arabic speaking churches in the US, this characterization may promote an understanding of Protestants in the Middle East as mere products of conservative American missions. If taken to the extreme, such a view would deny Arabic congregations in the US the status of legitimate, independent churches by interpreting concerns for language and identity as excuses for physical separation. Theological and social differences certainly exist within denominations, and more efforts could be made to promote unity between multi-linguistic congregations. My research shows, however, that Arabic church leaders value the structure and wider con-

nections provided by denominational affiliations and participate actively in higher church bodies. While maintaining ties with other American Protestants, worship and fellowship with Arabic speakers are essential to their transition experience.

Third, Arabic churches face a critical inter-generational dilemma. Parents who find the Arabic church an essential way to ease their own transition into American life may also look upon the church as an instrument for transmitting their culture of origin to their children. On the other hand, second generation Arab Americans place the stress on the “American” aspect of their identity and may not be as concerned with the national, religious, and cultural contexts that influence their parents.⁸ As Fouad put it, the youth become “American in music, in worship, in Bible study, in biblical understanding, [and] in religious devotion” (Focus Group 2011). First generation adult immigrants may see this emerging identity of the younger generation as a threat to unity within their families and churches. While cultural differences between generations can be a source of pain and conflict, these differences also provide an opportunity for churches to address issues of identity reformation in a faithful and open manner. The hybrid service at AAEC, for example, reflects the various expressions of cultural identity that are present within one congregation. This monthly Arabic-English worship service aims at the creation of a communal culture that blends rather than separates competing reference points.

Finally, while negotiating converging cultural and generational identities, Arab Americans also deal with widespread perceptions that they are not truly “American.” Instances of discrimination against Arab Christians and Muslims who are viewed as a national security concern make it more difficult for Arab Americans to cultivate a sense of belonging. Although the pastors and church leaders I spoke with gave more attention to problems like church divisions and inter-generational conflicts, they also acknowledged the seriousness of anti-Arab racism in the United States. During the focus group meeting, Eid recognized the barriers he faces as an Arab pastor in an English speaking church. Amin mentioned the September 11 attacks and confirmed that American views of Arabs are also a concern for his congregation. He went on to describe his theological response to restore his members’ sense of self and human dignity. “We are made in the image of God, whether Arabs or Caucasians”, he affirmed. His sermons frequently lift up this theme (Focus Group 2011). Safwat responded to my questions about the effect of September 11 by explaining that some Arab Christians avoid discussing the subject of discrimination because

8 Such inter-generational concerns are relevant for other immigrant communities in the US. See Stepick 2005: 19–20.

it would mean admitting their status as ethnic minorities. He spoke of his congregation's struggle with racial predispositions transplanted from Egypt and their tendency to self-identify as whites. Arab American Christians might distance themselves from American prejudices against Muslims and emphasize their claim to whiteness by saying, "We are Christian," rather than opposing discriminatory comments (Marzouk 2011).⁹ While not the first concern raised in Arabic church discussions, racialized views of "Americanness" are not incidental to the lives of Arab Protestants in the US.¹⁰

5 Conclusion

I return now to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter regarding Arab Christian immigrants' transition experiences, reference points, and processes of identity formation. This study of five Arabic speaking congregations in New Jersey has demonstrated that Arab American Protestants' reference points vary depending on age, previous religious affiliation, or years spent in the US. Despite such differences, members of Arabic American churches experience a number of similar challenges and opportunities. For many of these immigrants, the American Protestant religious environment is a defining factor in their resettlement process. Although Arab Protestants remain a minority within the Arab American population, denominational ties and shared worship spaces with other American Protestant churches give Arabic churches a sense of belonging within the wider American culture and Protestant heritage. Arab American Protestants appreciate their connections with other Protestant churches in the US, and they emphasize their greater freedom to worship and engage in mission and outreach, especially to Coptic Christians and Muslims. Along with the spiritual reference points Arabic churches provide their members, these churches' physical and theological connections with other American congregations help ease members' transitions to life in the US.

Given the loss of roots, language barriers, inter-generational differences, and other pressures related to immigration, church conflicts and divisions have often been part of the transition process for Arab Protestant immigrants. While internal church disputes might prompt some members to leave and join existing American churches, congregational conflicts in New Jersey have frequently led to the creation of new Arabic churches. This trend poses a major obstacle for

9 For the argument that some Arab Americans refuse to admit discrimination because it would present a barrier to their integration into American society, see Marvasti and McKinney 2004: 109–110.

10 For a comprehensive study of Arab American claims to whiteness see Gualtieri 2009.

congregational peace and unity, but it also indicates that the Arabic church itself is an essential reference point for Arab Protestant identity in the US. The church becomes a new cultural home where members worship in their own language and find fellowship with other immigrants. Along with a sense of belonging to a wider American Protestant community, the comfort of this familial church environment is especially important for Arabic church members facing the high levels of anti-Arab discrimination in the post-September 11 era.

In order to address the challenges and opportunities their members face in America, Arabic church leaders must know their members' religious, cultural, and national contexts and possess the ability to preach and converse in Arabic. At the same time, because of the growing second generation population, they must relate with Arab American youth for whom American culture is a primary identity marker. While the congregations in this study cater mainly to first generation immigrants, they aim to remain the spiritual home for Arab Protestants in the second generation and beyond. These churches face the critical challenge of becoming a hybrid, inter-generational place of worship that blends multiple reference points into a cohesive whole, rather than maintaining dueling Arab and American identities. Arabic churches have the opportunity to guide this process in a way that does justice to the historical circumstances and cultural realities of Arab Christians in the Middle East and the US.

Michael Suleiman argues that Arab Americans must be written into US history in order to facilitate their acceptance as fully American (Suleiman 2010: 55). Pointing to the deep roots of Arabic churches in the US, this paper has contributed to the small amount of literature on Arab American Protestants. Much more work is required, however, to provide a comprehensive, diversified picture of Arab American Protestant experiences. A detailed history of the establishment of Arabic American churches would be one step in this direction. More in-depth studies of particular congregations would yield fruitful insight on the processes, cultural tensions, and unwritten assumptions that have affected the development of Arabic Protestant churches. There is also great potential to explore the theological expressions of migration and cultural hybridity emerging from Arabic congregations through sermons, Bible studies, liturgical practices, and communal life. Finally, future research might examine the complex issues of race, gender, and Christian-Muslim relationships that arise within Arabic churches, especially in light of differing inter-generational perspectives. Historical, sociological, ethnographical, and theological studies would be valuable for Arabic churches and would inform other American Christians about their Arab brothers and sisters in faith. This might encourage stronger relationships between English and Arabic speaking Protestant congregations and alert American Christians to the injustices of unquestioned

assumptions about Arab Christians and Muslims in America. Increased scholarship and engagement with Arabic churches would also challenge American Christians of all ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to recognize their place within an increasingly global, transnational church.

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“Make Holy the Bare Life”

*Theological Reflections on Migration Grounded in Collaborative Praxis
with Youth Made Illegal by the United States*

Steve Pavey and Marco Saavedra*

And if you cannot justify our present reality with your faith, then you will become illegal, too, and also irreconcilable with the present.

MARCO SAAVEDRA (2014: 19)



1 Introduction: Methods, Marco and Avoiding False Problems

The co-author of the paper¹ Steve Pavey is a scholar, an artist, an activist and friend to many undocumented youth. All these identities and relationships are theologically and anthropologically informed and further, not easily bounded or disentangled. Knowledge and love, both discovered and applied, require pushing beyond borders and boundaries. Steve’s work as an activist anthropologist is methodologically grounded in relationships with marginalized communities

* Marco and Steve found each other on the margins of empire as brothers, as artists, and as contemplative activists without an institution. Our writing and work together is deeply shaped by *acompañamiento*, walking with one another in deep solidarity towards the dignity of our shared humanity. Marco, an undocumented poet, dilettante, and peripatetic, works as an occasional dishwasher at his family’s restaurant, La Morada (www.harvestwonderful.com). Steve (Ph.D., M.Div.), a documentary photographer and applied anthropologist, bears witness to the struggles and joys of humanity at Hope In Focus (www.stevepavey.com). Together, they have worked for four years with the National Immigrant Youth Alliance struggling for migrant justice. They are co-authors of the visual ethnography *Shadows then Light* and under contract for the co-authored book, *Eclipse of Dreams: Accompanying the Undocumented Youth-led Struggle for Freedom in the United States* (Praeger, forthcoming 2016).

1 The paper is written using a third person point of view purposely to conflate the common distinction between the subject and object of research. This third person point of view is our attempt to write collaboratively as a “we” and decolonize traditional research and writing methodologies.

with a commitment to seeking justice together. Steve got involved with the undocumented youth movement for immigrant justice back in 2010 when he boarded a bus with undocumented youth from Kentucky and Tennessee, headed to Washington, D.C. to join over five hundred undocumented youth and allies gathered for the annual DREAM Act graduation² where twenty-one youth were also arrested for civil disobedience. Steve continues to work with undocumented youth in the movement across their own organizational divisions. He works with Dream Activist and the National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA), by assisting with documenting and organizing civil disobedience across the USA, including the infiltration of the Broward Immigrant Detention Center in Florida (Pavey 2012). Steve utilizes multiple participatory and collaborative research methods alongside photography to document and inform the work of undocumented youth-led activists.

This chapter grows out of a dialogical journey of research and activism between an activist anthropologist and undocumented youth activists committed to a participatory and collaborative research model. The research methods are deeply shaped by Paulo Freire and his core value: “The silenced are not just incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry into the underlying causes of the events in their world. In this context research becomes a means of moving them beyond silence into a quest to proclaim the world” (Freire 1982: 30). And further, this ethnographic research “is only justified to the extent that it represents, not an attempt to learn about the people, but to come to know with them the reality which challenges them” (Freire 1970: 110). The methodology employed here, then, uses an approach that “rather than analyze communities, can actually learn from the analysis that comes from communities” (Smith 2004: 77). This collaborative approach extends beyond data collection and analysis to include co-authorship of this chapter among other writing and art projects.

Based on over three years of ethnographic research and activism across the USA, this work identifies within the diverse experiences of undocumented youth the dominant themes of fear and shame (out of the shadows) right alongside the growing power of a movement of youth finding agency and building community (into the light). The lived experiences of the

2 “Every June for the past twelve years, undocumented students from around the country have traveled to Washington D.C. to urge Congress to pass the DREAM Act, holding a ‘mock graduation ceremony’ followed by lobby visits to their respective Congress persons” (Lal 2012). The DREAM Act is an acronym for the “Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors” Act.

undocumented community are shaped by what De Genova (2010) calls the threat of “deportability” and Susan Coutin (2003) calls the “erasure of personhood” through the production and experience of “illegality.” The experience of these challenges, particularly as young people move through the high school ages, is aptly described as “awakening to a nightmare” (Gonzales and Chavez 2012). We recognize with them that “illegality” and “deportability” are at the same time produced by political-economic structures as well as experienced by undocumented youth and their communities. We are committed to putting this knowledge into action to challenge a status and identity conferred by a nation-state on the bodies of human beings through policies of exclusion, detainment and deportation.

This solidarity with undocumented youth activists begins with participatory and collaborative methods of research and activism. As Freire says, “[t]he oppressor is in solidarity with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plentitude of this act of love” (1970: 50). Research guided with this solidarity is grounded in relationships that risk acts of love.

Steve met Marco Saavedra, an illegal³ artist and activist, in the spring of 2011 as a part of his research and missiological engagement with undocumented youth activists. Marco’s life and friendship bears witness to the light of the gospel. The insights of this paper emerge wholly out of this relationship of solidarity with Marco that has produced both a rich dialogue, and more importantly, a deep friendship. Since July 2010, Steve has worked across the USA alongside undocumented youth like Marco; listening to their stories, following their lead in efforts to fight for immigrant rights, receiving and offering hospitality, crying and laughing together, and building friendships. The movement between action and reflection in relationship with undocumented youth grounds this theological reflection on undocumented migration.

The co-author of the paper Marco, age twenty-three, was born in the small village of San Miguel Ahuehuetitlan, in the southern state of Oaxaca in Mexico.

3 Regarding the use of the word illegal, refer to Saavedra’s essay “Illegal, More Indictment than Identity” in *Shadows then Light* (Pavey and Saavedra 2012: 27). “If I was never illegal, then, perhaps, the economy, the international politics, multinational corporations and their unmatched revenues were never legal. Doesn’t the fulfillment of the gospel point to a new creation? Have we become so alienated, so deaf to the yearnings of all creation?” (27).

His ancestors, as far back as they can remember, have always been farmers. But at the age of two, his father and mother left him, along with his older three-year old sister, in the care of his grandparents, in order to migrate to the United States in search of a job to feed their family. A year later, his parents returned to unite the family. At the age of three, Marco made the journey to the USA, along with his family entering without authorization through the desert. He grew up in New York City, earning a scholarship to a prestigious private high school in Massachusetts. Marco graduated with a degree in sociology in 2011. Unable to legally work without a social security number, let alone find employment in his field, he has volunteered and worked for small stipends as an organizer for immigrant justice with various non-profits, but largely without funding working on his own with the National Immigrant Youth Alliance.

