

# Just Faith

Glocal Responses to Planetary Urbanisation



Edited by **Stephan de Beer**

HTS Religion & Society Series  
Volume 3

# JUST FAITH

Glocal Responses to  
Planetary Urbanisation



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Volume 3

# JUST FAITH

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Planetary Urbanisation

EDITOR

Stephan de Beer



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## Research Justification

The purpose of this scholarly book is to expand the body of knowledge available on urban theology. It introduces readers to the concept of planetary urbanisation, with the view of deepening an understanding of urbanisation and its all-pervasive impact on the planet, people and places from a theological perspective. On the occasions when theological consideration has been given to urban challenges, it has often been done almost exclusively from the Global North. This book provides a critical theological reading of 'the urban', deliberating on bridging the divide between voices from the Global South and the Global North. In doing so, it simultaneously seeks out robust and dynamic faith constructs, expressed in various forms and embodiments of justice. The *methodology* chosen transcended narrow disciplinary boundaries, situating reflections between and across disciplines, in the interface between scholarly reflection and an activist faith, as well as between local rootedness and global connectedness. A collective of authors was gathered, spanning all continents, various Christian faith traditions and multiple disciplines, as well as a range of methodological approaches. Authors were requested to consider faith constructs expressed in justice, against the backdrop of planetary urbanisation, but to do so while being true to their own paradigmatic and methodological approaches. This was done intentionally to reflect the complexity and interconnectedness of the planetary urban reality. What holds the book together is the rare commitment of all the authors to practise engaged scholarship, bridging the gap between intellectual reflection and concrete urban engagement. Their contributions are mostly the fruit of grass-roots urban action, culminating in critical reflection, prompting deeper, critical action. The book endeavours to *contribute to knowledge production* in a number of ways. Firstly, it suggests the inadequacy of most dominant faith expressions in the face of all-pervasive forces of urbanisation, and it also provides clues as to the possibility of fostering potent alternative imaginaries. Secondly, it explores a decolonial faith that is expressed in various forms of justice. It is an attempt to offer concrete embodiments of what such a faith could look like in the context of planetary urbanisation. Thirdly, the book does not focus on one specific urban challenge or mode of ministry but rather introduces the concept of planetary urbanisation and then offers critical lenses with which to interrogate its consequences and challenges. It considers concrete and liberating faith constructs in areas ranging from gender, race, economic inequality, a solidarity economics, and housing, to urban violence, indigeneity and urbanisation, the interface between economic and environmental sustainability, and grass-roots theological education. The main *target audience* will be specialists in the field of Practical Theology, contextual theology and political theology. A more focused target audience would be scholars in the humanities and social sciences investigating sustainable and just urban futures, as well as urbanity from theological and missional perspectives. This book is *the result of original research* and no part of the book was plagiarised from another publication or published elsewhere. In cases where authors refer to other scholarly work, or their own, proper methods of referencing have been followed.

**Prof. Stephan de Beer**, Centre for Contextual Ministry and Department of Practical Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, South Africa



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# Abbreviations, Figures and Tables in the Text and Notes

## List of Abbreviations

AALC	African American Leadership Council
ABCD	Asset-based Community Development
BALA	Black American Leadership Alliance
CfBS	Center for Babaylan Studies
CIBC	Clarkston International Bible Church
CMS	Church Mission Society
CMT	Center for Transforming Mission
CPACS	Center for Pan Asian Community Services
FBO	Faith-based Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTF	Global Task Force of Local and Regional Govern- ments
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LAA	Latin American Association
NAP	New American Pathways
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NUA	New Urban Agenda
PNBC	Progressive National Baptist Convention
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RGC	Research Grants Council
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
US	United States
USS	Urban Shalom Society
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

WOW	Well-being Options for Wholeness
YASS	Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences
YCH	Yeast City Housing

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# Foreword

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We live on a planet that is marked by the ‘complete urbanization of society’ (Lefebvre 1970), spoken of by Henri Lefebvre as ‘planetary urbanization’. This refers both to the reality of the majority of the world’s people living in cities and also to the way in which urbanisation engulfs and swallows whole societies, even those not living in cities – the entire planet really – subsuming whatever is necessary for expansion and accumulation, at a huge cost, both to humanity and creation.

It leaves in its wake the demolition of cities, neighbourhoods, rural hinterlands, self-reliant local economies and local knowledges. Planetary urbanisation requires a planetary consciousness, epistemologically shaped by those undermined, excluded or subsumed by planetary histories, as well as an appreciation of planetary indigeneity.

Planetary urbanisation is not completely finalised, however. It is a continuous process of metamorphosis (cf. Merrifield 2013:22). Merrifield (2013:xv) calls for an understanding that we are on the verge of ‘something new [...] something that embraces urban becoming’. The question is whether the current ‘urban becoming’ spells doom or promise. For Merrifield (2013:34), the tentacles and impacts of planetary urbanisation have turned the urban into ‘a space where the fight for the transformation of the world will now take place’ (Merrifield 2013:34). And central to this contested space, or ‘urban becoming’, is the hope that we

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can indeed foster, and embody, radical new and alternate imaginaries. Merrifield (2013:114) says that '[t]o create the almost-unimaginable, imagination is pretty crucial'.

Whereas urban society 'constitutes itself on the ruins of the city' (Lefebvre 1970:11) – a city deconstructed, decentred and disfigured – there is now an urgency not only to imagine, but also to act – to embrace an imaginary and prophetic pragmatism, that shapes 'a new humanism, a new praxis' (Lefebvre 1970:150; Merrifield 2013:24).

This urgency for a new consciousness is expressed in 'a cry and demand' (Lefebvre 1970:150), resounding in communities across the planet. It is a radicalised cry and demand for a right to the city, but this is not about accessing a specific centre only (cf. Merrifield 2013:25). It is about much more: it is a cry and demand for a planetary love that is all-embracing, all-inclusive, affirming, respectful and bestowing dignity on all of creation and all of humanity alike. It is heard from Wall Street to Manila; from victims of gentrification in central Cape Town to those resisting the invasion of their low-income neighbourhoods by exploitative market forces, everywhere on the planet.

A just faith, or a faith bathed in justice, will dare to imagine the unimaginable, infused by a consciousness of God's new household; a planetary consciousness that asserts the entire planet 'as a sanctuary for our bodies and minds' (Spivak 2018:n.p.).

From an urban theological perspective, is planetary urbanisation a capitalist inevitability or is there a possibility of cosmic (and urban) redemption? Is further disintegration and fragmentation of planet and society inevitable, or is there a possibility of making the kinds of choices that could serve as catalysts towards greater integration and wholeness? Are deepening inequalities and hierarchical oppression and exclusion the only future scenarios, or can we dare imagine the possibility of equalising redistribution? Are our faith constructs entirely inadequate in the face of an urban planet, or can we discover constructs of faith bathed in planetary love and unleashed in

compassionate justice? What are the glocal expressions of such a just faith, or what should they be?

These, and other questions, are the content of this volume. This publication forms part of the HTS Religion and Society Series. It is with great gratitude that we acknowledge the support of AOSIS in publishing this volume.

Thirteen authors from six continents reflect on our urbanising planet with its serious implications and threats for the sustenance of all of life. In their own lives and work, they are all deeply committed to an integration of theoretical reflection and grass-roots action. In these chapters, they bravely explore and imagine just faith – or a faith characterised by justice – considering faith constructs and lived faith against the backdrop of the Trantor-like urban reality that is unfolding (cf. Asimov 1951, 1952, 1953).

The book does not focus on one specific challenge or mode of ministry but rather offers critical lenses with which to interrogate the consequences and challenges of planetary urbanisation. It considers concrete and liberating faith constructs in areas ranging from gender, race, economic inequality, a solidarity economics and housing to urban violence; indigeneity and urbanisation; the interface between economic, social and environmental sustainability; and grass-roots theological education. It hopes to provide clues for the possibility of fostering potent alternative imaginaries.

In the abstracts that follow, the authors articulate the intentions of their chapters, in their own language.

## ■ Chapter 1: Stephan de Beer

After a brief introduction and critique of planetary urbanisation as a concept, the inadequacy of most dominant faith expressions is suggested, in the face of an urbanising planet. The search for an all-embracing planetary faith is explored, emanating from a planetary consciousness and held by a planetary love. Resonance is sought between the effects of, and revolt against, planetary urbanisation

today and the historical Jesus living during a time of imperial conquest, religious oppression and co-option, and rebel protests.

Lamenting the inadequacy of just faith under conditions of planetary urbanisation and insisting on a radical return to a retrieval of the historical Jesus, this chapter seeks to articulate a robust, dynamic and saturating faith, countering the robustness, dynamism and saturation of planetary urbanisation, through prophetic pragmatism expressed in subversive, resistant and tenacious justice. It draws from Merrifield's collideorspaces, wormholes and minor spaces, to imagine an all-embracing planetary faith-love that dares to imagine the unimaginable – which is alternate human and urban futures.