Marco's final court hearing for his removal from the United States is scheduled for the summer of 2017 (Calloway-Hanauer 2015). The last time he appeared before Judge Bain, he told her that he had done nothing wrong when he crossed the border “illegally” at the age of three. What's wrong, he continued, is that a nation-state created laws that criminalize the movement of people across borders that further dehumanize migrants through a growing detention and deportation industrial complex. Marco is one of the “perfect” DREAMERS who moved away from fighting for his own benefit through isolated legislation, to risking his own future in efforts to end deportations. He was one of the first undocumented youth to intentionally infiltrate a detention center in order to organize from the inside with other migrants facing deportation (Pavey and Saavedra 2012). Claudio, one of the immigrants whose deportation was stopped, described the sacrifice of Marco as someone who was willing to become another orange (jumpsuit) among us (willing to risk deportation). We have much to learn from the undocumented migrant about faith, hope and love.

Last month, I told Judge Bain that I did nothing wrong when I crossed the border at age three, and I was right. Yet this single truth took years to develop. If not for my friends, family and faith, I could not have gone before the law with the uncompromising position that the burden of proof was not on me and with the confidence that I could (we could) take on whatever decision came from the court—even a removal order—and fight it and win (Saavedra 2013: 26).

We briefly introduce Marco's story because his story, and the stories of all the undocumented youth at the margins of society, are at the center for this theological reflection. And it is not just the ethnographic details of their lives which

are important, “but more fundamentally,” as Phan says, it is the “very existential condition of the immigrants themselves” that is central for theology (2003: 148). “The existential ontology of the immigrant entails a distinct epistemology and hermeneutics, a particular way of perceiving and interpreting reality” (Phan 2003: 148). Marco says this in another way, quoting from Du Bois. “My life had its significance and its only deep significance because it was part of a problem; but that problem was, as I continue to think, the central problem of the greatest of the world’s democracies and so the problem of the future world” (1940: vii–viii). Marco believes this fundamental problem is updated and further contextualized through the context of his life as an illegal migrant.

We will at the end of the paper return to analysis and theological reflections that are born from this methodological commitment to relationship with the marginalized migrant who offers his/her life as the challenge and path toward justice and God’s kingdom. For now, we must recognize that far too often we engage in research and action addressing false problems, as Jacques Ellul warns, “at the cost of Christians truly becoming ‘present’ to this world” (Ellul 1989: 20).

If we want to avoid being completely abstract, we are then obliged to understand the depth, and the spiritual reality of the mortal tendency of this world; it is to this that we ought to direct all our efforts, and not to the false problems which the world raises, or to an unfortunate application of an “order of God” which has become abstract. Thus it is always by placing (one’s) self at this point of contact that the Christian can be truly “present” in the world, and can carry on effective social or political work, by the grace of God. Thus it is not for us to construct the City of God, to build up an “order of God” within this world, without taking any notice of its suicidal tendencies. Our concern should be to place ourselves at the very point where this suicidal desire is most active, in the actual form it adopts, and to see how God’s will of preservation can act in this given situation (Ellul 1989: 19).

As the church largely partners with organizers to fight for immigration reform in the United States, we wonder if this is at the greater cost to freedom and justice (Pavey 2013). The thread of hope within this chapter toward addressing immigrant injustice rests with submitting ourselves to our true sovereign and seeking first in divine obedience the presence of the kingdom of God.

2 Locating the Context of the Undocumented Youth-led Struggle for Freedom in the USA

The context for the theological and methodological approach to migration in the present chapter admittedly represents a limited part of a much more complex and diverse phenomenon of global migrations. But, it does humbly contribute to a growing and important theological discussion of migrants on their journey (Campese 2007; Gutierrez 2008; Bevans 2008; Pineda 1996). Over 195 million people lived outside their country of birth in 2005 (UN 2009). Of that number, the United Nations estimates that 20–30 million are unauthorized migrants. The vast percentage of that number, eleven million, resides in the United States. Undocumented youth who entered the USA under the age of sixteen, on the other hand, are only a small portion of this population. According to the Migration Policy Institute study, there are nearly 2.1 million undocumented immigrants in the USA who came into this country under the age of sixteen (Batalova and McHugh 2010). To put that into perspective, nearly 65,000 undocumented youth graduate from American high schools each year. Unfortunately, only an estimated five to ten percent pursue higher education (Gonzales 2007). Many never graduate from high school and the majority choose to work a low-wage job because of the social, institutional, legal, and financial barriers they face (Gonzales 2011; Glidersleeve 2010). While much of the national research and media attention focuses on the small percentage of highly successful undocumented youth (who still face tremendous obstacles), it is important to recognize the vast majority remain in the shadows. They face the very real possibility of joining a permanent underclass (Abrego 2006; Gonzales 2011; Suarez-Orozco et al. 2011).

These undocumented youth are often identified, both by themselves and others, as DREAMers. The term DREAMers refers to the undocumented immigrant youth who would qualify for a conditional pathway to citizenship under the yet-to-be-passed DREAM Act legislation. The DREAM Act legislation, first introduced in 2001, would provide a path to citizenship for those also referred to as “generation 1.5,” who were brought to the United States as children by first generation immigrant parents (Rumbaut 2004; Seif 2009). They are caught in a legal paradox. Although guaranteed free public primary and secondary education by the Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe* in 1982, these students today face the contradictions of limited opportunities for college education and social mobility in a country that for all intents and purposes is the only home

they know (Olivas 2012). After high school, for those who do finish, DREAMers must contend with limited access to financial aid, out of state tuition rates (except in fourteen states), the inability to work legally, and a host of restrictions of their movement and rights in the country that most refer to as “home.”

Following the narrow defeat of the DREAM Act in December 2010, more and more undocumented youth began to “come out of the shadows” to join the undocumented youth-led movement. Some come out by sharing their story with a friend; others publically announce their status during rallies, and still others come out of the shadows through acts of civil disobedience. Dulce Guerrero, an eighteen year old undocumented youth from Georgia and member of NIYA, spoke these words prior to her arrest for civil disobedience against Georgia’s anti-immigrant laws:

I’m here today to claim my status as undocumented because I’m sick and tired of people telling me to relax. I’m sick and tired of people telling me that things are going to be okay, because things are not okay. It is not okay for any student to wake up each morning and feel worthless because of their immigration status, it is not okay for students to stay home with all this talent and not be able to go to college. It is not okay and I’m not okay with it. I’m not going to relax and I’m not going to sleep and I’m not going to be okay with this knowing that there are 74,000 students just in the state of Georgia, 74,000 of us! So to all you undocumented students watching this today, I want you to know that you are not alone, that if you have ever felt depressed or felt that you were alone, you are not. Today we are claiming our status. We are taking back our dignity. My name is Dulce Guerrero. I’m undocumented and unafraid.⁴

Up until December 2010, United We Dream (UWD) was the primary organization of undocumented youth activists, focused on education and organizing towards winning legislation like the DREAM Act, and currently for comprehensive immigration reform. UWD has now successfully garnered major funding and backing from national mainstream immigrant rights organizations that have, in turn, co-opted this supposedly youth-led organization. The result is a monolithic platform that is uncritical of America and its hegemony.

4 Quotes are used extensively throughout the chapter that we do not reference because they come from field notes and transcriptions of conversations, interviews and participant observation.

Mainstream organizations benefit from the credibility that UWD bestows upon them, and in exchange UWD receives more money to finance their supposedly undocumented youth-led campaigns and recruit members to a supposedly independent organization. UWD claims to be the largest immigrant youth-led organization in the USA. It certainly is true that they are the largest, but the question remains whether they are truly led by undocumented and immigrant youth.

Failure of the DREAM Act to pass in 2010 led to the organization of the National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA) by undocumented youth who were formally part of UWD. The NIYA immigrant youth recognize that both political parties and their legislative efforts are themselves part of the broken system that dehumanizes their parents and communities. With that perspective, NIYA focuses on grassroots organizing, using education, empowerment and escalation, in particular civil disobedience, as strategies to build a movement rather than to win a campaign. NIYA is wary of being co-opted by any political group that promises a limited piece of legislation based too often on the merit of the “perfect” DREAMer, as the cost of continued oppression of their families and communities. According to one of NIYA’s leaders, “Maybe our goal isn’t to pass the DREAM Act; maybe our goal is for undocumented youth to reach a point of acceptance where the passing of the DREAM Act may or may not matter.” NIYA leadership continued, “We have reached a point where lobbying alone is not adequate to accomplish our mission. We strongly believe that our movement needs to escalate and we will use mindful and intentional strategic acts of civil disobedience to be effective.”

Marco has been arrested three times for civil disobedience, including most recently in 2012, when he chose to infiltrate an immigrant detention center after two years of fighting deportations on a case-by-case basis. The National Immigrant Youth Alliance has focused on fighting deportations since its inception and has the most inclusive predisposition of any advocacy group in this field. Specifically, NIYA has rallied and pushed for the just application of prosecutorial discretion for migrants deemed “low-priority” for deportation. Due to lack of accountability in Immigration and Customs Enforcement this policy pathetically falls short of its goal as the majority of deported individuals qualify for this relief. Infiltration of detention centers has further built on past acts of publicly coming out and declaring undocumented status, civil disobedience, and information gained through deportation cases. It is an escalation tactic because instead of waiting to receive individual cases, the infiltration campaign aggressively seeks cases in a detention center where the potential for organizing is greater due to the emergency need of relief.

3 Into the Light, Losing Fear and Shame—“We are Undocumented and Unafraid!”

Early in our research, undocumented youth were asked to explain the fears they faced, the meaning behind those public declarations, “I am no longer unafraid.” More often, this led to a discussion of shame and frustration, rather than just fear. Yes, there existed the fear of separation from one’s family. But this fear was entangled with frustration with the lack of nine digits (social security number), the lack of a driver’s license, the inability to work a legal job, the difficulty of going to college, and the big picture of not being able to live the American Dream, which their parents, and themselves have sacrificed and worked so hard to get. There is great suffering embodied in a life of “legal non-existence” (Coutin 2000). Probing even deeper, conversations unfolded a deep level of internalized shame. One youth told me, with deep sorrow and tears, she remembers in grade school sneaking into the bathroom to rub baby powder on her skin so she could be white like her friends. “What would my friends think of me”, if they knew my status, another youth told me.

In January 2012, NIYA launched its *Undocuhealth* website in an effort to address the mental health pathologies among the undocumented youth population. The goal through education and organizing was to reach out to youth, largely as they transitioned into the high school years, to assist with dealing with the pain, the challenges, the fear and frustration of being undocumented, of living with restrictions and the constant threat of deportation. This “nightmare” is described well by Gonzales and Chavez (2012) as awakening to the experience of abjectivity and illegality. Their description of abjectivity “underscores the link between the mechanics of biopower and the lived experiences of those most vulnerable to the exercise of power” (2012: 256). For many, Paulo Freire describes well their orientation to the future as “hope pulverized in the immobility of the crushing present, some sort of final stop beyond which nothing is possible” (Freire 1997: 101).

The experiences of “illegality,” “deportability” and the “erasure of personhood” all give shape to the fears and shame we hear in nearly every narrative. But at the same time, a growing movement of undocumented youth is now facing these experiences by telling their personal story that leads to empowered lives and the building of safe supportive communities. At a prayer vigil in Washington DC, before the vote in the house in December 2010, an undocumented youth leader in the movement described the DREAMer movement as walking out of the dark shadows and into the light. Many tears began spreading around the circle when she realized and identified this light as the light of their own lives. Recently, commenting on a local state struggle, she said,

“They can never take who we are from us! They can try and try, but we know who we are! And it is the people and bonds we create that give a sense of hope and realization that we are all humans. We belong to each other. We are not alone!”

Many times I was told something similar to this; “I don’t remember who I was last year. Something changed inside of me after coming out. I’m a much happier and stronger person now. I feel free. I feel like myself.” Another DREAMER shared, “I think losing the shame overshadows the fear” when coming out. By finding their story, accepting their story, telling their story even to one other person, they shared they were overcoming their feelings of shame, of feeling less than those around them. One undocumented youth told me, “Coming out has liberated me. It has put a human face to the immigration issue. It shows that we are human beings, that we are students, sisters, brothers, friends, with dreams and rights.”

At a civil disobedience action in Phoenix, one undocumented youth participant shared:

I am afraid of being out here and doing this, you know, being arrested. I am willing to face that fear because that is the fear that is in our community every day. It is in our hands. Everything that this fear takes away from us, we are letting it go to gain our dignity. The same thing that they use to keep us down, it is the same thing we will use to get back up.