## ■ Chapter 2: James W. Perkinson

How shall we think of indigeneity, land, settler colonialism and climate change in relationship to issues of race, class and religion, in the face of a monstrosity of urbanisation whose maw is now planetary-wide? I write in place, out of an academic discipline that might be loosely called 'political spirituality' (more technically, 'eco-theology'), schooled for more than three decades by the harshly embattled location of inner-city, post-industrial Detroit. Riffing on the work of postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak – dreaming, at one point in her theorising, of the impossible possibility of 'globe-girdling movements' energised by 'animist liberation theologies' – the galvanising concern in this chapter might be glossed as the eco-critical irruption of the subaltern in the place of history, Global South eco-animism challenging Northern consumerist geocide, indigenous wiles and wisdoms haunting the weal and wealth and weapons of the coloniser world of settlement and settlements and urbanised savagery.

## ■ Chapter 3: S. Lily Mendoza

This chapter emerges out of two places of gestation, namely, in a Detroit Beloved Community seeking just faith in the face

of post-industrial ruin, and also in a Filipino diasporic movement seeking wholeness and recuperation of indigenous memory out of the wreckage of colonial history – both communities engaged in a passionate and creative reimagining of worlds ravaged by dreams of civilisation and growth, now seeking rebirth through a radically different vision of future well-being. Refracted through the author’s narration of her (ethno-) autobiographical journey, the writing offers itself as a ‘seed-hope’ for a planet shuddering in the throes of climate comeuppance and neo-liberal apocalypse. The ‘turn to the indigenous’ explored here – given stark political context as well as disarming and heart-stopping eloquence in living communities in the homeland as well as diasporic flavour among Filipino Americans in the USA and Canada – counsels radical revision of most of our modern assumptions about urban living and a profound challenge to Christians (and everyone else) to reconnect with ancestry, human and otherwise, for the sake of a viable future.

## ■ Chapter 4: Joel Aguilar

I explore a global sacrificial theology as the starting point of planetary urbanisation. With global sacrificial theology I refer to a system that is willing to reject, even kill, those on the margins of society in the name of progress and social cohesion. In the process of understanding the systems that see the least, the last and the lost of Guatemalan society as disposable, I will follow the anthropology of René Girard as a lens to read and interpret the urban environment. In the development of a grass-roots theology of resistance, I will start with a brief overview of mimetic theory as presented by Girard. This will lead the reader into engaging the issue of violence and what violence may look like in everyday life at a personal and structural level.

I present some experiences of working in the slum communities of Guatemala City, while entering into dialogue with different

thinkers who have engaged violence from a philosophical, theological and economic perspective. All of this is done to set the background for defining a global sacrificial theology as a platform for developing a grass-roots theology based in communities of desire and resistance.

## ■ Chapter 5: Selina Palm and Elisabeth le Roux

We interrogate the need for urban public theology to go beyond perpetuating a public-private binary. This has to be done if it is to transcend a patriarchal bias that perpetuates ‘violent silences’ around the spaces where women and girls are frequently most unsafe within cities and leads to ‘geographies of violence’ moving location rather than being addressed at their roots. The chapter draws on the South African urban context to show that, in the light of a pandemic of violence against women and girls, prophetic calls for churches to engage on this issue remain primarily unanswered today. South Africa’s unique sociospatial history has gendered implications that must be better acknowledged if its cities are to become gender-just spaces. Drawing on feminist theologian Letty Russell’s concept of ‘households of freedom’, urban public theology must reject the false duality between *polis* and *oikos*, if it is to nurture a gender-just faith and hear women’s cries against the death-dealing violence inhabiting many spaces within our cities.

## ■ Chapter 6: R. Drew Smith

My chapter is entitled ‘Churches, Urban Geographies and Contested Immigration in the United States’. The chapter examines racialised US thought and practice specific to immigration and citizenship, especially as operative within south-eastern and Midwestern immigrant gateway contexts. I explore the relationship between immigration policy and social opportunity in these two contexts.

The analysis of this chapter explores tensions related to race and socio-economic life within these contexts and the role of religious and political leaders in either fostering or dispelling antagonisms.

It reflects on religious contestations over immigration but finally proposes a search for a public theology of global community inclusivity.

## ■ **Chapter 7: Adrian Bailey, Stephan de Beer and Katherine Hankins**

Planetary urbanisation involves unprecedented levels and diversities of migration to, from and between cities. Migrant housing – long recognised as pivotal to assimilation, social cohesion, economic advancement, political integration and so forth – plays a key but under-studied role in this new urban age. In our chapter, we respond to this gap in knowledge by arguing that a focus on the housing experiences of migrants offers broader insights into how individuals, families and institutions respond to and rework the precarities of urban living.

We illustrate our argument with original field-based data from migrants living in the cities of Tshwane (South Africa) and Atlanta (USA) and by focusing on the activities of faith-based organisations (FBOs) in these cities. We investigate, firstly, what experiences of precarity migrants face in their housing situations; secondly, what interventions FBOs make in housing issues to mediate these experiences; and thirdly, what forms of belonging are emerging as negotiations of multiple sources of material and symbolic precarity. Our discussion also considers dwelling as a praxis of just faith and a resource that migrants may use in their everyday urban lives.

## ■ **Chapter 8: Sheth O. Oguok and Colin Smith**

This chapter is drawn from our experience of being involved in alternative models of theological education, set within the

context of Nairobi's informal settlements. One devastating aspect of the global economy, evident in Nairobi, has been the marginalisation of vast urban populations who are excluded from many of the rights, privileges and opportunities of urban life. Within these contexts, it is apparent that the formal institutions and sectors of urban society, including those related to theological education, have organised themselves in a manner that excludes whole populations of cities, and specifically the world's estimated two billion slum dwellers.

In what follows we lament the ever-widening fissures that are opening up between the academy and the street. We explore how we can develop a form of theological education that is not predicated upon language, perspectives and thought forms conceived, born and bred in the academy and where we might speak of the informality of God. The chapter proposes a form of theological education that challenges current paradigms and where theological learning authentically engages with and emerges from the realities of life at the margins of the city.

## ■ Chapter 9: Andre van Eymeren

UN-HABITAT's New Urban Agenda seeks to influence the development of cities at many different tables, from the global to the local. The agenda recognises the impact of planetary urbanisation as well as the importance of setting a unified global direction for its development. In addition, for the implementation of the agenda, it recognises the importance of local government and civil society. As part of civil society, faith communities have an important role to play in the development of cities.

Biblical-theological concepts such as shalom and the hope laid out in the apocalyptic visions of Revelation 21 find deep resonance – a common agenda even – with much of the New Urban Agenda. This provides Christians with the platform to speak and act in hope under planetary urbanisation. However, we have been reticent to engage. Hampered by an inadequate theology and practical understanding of the city, we have tended to retreat.

This chapter will argue that there is a connection between the New Urban Agenda and our Christian faith that opens the way for informed engagement. It will outline a theology for that engagement and some practical understandings and tools to help.

## ■ Chapter 10: Benigno P. Beltran

Presented as a case study, this chapter provides a rather detailed description of an e-Trading network between groups of urban and rural poor in the Philippines, used to trade organic goods directly. Facilitated by a faith-based organisation, this network was birthed in response to a suggestion by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, that '[t]he best way to solve global poverty is to allow the poor to participate in the systems of production and exchange'.

Through making use of an e-Commerce platform the power of networks is harnessed to address issues of social justice, economic well-being and environmental sustainability, in the direction of a more sustainable planetary future. Considering agriculture as one of the most detrimental contributing sectors to climate change, this network develops and creates access to innovative and alternative farming technologies, enabling subsistence farmers and fishermen to bypass the capitalist economies of the world while connecting with rural and urban poor neighbours and reducing our impact on the planet. The process is built on the values of integrity, solidarity and creativity and innovatively combining community organising, social entrepreneurship and a retrieval of existing indigenous and church resources.

All these contributions, in their diverse immersions, reflect on the effects of planetary urbanisation, and its claims on a faith expressed in justice – whether epistemic, socio-economic, gender-based, racial, environmental or spatial.

Will 'planet urban' continue to demolish ecosystems, cities, people and indigeneity in its wake, or could it be(come) 'a sanctuary for our bodies and minds' (Spivak 2018:n.p.)? It is such a sanctuary that we would like to imagine.





# Just Faith and Planetary Urbanisation

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## ■ Introduction

### ■ Disaster or Promise: Viewing the World Through the Planet of Trantor

In Asimov's science fiction novels – the *Foundation Series* and the *Empire Series* – Trantor is a planet that is wholly urban, having a population of over 45 billion people. As it goes with empires, Trantor too becomes increasingly engrossed in administrative, bureaucratic and technocratic affairs; they are working to manage such a vast population, but at the same time faltering in maintaining its infrastructure on behalf of the people who are its subjects. In addition, it becomes completely dependent on 20 nearby agricultural worlds for food supplies, rendering it

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rather precarious despite the enormity of the Empire (Asimov 1951, 1952, 1953; cf. Merrifield 2013: xviii-xix; 1-3).

Trantor, on the one hand, can be understood as the Empire in its most unbridled form, colonising and governing all surrounding worlds and extracting from them what the Empire required for its own inhabitants. This intensity was matched only by the sheer precarity it dealt, leading to a coup staged by rebel leader Gilmer, displacing Trantor and the imperial family. Over time it was the farmers, discovering the fertile soil presented by the planet Trantor, who became the recognised inhabitants of Trantor, reclaiming what could be regarded as extracted from them. Empire and precarity coexist, and eventually the Empire probably brings about its own precarious fall.