On September 6, 2011, in Charlotte, North Carolina, Marco Saavedra was arrested (for the first time) with six others for an action of civil disobedience protesting the implementation of harsh anti-immigrant state legislation. It was this action and the following fifty hours in jail that he now describes as a kind of “baptism and resurrection.” It is for him both personal renewal and also social renewal to question the hegemonic structures that make people “illegal” and less than human. He writes, “To be called by name in an age of distortion is achievement enough; to be known, truly, without fear, without shame, without apologies.” Quoting from James Baldwin’s essay “The Fire Next Time”, he says of that experience, “The very time I thought I was lost, my dungeon shook and my chains fell off” (Baldwin 1998).

Speaking of this moment of liberation that is giving birth to a community, he compares the experience to “the Genesis creation poem, of how the cosmos [order] is birthed from chaos [shadows].” We are children of the light and live in the light of a new creation under God’s reign. This hope, says Marco, is not rooted in a piece of legislation, or a political system. It is hope, as Ellul writes, which seizes God’s future; where allegiances are transferred to God’s kingdom

(Ellul and Vanderburg 2010). Paraphrasing the apostle John, Marco says, “there is no fear where there is love” (1 John 4:18). Remember, he tells me, “Whosoever shall lose their life, will find it” (John 12:25). Civil disobedience in the movement as interpreted by Marco, becomes divine obedience. This is a radically different lens with which to view loyalty, power, and identity towards a theological understanding of migration.

4 **Into the Light, Building a Community—“I am No Longer Alone”**

The movement of undocumented youth coming out of the shadows and into the light is growing very quickly. The “Coming Out of the Shadows” stories have become almost a rite of passage into the movement that leads to building a local community of support. One undocumented youth explains:

Slowly but surely, I was beginning to find others like me. I read articles and saw their videos online. Tam Tram was the first undocumented student I ever saw speaking out openly—undocumented and unafraid. She gave me the courage to stop feeling bad for myself, to make the best of the situation and carry on. I wasn’t alone anymore. I began finding more and more undocumented students as I shared my struggles online through blogs. I discovered group after group that was organizing for our rights and the DREAM Act. I finally had a place to belong, and friends that understand what it’s like to grow up as an undocumented American.

Marco writes of finding a sense of hope through friendship with others facing similar fears and shame,

I can confess my fears to David knowing him as a fellow undocumented poet—we’ve only met on a handful of occasions when civil disobediences or celebrations have brought us together—but we know each other deeply having been forced into America from Mexico before the age of four and growing up with the terror of deportation and finding ourselves irreconcilable with our reality and having wrestled with loneliness and insecurity and disillusioned ourselves with policy as relief and felt liberated and then overwhelmed by organizing within our communities.

The agency and identity of undocumented youth are rooted in and grow out of finding a community. One youth said, “Coming out isn’t about them. It’s about us. It’s about taking back our power, simply by stating something they

want to keep hidden.” Another youth told me, “as a DREAMer, you see another DREAMer putting their life on the line, and you feel a sense of service to them. You are doing it. I should do it too.” Over and over I was told of how important it was to discover and feel that they no longer felt alone. One undocumented youth remarked, “I don’t know how our DREAM elders did it before us. I could not do this alone.” One undocumented youth shared, “We fear being separated from our families. We fear not seeing our parents, our brothers, and our sisters. We fear not seeing them again. And so we hide. We ignore our reality, that every day is a risk. We are confronting that fear. As a community we can stand strong!” Another undocumented youth spoke at a rally, “We don’t sit down at intersections and refuse to get up because of the DREAM Act. We do this for our families, for our communities.”

I sat in the senate gallery in December 2010, holding hands alongside undocumented youth and allies where dreams were crushed once again with the failed DREAM Act vote. Testimonies shared afterward included the experience of frustration and sadness, but almost always was followed up with the stronger experience of hope. They felt hope because they were together. Later we learned that this was a very different experience than to watch the vote alone. One youth shared, “Being in the senate gallery was more important than my graduation.” She continued, “We didn’t lose today because we came together.” Another said, “The loss this time is different, because this time, I have become part of a bigger family.”

Mohammed, a leader with NIYA, says:

Over the course of the last year (2011), I have watched dozens and dozens of undocumented youth take the risk, step up, face arrest, and face deportation willingly because we are tired of waiting. As undocumented youth we recognize that our parents made a sacrifice when they came here. And as undocumented youth those of us who speak this language perfectly, those of us who understand this country, need to step up, need to recognize our privilege, need to make a sacrifice for our families, and make the right thing happen.

5 Into the Light, Affirming the Dignity and Holiness of a Bare Life

Before turning to the theological reflections on undocumented migration, I will argue that this ethnographic reality of suffering on the margins by undocumented youth can be better understood through the lens of what Agamben identifies as a “bare life” (1998). Giorgio Agamben, drawing on Hannah Arendt

(1994), theorizes on the relationship between the “citizen” and “bare life” through the figure of the refugee as the figure “who has become the decisive factor of the modern nation-state by breaking the nexus between human being and citizen” (Agamben 1998: 134; Agamben 2000). The refugee, for Agamben, embodies a bare life without rights, as she stands outside the rights given by sovereign states to citizens, and therefore calls into question the legitimacy of the nation-state. I posit that, in a similar comparison, the 1.5 generation of undocumented immigrant also represents this “bare life” that confronts and challenges the power of the nation-state and the juridical order of citizenship. It opens up the important theological questions: what is a bare life worth and who gets to decide? Further, where should sovereign power lie theologically? Where does the allegiance of a Christian belong? This 1.5 generation of undocumented youth confounds the meaning and practice of citizenship while problematizing the sovereignty of nation states and their conferral of rights. Undocumented youth, like the refugee, embody this challenge:

The refugee must be considered for what he is: nothing less than a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state, from the birth-nation to the man-citizen link, and that thereby makes it possible to clear the way for a long-overdue renewal of categories in the service of a politics in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted, either in the state order or in the figure of human rights (Agamben 1998: 134).

Marco has discovered this liberation that Agamben points to, saying, “We, the undocumented, do not need legalization if no human is illegal.” One youth declared, “My very existence is an act of freedom.” This is not about politics, of securing legislation for human rights. “Our faith is not guaranteed in any current [or future] institution.” Their faith is in the reign of God through an identity, Marco says, “like Christ, as children of God.” But further, Marco argues, his own liberation is tied intimately to the liberation of all, especially the oppressor. He says,

If I never was illegal, then that reveals that you, also, don’t know who you are. If a people who have been subjugated and demeaned for so long; yet manage to carve out of that, a humanity. Therein exists some gospel from which we shall all learn; to which we should all return. If I was never illegal, then that cornerstone on which lay the foundations for systems of oppression is folly. If I was never illegal, then, perhaps, the economy, the international politics, multinational corporations and their unmatched

revenues were never legal. Doesn't the fulfillment of the gospel point to a new creation? Have we become so alienated, so deaf to the yearnings of all creation?

6 Theological Reflections: Human Dignity and the Challenge of the Migrant

Reflecting on his experience out of the shadows and into the light of the movement, Marco says:

What I was trying to argue, and maybe still am, is that maybe it takes a lot of audacity to say, and more humility to bear, that perhaps undocumented DREAMERS say more about Christianity and the faith than we are willing to believe. That maybe, and here I'm loosely quoting scripture: "stones are speaking;" perhaps stifled by moans too deep for words, perhaps unheard by unwilling ears, and incredulous eyes. It is rushed and unfinished but a foundation to build further on a theology of immigration.

Here we turn to a few theological reflections from the margins on migration acknowledging that this is just a beginning and draws from a limited source and context of migration. The reality of migration and the migrant is much more complex, as should be the theological picture. But it is my belief that this is where it must begin, at the margins, in solidarity and theological praxis with the most marginalized. Other theological work has begun the journey in this same direction (Myers and Colwell 2011; Bevans 2008; Groody and Campese 2008; Campese 2003; Campese 2007; Schreiter 2003; Phan 2003; Goizueta 2001; Gonzalez 1996; Fernandez and Segovia 2006; Segovia 1996; Cavanaugh 2011).

First, we must recognize that these theological reflections ought to be rooted in solidarity with the most marginalized. This is a solidarity that walks with migrants and "shares the dangers of the journey" (Golden and McConnell 1984: 487). One undocumented youth says that theological talk on migration means nothing apart from a theological walk with migrants. Theology must "not only 'think' about God, but commit to God's way and act on God's word" (Burke 2005: 42). Further, the way forward includes a theological vision of hope that sees and embodies God's future, but does so by facing history. There must be a willingness to remember the past from the perspective of the marginalized, to face what Metz calls "dangerous memories" (Metz 1998: 40). This will lead to hope that sees that "history is not closed and God is not finished yet" (Fernandez 2007: 271). Finally, in terms of process, it will be important to use

interdisciplinary approaches, including a dialogue with the social sciences “in order to ‘de-ideologize’ the customary interpretation of the Christian faith and its language that hide and legitimate oppression or social injustice” (Segundo 1993: 161).

Second, the key theological concept that emerges out of this study of the lives of undocumented youth is the God given dignity of all human beings. Their very existence as children of God as *imago Dei*, challenges any political, economic or social system that excludes them or treats them otherwise. In 1968, James Baldwin was asked to address the World Council of Churches (WCC) on the black experience. I asked Marco and several other undocumented youth what they would say today to the WCC on the migrant experience. Marco affirmed Baldwin’s opening statement, and updates it with his own. Baldwin began by acknowledging he was not a theologian, but rather, his credentials for speaking was the reality that he was one of “God’s creatures.”

I address you as one of God’s creatures, whom the Christian Church has most betrayed. And I want to make it clear to you that though I may have to say some rather difficult things here this afternoon, I want to make it understood that in the heart of the absolutely necessary accusation there is contained a plea. The plea was articulated by Jesus Christ himself, who said, “Insofar as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it all unto me” (Baldwin 1985: 749).

Marco continued, “The tragedy of the gospel is not that God became human only to be murdered by his creation, but that we continue to do so. As long as we fail to see Christ in each other, to neglect the spark of divinity in our neighbor, we ignore Christ’s passion and sacrifice.”

This leads to an important corollary and a final challenge from the migrant, that our loyalty ought to side with the reign of God, not the sovereignty of a nation-state. The US church fails when its theological imagination remains bounded by the boundaries of a nation-state. Her imagination of God’s future becomes co-opted by political and economic power. “God’s mission is not primarily about the church, but about the reign of God” (Bevans 2008: 92).

The most challenging theological reflection for the researcher is the challenge of the lived experience of the migrant (Flusser 2003). “We, the countless millions of migrants recognize ourselves not as outsiders, but as vanguards of the future” (Flusser 2003: 3). This unsettledness is what “opens us up to a different sort of mystery: the mystery of living together with others” (Flusser 2003: 15). Living in this “new creation” tent “means the Christian’s security and settledness will never be spelled out in a clear-cut system and their security and

peace will be in their relationships with God and each other” (Baker 2005: 155). The focus of any theological approach to migration then ought to be to seek first the kingdom of God, a radical realignment of power that has its boundary when it comes to love and the embrace of all people as God’s people. Christians ought to make holy the bare life.

This challenge comes out of the gospel of Christ shining out from Marco’s life:

Returning to my first point, this sense of confinement and surveillance is not new to someone who grows up undocumented and criminalized. One develops a separate consciousness that is always monitoring what you do and who you’re with and what’s to lose. And the more urgent call to me is that when we let the market dictate our morality and determine our lives then there will be segments of people left out who find this form of living in complete disagreement with theirs. I am not unimaginative enough to believe that millions of people abroad selected to be poor and found migration unavoidable and found their existence unjustifiable in the land of the free. I think here is where we must confront the gospel. And if you cannot justify our present reality with your faith, then you will become illegal, too, and also irreconcilable with the present. That’s the lesson from Broward Detention, that the current system of operation is unsustainable and yearns for a new creation.

Marco continues, “If in the fulfillment of the gospel the first are last and the last are first, then that means the most marginalized among us should be foremost considered in living and teaching the gospel.” The undocumented migrant challenges us to become “illegal” too, irreconcilable to the law apart from faith (Saavedra 2013). It is only apart the law that the migrant’s bare life and the citizen’s bare life becomes holy. Returning to Agamben, he warns of the church losing its Messianic vocation in part because it lost its relationship to this bare life and further, its own identity as the stranger (Agamben 2012).

Now I, the researcher, the activist, and the friend of undocumented migrants, illuminated by the light of their lives, am confronted with the complicity of my own participation in a hegemonic political-economic system that begets darkness generating a shadowed oppression. The question, now, for me, for all Christians who live in the United States, having seen the light, where does your allegiance lie? To which sovereign power do you belong?

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Faith, An Alien and Narrow Path of Christian Ethics in Migration

Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

1 Preamble

This chapter deals with the sensitive issue of misrepresentations of identities relating to international migration involving West African Christians and the immigrant churches in which they worship. We focus on issues bordering on situation ethics and the inevitable tensions created between Christian morality and illegal means of survival abroad. In situation ethics theory, which is applied in a very limited way here, there is usually no predefinition of good or bad. Judgments are based on the situation. Situationists are familiar with existing rules and regulations but they refuse to be bound by any principle in absolute terms. This theory, developed in the middle of the 1960s by Joseph Fletcher, proved quite influential at the time (Fletcher 1966). William Barclay, explaining aspects of it, notes that the situationist is always confronting people with decisions. Principles only advise but do not possess the right of veto. In situation ethics, principles for instance are abandoned, left or disregarded, if the command to love a neighbour can be better served by so doing (Barclay 1971: 69–91).

The commonest issue regarding migration to which many Africans apply the ethics of situation is when they decide to overstay their visas or enter other countries illegally. Survival in the diaspora usually requires making several false declarations. The common belief that those who have their way with the authorities are those who tell the best lies. So for example, it is not uncommon for people with legal documents to marry their own siblings on paper in order to facilitate relocation abroad. It is seen as a gesture of love for family rather than in terms of breaking the law. After all, as Barclay explains, for the situationist there is one thing and one only that is ‘absolutely, always, and universally good—and *that one thing is love*’ which is also the ultimate norm for Christian decision-making (Barclay 1971: 70). Here in this chapter, we will find a Ghanaian citizen of the Netherlands, a Christian who for example defies the law to accommodate a fellow undocumented Ghanaian member of her church in her home. We also encounter African immigrant churches openly announcing that some members who are legal have documents available for illegals who need documents to find work. The action is illegal but

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their undocumented brothers and sisters in Christ need to eat, be clothed and find places to stay and the documented also need the funds from these actions to supplement their income.

Many undocumented African immigrants seeking to work or regularize their status as resident aliens in the West also go to church and therefore profess to be Christian, however loosely interpreted. Some see their sojourn in the former heartlands of Christianity in terms of mission to the West, that is, as the call of God to restore the declining fortunes of the faith. To all intents and purposes therefore, being people of faith presupposes the adoption of lifestyles of truth. However, their living conditions and situations in terms of the choice to live abroad without proper documentation often means relying on misrepresentations. Many details may be falsified including age, marriage, nationality, reasons for migration, names, and other personal details to survive. On nationality for example, an illegal Ghanaian migrant could claim to be from another war-torn African country to avoid repatriation on humanitarian grounds. The most common misrepresentations include illegal aliens entering into 'contract marriages' or using the documents of others to gain employment. This practice is widespread and African churches, as we noted above, often announce that 'there are papers' available for anybody looking for legal documents to work. Those who make their documents available make a living out of it by charging fees for them.

The desire to migrate from Africa is very strong and partly heightened by impressive stories, photographs and videos of weddings and parties on the good social lives that friends and relations have abroad (Levitt 2007: 23). The overwhelming reason for migration though, has to do with economics. Most of the Africans whose situations are discussed here are recent migrants. They have mostly travelled to Europe from other African countries either directly or through some another African country closer to Europe such as Libya and Morocco. These migrations have occurred only within the last two and a half decades and this at the height of the collapse of many African economies. The collapse of economies has been due to a combination of factors such as military interventions in the processes of governance, massive corruption and the adoption of economic recovery programs that continue to have telling negative effects on the most vulnerable of the continent. Migrations from West Africa have mostly been towards Germany, Italy, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the USA with major cities in these countries having quite sizeable proportions of West African communities.

For many of these migrants, Europe and North America have become earthly heavens and they aspire to migrate there in search of improved economic conditions. That Ghanaian remittances from abroad have since the

1990s come to constitute the third main source of income to the country is only one evidence of the importance of migration to modern African economies. Ghanaians travel to the West to take up all sorts of menial and low-income employments and often work without the proper resident documentation and work permits. The increased numbers of West African migrants from countries such as Ghana in Europe and other Western locations has led to the drafting of new legislation in these countries aimed at arresting the situation. Thus in a paper focusing on marriage as a means of regularizing residential status in the Netherlands, Rijk van Dijk points to how the Dutch government introduced a series of laws in the late 1990s aimed at dealing with illegal immigration. One of these was the coding of citizens to be able to track certain personal details. For the purposes of this chapter, we note that certain African countries, including Ghana, were blacklisted 'for having a notorious record of producing fraudulent identity documents' (Van Dijk 2004: 453).

2 Migrating as Divine Destiny

Today desperate Africans avail themselves for all kinds of religious rituals that are meant to facilitate travel arrangements and help them survive in the diaspora. The countries concerned have for the last three decades become for many Africans places of 'divine destiny' and promise for material prosperity. Whether they are practicing Christians or not, the new 'promised lands' for young Africans are in the West, and there is much preaching that sustains this mind-set in Pentecostal rhetoric and enough rituals of facilitation to make sure ambitious dreams to travel abroad come true. The desire with which some cross the oceans and deserts in risky travel arrangements and how people continue to proceed in spite of the casualties, are enough to explain how desperate the situation is. Our concern would be how within Christian churches, travel arrangements are facilitated through prayer, even when it is clear that the potential migrant is doing so illegally. It is not only Christians who travel, but the thought behind this paper is that studies in Christian mission need to start reflecting on the pastoral, ethical, and moral implications of certain types of migration.

Within the theological context of Pentecostalism in Africa, I have argued in *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, traveling abroad constitutes an important index of the workings of the prosperity theology (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013: 38ff). In the sort of Pentecostal Christianity that preaches this gospel in West Africa, international travel provides access to those material things and opportunities that indicate that a person is blessed by God. Thus in migration experiences, we are dealing not simply with unemployed African youth struggling

for survival but many others who have come to believe that the opportunities offered by migration are part of God's purposes for their lives. Thus there are many graduates and young professionals who also, driven by dreams of prosperity, travel abroad often leaving lucrative jobs and business for less dignifying Western options. What matters for them at the end of the day is not so much what work they do, but the material acquisitions that testify of God's faithfulness.

The moral issues associated with migration often begin at the point of application for the visa. People pray in churches to God for visitor's visas knowing that once these are received, they are not returning to Africa. In most cases therefore, the illegal alien populations would be made up both of people who used unapproved reasons to enter Western countries, those who overstayed their short-term visas and students who refuse to return home to Africa on completion of courses.

3 Diaspora Religion and Morality

The unprecedented upsurge in the numbers of African immigrants traveling to settle in Europe and North America, Afe Adogame has argued, 'heralds a new phase in the history of African diaspora' (Adogame 2013: viii). The expression 'diaspora' is adopted here in loose reference to African Christians living anywhere in the developed world in search of better living conditions. We argue that religion, especially Christianity and increasingly certain forms of Pentecostalism, plays an important role in the process of migration and survival in the diaspora. They do so unmindful of the false representations that migrants make in order to continue to live abroad permanently. Many Africans who undergo complex forms of immigration processes, Adogame points out, have carried with them their religio-cultural identities. Religion in Africa, especially the revivalistic or Pentecostal type tends to be deployed as a survival strategy and so the sojourn in new and precarious geo-political contexts leads to situations that encourage 'immigrants to identify, organize, and reconstruct their religion both for themselves and their host societies' (Adogame 2013: viii).

Magda is Ghanaian and a single mother of two living in New York. Within six months of encountering the Ghanaian father of her twin girls, she had resigned her job as a banker and relocated to the USA to marry. On arrival, a wedding was celebrated in a Ghanaian Pentecostal church; the leadership knew that both were undocumented. Preparations to travel had been backed with some powerful Pentecostal 'prophetic prayers' from her pastor. The promise of marriage was the primary motivation for the journey. Marriage is a source of glory to Africa's young and if the spouse lives abroad, that is itself

considered an additional blessing from God. So in African Pentecostal breakthrough prayers, international travel is coveted as a sign of the workings of the prosperity gospel. Magda was three months away from delivery when her husband lost her job. Having lost the job, a process that was underway for his employers to get him proper documentation also collapsed. Within a week, a pregnant bride and her so-perceived God-given groom were illegal aliens in the USA. At that time, because Magda had also overstayed her visa, frustration set in for both of them.

The tensions arising from this difficult situation led to a divorce. On delivery, Magda weaned her twins prematurely and sent them to her family in Ghana. She stayed on in America. When I met her, she looked very troubled. Her savings of \$10,000 for a 'contract marriage' to enable her regularize her stay as an American citizen had been paid to a 'marriage contractor' who ran away with the money. Magda knew her action was wrong but her situation meant the only way to survive, was to engage in a false marriage by paying for it. She could not seek justice, as she was an illegal alien paying money for an illegal marriage. Magda still lives in the USA. She cries every day, even becoming hysterical, and this for three interrelated reasons. First, being illegal in the USA means most things are done under a false identity. This is something she struggles to live with as a Pentecostal Christian. Second, she needs proper documentation to do most things and the attempt to enter into a contract marriage was supposed to help correct this position. Third, she misses her twin girls in Ghana but cannot travel to see them. My counsel for her to return home was not taken kindly: 'I left a good job in Ghana for a better life in America; my marriage has collapsed; and I have nothing to show for living here [in the USA] for so long; I feel like a failure I will not return for my enemies in Ghana to laugh at me. God will make a way for me.'

4 Misfortune and Causality in Immigration Discourse

Magda was certain—as with many African immigrants with documentation, employment, medical care and family life issues—that the cause of her problems is spiritual. She is convinced that her problems have arisen through a diabolical collaboration between witches in her family and the devil to thwart God's plans of prosperity for her life. This causal explanation pointing to the demonic as the source of misfortune does not allow for enough introspection. It accounts in part for the role that Pentecostal-type prayers in particular play in the process of migration and in the lives of immigrants. 'Forces', as evil powers are euphemistically referred to in Ghanaian public discourse, are there

to frustrate God's plan for lives such as those of Magda. That immigrants use unethical and illegal means to regularize their stay abroad or work under false identities does not usually matter in African migration ethics. I have heard some in a similar position as Magda quote the following text as a form of assurance that things would eventually work:

When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you (Jeremiah 29:10–12).

'Babylon' is the term for all the structures and institutions making it impossible for immigrants in the diaspora to succeed and powerful prayers are the means to deal with those obstacles.

5 Strangers in a Promised Land

There is no questioning the fact that African immigrant Christianity has helped in the transformation of the faith in the modern West. In reconstituting new believing communities outside of existing European churches and denominations, African immigrant churches make the presence of Christ felt in contexts that have all but lost a sense of Christian belonging and the workings of supernatural power. There is now enough academic research on mission and migration that demonstrates how immigrant churches have served to reverse in their own way the declining presence of Christianity in the Northern continents (Ludwig and Asamoah-Gyadu 2011; Hanciles 2008). What scholars of Christian mission and migration have not done is to reflect on the ethical issues arising out of migration activities in the search for proper documentation and employment. The new African immigrant churches are not all Pentecostal but have certainly been influenced especially by the prayer and prosperity culture of the movement. Pentecostal spirituality is orientated towards power encounter and discourses that sustain the worldview in which evil is hyperactive in human affairs and endeavours.

Thus we will consider African Christian migration within the context of the prosperity message associated with contemporary Pentecostalism. The ability of this type of spirituality to create Christianized ritual contexts of power for dealing with immigration issues has contributed to making it the religion of choice for many immigrants. The numbers of publications and conferences on

non-Western immigrant Christianity are indicative of the importance of diaspora as a significant factor in Christian mission (Kim and Ma 2011). Diaspora practices and discourses however, throw up certain challenges that lead to innovative but unethical risky choices in the search for survival. In contemporary Pentecostal discourses the developed countries are the new 'promised lands' for desperate Africans in search of material fortune. Much prayer goes into these endeavours because the churches and their leaders are aware of the dangers of stranger-hood in fortress Europe.

Rijk van Dijk has noted that the present socio-political context of the modern state is that the stranger remains a perpetual stranger—a person who constantly disturbs the smooth evenness of our familiar social and cultural landscape by a persistent incongruity in it (Van Dijk 1997: 136). The implications of this determines the very unorthodox choices that the stranger has to make to ensure survival. For as Van Dijk further explains:

To the modern nation state the 'stranger' is a threat, a category that calls into question, and escapes from, established schemes, social grids and routines, and upsets the tranquillity of social arrangements and formations by becoming potential alternative (Van Dijk 1997: 136).

So far works on immigrant Christianity and mission have been based on the dynamism of the churches as important indicators of the health of African Christianity beyond the continent. Many of the churches are doing well and providing vibrant Christian worship communities for spiritually starving immigrants looking to express their faith in a living God. There is also the witness of presence. Through their dynamic and forceful churches, African Christians make the important theological statement that the Gospel of Christ is alive and well through those from the underside of history. The question is how strong can the testimony of a Christian be when he or she receives working papers through the assumption of false identities and contracting of false marriages? Prayers for documentation, employment and family related issues such as marriage and the desire to be able to bring spouses and children over, constitute three of the most important topics that dominate prayer in any African immigrant church in the developed West. That many of these prayers are supposedly 'answered' through the use of unapproved routes to travel or obtain documentation does not feature in the discourse. The tightening of immigration rules means that many immigrants have their backs to the wall and God has become the only source of hope and breakthrough against the fortresses of 'Babylon'. In other words, God is supposed to look at the situation and not the means through which these prayers may be fulfilled.