Right now our planet, marked by ongoing urbanisation of a certain kind – with the exploitation and extraction of capital and self-serving Empire(s) co-existing with forms of precarity more severe than in any earlier period – is on a collision course with itself. What science fiction was made of has become the new reality.

## ■ Planetary Urbanisation: A Theological Consideration and Challenge

*Planetary urbanisation* is a phrase that was first coined by Marxist urban philosopher Henri Lefebvre in 1970, referring to the ‘complete urbanization of society’. According to Swyngedouw and Kaika (2014), it refers to both the reality of the majority of the world’s people living in cities, as well as to the vast majority of the world’s people, even those not living in cities, being affected by or contributing to global urbanisation processes, with huge costs to both humanity and creation.

This reality of a planet being urbanised to a point at which the sustenance of life becomes really problematic – almost as if life is slowly sucked from it – is a deeply theological issue and raises a

question as to what authentic and bold expressions of *just faith* could and should be.

A number of interconnected questions linger behind the reflections of this chapter:

- Would we theologians be prophets of doom only, or can we foster faith in the possibilities of planetary urbanisation being redeemed for the greater good of all humanity and creation?
- Who will our interlocutors be, seeing that we too are often self-engrossed in our complicity with the Empire?
- What do we need to disentangle ourselves from?
- What are the constructs of faith and justice we need in order to engage appropriately under planetary urbanisation?
- What should new forms of faith look like, ever present and increasingly saturating (but not in the sense of capitalist expansion) wherever urbanisation's tentacles engulf spaces and absorb habitats and hinterlands?
- In particular, what should new forms of faith look like that express themselves in the subversion, resistance and tenacity of justice?

## ■ The Meaning and Challenge of Planetary Urbanisation

In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre (2003:1-22) proposed a shift '[f]rom the city to urban society', acknowledging that the processes of urbanisation have actually obliterated the city as we have known it (cf. also Merrifield 2013:14). Andy Merrifield (2013:xv) picks up on this, suggesting that urban considerations should shift from the city as place 'to a prioritization of urban society, and, especially, of planetary urbanization'. This is a shift from regarding the city as a fixed centralised place to a new appreciation for the complexity and (dis)continuities of urbanisation processes, resulting in ever-changing and ever-shifting urban configurations and expanded urban terrains (cf. Brenner & Schmid 2015:162; Reddy 2017:2). Instead of one identifiable centre, urbanity is now composed of a decentred polycentricity. It implies a break with conventional thinking about

‘entities with borders and clear demarcations between what’s inside and what’s outside’ (Merrifield 2013:xv); everything has changed, with continuous fusions of centres and margins, inside and outside.

Brenner and Schmid (2015:155,173) speak of the ways in which the urban now extends far beyond the boundaries or geographical divisions that traditionally distinguished urban and rural. In the ways of Trantor, cities today depend on rural hinterlands, or landscapes of ‘extended urbanisation’ or ‘operational landscapes’, for their sustenance. And yet, they argue, urban policy has largely failed to engage the ‘planetary formation of capitalist urbanization’ (Brenner & Schmid 2015:153) in comprehensive, critical and meaningful ways.

The obliteration of the city is a result of the completeness of capitalist urbanisation, like a self-devouring parasite. The harshness of capital urbanisation is evident everywhere as markets expand into multiple new centres, exported via highways to rural supermarkets, destroying locally owned economies and indigenous knowledges, privatising public land and assets formerly collectively held and turning self-reliant communities into objects of the urban machinery (cf. Harvey 2008).

Not only does the city we know get obliterated but entire labour markets too, as rural worlds are urbanised and state and private capital collude to squeeze life out of local communities in the interest of external greed (cf. Merrifield 2013:15). Merrifield (2013:87) describes how ‘a planet-full of people can no longer find steady work or steady homes, and a huge unwieldy inertia persists’.

The rural (‘non-urban’) is relegated to a largely passive surface mediated by the sociospatial changes stemming from urbanisation (Reddy 2017:4). Instead of the urban-rural binary being subverted by planetary urbanisation, the rural is simply subsumed into the urban (cf. Reddy 2017:4), disabling the ‘non-urban’.

This happens through the collusion of state, corporate and financial interests (cf. Merrifield 2013:11) as their collective self-interest ‘tears into the globe and sequesters land through forcible slum clearance and eminent domain, valorising it whilst banishing former residents to the global hinterlands of post-industrial malaise’ (Merrifield 2013:10).

This is a universal reality, as the global movement of capitalist urbanisation sweeps through local neighbourhoods of cities as diverse as Cape Town and Chicago, Manila and Sao Paulo, Caracas and Nairobi, to fracture, segregate and homogenise. Although a certain reciprocity has developed between the world market and urban society, it seems to be the global capitalist processes of simultaneous accumulation and regeneration, on the one hand, and exclusion or obliteration, on the other, that drive urbanisation, more than the other way around (cf. Merrifield 2013:14).

Instead of such transnational movement of capital becoming a vehicle of redistributive power and economic well-being, facilitating more just forms of sharing and access to livelihood resources, Merrifield (2013:10) convincingly shows that transnational monopoly capital and urban (economic) growth are rather marked by ‘a process of uneven development, of homogeneity and fragmentation’.

## ■ **The Illusion of Autonomous Self-Governance: The ‘Terrible Twins’ of Technocracy and Bureaucracy**

Globalisation, and urbanisation in its planetary expressions, often rather accentuate hierarchies, instead of dissolving binaries or mediating greater equality. Tsekpo (2015:80–81), with reference to African urban societies, describes how national and local governments struggle to make autonomous decisions in the interest of what is best for their own local contexts, being ‘under

constant pressure to conform to international norms' (Tsekpo 2015:81). The ability to compete internationally has become an economic mantra for cities, crucifying local people and communities at the altar of gaining international acceptance.

Self-governance and indigenous autonomy of African cities hardly serve as antidotes to exploitative capitalism or urbanisation. Instead, as a result of African 'freedoms', African economies are more deeply integrated into the world capitalist system, benefiting the 'geo-political and economic interest' of the Global North, and now China, more than it does African people, and therefore no longer free at all (cf. Tsekpo 2015:81). In addition, self-governance often tends to be a legitimiser for ongoing extraction and manipulation of local urban societies, serving the interests of an elite local few, both politically and economically, at the expense of the majority of local people and communities (cf. Tsekpo 2015:81).

What is it that sustains the urbanisation machine, the deliberate collusions and the accompanying inertia? Serious obstacles to any bold urban alternative persist. Merrifield (2013:72) speaks of these as the 'double dependence', which Lefebvre names as technocracy and bureaucracy, contributing deeply to the 'complete and undemocratic urbanization of the world'. Technocracy and bureaucracy become the 'terrible twins', creating havoc with the souls of organisations, cities, nations and regions. From higher education institutions to government, departments are paralysed and devoured from within by the soullessness of these twins and their mindless service to an undemocratic, capitalist machine that devours everything in its way.

Merrifield (2013:88) says the struggle to access housing, jobs, services or other urban resources does not primarily exist because urban regions are too big with too many people. The biggest challenge is that dominant forms of social organisation today are shaping themselves not 'through technology but

through technocracy, not so much through overpopulation as over-bureaucratization' (Merrifield 2013:88). Instead of leadership of relationality, connectedness and access, many at the helm of institutions and cities today have merely become servants of capitalist urbanisation and hide behind technocratic or bureaucratic certainties, to avoid the risk of going against the current.

Nolan (1995) speaks about this 'impersonal machine' we have become dependents of:

This indeed is the heart of the problem. We have built up an all-inclusive political and economic system based upon certain assumptions and values and now we are beginning to realize that this system is not only counter-productive - it has brought us to the brink of disaster - but it has also become our master. Nobody seems to be able to change it or control it. The most frightening discovery of all is that there is nobody at its helm and that the impersonal machine that we have so carefully designed will drag us along inexorably to our destruction. (p. 9)

To Nolan, nobody is at the helm, because carefully programmed technocracies and bureaucracies sustain the saturation of an entire planet by capital.

## ■ Planetary Urbanisation, Challenged

Reddy, while acknowledging the validity of planetary urbanisation as a phenomenon, has developed a strong critique against the dominant discourse that describes it. His sense is that people like Brenner and Schmid reduce the 'contemporary planetary condition to the imperatives of capitalist urbanization' (in Reddy 2017:1), which in his mind might have certain blind spots.

Reddy's most persistent critique is against the way in which it largely accepts the inevitability of capitalist urbanisation to subsume, without recognising the possibility of 'constitutive outsides which compromise, redirect, mutate, and refuse the thrusts of capitalist urbanization' (Reddy 2017:5).



In reference to Dussel (1998) and other postcolonial scholars, Reddy (2017) speaks of:

[7]he centrality of distant, dispersed, discontinuous colonial peripheries secured through the violence of colonization and plunder to the prosperity and reproduction of the metropole. (pp. 2–3)

Reddy argues that these distant spaces are affirmed in postcolonial thought as important carriers of knowledge and possible alternates to the city itself. His critique is that proponents of planetary urbanisation rarely acknowledge these alternate carriers of knowledge (cf. Reddy 2017:3). These spaces are portrayed as ‘terra nullius/terra incognita’ (cf. Reddy 2017:4), effacing, as Reddy (2017:3) suggests, ‘subjugated and critical knowledge/s of indigenous people and other marginalized groups’.