6 Migration and the Instrumentalization of Religion

Many African immigrant churches are doing well, but we should not overlook the fact that they are also filled with desperate Africans looking for a way out of the quagmire of living abroad without proper documentation. The lack of proper documentation means that access to health care in a lot of countries, employment, and the ability to reunite with family or attend to important family matters such as funerals of parents are all impossible. The alienating conditions of illegal migration can be traumatic and depressing. Returning home to Africa is just not an option because it complicates matters. Many immigrants, especially professionals have woken up to the realization that the colleagues they left in Ghana for example, have moved on and achieved far more in terms of material acquisitions and family stability than they have done abroad after years of sojourning there. As one immigrant said during a conversation: 'We want to return home, yes, but going home is not the issue. It is the how.'—'How' in this context does not necessarily refer to the airfare but rather what this individual, as with the case of Magda, has to show for years of living abroad.

To that end, Ebenezer Obadare and Wale Adebaniwi have pointed to an important vacuum in the literature on religious transnationalism by highlighting how would-be migrants turn to and instrumentalize religion in the processes of migration (Obadare and Adebaniwi 2010: 31–48). They discuss how potential immigrants resort to various 'traditional' or even 'juju' rites as 'part of a complex repertoire of spiritual and other resources' by drawing on them to achieve their immediate goal of evacuating their countries (Obadare and Adebaniwi 2010: 33). In terms of academic study, the instrumentalization of religion serves as important primary material for social anthropologists who study religion and migration in relation to Africa. Mission studies, unfortunately, has tended to romanticize African immigrant Christians for working to restore the fortunes of the faith in the West without attention to immigrant pastoral problems and ethical issues that undermine Christian ethics and witness.

The difficulty in international travel arrangements make it such that for a people with a supernatural orientation to life, religion becomes an important instrument in migration. Resorting to the services of shrine priests, and Christian pastors and prophets are options in the process of deactivating activities of witches—mostly suspected to be envious relations—employing witchcraft or 'African electronics', as it is popularly called, against one's progress and activate the power of God for things to happen. At 'prophetic prayer meetings' in urban Africa potential immigrants call upon the fire of God to deal ruthlessly with relations spiritually impeding their travel plans. Struggling immigrants

also fire spiritual missiles back to Africa to decimate the lives of family witches working against them. In the process Old Testament imprecatory prayers have been incorporated into spirituality without any sense of Christological critique of these vengeance prayers.

7 Visa God

For many potential migrants, as Obadare and Adebani note, the primary concern is a religious resource that works—whether Christian, traditional or Muslim. There is a greater concern, they note, ‘with which religious authority is putatively acclaimed to guarantee success with the visa process at any particular time, rather than his or her denominational identity’ (Obadare and Adebani 2010: 34). In 2001, a British High Commission official expressed consternation on Joy FM radio regarding reports that potential Ghanaian immigrants often take the names of officials in his outfit to shrines and Spiritual churches. They go there in search of ‘supernatural assistance’ to bend the minds of officials so that requests for travel documentation would be granted. At the popular Pentecostal prayer camp at Edumfa in the Central Region of Ghana, heaps of passport belonging to potential migrants sit on a table in front of the prophetess in charge at every prayer service as she invokes the blessing of God upon the owners for divine breakthrough at embassies as they apply for travel documentation and visas.

This is not just a traditional religious or occult problem. It has become a pastoral problem too because the need for supernatural intervention has generated a crop of Christian charismatic pastors whose specialties lie in prayers of supernatural breakthrough for visas and employment in the diaspora. As with the traditional settings, it is not uncommon for Christian pastors to request potential migrants and immigrants to sow a ‘seed’, that is, remit money to Africa as ritual for sustaining whatever breakthroughs they may be enjoying as a result of prayer offered on their behalf. You sow a seed to open doors and you have to continue to sow those seeds to keep the doors of breakthrough open. The fact that some of the problems for which people are seeking supernatural interventions are self-inflicted through lies does not usually feature in the discussions. It is a common experience to find potential immigrants in churches of Pentecostal persuasion because their focus on supernatural intervention feed into the needs and discourses of migration. God, as Obadare and Adebani note, is thus very much a ‘visa’ and ‘documentation’ God as the following prayer indicates:

Loving Lord! The Scripture say You are aware of all our needs, even before we ask You. So I come to You and place this request at Your loving hands. You know how desperate I am for getting the Visa. My soul has become weary and anxious over this delay in getting the visa. O Lord! Speak in the hearts of the concerned officials, grant me favour in their eyes and help me to get my visa on time so that my purpose is fulfilled. Perfect everything for me my Master. I wait at your feet and trust in you to make this possible. I know that You will do it, for You will never let Your children down. I thank You for listening to my plea! To You alone be all honour and glory. In the sweet name of Jesus I pray. Amen (Obadare and Adebani 2010: 38).

Rijk van Dijk also reports from a Church of Pentecost prayer camp in Accra that those admitted for reasons of international travel had been increasing (Van Dijk 1997: 145). They go to the camps for prayer against witches of the African universe, mainly envious relations who unrestrained by distance are able to undo plans and bring victims to ruin. If proper protection is not sought, witches can thwart physical plans by working against the issuance of visas or instigating the repatriation of those already living abroad. Van Dijk explains how concerned family members get involved in the religious aspects of migration:

Once a migrant has made it to Europe, close relatives might occasionally come and stay at the prayer camps to engage in prayer for the success and protection of the one who has travelled abroad. This practice is closely linked to the notion of social investment that a family makes in one of its younger members to allow him to travel to the West to send home revenues. It is thus considered a deep family crisis whenever such a family member sends no money or other signs of their well-being. Such a crisis might again prompt family members to stay at a prayer camp to mollify the heavenly powers that they may change the spirit of the migrant or cast out the demon that is blocking the flow of substances sent home (Van Dijk 1997: 145).

That the popular expression in Ghana for witchcraft activities is 'African electronics' says much about what people believe about these 'forces' of harm and why migration plans tend to be some of the best kept secrets from relations in Africa. In one church a young man who had received his breakthrough by obtaining a five-year multiple entry visa to the USA brought his passport to church. The pastor then took the passport, opened to the page with the visa

stamp and went from row to row showing what God could do for those who come to that particular church seeking supernatural intervention. There were no questions asked regarding the obvious fact that this individual does not intend to return to Ghana after visiting the USA. The reasons for travel and what awaited this young man abroad were not important here. What was important was that he had obtained a visa to travel to the USA and this was divine breakthrough into success and prosperity of the material kind. The interest of the pastor goes beyond the workings of his prayerful interventions because of the 'seeds' of money and gifts that the immigrant sends in gratitude for those powerful prayers that make travel possible (Van Dijk 1997: 145).

8 Precarious Diasporas and Situation Ethics

At this point I recount two other major incidents that occurred in the lives of immigrant communities in Europe and the USA that are relevant to our discussion in terms of migration stories with implications for Christian ethics and morality. In the first incident a member of a Ghanaian immigrant Christian community died suddenly in his sleep one night. The death was discovered on a Sunday morning when the landlady who was a member of the church the deceased used to attend, tried to call him that it was time to go to church. When the lifeless body was discovered, the landlady knew she was in trouble with the law. It is against immigration law in the Netherlands to accommodate an undocumented immigrant but the lady had placed 'Christian love' above state law and now she had to answer to the authorities for a 'Samaritan' act that had gone horribly wrong. Eventually the Christian church where they both worshipped stepped in, took responsibility for the burial and the police decided that since the gentleman died of natural causes and the state was not going to incur debts, charges against the young lady were to be dropped.

The second incident was when while visiting the USA, I had to fill some forms and needed an endorsement from a friend who had lived there for many years. Knowing his name, I had actually filled out the form and taken it to him for signature. That was when I learnt that the name in his passport was different from what I knew him to be called. As he explained to me later, the situation demanded a change of name: 'On my first entry into the country, I overstayed and was repatriated. On the second attempt, I had to change my name, age and passport in order to avoid being found out that I was the same person.' There are numbers of Africans who live abroad under false identities. The circumstances under which people assume these false identities differ but in many cases, they are either the identities of deceased friends and relatives or they are

acquired through false or 'contract' marriages. As Van Dijk explains marriage is an important 'entry ticket' for many migrant groups into the Dutch welfare system and has since the 1980s acquired 'a highly contested significance in the context of Dutch immigration and identity policies' (Van Dijk 2004: 451).

9 Resident Aliens: Patriarchal Narratives in Immigration Experiences

In the circumstances described so far, the story of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt has often been quoted in support of decisions that in principle may weigh against Christian ethics. Claudia Währisch-Oblau explains that African immigrant Christians in Europe 'pray for changed government policies and even confront the 'demon of racism' in their spiritual warfare' (Währisch-Oblau 2009: 31). At these intensively emotional and physically aggressive prevailing prayer services the name and authority of Jesus or the power of God are forcefully invoked to deal with those representing 'Babylon' and making international travel difficult. That the word 'alien' is the official designation for immigrants in many Western countries already introduces a religious dimension into migration discourses in the imagination of African Christians.

In their position as aliens, the Israelites came up against much in terms of hard labour, oppression and denial of basic rights but God was always at hand to intervene on behalf of his people. In Deuteronomy 26, members of the Israelite worshipping community present a basket of the 'first and the best' of their produce in gratitude for God's deliverance for their alien forefathers in Egypt. The presentation begins with the liturgical chant that recounts the historical and momentous deliverance as passed down to later generations:

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression . . . and now I bring the first-fruits of the soil that you O Lord have given me . . . (Deut. 26:5–10).

What is important from the viewpoint of the immigrant is the presentation of God here as the God of deliverance from the forces of oppression and who deserves the 'first and best' in gratitude. Thus, an important means of sustaining God's blessing is to be faithful in the payment of tithes and offerings often directly to the 'man of God' or 'woman of God' whose prayerful interventions

are credited for migration success and prosperity. The ‘average’ African immigrant Christian identifies with these Biblical experiences and that explains in part the strong relationship that exists between religion and migration in African immigrant discourse. Biblical passages that talk about God’s interventions on behalf of the alienated and oppressed thus resonate very much with the hopes and aspiration of African immigrant Christians and they are reinvented and applied in contemporary discourses and prayers.

In short, living in the diaspora, especially as an undocumented alien, can be a precarious endeavour and strategies of survival usually break the limits of Christian ethics. ‘Our position is not new,’ one Ghanaian illegal immigrant noted, ‘even Abraham was an illegal alien in Egypt and because God was on his side, he succeeded.’¹ The Biblical narrative from which my friend was making his case for continued stay abroad without proper documentation reads as follows:

Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you” (Genesis 12:10–13).

The ‘famine’ in Egypt is used here as a symbolic representation of all the socioeconomic and political reasons why people migrate from Africa to North America and Europe. Now economies have started improving but for many years even African professionals like doctors and nurses were better off undertaking menial jobs abroad than work within their professions in Africa. For many ordinary African school leavers—no matter the level—their best option of making it in life in terms of economic prosperity is still migrating to any of the Western countries and slugging it out in those harsh conditions to eke out a living and extend an economic lifeline to brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and parents and parents in law back in Africa.

Jacob is also reinvented in contemporary Pentecostal preaching, not as a cheat but as one in whose life God’s purposes were fulfilled through taking advantage of situations in which he found himself. In using the tales of the lives of Jacob and Esau in charismatic preaching, the emphasis shifts from what grace and mercy can accomplish with the worst of sinners and truant, to

¹ Conversations with an undocumented migrant in Maryland, USA in May 2012.

reinterpreting Jacob's exploitative approach to life as wisdom principles that culminate in prosperity and success. I am not suggesting that those preaching this way recommend illegal migration but the reinterpretations of the life of Jacob when stretched to its logical limits virtually supports the position that the end justifies the means!

The contemporary charismatic interpretation is that life is about smart negotiations. This is illustrated by the picture of a handshake involving a black hand and a white one on the cover of Mensa Otabil's book *Buy the Future* which brings together a series of sermons on Jacob. In *Quest for Supremacy*, by Eastwood Anaba, life is about 'wrestling' for your place and this is illustrated by the two wrestlers in combat on the front cover of Anaba's book. Thus against the grain of conventional understanding of Jacob as a sinner transformed by grace from a 'supplanter' to Israel, he is presented by the two contemporary Pentecostals as one who made right and perceptive choices with the 'future' and 'supremacy' in mind. This is how Otabil interprets Jacob:

Most people see him as a trickster and a fraud who exploited his brother Esau. . . . Jacob did not spend his time scheming to take advantage of people. He developed a character that was very different from his name; he was an upright man. Later on in life, after a season of struggle for divine blessing, God rightly changed the name of Jacob to reflect his true heritage (Otabil 2002: 28).

Anaba takes a similar position that Jacob was not a cheat he simply had business sense when he notes that:

Jacob was not a dishonest person who subverted his brother, Esau's position, to take away his birthright. As good men and women struggle to come out of the rubble of life it is not unusual to see them dented and distorted by the pressures around them; God concentrates on the good underneath the dents but man fixes his gaze on the dents (Anaba 2004: vi–vii).

The references to 'struggles' in Otabil and to 'dents' in Anaba are important because it shows that charismatic pastors such as the two we examine do not take a simplistic approach to prosperity. The road to our God-given destinies has many obstacles but they are only transient if one stays focused and works towards those goals in search of a better future or supremacy. Thus as Anaba explains: 'God turns the obstacle into a springboard to catapult you to another level of supremacy. Obstacles are not meant to obstruct you but to uplift you' (Anaba 2004: 32).

In this matter, the Biblical Abraham tends to be an important paradigm not simply as a model of faith but also in negotiating one's way out of danger in spite of the ethical demands of faith. In the contemporary application of the Abrahamic strategy, telling lies and falsifying documents may well be God's way of helping his children realize their divine destinies. Migration as we see from the story of Abraham, especially in his initial journey into Egypt is accompanied by its own challenges. Our focus here has been on some of these challenges in the lives of Christian immigrants in Africa and the struggle to live by Christian ideals in contexts where many Christians have had to lie or assume false identities in the search for survival.

10 Faith, Alienation and Christian Ethics

We live today in what Walls describes as 'a post-Christian West and a post-Western Christianity' (Walls 2002: 3–4). He notes that, in relation to this development that 'Christianity will now increasingly be associated (mostly) with rather poor and very poor people, and with some of the poorest countries on earth' (Walls 2002: 10). People migrate in search of better conditions of living and as they do so, it has been established, they go with their faith. Adogame points out that next to the intentional expansion of mission, migration is the most important factor determining the spread of religion. An important part of the process is what he calls 'chain migration' in which spouses and families migrate to join the first comers (Adogame 2013: 10). Even when they were not originally confessing Christians, a lot of immigrants have come to faith through the difficulties of living in foreign lands and here, they begin to call on God for deliverance from security authorities doing the legitimate work.

Andrew Walls concludes on the presence of non-Western Christians in a lot of Western countries that, 'Christianity will be associated increasingly with immigrants' (Walls 2002: 10). It is the quest for the preservation of faith that sometimes conflicts with the strategies of survival leading to the deployment of situation ethics. In the Biblical record Abram, later to become the father of faith, was driven to move as a result of hunger in his homeland and once in Egypt following this migration, he found himself having to lie about his relationship with Sarai in order to survive (Gen. 12). That is what is also revealed in the Biblical records where the pains of exile also became opportunities for seeking divine intervention and keeping the messianic hope alive. In the case of Israel they continued to receive prophetic assurances that some

divine purpose was being worked out within the pains of exile. Of the many Old Testament promises of divine intervention that today's African Christian immigrants identify with, one of the most favoured is Jeremiah 29:11–12,

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you”.

When this promise is invoked in African immigrant churches today, it is not necessarily interpreted to mean that God is going to take his people back to Africa from exile. The modern interpretations relate to God's promises and plans of prosperity as people hold on to the hope of faith in those places where they now live in search of better fortunes in life. The Abrahamic incident occurs between the period of promise and consummation of the covenant made between God and Abram. In African Christianity today, the Pharaohs who put the lives of the people of God in danger may be the embassy official, the immigration officer, the policeman or woman and people of such standing who in the course of their official duties make it difficult for the potential migrant to travel or the immigrant to live and work in a foreign land. The fact that the stranger experiences disciplinary actions taken by the host nation state as it attempts to intervene in diasporic flows has led to the development of shared strategies of survival among immigrants. These strategies of survival, we have noted, include the assumption of false identities, claiming forced asylums and entering into illegal unions in order to beat the systems in place.

The Pentecostal/charismatic discourses of power and supernatural intervention enable the creation of the appropriate ritual contexts for dealing with the challenges of being aliens in foreign lands. In the wake of the increasing numbers of non-Western immigrant churches in the diaspora, studies point out that it is the turn of the churches in the Global South to revive the Western church. This makes the role of the diaspora in the secular West critically important. Yet the challenges of being an alien require unorthodox strategies of survival that may undermine Christian ethics and pitch immigrants against the laws of host countries. The materialistic orientation of the gospel of prosperity in contemporary Pentecostalism means that international travel has gained high priority as the focus of preaching, teaching, prophetic declarations, the lyrics of gospel music and prayer. The opportunity to travel and what goes into it are not as straightforward as one may think.

Religion is important not simply as a means of identity but the processes of travel and access to social and economic services may involve risky undertakings for which religion is needed as a means of response. The processes involve filling physical forms and also dealing with human beings who are doing their work, but supernatural forces, working through the physical forces can interfere negatively with these arrangements. To counter their effects powerful prayers are required. Thus obtaining resident papers, employment or the ability to bring spouses and relations over are major thanksgiving occasions in African immigrant churches. For those whose arrangements to travel were aided by traditional religious functionaries and diviners, appropriate tokens are duly sent to the countries of origin in fulfilment of pledges made. In both the Christian and traditional religious settings, it is believed, the renegeing on such responsibility could lead to the derailment of plans abroad. The evils that occur in the lives of migrant are often interpreted in Biblical terms as the release of 'pests' by the Lord to devour the fortunes of those holding back what is due him (Malachi 3:11).

In contemporary Pentecostal discourse, foreign lands are now linked to personal destinies in virtually the same way that the destiny of Israel was linked to the promise land. One of the first motifs that we encounter in the very first book of the Bible is the divine promise to the Patriarchs, in which the promise of land is a major element (Frankel 2011: 2). In Exodus through Deuteronomy, the goal and purpose of the exodus from Egypt are depicted in terms of fulfilling the promise to provide Israel with a land 'flowing with milk and honey' (Ex. 3:8; Deut. 7:23). The book of Deuteronomy continues to accentuate the issue of the land, its conquest and settlement, bringing the theme to an even higher level of prominence. The land is continually referred to in Deuteronomy as the ultimate gracious gift that the Lord bestows upon the people of Israel (Frankel 2011: 4).

It is from the land that people eke out a living and it is on it they settle and that means human destiny is itself based on the availability of land. Thus the promise of land to the Patriarchs has become metaphorical for human aspirations which are linked with divine promise. This explains why certain Old Testament narratives possess such a unique appeal for contemporary Pentecostal preachers who encourage members to pursue their material aspirations through such themes as: 'take territories', 'possess your possessions' or 'occupy the land'. The land may be interpreted as a land of promise but it is also understood that to be an alien in a foreign land, comes with specific problems:

1. The land devours aliens because of the giants who live there (Spying the Land).

2. Survival in exile may sometimes require that one is economical with the truth (Abram and Sarai).
3. Related to point 2 is the fact that being an immigrant may require a different set of ethical rules.

The problems of the 'average' African migrant usually depend on a number of factors including social status, employment situation, immigrant status, linguistic ability, and the like. The influence of pneumatic ministries that spiritualize problems and promise supernatural interventions because of prayers from 'powerful' charismatic pastors means that the types of Christian spirituality on offer feed and encourage traditional beliefs on mystical causality. Prayers are often 'supernatural scud missiles' sent over the seas to destroy those responsible for the lack of success abroad. Stories of witchcraft abound among Ghanaians about how envious relations assisted by the powers of witchcraft have appeared in dreams abroad pursuing their victims in order to make their lives miserable.

11 Conclusion

There are no easy answers to the questions raised here and in my experience even the most honest and spiritual of African pastors has to contend with members who are undocumented in the congregation. Many pastors have to make a choice regarding the ethical propriety of allowing notices regarding the availability of documents for the undocumented to secure work when it goes both against the laws of the host country and Christian ethics. Whatever it is immigrant Christianity serves an important purpose in mission to the Northern continents. Nevertheless, we must also confront the issue of the provision of pastoral care to people who are surviving by flouting immigration laws of host countries and demonizing others for the problems that this generates for their lives abroad.

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Refugees as Guests and Hosts

Towards a Theology of Mission among Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Ross Langmead†

1 Introduction

Refugees and asylum seekers are among the most powerless, marginalized and dislocated people in the world, clearly a high priority for those who follow Jesus. Christian mission and ministry stands or falls in its response of hospitality to such groups.

In this chapter, I want to suggest that in any sketch of a theology of mission amongst refugees and asylum seekers, hospitality will be a central metaphor. In this context hospitality is a strong concept which includes justice-seeking, political action, inclusion around our tables, intercultural friendship, pursuing a hospitable multicultural approach to church life, practical assistance, long-term commitment, learning from those who are different, sensitivity to the power dynamics of 'welcome', a willingness to 'let go' as well as 'embrace', interfaith dialogue and discovering the intertwining of the guest and host roles which is embedded in Biblical and theological understandings of God's activity amongst us.

Following the approach of practical theology, of which missiology is a part in Australia, I will begin with the questions raised by our lived experience, correlate them with the resources of the Christian tradition and wrestle with the practical implications (Langmead 2004b: 13). The Young Christian Worker movement summed it up simply with its slogan, 'See, Judge, Act' (Hally 2008). As Gustavo Gutiérrez put it: reflection is only one part of praxis, which is the dialectic of action and reflection in the cause of transformation. The aim of a theology of mission amongst refugees, therefore, is to make our 'commitment to liberation . . . more evangelical, more concrete, more effective' (Gutiérrez 1999: 29).

While this exploration has relevance for a Christian response to refugees and asylum seekers in the Majority World, where the challenge is even greater than found in the West, the context from which I speak is Australia and my suggestions have the greatest relevance for Western countries, which have recently felt real pressure from the global tides of persecuted and displaced people desperate to find a home.

2 Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The global phenomenon of vulnerable people being displaced, persecuted or fleeing conflict and war has grown in the last fifty years to be a major humanitarian challenge. While figures are unreliable, the people of concern to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2011 numbered around thirty-four million, the main groups being refugees (eleven million), asylum seekers (one million in process), internally displaced persons (fifteen million) and stateless persons (three million) (UNHCR 2011a). The number of those recognized as refugees grew from one and a half million in 1960 to around ten or eleven million in the decade since 2000, having peaked at nearly eighteen million in 1992 (UNHCR 2011b).

The political context in which Western Christians are responding to refugees is often one of increasing hostility and resentment to numbers of desperate people seeking entry. Consider the Australian context as an example of the volatile politics of refugees and asylum seekers in Western countries.

3 Asylum Seeker Politics in Australia

In Australia, for example, the national mood has deteriorated since the 1970s, when Vietnamese asylum seekers arrived by boat to widespread sympathy, partly because they were fleeing the communist victors in Vietnam against whom Australia had fought and lost. Several factors have contributed to a growing resistance to refugees, including fear of hordes arriving, political swings to the right and immigration policy focusing on economic benefits to Australia (McMaster 2001: 50–65).

Despite a chequered history of white racism in Australian immigration there has been a steady quota of immigrants who are refugees or their families. Between 1993 and 2009 Australia received 186,000 migrants under its humanitarian program (Refugees Council of Australia 2010). In the UNHCR resettlement program it ranks second only to the United States in the numbers it takes in (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2005). To put this into perspective, however, only 1% of the world's refugees are offered resettlement by the UNHCR. If we look at the broader picture, over the last ten years Australia has taken 0.53% of the world's refugees, ranking 19th on the table of nations, 23rd on a per capita basis and 68th relative to national Gross Domestic Product (Refugee Council of Australia 2011a: 3).

Australia's resettlement program for recognized refugees is well regarded, with language programs, settlement services, provision of basic housing needs

and other welfare benefits. On-shore asylum seekers—those who fly in and then apply for asylum—are also allowed to remain in the community while being processed. But off-shore asylum seekers—those arriving without papers by boat—have been treated less well.

In the 1980s off-shore asylum seekers began to be classified as ‘illegal non-citizens’ and their legal rights were gradually limited, despite objections from human rights groups. Since 1991 those who arrive by boat have faced mandatory detention. Australia is one of only a few nations to impose this on all unauthorized arrivals (Refugee Council of Australia 2011b). A series of detention centers have been built. Some have been extremely remote; the Port Hedland center on the west coast, operative from 1991 to 2003, was more than 1600 km from a major city.

In 2001 the 433 occupants of one boat which sank were rescued by a Swedish tanker (the *Tampa*) which was then denied landing rights in Australia amidst a political furore (Jupp 2003: 185–197). In response the Australian government declared some of Australia’s nearby islands—such as Christmas Island, which is closer to Indonesia than the Australian mainland—not to be part of Australia for immigration purposes. Boat arrivals on those islands were, for some years, sent directly to detention centers on Christmas Island or in Nauru and Papua New Guinea so that the Australian government did not have to consider them as having arrived in Australia. This avoidance of Australia’s responsibility under the United Nations Convention Related to the Status of Refugees (UN 1988: 294–310)—through pretending that asylum seekers have not actually arrived in Australia and therefore do not need to be given asylum if found to be genuine—was reinstated in August 2012, to an outcry from refugee advocates. Several boats have sunk, with the loss of hundreds of lives, in a political atmosphere that favors immigration control above humanitarian assistance.