For Reddy (2017:4), the dominant planetary urbanisation discourse is largely a disabling model. While Brenner and Schmid (2013:21) are probably correct to assert that urban–rural binaries are now outdated categories, Reddy’s (2017:4) concern is that the urban–rural binaries are not really dissolved; the urban simply maintains primacy by having absorbed the rural into itself, deepening the hierarchy and exclusionary nature of capital at work. What is required is the necessity to theorise ‘the urban and the contemporary planetary condition’ from spaces outside, or not determined by, capitalist urbanisation (Reddy 2017:5). Reddy (2017:5) insists that urbanisation is ‘insufficient to understand the urban and planetary socio-spatial dynamics’ and should be complemented with an appreciation of ‘the everyday lived dimension of urban life in the city’ as ‘a critical category for understanding’ (Reddy 2017:5).

The distant or extended spaces, or ‘operational landscapes’ beyond or ‘outside’ the city, are not restricted to rural hinterlands or the ‘remote’ or ‘wilderness’ (cf. Reddy 2017:10), either. Reddy (2017:9–10) makes a crucial point about ‘the internalization of extended operational landscapes within cities of the global South’. These cities, as described earlier by Tsekpo, become

places of extraction, serving the interests of other cities without necessarily seeing the benefits for their own populations. Instead of being centres in their own right, they become marginal spaces serving new centres outside themselves.

These spaces, Reddy would suggest, need to be(come) our epistemological starting points for considering and rethinking the urban. He speaks of his work as ‘writing under erasure’, but, similarly, we could consider cities, local urban communities, rural hinterlands, certain vulnerable populations or local indigenous knowledges all as ‘under erasure’ through dominant urbanisation processes.

If planetary urbanisation is indeed the complete urbanisation of the entire planet, and if it further perpetuates inequalities and advances oppressive and extractive hierarchies, what are the alternatives? Considering ‘spaces under erasure’, as our epistemological orientation for rethinking urbanity, will provide clues as to possible alternative imaginaries. The migratory patterns of the world’s poor populations contribute to and reshape the demography of local communities, nation states and even continents. Social movements of the poor help shape urban political action from below. Informality resists and subverts dominant urban forms in significant ways. Whereas planetary urbanisation exceeds cities and known urban forms, the local and commonplace in conjunction with the global and – indeed – planetary dimensions remain vital and interconnected categories for ongoing contestation as well as, in their contestation, for hopeful and radical alternative imaginations.

In the context of African urbanisation and its challenges, Tsekpo (2015:81) argues for ‘a radical shift in the practice of self-governance in Africa and how it is understood’. Tsekpo (2015) says:

[F]or self-governance to address the peculiar needs of African societies, it must emerge from the daily realities of the people. This process must be shaped by those whose governance is at issue – the masses of the continent, such as illiterate people, the poor, and those struck by conflict, hunger and diseases. (p. 81)

I would like to argue that self-governance at all levels – local or national, rural or urban – should be reinterpreted and radical new practices developed in the direction of justice, well-being and sustainable livelihoods of local communities and peoples, in close conjunction with the communities themselves. Without such an epistemological point of departure and an embracing of self-governance as a local practice shaped by planetary indigeneity, the urban crisis – of Africa and the planet – will continue to deepen.

## ■ **The Inadequacy of Just Faith on an Urban Planet**

The complexity of a whole planet being urbanised, and urban forms perpetually changing and refiguring themselves, obviously holds great challenges for the faith practices of local – and glocal – faith communities and faith movements. The slowness with which faith communities generally respond to change, and the vastness of rapid and ongoing urban change, creates an existential crisis. Theologically, we are so far removed from most of the critical urban discourses, generally speaking, that we do not even acknowledge the existential crisis we are in.

My contention is that our faith languages, expressions and practices are inadequate, outdated and inappropriate, if they are to respond to an urban planet in ways that could mediate justice. Moreover, even if our faith languages, expressions and practices were current and fleshed out in diverse ways in the new and extended urban spaces around the globe, my second contention is the absence of deliberate, thoughtful and radical (urban) justice commitments, at the core of our theological and pragmatic deliberations and actions. We are at best reactive, sometimes participants in others' radical movements, but, by and large, co-opted by the dominant culture of capitalist urbanisation.

## ■ Christian Inertia

Kafka's (1997:52) description of the struggle is of something much more than a class affair but really a battle against 'an immense and invariably abstract total administration' (Merrifield 2013:127). What we have to contend with is a gigantic machine, which Merrifield (2013) describes rather graphically, referring to Kafka (1997:52) and Debord (1991:9):

It has created a one-world cell-form of planetary urbanisation. Erstwhile distinctions between the political and the economic; between urban and rural; and between form and content, conflict and consent, politics and technocracy have lost their specific gravity, have lost their clarity of meaning. Integrating functions through a conflating process of co-optation and corruption, of re-appropriation and reabsorption, of blocking off by breaking down. (p. 129)

The overwhelming nature of this process often evokes inertia as the most convenient, if deadly, response. Christian faith communities, and theological education at large, often struggle to deal with the city-that-we-had as a phenomenon. When centres shift into larger metropolitan areas, suburbs or new cities, a common response of traditional, mainstream Christianity has often been suburban escapism. This was expressed in either physical relocation, or in reformatting urban churches into suburban enclaves, characterised by the domination of commuting members versus local participation; complicity with exclusivist urban renewal processes instead of advocating or participating in radically inclusive urban transformational agendas; and ritualistic busy-ness at the expense of deep engagement in the liberation of urban society.

While we are preoccupied with escape, or practising inertia, and only a small minority try to get their heads around the urban challenge for the church's mission, processes of urbanisation continue unhindered and change the format of cities completely. Under planetary urbanisation, theologians lack the language and practices to engage meaningfully.

There are, however, new expressions of church riding the wave of urban reconfiguration. Mall-like megachurches appear overnight, wiping out the remnants of small traditional churches, yet mostly notoriously disconnected from the pain of the urban society in which they are located. In other, often decaying parts of the city, where transnational migrants make themselves a new home, a proliferation of migrant churches arise from somewhere, almost as suddenly as their transnational members, providing safe pastoral spaces to their faithful ones, changing the forms of urban architecture, but hardly affecting the systemic exclusions of those exploited in the process of an urbanising planet. There are also those fusions of mall-like megachurches and suddenly appearing migrant churches, building on the backs of completely desperate people, extracting millions in exchange for never-to-arrive blessings, just to disinvest the investments made in false promises, offshore.

In between the folding traditional churches, struggling migrant churches, booming market churches and exploding exploiter churches are what some would call fresh expressions of church, creating themselves in new and unconventional ways, sporadically but irregularly indeed like drops of rain, but most often rather un-fresh in their perpetuation of faith lived without justice.

The planet is urbanising and though they might not be oblivious to it, local churches, church denominations and schools of theology are most often silent, complicit participants in, or bystanders to, extractive, exclusivist urban patterns, suffering from the same inertia that destroyed Jerusalem in 135 CE (Nolan 1995:15).

## ■ State, Church and Market Theologies

I submit, on the one hand, that the inertia is a result both of a misconception of the meaning of the historical Jesus and the first Jesus movement, or a rejection of the claims of the Jesus un-co-opted by Empire, and on the other hand a total theological

co-option of and complicity with state, church and market, unwittingly or as a matter of choice.

The Kairos document (Kairos Theologians 1986) was a response to apartheid South Africa. It distinguished between a state theology and a church theology:

- a state theology equated Jesus with the ruling political party and allowed the total co-option of the Christian church by national government policies
- a church theology equated Jesus with the church and, while holding a more critical distance from the state, remained largely apathetic in relation to apartheid abuses of power.

Jesus was apolitical, according to this theology, and so too should the church be.

Today, in new cloaks, state and church theologies have re-emerged in the South African church, as politicians and church leaders collude for a share of the pie, and radical discipleship seldom enters the doors of the church. On different continents and in different locations, the relationship between Jesus and the church or the state might play itself out differently. In all cases it is crucial to develop a critical theological stance on these relationships, to ensure faith's unadulterated urban engagement.

In a very concerned and emboldened way, Paddison (2011:227) speaks of 'the state's monopolization of what is political and public', which, he says, 'will ultimately only render the church less political and less public'. The 'polis' is hardly a space of faithful engagement for a large sector of the church that happens to have its worshipping presence in the very same 'polis' - because we have unlearned the 'political' meaning of God's new household. We have ceased to hold our ground. Justice has become the preserve of other movements. Jesus is out in the cold.

Globally, urban landscapes are witnessing not only a state theology, equating Jesus with the state, or church theology, equating Jesus with the church, but even more dominant and

visible has become a market theology (cf. Goh 2011:50–68), equating Jesus with the corporate interests of the market.