For a decade the media has reported instances of long or indefinite detention of asylum seekers, inhumane treatment, denial of legal representation and severe mental illness resulting from high stress (sometimes leading to suicide). Children were detained in harsh prison-like facilities behind razor-wire until 2012. Due to political pressure from refugee advocates, including churches, government policy is softening a little, with children being released, senate committees urging strict limits on the length of detention, improvements in processing applications and the option for citizens to offer homestays for asylum seekers with bridging visas (Australian Homestay Network 2012; Murphy 2012; Wilson 2012). Between 1999 and 2008 those who arrived by boat were issued with only temporary protection visas with few legal and travel rights, and an

obligation to prove their status again once the visa ran out. Australia is the only country to have issued such visas to those who have proven their refugee status (Human Rights Watch 2003).

Political cartoonists have often noted the irony of white Australians, the first 'boat people' on the continent, being so vigilant in turning away later boat people. Cartoons abound of Indigenous people watching the arrival in 1788 of Captain Phillip and his boatloads of convicts being discarded by Britain. In the cartoons the Indigenous people are always anxious about being overrun by these boat people, and history has vindicated their concern (Evers 2010).

Often hidden by the politics and statistics is the human and personal dimension of being a refugee. I know women who have been raped in their home country, men who have been tortured and leaders who have been imprisoned in harsh conditions. Friends of mine have lost many relatives and lived in daily fear for years before fleeing for their lives. Respected church leaders I know have been used by the military in Burma as forced porters for days at the point of a gun. Some of my friends have fled for their lives through jungles, bringing out only what they could carry. The stories are told in many places (Lemere and West 2011). So many of them face fear, powerlessness, uncertainty, the unlikelihood of recognition as a refugee, poverty and physical privations.

It is clear that refugees and asylum seekers are among the most marginalized people we are likely to meet in the West. If Jesus came to bring life, and to bring it abundantly (Jn. 10:10), these people, of all people, deserve to experience the Good News in all of its dimensions.

Although the Australian context is unique and the stories of each country's response to the waves of refugees and of asylum seekers differ, it is common in Western countries to hear loud calls to 'keep them out' almost drowning more humanitarian voices. It is in this atmosphere that the Christian churches are having to develop their response. Such a response needs to be Biblical and theological, politically aware and practical.

Fortunately, a strong and focused concern for the most marginalized is deeply embedded within the Christian tradition. I will draw out some strands of that concern, which begins with the Christian understanding of God and God's mission.

4 **The Marginalized are at the Centre**

The foundation of Christian tradition is the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, himself a refugee when he was an infant, according to the story in Matthew 2.

In his *life* Jesus consistently broke boundaries and reversed the social order in affirming the human dignity and blessedness of those on the margins of his society—the women, children, ritually impure, poor, sick, cultural outsiders and moral failures. Although he mixed with all types of people, these were the groups he particularly welcomed, touched, talked to and ate with. In Donald Kraybill's memorable phrase, these were the 'inside outsiders' (Kraybill 2003: 194). The explosive social implications of Jesus' life were foreseen in Mary's song of praise, a song of dramatic reversal (Lk. 1:46–55).

In his *death* Jesus was executed alongside common criminals by crucifixion, the form of death reserved by Romans for slaves, rebels and despised foreigners. The symbolism of Jesus' identification with the margins is unmistakable.

It continues in the four gospel accounts of his *resurrection* appearances where the first witnesses are women, including Mary Magdalene (Mat. 28:1; Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:10; Jn. 20:1), who had been cured of mental illness (Lk. 8:2).

His *teaching* centered on the kingdom of God, an upside-down kingdom (Kraybill 2003) which is virtually impossible for the rich to enter (Mat. 19:24); is open first to prostitutes, tax collectors (Mat. 21:31) and the poor (Lk. 6:20); is for the childlike (Mk. 10:15); and is for the humble (Mat. 18:4).

Of particular relevance to refugees on the margins is Jesus' promise that God's realm is especially good news for those who are persecuted as justice-seekers (Mat. 5:10), and for those who are poor, who weep now and who are hungry (Lk. 6:21). This gracious realm is a hospitable tree whose branches give birds a place to nest (Lk. 13:19).

Jesus is anointed to bring good news to the poor, release for the captives, healing for the sick and liberation for the oppressed (Lk. 4:18). His parables often describe the switch from the center to the margins and vice versa. A striking example is the story of the great banquet, which in the end is opened to the poor and sick from the streets and lanes and closed to the invited guests (Lk. 14:15–24). There is also a dramatic switch in Jesus' biting story of the judgment in Matthew 25. Only when serving those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, naked, imprisoned and foreigners—what better summary could there be of the extremities faced by so many refugees?—are the people of all nations worshiping God (serving Christ himself) and living into God's gracious realm (Mat. 25:31–46).

Jesus stands in a rich Hebrew tradition in which God is merciful and just, 'a refuge for the oppressed, a place of safety in times of trouble' (Ps. 9:9). God sees the needs of the widows, orphans and foreigners and acts on their behalf (Deut. 26:12; 24:21). The Exodus, the basis of Israel's identity, is God's response to their cry of oppression (Ex. 3:7–8). It is Israel's weakness and vulnerability, not their righteousness, that leads to God's liberating concern. When they are freed from slavery they will know that God is their God (Ez. 34:27).

The prophetic tradition out of which Jesus speaks, calls God's people to worship and fast through justice seeking: 'Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives. Then my favor will shine on you like the morning sun' (Is. 58:6–8).

Particular concern for those who are hungry or in prison is expressed elsewhere in the New Testament writings, such as in Hebrews 13:3, where after urging his readers to show hospitality to strangers, the writer counsels: 'Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.'

Christian mission is a response to the mission of God as understood through the lens of Jesus. It is to take up the cross and follow Jesus (Mk. 8:34), to live into the gracious realm of God and proclaim the Good News. Even this brief review of what the Good News of Jesus means in relation to those who are pushed to the margins—in persecution, poverty, landlessness, orphanhood, widowhood and statelessness—makes it clear why it is at the core of the Christian faith to defend refugees and asylum seekers. If the command to love our neighbor is seen through the eyes of the story of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29–37), the neighbor is clearly the friendless stranger (Bretherton 2006: 139), one who is beaten up and abandoned by the side of the road, or perhaps left for years in a refugee camp or left to drown on the high seas in a leaky boat.

5 Mission as Hospitality

The metaphor for mission that most readily suggests itself in response to the plight of those seeking asylum is that of hospitality. Mission as hospitality or friendship has been fruitfully explored by several authors in recent writings (Bass 1998: 139; Cornish 2002; Hershberger 1999; Huertz and Pohl 2010; Oden 2001; Pohl 1999; Ross 2008; Russell 2009; Sutherland 2006). The very concept of hospitality is intertwined with that of the stranger. The New Testament word for 'stranger' (*xenos*) also means 'guest' and 'host'. Whether someone is a stranger or our guest depends entirely on how we respond to them (Pinada 1997: 33). And as I will note further below, whether one is a guest or a host also depends on what transformations occur in the divine-human relationship and in human relationships, a common theme in the Bible.

In this context I am using hospitality to mean much more than offering a meal or bed, or making someone feel comfortable in our presence. It is a strong and multidimensional concept similar to that of public friendship in classical

Greek times, which (although only available between peers) involved solidarity and defense of the other. Jesus' friendship with tax collectors and sinners (Mat. 11:19) broke the contemporary boundaries of friendship, reflecting the transforming and open friendship of God (Moltmann 1978: 50–63). In Letty Russell's words, hospitality is 'the practice of God's welcome, embodied in our actions as we reach across difference to participate with God in bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis' (Russell 2009: 2). As Arthur Sutherland puts it, with particular relevance to refugees: 'Christian hospitality is the intentional, responsible, and caring act of welcoming or visiting, in either public or private places, those who are strangers, enemies, or distressed, without regard for reciprocation' (Sutherland 2006: xiii).

The simple act of hospitality in the home is based on creating a safe and comfortable space for our guests. This is also at the center of a fully-orbed hospitality as an expression of Christian mission. The Hebrew word for salvation, *yasha*, carries the meaning of bringing us into a spacious environment, freeing us from a narrow or cramped existence (Bradley 2010: 104), and this sense of making room, or creating space is part of all dimensions of hospitality (Pohl 1999; Ross 2008: 173).

Theologically speaking, extending Christian hospitality is fundamentally a response to our experience of God, 'gifting and honoring human beings with the super-abundant hospitality of God' (Byrne 2000: 124). As mission is our response to our own experience of God's Good News, so also is hospitality a natural response to finding our home in God. Mission through this lens is a spiritual–material welcoming, a 'unified ministry of word and table' (Koenig 1985: 110).

Mission as hospitality both reaches out and gathers in. The two aspects are integrated in the concept of incarnational mission, where—following Jesus' example—Christians endeavor to embody good news in our lives and words (Langmead 2004a). It occurs 'out there' in society and 'in here' in the practices of hospitable Christian community. There has been an appropriate emphasis in missiology on centrifugal mission—flinging the message outwards across the world, as it were (since Blauw 1962: 34). But in hospitality there is a correction to any danger that in centrifugal mission 'the other' might remain in our eyes as 'the other', or that we are simply distributing pearls of wisdom. In an article on 'Centripetal Mission, or Evangelization by Hospitality' Mortimer Arias addresses the phenomenon of the world coming to the door of Western countries through migration, arguing that centripetal mission is a necessary balance to centrifugal mission. As seen in the Hebrew Bible it is the call of God's people to authenticity and faithfulness where we are. Western countries, says Arias, need to practice God's hospitality by welcoming migrants

and refugees, living out God's welcoming justice (Arias 2008: 429–430). 'Like Jesus, the speech and action of the church is simultaneously centrifugal—they go out into the world—and centripetal—the world is drawn into participating in the banquet' (Bretherton 2006: 135). In this double action we are drawn into mutuality rather than a relationship of distribution from the center. In this double action is the possibility, indeed likelihood, that both partners will be transformed (Gittins 1994: 398).

The themes we have briefly canvassed provide the elements of a theology of migration and identity, particularly with refugees in mind. There is a correlation between—on the one hand—the human experience of journey and alienation until we find our welcome in God and—on the other—the migrant experience of uprootedness until experiencing the different dimensions of hospitality in a new home. If the churches in the 'receiving' country catch the vision of mission as hospitality, strangers will become guests, and then hosts. Those without defenders in their old country will have advocates in the new. Those on the margins will, at least in faith communities, become 'insiders', 'at home'. Our welcome will in some way reflect God's abundant welcome. We should not underestimate how countercultural this vision is, or how challenging it is to live out in a fearful and often selfish society.

In teasing out further the dynamics of hospitality let us ground it in the context of welcoming and defending refugees and asylum seekers. My brief comments can be made under ten simple headings and usually involve both reflective and practical aspects. What does Christian hospitality towards refugees and asylum seekers involve?

6 Aspects of Hospitable Friendship

6.1 *Defending Human Rights*

If friendship involves solidarity we begin by defending the human rights of those whose humanity is denied. Justice is structural love, or the principle of love for all distributed fairly in a social context. If there is neither slave nor free before Christ (Gal. 3:28), if the Good News is of life abundant, then Christian mission involves at least strongly and actively supporting international instruments which seek to guarantee rights and freedoms such as the following from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: that all humans have dignity, are treated fairly and without discrimination, can move freely, know security and freedom from violence, have rights before the law, are not imprisoned for political reasons, may speak freely, may hold religious beliefs freely, may assemble

peacefully, can vote freely, are able to work, receive medical care, have a roof over their heads, and have access to education (UN 2007).

Refugees themselves not only join with Western Christians in calling for human rights to be respected but are typically very active in exile, opposing oppression and injustice in their home country and calling for the international spotlight to be trained on their plight. They can speak freely in exile in ways that were impossible at home. Refugees see justice-seeking as public hospitality towards their own.

6.2 *Political Defense of Refugees and Asylum Seekers*

Defense of human rights leads to the more specific political defense of refugees and asylum seekers. In the Australian context it has been necessary for churches to counter public opinion by reminding governments that, because Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UN 1988), asylum seekers have rights to be treated well and not to be returned to situations where conflict continues and they are at risk. Churches have been the most consistent voice for ending mandatory detention, shortening processing times, restoring legal rights of appeal, improving detention conditions, allowing visitors to detention centers and abolishing temporary protection visas. Christians have lobbied the Australian government not to engage in trade with oppressive countries which are producing hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers. More broadly, Christians have articulated the morality of welcoming, rather than harshly turning away, the desperate people who arrive by boat (nearly all of whom eventually receive refugee status anyway, despite the hurdles they have to jump).

These first two aspects of hospitality exhibit the public friendship or solidarity referred to above, where Christians seek the merciful justice that characterizes the God of the Bible.

6.3 *Settlement Assistance*

Hospitality involves making people feel 'at home', and there are many aspects to welcoming as Christian mission. The dislocation that refugees experience in a new and rich country is usually massive. I know refugees from mountainous Asian villages—where there is no vehicular traffic, intermittent electricity and widespread poverty—being flown into capital cities in Australia to face a totally new life. There are gaps in government settlement services which are filled by churches, often by migrant churches looking after their own.

I shudder to remember my biggest contribution to the settlement of a Chin Burmese refugee community in Melbourne soon after their first members

began to arrive and become part of my local church: I taught two of them to drive a car, a nerve-wracking experience at any time without adding the cultural and language differences we faced. But those two young men taught others and several years later many in that community own and drive cars, which are a necessity for migrants renting houses in low-income areas away from public transport.

The Baptist Union of Victoria runs a Refugee Airfare Loans Scheme which has been used as a rotating fund assisting refugees to bring their families. In its nine years of operation it has assisted five hundred refugees and their relatives in coming to Australia. The rate of defaulting on loans is extraordinarily low. It now lends money to buy cars and meet other needs in assisting new migrants in settling in to a new country (Yang 2012).

Westgate Baptist Community in Melbourne offers a playgroup for Karen Burmese mothers and young children, doubling as an informal English conversation class and community information forum, which invites local police, fire officers, health authorities, council officers, bank officers and others to explain how things work.

Hospitality amongst refugees themselves is particularly evident in settlement assistance. In the examples just mentioned, those with driving licenses teach those without; those with employment take out loans to pay the airfares of other refugees in their home country; and those whose English is more advanced act as interpreters and guides. All migrant communities assist each other, but it is especially evident amongst those who know what it is to be crushed and in fear—hospitality, solidarity and generosity are features of refugee communities in their adopted countries.

6.4 *Sanctuary and Temporary Accommodation*

By definition asylum seekers seek sanctuary, a place of refuge. At a bureaucratic level they need to satisfy officials that they are fleeing persecution and are at risk. But once they reach a country of asylum they face often long periods of application and assessment. Christian churches have a real role to play in providing 'asylum', here meaning a place of safety more broadly.

The little-discussed Biblical tradition of cities of refuge can illustrate the role of genuine asylum. Both in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 4 we find references to six cities set aside for those in Israel who accidentally kill someone else, so that revenge will not occur before justice can be done. As Mike Purcell points out, they are a form of hospitality and a measure of humanity. Referring to Emmanuel Levinas's treatment of cities of refuge Purcell lists their characteristics and relates them to treatment of asylum seekers today. These cities are not to be enclosed or shut away, as immigration detention centers are today. They

are to have sufficient provisions, which today might include food, drink and access to education. And they are to provide access to labor, which today might mean freedom to work (Purcell 2008: 67; Derrida 2001: 41; Levinas 1994: 3–23).

Churches often provide accommodation to asylum seekers while they await the outcome of their application for refugee status. Sometimes individuals offer accommodation, in personal hospitality. Sometimes the hospitality is organized and open, such as accommodation and support offered at the Asylum Seekers' House started by Brunswick Baptist Church in Melbourne and now run by Baptcare (Baptcare 2011). At other times it has been covert sanctuary for those of uncertain or illegal status, provided in the spirit of cities of refuge—protection for those in a legal grey area or who have fallen foul of immigration law.

When attempts by the Australian government to deport unaccompanied minors in detention centers to Malaysia were ruled illegal by the High Court in August 2011 Crossway Baptist Church, a conservative evangelical mega-church in Melbourne, urged the government to release all children and offered to house many of them at no cost to taxpayers. Crossway was supported by two Christian welfare organizations, Baptcare and Mission Australia (Crossway Baptist Church 2011). It was both a political and practical move by Christians who saw the need to protect vulnerable people—in this case children—who were in a legal 'no man's land'. There is now an opportunity for Christians to open their homes to asylum seekers for six-week periods as the Australian government supports the Community Placement Network in placing asylum seekers in the community.

6.5 *Welcoming Multicultural Churches*

Christian churches are a sign of God's welcome when they are hospitable multicultural faith communities. In fact multicultural ministry is best seen in terms of creating a safe and welcoming space for those who are different from each other, especially those who are strangers to the dominant culture (Keifert 1991: 36). While we might expect that in multicultural contexts—such as most Western societies are today—vigorous visions of multicultural churches would thrive, sadly there are still many churches that reflect only the dominant culture, unaware of its inhospitality to refugees and other migrants.

A hospitable faith community is intentional in its welcome, embracing difference as gift. It makes space for people's unique stories. It works to ensure diversity in worship styles, music, leadership, committees and ways of gathering. Food and laughter figure highly. It is more event-centered and celebration-oriented than program-centered (Foster 1997: 110–115). It goes out

of its way to ensure that the lonely and least are included. It sees the new community of Jesus as a place of safety and healing, knowing that when people come from everywhere they've probably been through nearly everything.

When a congregation is offering hospitality well it is extending God's hospitality in the way Jesus did and therefore is a holy place, a place of healing, of belonging and of shared meals. As such it is a sign of the gracious realm of God.

Here is another area where refugees so often lead the way in showing hospitality towards those of other cultures, including those in the dominant culture. They are often visitors welcoming locals. Perhaps it is because those who have been welcomed offer the warmest welcome to others. Another likely factor is that the great majority of non-Western cultures seem to value hospitality more highly than do Western cultures. My experience in a multicultural church is that I receive more hospitality than I give.

Many of the features of a welcoming congregation apply also to a welcoming denomination. The Uniting Church in Australia, for example, has declared that it aspires to be an intentionally multicultural church. It has taken many steps to be inclusive, to make decisions in ways that respect migrant congregations and to listen to the stories of refugees within its ranks (Uniting Church of Australia 1998). The Baptist Union of Victoria, similarly, has moved from merely catering for migrant and refugee congregations on its edges towards intentionally incorporating them into denominational life, seeking mutual enrichment and valuing the stories of its refugee leaders. Choosing a path in between the 'mosaic' model (where different cultures co-exist alongside each other) and the 'melting pot' model (where culture becomes lost in a process of assimilation), the BUV has chosen a 'minestrone soup' model (in which the various ingredients keep their shape but all contribute to the rich flavor of the soup) (Langmead and Yang 2006: 121–132).

6.6 *Intercultural Learning*

The first five aspects of hospitality outlined here emphasize the initiative and responsibility of the host, and carry the danger of assuming that the dynamics are one-way, in which 'we' open up to 'them' as gift. The next five complement them, by reminding us that hospitality always involves a two-way relationship, one that at times becomes transformative for both parties.

Christian hospitality involves not only opening up to 'the other' but also to the other's world. Genuine hospitality involves genuine interest in guests, and refugees have amazing stories to tell of challenge, suffering and persistence. As the saying goes, the world comes to our door. We discover how much there is to learn. If we are open to it, we discover the holy and the divine in each person's

story. We are likely to stumble over our ignorance and a bond will grow if our defenses are lowered through friendship, humor and self-disclosure.

At the congregational level multicultural churches often hear stories and hold cultural events because there is so much to learn from each other. In fact, we need to listen a great deal before we jump in to help, in most cases, as we are likely to make mistakes in our ignorance.

6.7 *Interfaith Dialogue*

Most refugees happen to be religious, so the opportunity for intercultural learning is matched by openings for interfaith dialogue. While I prefer not to draw lines between Christian ministry and mission, the former is usually service to the church—pastoral care, worship, leadership, passing on faith, administrative service and so on—whereas mission is the church facing the world beyond the church, co-operating with God's purposes in the world. Much of the church's service to refugees is to those who are Christian, naturally, because we are to look after our 'family'. But it is a challenge to care for those who belong to other faiths. First we need to listen and learn in respect. A dialogical approach is the most appropriate for crossing great barriers. A greatly respectful approach is appropriate when there is a power difference or when people have been traumatized.

There is a dialogue of ideas, but more frequently there is a dialogue of daily life, or of political solidarity. Between two people who respect each other's journey of faith there is also the gift of sharing personal religious experience. Many churches fall to one side or the other—either evangelizing directly, which is usually inappropriate, or being respectful in their relationships with refugees from other faiths but avoiding all talk of faith.

6.8 *The Ethics of Welcoming*

Creating space for vulnerable people involves being aware of the power we hold. Anthony Gittins reminds us that Jesus' teaching was full of power reversals, so we should beware. 'It is fairly natural, and easy (at least in theory) to see the other as stranger, guest, outsider, needy, or outcast. But such astigmatism distorts, and may produce a theology of control, a 'magisterial' approach, and a tendency to indoctrinate' (Gittins 1994: 399).

A deliberate strategy is usually needed for people in power to become aware of its dangers and to counter them as much as is possible. Russell characterizes a feminist hermeneutic of hospitality in three steps: paying attention to the power quotient in what is said by whom, giving priority to the perspective of the outsider and rejoicing in God's unfolding promise (Russell 2009: 43).

Even the act of hospitality can unwittingly hold guests back from freedom to be who they can be in a new culture. The act of hospitality, like the act of embrace, has four movements, described well by Miroslav Volf. We open our arms in offer (or open the door). We wait for a free response to accept. We close our arms in embrace (or invite others into our house and make them at home). But finally and most importantly, we open our arms again (or let the guest go), symbolizing a recognition of difference, a willingness for the other to be themselves, though perhaps now in a new space. These are the ethics and dynamics of hospitality and embrace (Volf 1996: 140–147).

6.9 *Meals and Personal Friendship*

Christian hospitality nearly always involves eating together and the development of personal friendship. Everybody knows that the path to multiculturalism goes through the stomach. Appreciation of difference so easily begins with taste and learning about other cultures through their cuisine. But the significance of table fellowship goes much deeper, as the practice of Communion shows. It allows the host to serve. It puts people in the same space, hopefully at the same level. It provides the context and the time for conversation. It is relaxed, allowing conversation to range naturally from the superficial to the deep. If it is an inclusive table it is a potent symbol of the diversity and richness of the gracious realm of God. There is abundance in the food and drink, enough to share. There is inclusiveness in the welcome. And there is enjoyment in the time together. Abundant living in good relationship is truly symbolic of God's kingdom.

Despite the need for public and political friendship of refugees, all solidarity must contain a personal element (Bretherton 2006: 105). We do not really understand what refugees go through until we deeply understand what at least one good friend has gone through. Friendship is costly because it is open-ended and involves listening and action. But it is one of the richest paths towards understanding between hosts and guests in the dynamics of hospitality. When we are friends, we lose the distinction between host and guest, which leads to the final and perhaps most important observation.

6.10 *Unexpected Divine Presence*

Perhaps the greatest mystery of Christian hospitality is that in extending God's welcome as a host we so often become the guest, both because our guest becomes our host or because, more profoundly, the Jesus we serve through the poor and hungry (Mat. 25) becomes our host. Hospitality frequently becomes a holy or divine moment and the occasion for the transformation of all involved.

These dynamics are often hidden until afterwards or they become apparent in an epiphany. Hospitality can be the occasion for unexpected divine presence (Russell 2009: 82).

This thread occurs at several points in the Biblical tradition. Abraham and Sarah welcomed three strangers at Mamre, who turned out to be messengers of the Lord, bringing the miraculous promise of a son, though also predicting the downfall of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18). The prostitute Rahab of Jericho showed hospitality to Joshua's two spies and in return her family was spared in the battle of Jericho (Josh. 2). The widow in Zarephath who had hardly any food offered hospitality to Elijah in his extreme hunger and was rewarded by jars that didn't run out and the miraculous healing of her son (1 Kgs. 17). Most clearly, the followers of Jesus who were returning to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection offered their walking companion hospitality and discovered, as he broke bread, that their guest was their divine host. In opening their home they had been brought unexpectedly into God's presence.

This is the meaning of the advice in Hebrews 13:2 to show hospitality to strangers because some who have done so have entertained angels without knowing it. As we noted earlier, Matthew 25 puts it in even stronger terms—in welcoming the most vulnerable we welcome Christ himself.

7 Conclusion

In seeking to frame a theology of mission towards refugees and asylum seekers I have turned to the metaphor of mission as hospitality. I began with a sketch of the present challenge of asylum seekers in the world, in particular the numbers who are now arriving in Western countries. I outlined the special concern of the gospel for the most vulnerable and marginalized, suggesting that in the reversals that fill the Gospel accounts those on the margins are at the center of God's concern.

I explored what mission as hospitality might look like, emphasizing its strong, public character, its relationship to the Hebrew concept of salvation as creating space, its function in complementing mission as always 'going out', and its theological significance as extending God's hospitality.

Finally, ten aspects of hospitality towards refugees and asylum seekers were spelt out, from justice seeking to opening our homes and being welcoming faith communities. The last of these noted that hospitality is often the occasion for unexpected divine presence, for in responding in love to the world's most vulnerable people we are responding in love to Jesus Christ himself.

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