Churches, aligned to a market theology, are ‘distinct in its successful integration into the commercial ethos of the city’ (Goh 2011:59), uncritical co-option into neoliberal capital models of urbanisation and sophisticated practices of branding and marketing. These churches practise a ‘theo-deology’ (Goh 2011:59), integrating their ‘theological position and the commercial ideology of the global city’ in uncritical and mutually reinforcing ways (Goh 2011):

Theo-deology is thus a complex reinterpretation of the church position and calling within the essential processes and life of the global commercial city, bringing to bear arguments from urban spatial logic, social psychology, branding, professional networking and other discourses to scriptural teachings on evangelism and the role of the church. (p. 59)

Market-dictated churches differ significantly in mission, strategy and self-understanding from other urban churches (Goh 2011):

The success – in terms of size, rapid growth and finances – of these mega-ministries, as much as the facility with which they position themselves within urban processes, distinguish them from other Christian urban ministries with a more ‘healing salvific’ attitude to the city. (p. 59)

In terms of self-definition, such churches often deny being proponents of prosperity theology, offering their investment in ‘salvific means’ through church revenues as apologetic. At times, those committed to an alternative urban reality and working for social justice in partnership with the city’s most vulnerable find themselves being supported financially by churches that are proponents of market theologies. Goh (2011:65) expresses concern about how agents of social justice then become participants in the workings of ‘market transaction, rather than apart from and in opposition to it’.

Whereas the spatial turn has hardly occurred in mainstream theology, and the reality of spatial (in)justice not become something preached about on a Sunday morning, these churches

have clear (even if uncritical) spatial strategies in terms of location and blend ‘easily into the urban landscape’ (Goh 2011:61). Goh (2011:50–68) refers to Hillsong’s Baulkham Hills campus that ‘resembles a warehouse converted into a trendy club’ or other such churches marked by ‘the idiom of “hub” lifestyles drawing large consumer crowds, mega-mall structures and distinctive award-winning architecture’ (Goh 2011:63).

Goh (2011:65) concludes his reflections on proponents of a market theology, saying ‘Christian ministry, called to be in the city, will necessarily have to adapt to the city’s nature and wants’. Although this chapter argues for the urgency of appropriate reconstructions of faith, in the face of planetary urbanisation, such reconstructions should never happen uncritically, as simple adaptations ‘to the city’s nature and wants’. Faith needs to be expressed in urban clothes, and incarnated in planetary languages, but in ways that refuse the co-option of Jesus, yet again.

## ■ **Just Faith – Without Justice – is Not Enough**

Faith without justice is not enough. A suburbanised faith, escaping from the realities and effects of planetary urbanisation, often contributing to its extractive nature, is not good enough. A mindless faith that is paralysed by the complexities of planetary urbanisation is not good enough. A market-driven faith, downsizing the claims of Jesus in response to an unequal city, is not good enough. In fact, one could ask whether such extractive, escapist ‘faith’ is really faith at all.

What is required is faith in the redemptive possibilities of planetary urbanisation to serve the common good of humanity and creation alike. Only such a faith can engage ever-increasing urban fractures deliberately, deeply and innovatively. Such a faith, for it to hold liberating and transforming potential, needs to be robust and dynamic in the face of the ever-changing move of



people, places and planet but also subversive, resistant and tenacious, in embodying God's new household. Without such a faith, urban fractures will not heal, and those forces creating fractures not discerned, named and resisted. The central vocation of the church as urban diakonos (cf. Cox 1965) – to heal urban fractures – will be forsaken.

Can faith communities discover, rekindle or develop such a faith? Or will we, and our *faith constructs*, succumb to something more cynical, in the face of impending apocalypse, which might not hold promise but rather disaster?

## ■ In Search of a Robust, Dynamic and Saturating Faith

What should new forms of faith look like, ever present and increasingly saturating wherever urbanisation's tentacles engulf spaces and absorb habitats and hinterlands?

Jesus was concerned with all of life, and therefore the complete and extended impact and effects of planetary urbanisation fall within the scope of Jesus' concern. Paddison (2011:223) speaks of a theological politics, which is the discipline of thinking 'theologically about politics and so allows a different type of politics to be seen in the midst of the cities in which we live'.

Paddison (2011:224–225) advocates theologians' interest in and concern with 'the good city' from three perspectives. Firstly, theologians should be interested in all things and by nature be interdisciplinary because God is the source of all things (Paddison 2011:224). Secondly, 'a theologian's commitment to the world is only an echo of God's non-negotiable, overwhelming relationship with the world as revealed in the unfolding of the triune life' (Paddison 2011:224), expressed in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, which 'invests places with sacramental significance, as bearing the possibility of revealing the divine' (Paddison 2011:224). Thirdly, in their absorption of a diversity of cultures and migratory movements, cities embody 'the central political

challenge of our time' (Paddison 2011:225), which is how to live as human beings in the shared spaces of contemporary urban society, negotiating diversity and contestation, and carving out a just humanity (Paddison 2011):

The task of relating all things to God is a permanent rebuke to the modern conceit that politics – and therefore the city – can be autonomous from theological scrutiny. (p. 225)

## ■ Fantasy, Festivity and Faith

I maintain that the most important task of urban theologians, or practising theologians, is to foster an alternative (read: hopeful) imagination or consciousness among urban people of faith, urban neighbours and urban citizens (cf. Brueggemann 1978, 1986). Without that, inertia and co-option will continue indefinitely.

Cox, in his classic 1965 work, *The Secular City*, lamented the loss of fantasy (imagination) and festivity (celebration) from both the church and the city. To that I would like to add a third category of loss, namely, faith as prophetic action. I hold these as three central categories in an urban theopraxis:

1. fantasy as prophetic imagination
2. festivity as celebratory embodiment, witnessing to God's new household
3. faith as prophetic action in the direction of justice and wholeness.

Merrifield (2013:115) speaks of an imaginary pragmatics, which he insists is not a 'pragmatism of compromise, which is what most pragmatics is'. Rather, he (Merrifield 2013) suggests:

[/]t is an imaginative form of action, an activism that constantly tests out and overcomes its own limits, pushes beyond its own limits, and experiments with itself and the world. (p. 115)

An imaginary pragmatics correlates with West's (1999) idea of prophetic pragmatism, both referring to concretised embodiments of possible alternative realities. Theologically speaking, an imaginary or prophetic pragmatism forms a bridge

between imagination and action, fantasy and faith, enabling God's new household of festivity.

Instead of sterile, dogmatic theology, planetary urbanisation – in its dynamism, fluidity and complexity – calls for poetic, vibrant and imaginative theologies, rapped out at festivals, resisting through occupations and guerrilla gardens, designing reconstructions and innovating subversions, buzzing on social media and infiltrating minds through graffiti-like invasions, caressing the soul and animating the body, healing the wounded and tending to creation.

These all could be alternative forms of witness, riffing off the flows of planetary urbanisation without being co-opted by its parasitical tentacles. As a sign of the new kingdom that has broken into the world, which Paddison (2011:231) argues to be '[t]he church's primary contribution to the city', the church needs to reincarnate itself faithfully in every vein of the urbanised planet – a pointer to new possibilities for human life together, away from the lure of state and market, away from the stale religiosities that prevent it from appropriate engagement – realigning itself with the liberating mission of Jesus. Such a church would need to recover its capacity for fantasy, festivity and faith.

## ■ Finding and Shaping New Forms of Be(com)ing: Faith and a Politics of Becoming

Not only are urban societies changing and becoming, but our engagement with urbanity also remains fluid and dynamic. We can therefore speak of a politics of becoming, learning how to be in the encounter. Our faith, too, is becoming, changing from a co-opted Christian construct to a vibrant act of resistance, fuelled by the compassion *and* anger of Jesus, and embodying a new household of God, deliberately away from Empire.

Cloke speaks about such a 'politics of becoming' (cf. Connolly 1999:185) as a 'theo-poetics' (Cloke 2011):

[/]n which new energies and lines of flight emerge from the power of powerlessness; the possibility of impossibility; and the translation of attributes such as peace, generosity, forgiveness, mercy and hospitality into everyday practices. It is in these ground-level performative politics of becoming that post-secular rapprochement may well continue to emerge in the contemporary city. (p. 250)

Such a 'becoming' faith, in conversation and relationship with local churches and faith expressions, would contribute to altered forms of church. Older forms of church might change drastically and sometimes even disappear. What was regarded as base communities or para-church might morph into a new understanding of what church is. What is the urban church, if not a community of radical Jesus followers, seeking to subvert and outwit the powers of Empire under planetary urbanisation? If anything, it is perhaps a church as co-opted religious entity, but not the church as radical Jesus movement.

There is a reciprocity between urban 'becoming' and a 'becoming' faith, as faith discerns appropriate incarnations in 'the post-secular city as laboratory' (Baker & Beaumont 2011b:259), a place of experimentation that is 'always in the making' (Sandercock 1998, 2003). One expression of such a 'becoming' faith, incarnating from below, is when 'spirituality becomes part of localized resistance against the appropriation of space for profit by the fluid ubiquity of global investment strategies' (Baker & Beaumont 2011b:258).

In this context of becoming, new configurations of collaboration and experimentation occur, which could take a multitude of forms. They could be faith communities participating in social movements, citizens' organisations or social enterprises, negotiating common ground around concrete goals or ideas. They could be closer collaboration between church and government to implement specific developmental goals, without dissolving a robust criticality on the part of the church. Baker and Beaumont (2011b:259) sense a new maturity on the part of

religious and non-religious groups alike, acknowledging ‘that the complexity and entrenched nature of the common problems facing urban societies (poverty, inequality, environment degradation, terrorism, environmental threat, etc.) are beyond the skill and resources of either to meet on their own’. The urbanisation of the planet demands collaborative movements to counter disastrous effects.

## ■ A Post-Christendom, Post-Church, Planetary Faith

In response to planetary urbanisation’s effects, a post-Christendom, post-church, planetary faith has to be discerned. *Post-Christendom* (cf. Paas 2011) refers to an unshackling of the powerful constructs that equate Western Christianity with colonial conquest and economic domination. It deliberately discerns Jesus as detached from Western empires in the intimate complicities of the Christian church in its formation and expansion. It seeks radically different forms of faith expression than what was, and still is, to be found in Christendom.

Cox (2009), in *The Future of Faith*, speaks about a shift from the Age of Faith in the first Christian centuries, to the Age of Dogma and institutionalised Christianity, to what he discerns to be a contemporary Age of the Spirit, in which Pentecostalism and liberation theologies flourish, emphasising spirituality and social justice. Similarly, Baker and Beaumont (2011b:264) describes a rise of a certain brand of contemporary Pentecostalism, not immersed in prosperity theology but shifting towards social justice, community development and civic engagement. If the contours of such a faith can seek to be more deliberately embodied in the intestines of planet urban, prompted and shaped by the Spirit but also infusing darkness with the liberating hope of the Spirit, we might start to witness radically alternative urban imaginaries.

*Post-church* refers to imaginaries of a lived faith not rigidly captured by institutional forms of church but expressed in fresh,

dynamic and robust ways, in diverse urbanised spaces. It does not negate the potential redemptive role the church as faith community can play or indeed even the possibility of the church's own redemption from the shackles of institutionalism. However, it does not want to restrict dynamic faith to narrow or known institutional forms, as if the Spirit is unfree to blow in brand-new directions.

A *planetary faith* would at once embrace the totality of creation as the space over which the Spirit hovers, as well as the major or minor spaces in which the Spirit longs to flow, seeking to align itself to the Spirit's promptings, while simultaneously embracing a deeply humble posture, acknowledging humanity's destructive agency in the deformation of creation, and inviting other knowledges – indigenous, planetary and unknown – to help shape new wisdoms not yet grasped.

A 'becoming' faith exorcises fear because it is consumed by a planetary love (cf. Moore & Rivera 2010; Spivak 2003:71-102), held in the womb of the Earth and God alike. Moved by love, such a faith would be robust instead of timid, dynamic instead of rigid, saturating instead of static, concrete instead of abstract, but, unlike the faith of the majority of Christendom, not robust, dynamic or saturating for its own sake but in solidarity and collaboration with, and for the sake of, the most vulnerable and marginalised communities or spaces on the planet.

## ■ Planetary Urbanisation: A Politics of Encounter and Justice Movements from Below and Outside

As we search theologically for the forms that faith, church or theology should take, to engage urban society appropriately in all its reconfigurations, we might do well to share notes with other contemporary (urban) movements. Movements deliberately in solidarity with vulnerable or excluded groups and places are consistent with the epistemological orientation advocated here.

Such movements often emerge from the ashes of bulldozed buildings or evicted dreams.

Merrifield (2011:47) considers the rise of such movements, almost paradoxically, as a reawakened urban citizenry. He refers to Berman (1988), who said:

Hausmann, in tearing down the old medieval slums, inadvertently broke down the self-enclosed and hermetically sealed world of traditional urban poverty. The boulevards, blasting great holes through the poorest neighbourhoods, enable the poor to walk through the holes and out of their ravaged neighbourhoods, to discover for the first time what the rest of the city and the rest of life are like. (p. 150)

The bulldozers, unwittingly, not only demolished buildings but also removed the walls of separation, and, instead of victimhood, the reassertion of agency among those evicted or affected becomes a daring display of revolt or resistance (Merrifield 2011):

They are but one step away from asserting themselves as citizens, citizens of a wider universe, citizens expressing adequate ideas about all kinds of common notions they're now capable of developing. (p. 52)

Grass-roots groups, affected detrimentally by planetary urbanisation, start to reclaim 'control over their own lives' in ways that resemble the best of participatory democracy (Merrifield 2011:47). Although some of that might be organised under the banner of 'a right to the city', as is the case in the 'Reclaim the City' campaign in Cape Town, Merrifield (2011:xvii) also notes a shift to a broader, more dynamic 'politics of the encounter'.

Encounter takes place 'when an affinity "takes hold"; when a common enemy is identified; when common notions cohere and collectivities are formed; and when solidarity takes shape' (Merrifield 2011:xvii). The encounters Merrifield (2011:xviii) speaks of including not only deliberately organised encounters, but also chance encounters as 'a more free-floating, dynamic, and relational militancy'.

In the contemporary (urban) politics of encounter probably lies the seedbed of a new planetary revolution. Merrifield (2011:92) speaks of this revolution as complex, fusing organic process, radical break and gradual morphing, with “‘the actual” and “‘the possible” encountering one another’. It organically grows from individuals to movements, through multiple makings and re-makings that hold the potential to radically alter the way things are.

Sartre (1976:365, 505; cf. Merrifield 2011:102) describes this process, from so-called revolutionary rehearsals to real deep change (cf. Merrifield 2011:102; Sartre 1976; 356, 505), as a process with distinctive steps (Merrifield 2011):

[F]rom alienated individuals to a ‘series’ of individuals; from serial gatherings to groups; and from groups that encounter each other, that bond with one another, to become fused groups. (p. 102)

This, Sartre saw with amazing foresight, is in a sense what characterises many social movements today (Merrifield 2011; referring to Sartre 1976:356–357):

The culmination of the fused group [...] is when the unity of its participants create a new combination, an inventive fusion of people who represent themselves both as an ‘I’ and a ‘we’, a unity of me and you, of you and me – especially of you and me against them. (p. 103)

The politics of encounter is about ‘creating a node [...] that represents a fusion of people and the overlapping of encounters, a critical force inside that diffuses and radiates outward’ (Merrifield 2011:63).

## ■ ‘Common Notions Around Adequate Ideas’

‘Common notions’ and ‘adequate ideas’ (Merrifield 2011:122) are important concepts in a politics of encounter. Common notions are different from universal rights, being more pragmatic, more concrete, negotiated through consensus, addressing specific challenges of specific groups. In a politics of encounter, widely



diverse groups have the potential to gather around common notions if the ideas presented are compelling and adequate. The activists driving the ‘Reclaim the City’ campaign in Cape Town were quite successful in gaining traction from diverse stakeholders around the simple idea of public land not being sold to the highest bidder but being made available for the purposes of social housing. As part of a kingdom agenda, faith communities need to discern their participation in encounters that build common notions and adequate ideas, in the direction of wholeness and justice.

## ■ **‘Occupation as Encounter, Encounter as Occupation’**

A central concept in a politics of encounter has become the notion of occupation. Occupation can be meant in the sense of retaining one’s sociopastoral presence in a certain locality, such as a local inner-city church, or investing in vulnerable urban places known for being disinvested from. Occupation can refer to asserting a sociopastoral presence in a new space – an urban fracture, or marginal locality – as a pledge of solidarity. Occupation can also refer to a more deliberate and proactive disruption of the status quo, creating encounters that expose urban fault lines very publicly. The occupation of public sector buildings known for corruption, or vacant buildings or land unaccountably held by the city while thousands are homeless, without asking permission, becomes a deliberate and bold space of encounter but also expressions of prophetic activism.

Spaces being occupied become public spaces not necessarily because of their physical locations being central but because of the kinds of encounters taking place in them (Merrifield 2011:66); ‘they are meeting places between virtual and physical worlds, between online and offline conversations, between online and offline encounters’. They are spaces ‘in which social absence and social presence attain a visible structuration and political coherence’ (Merrifield 2011:66).

When ‘Reclaim the City’ in Cape Town occupied two public buildings, ‘holding’ them for the city until the city could clarify time frames and budgetary commitments to implement their social housing promises, these occupations were space-making, expressing affinities, dissatisfaction and desire (cf. Merrifield 2011:67), through what became ‘a node of solidarity [...] a new form of empathetic human relationship – of common notions based on adequate ideas’ (Merrifield 2011:67).

A politics of encounter and occupation is now playing out across the globe, from Wall Street to the vertical favelas in Sao Paulo; from the #Fallist movement in South Africa to rogue creatives subverting what the market considers ‘prime’, providing centrality with new meaning (Merrifield 2011):

We might even say that a global family of eyes now truly encounters itself as a family, as an emerging citizenry, as an affinity group that yearns to repossess what has been dispossessed. Their big saucer eyes now look on with indignation at the public realm, doing so with animosity as well as awe. Now, there is not so much a world to win as a whole world to occupy. A whole world that’s really people’s own backyard. (p. 53)

What I argue here is not in favour of random occupations, spearheaded by party political organisations masquerading as advocates of the poor. Rather, I trace those movements from below that engage in a politics of encounter, in occupation as encounter, in order to shift the discourse from profit-driven market politics to a people- and creation-centred politics of inclusive justice.

## ■ Beyond Revolutionary Citizenship to Planetary Love

Merrifield (2011) describes the tensions that arose when citizen and city-dweller were dissociated from each other:

City-dwellers now apparently live with a terrible intimacy, a tragic intimacy of proximity without sociability, of presence without representation, of meeting without encounter. (p. 16)

What is required is ‘a reformulation of the notion of citizenship’, in which urban dweller and citizen ‘embrace one another again, but in a new way’ (Merrifield 2011:16). Merrifield (2011:16) insists on ‘a new revolutionary conception of citizenship’, if we are to engage urban society in ways that are liberationist, constructive and transformative.

Spivak (2003:72), however, goes even further, critiquing the very idea of global citizenship in which human agency – and struggle – still remains central, often at the expense of both planet and people. She calls for ‘the planet to overwrite the global’, offering planetarity, in its concrete, ecological sense, as an ethical alternative to the abstractness of globalisation, with its emphasis on profit and extraction. In nurturing a planetary love, instead of succumbing to the planetary exploitations of Empire, we will assert the planet ‘as a sanctuary for our bodies and minds’ (Spivak 2018:n.p.).

## ■ Faith as Subversive, Resistant and Tenacious Justice

In response to planetary urbanisation, and particularly its exploitative and exclusivist effects, a politics of encounter has emerged, characterised by creative resistance, revolutionary citizenship, new and fused groups, broad-based social movements, occupations and contestations.

What could a post-Christendom, post-church, planetary faith learn from or contribute to such movements? What will appropriate expressions of faith – as subversive, resistant, tenacious justice – look like? Can we animate, construct and live new forms of just faith, prophetically and creatively present, amidst the effects of planetary urbanisation (Swyngedouw & Kaika 2014)? Baker and Beaumont (2011b:264) seem to identify an emerging emphasis on ‘the role of religions in general and radical faith based praxis more specifically in the quest for the right to the city and the just city’.

## ■ Jesus As Prophet: Religion, Revolt and the Kingdom of God

If Jesus is co-opted by church, state or market, where is God still free to be at work in history? Jesus, as described by Nolan (1995), feasted with those whose histories were negated, disregarded or untold. In order to argue for a faith expressed in justice it is important to first locate Jesus in his own socio-historical context, if we are to discern possible planetary incarnations of a just faith today.

Palestine was colonised by the Romans in 63 BCE. Jesus lived and died during this volatile time, in which the Temple, city and Jewish nation were almost completely destroyed in 70 CE, and then the final destruction took place in 135 CE (Nolan 1995:15). It was during this time, argues Nolan (1995:15), that ‘the first communities of Christians had to find their feet’.

This was a time of oppression, revolt and repression. The first revolt against the Roman Empire was steered by the Zealots and involved taxes. This revolt was suppressed by Roman rule, and more than 2000 people were crucified (Nolan 1995:15). Even after the violent crushing of their initial revolt, the Zealots – a loosely organised, underground movement inspired by dedication to a Jewish theocracy – continued to build support, in 66 CE actually overthrowing the Roman government. However, they were ousted by the Roman army in 70 CE in ‘a merciless massacre’ (Nolan 1995:15).

Closest to the core of the Temple were the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees were the scribes, rabbis and theologians who sustained the Jewish faith in a rather legalistic, moralistic and exclusivist manner (cf. Nolan 1995:16–18). The Sadducees, although including some rabbis and scribes, were mostly composed of priests and elders, making them ‘the wealthy aristocracy’ (Nolan 1995:17), conservatively clinging to Jewish tradition (Nolan 1995:17) and collaborating ‘with the Romans’ (Nolan 1995:17) while they ‘endeavoured to maintain the status

quo' (Nolan 1995:17). The buck, in a certain sense, stopped with them when it came to the affairs, and gatekeeping, of the Temple, with the Pharisees as their functionaries. These were the groups Jesus contested, and subverted, consistently.

There were also the Essenes (Nolan 1995:16-17), who regarded the Temple as corrupt and saw themselves as the only faithful remnant of Israel; and a smaller, anonymous grouping of apocalyptic writers, believing that they had the clearest revelation of God's intentions and historical plans (Nolan 1995:18).

Against this backdrop – a time of Roman imperial rule, oppression of the Jews, Jewish rebellion and protest, and conservative religiosity – first John the Baptist and then Jesus of Nazareth emerged. John became a prophetic contradiction to all that played out in Israel (cf. Nolan 1995):

There had been no prophet in Israel for a long time. Everyone was painfully aware of this, as all the literature of the period attests. The spirit of prophecy had been quenched. God was silent. All one could hear was 'the echo of his voice'. (p. 18)

He appealed to a wide range of people – 'sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors and soldiers as well as scribes and Pharisees' (Nolan 1995:19), insisting that '[e]veryone must change'. The Old Testament prophets – and John the Baptist was no different – always included a naming of death and a promise of life, provoking a response and making particular claims, including an invitation to conversion away from existing ways. John displaced the emphasis from ritual purity to social morality (cf. Nolan 1995:20; in reference to Lk 3:11-14), challenging corruption, extortion, greed and economic inequality, which were practices in which the religio-politicos were deeply embedded. 'John was arrested and beheaded because he dared to speak out against Herod too' (Nolan 1995:21).

In came Jesus. Jesus shared John's sense of alarm about the future of God's people at the hands of the Roman Empire. He wept over them, both for how scattered they were, but also for what was to come (cf. Nolan 1995:22-23).

While John's focus was on baptism, Jesus' was on gathering 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (cf. Nolan 1995:27), 'the poor, the sinners and the sick'. This group probably included everybody from the beggars, lepers, sick and disabled to widows, orphans and other marginalised groups. It included those regarded as ritually impure (cf. Nolan 1995:28-29) – prostitutes, herdsmen, robbers and tax collectors. 'The principal suffering of the poor, then as now, was shame and disgrace' (Nolan 1995:29).

Driven by compassion (Nolan 1995:34-35), and in particular compassionate identification with the outcast and the poor, Jesus made himself into an outcast, in his life and death. 'He was not moved by the grandeur of the great Temple buildings' (Mk.13:1-2), 'he was moved by the poor widow who put her last cent into the Temple treasury' (Mk.12:41-44).

While John engaged in baptisms of conversion (Nolan 1995:36), Jesus' mission was to 'liberate people from every form of suffering and anguish' (Nolan 1995:36). Jesus did so through the dual acts of making himself an outcast, moved by compassion and solidarity with outcasts and embracing a mission of liberation from suffering. These dual acts were at once spiritual-religious and political, coming together in Jesus' integral mission on Earth. Nolan (1995:114) argues that the Jewish mindset 'made no distinction at all between politics and religion'. Israel's relationship to the Roman Empire and the relationship between Temple and ritual outcasts were religio-political issues.

Jesus's commitment was to liberation, but not the kind expected or desired by the Jews. Similar to John the Baptist, Jesus required deep inner change by everyone. In the Gospel of Luke, for example, Jesus said '[u]nless you change, you will all be destroyed' (Lk 13:3,5). Jesus called for socio-economic and political morality and justice, which had to start with deep personal transformation. This Nolan (1995:115-116) summarised it saying '[w]ithout a change of heart in Israel itself, liberation from imperialism of any kind would be impossible'.

Nolan (1995:116–117) radicalises Jesus’ commitment to liberation, as compared to that of, say, the Zealots. Whereas they wanted a change of power from the Romans to the Jews, ‘Jesus wanted a qualitatively different world – the “kingdom” of God’ (Nolan 1995:117). True liberation meant to take up the cause of all people as human beings – even to love our enemies as an expression of such universal solidarity (Nolan 1995:119).

One should understand these acts of Jesus through the lens of his own articulation of the ‘kingdom of God’, bringing theological and political language into one imaginary. Nolan insists that the kingdom as God’s new household is ‘a politically structured society of people here on earth’ (Nolan 1995:59). When Jesus says his kingdom is not of this world, he does not mean that it is non-political, but he signifies the powerful alternative politics of this new kingdom, subversive to the core, prophesying against religion, economic exclusion and state Empire alike (cf. Nolan 1995:59–60).

Jesus’s prophecy reached a climax in the Temple incident. Unimpressed with the grandeur and exclusionary practices of the Temple, witnessing how people’s devotion was exploited economically, Jesus became so irate that he literally turned the Temple upside down (cf. Nolan 1995:126). This incident probably changed the profile of Jesus from an itinerant preacher – miracle-doer and storyteller – to a national figure in whom people thought they could put their hope (Nolan 1995:128). The elitist hierarchy had to find a way of silencing Jesus. The religious leaders conspired, as is evident from a text in the book of Mark (11:47–52), arguing for sacrificing one person (meaning Jesus) instead of running the risk of losing a whole nation (cf. Nolan 1995:28).

## ■ **The Alternative Kingdom of God and Planetary Urbanisation**

In retrieving an understanding of Jesus as prophet, against the backdrop of imperial conquest and religious co-option, it

becomes possible to discern the outlines of a planetary faith with a commitment to justice at its core.

The kingdom, or new household of God, was indeed different. It represents a radical alternate imaginary and gets mediated not through grabbing power but through subversive, resistant and tenacious actions of love-justice, from within and from below. This radically different kingdom or household, practised in a politics of love-justice, is mostly expressed in Jesus' focus on healing, forgiveness and festivity and in his radically different relationship to money, status and power.

His miracles were not to prove his deity, Nolan (1995:43-44) holds, but were acts of compassion that wanted to evoke similar compassion with the people themselves, liberating them both 'from their suffering and their fatalistic resignation to suffering' (Nolan 1995:44).

Forgiveness, for Jesus, was about recovery of loss and restoration to an original status. Addressing both personal or interpersonal sin and debt, Jesus announced freedom to both those who were indebted and those who were owed. The example of Jesus provoked similar actions from those around him, as is seen in the case of Zacchaeus, who rectified his wrongs many times over. In the face of the intensified hierarchies and inequalities dealt by planetary urbanisation, just faith will interrogate notions of compassion, resistance to the causes of suffering and forgiveness combined with restitution - restoration of land and release of people, neighbourhoods and countries, captured by extraction and indebtedness to the urban elite. Instead of an exploitative globalisation, a life-embracing planetarity would be nurtured.

Nolan (1995:51) says that 'Jesus feasted while John fasted'. A planet of inequality requires both fasting and feasting, with the kind of fasting - personally, collectively and corporately - that can enable the redistribution of resources and the sustenance of the ecology, currently disabled by greedy and exploitative self-interest. Such fasting can help prepare the feasting that



Jesus embodied, with tables of shared and equal generosity and abundance, where everyone is welcome to be seated.

And yet, in the absence of deep fasting, Jesus still feasted. Nolan (1995:59) describes Jesus' preoccupation with the 'household of festivity', mentioning that seven parables had the householder as central character, and in six of these households 'a festive meal' was at the centre. For Jesus the 'kingdom of God' on Earth was a new household, radically different from the household of bondage symbolised by both religion and Empire (cf. Russell 1987). Feasting was a prophetic sign, provoking - imagining - true, deep, continuous fasting, as the new way of life.

In this new household, 'Jesus is asking for a total and general *sharing* of all material possessions' (Nolan 1995:63). The real miracle in the multiplication of the bread and fish, namely, was people's willingness to share (cf. Nolan 1995:64), as that unleashed the possibility of multiplication, surpluses and equality. The first Jesus communities in Acts 2, 4 and 5 continued to simulate such practices of deep economic solidarity and sharing (cf. Nolan 1995:64-65). Jesus' insistence on sharing, as part of a new household or community, was in the direction of a much greater vision. 'Jesus dared to hope for a "kingdom" or world-wide community which would be so structured that there would be no poor and no rich' (Nolan 1995:65).

Jesus' most profound critique of the religious leaders of his day was not levelled against their teaching but at how impressed they were with status and prestige, allowing themselves to be co-opted into oppressive hierarchies that marginalised the poor (cf. Nolan 1995:68). Instead, and deeply provocatively, Jesus placed a small child at the centre, suggesting that only such could enter the kingdom of God. Jesus named those bestowed with no social status in society as central characters in God's new household, namely, a child, women, beggars, servants, lepers and anyone else who, according to societal and religious norms and standards, was deemed inferior (Nolan 1995:71-72).

Jesus broke the boundaries of economic, religious and ethnic purity and exclusivity. Instead of closed group solidarity with clear boundaries determining who were insiders or outsiders, Jesus inaugurated universal solidarity with all of humankind that 'must supersede all the old group solidarities' (Nolan 1995:77). Within such universal solidarity, Jesus showed particular solidarity with the poor and oppressed, in order to level the playing fields. His was always an affirmation of the weakest among us, to demonstrate the workings of the new household of God (Nolan 1995:79).

In this new household, the poor and little ones will show the way (Nolan 1995:84). Instead of playing the games of Empire where power is simply transferred from one dominant group to another, in the kingdom of God power is seated in deep servanthood, in a community sharing universal solidarity, upholding creation and the least of these.

## ■ A Remnant Only?

The depth of Jesus' solidarity ended in a cross. It seems as if only a remnant minority is able to respond to the claims of this Jesus in faithful ways. The radicality of Jesus' call was embodied by his suffering. His commitment was to liberate people from the conditions of suffering and from the ways in which people inflicted suffering on others. And yet, suffering could only be conquered in this world, Nolan (1995:138) states, if we were willing to suffer ourselves. Jesus modelled this through his embodied leadership as a servant God, revealing how 'Compassion destroys suffering by suffering with and on behalf of those who suffer' (Nolan 1995:138).

The claim such a Jesus makes on our lives is altogether different from dominant state, church or market theologies. It invites people into 'a radical reorientation of one's life' (Nolan 1995:102), a way of compassion that lets go of aspirations of power, prestige, greed or money and instead stands in solidarity

with those who are most vulnerable and excluded, sharing as equal participants in a new household of festivity. It represents faith, not as 'a magical power' (Nolan 1995:102) but as an alignment to the mission of Jesus and the kingdom of God, expressed in deep compassion and justice, countering the absorption, extortion and exploitation of planetary urbanisation led by the exclusionary forces of capital.

It is in the rare instances where a faith community is able to connect worship and social transformation, letting its worship be a space of 'communal cultivation of an alternative construction of society' (Yoder 1984:34), that the faith community will be 'true to its exilic status' (Yoder 1984:34); a prophetic remnant, an exile community, yet fully present.

## ■ **Prophetic Communities: Practising Prophetic Theology**

The Kairos document identified not only a state theology or church theology but also provided the outline of a prophetic theology. Such a theology would resist the co-option of Jesus into dominant state, religious or market discourses, prophetically imagining the alternative way of being for a particular time.

According to Nolan (1995:91), the prophet was always tasked with the vocation of 'telling the people the meaning of the particular time in which they lived in view of a new divine act which was about to take place'. Prophetic communities today would have to discern the time we find ourselves in under planetary urbanisation; how and where the Spirit of God is at work; and then seek to align itself to the movement of God's Spirit at this time.

Faith communities in our time, if we consider the work of Merrifield and others as appropriate indicators of where justice movements are at, would participate in new emerging movements, or in fused groups, in solidarity, but also discern the particular gifts they can share at many different tables. Prophetic faith

communities would work with many others, to subvert the exploitations of Empire, through ‘decoupling from the state’s “official” domain to weaken its grip [...] and loosen its political and bureaucratic straightjacket’ (Merrifield 2013:105).

Such encounter(s), as explained by Merrifield (2013), if authentic, are significant to break through the inertia, calling forth new life and vibrancy in response to death-dealing urban forces:

Before the encounter, before the fused group took hold, ‘the city’, we might say, and its spaces were just there, simply latent, passive terrains of the practico-inert. I say ‘city’ because these spaces existed like dead labour in redundant fixed capital, objectified in the landscape, smacking of alienation, of nonlife, of plain-old bricks and mortar, of concrete and steel. (p. 105)

## ■ Discerning a Planetary Urban Theological Agenda

A planetary urban theological agenda would need to hold faith and justice together, for it to become a source of flourishing life. It would require, and foster, prophetic communities practising tender yet robust faith and subversive, tenacious justice, in ways that will mediate ongoing liberations and transformations of all kinds, either directly or as participants in broader glocal (planetary) movements. Such a theological agenda will have to embrace a number of critical postures:

- Urban discipleship as perpetual subversion – Merrifield (2013:116) speaks of our challenge ‘to sneak about through narrow trails of permanent subversion’, fleshing out alternate urban lives to the dominant pattern. Following Jesus in an age of planetary urbanisation would require, even more than before, perpetual acts of subversion.
- Continuous encounter and repeated conversion – Faith, under planetary urbanisation, requires multiple and continuous encounters, such as those with and between state, market and church; different religious expressions; groups, fused groups or social movements committed to justice, taking place locally,

regionally and globally. Authentic encounters would always heed a call to conversion, of some sort, as it presupposes deep conversational dialogue.

- Faith as urban performativity – Acknowledging ‘the performative nature of religious engagement with the public space’ (cf. Baker & Beaumont 2011a:47) is important as a resource for sustainable and flourishing planetary living, as well as to shape a certain form of spatiality that is more radically inclusive and embracing of all urban inhabitants. Faith as urban performativity can be embodied in liturgies, worship, diaconal solidarities, artistic expression and festivals, incarnational living and various forms of resistance.
- An embodied call for justice: beyond abstractions and rights to occupations and feasts – Christian inertia also results from theological abstractions that fail to be embodied in practices, rituals, liturgies and lifestyles (our way of being with each other as inhabitants of ‘planet urban’). Through encounters and collaborations participating in occupations and festivals, ours should increasingly become an embodied call for justice, not theorising only but living justice deeply in close solidarities.
- Planning infused with spirituality – Urban planning, in the understanding of Sandercock and Senbel (2011:87), is ‘an ethical inquiry into how to live with each other’; and ‘the work of organizing hope’, often against the backdrop of great despair (Sandercock & Senbel 2011:88). Such hope can only be sustained and replenished through spirituality (cf. Sandercock & Senbel 2011:88). Faith communities have an incredibly important role to play in accompanying planning practices that are connected to people and planet in humble, loving and just ways.
- Connecting as affirmation of our inherent (inter) connectedness – The more we are connected through globalising processes, the more fragmented we become through increased hierarchies and deepened inequalities. Connecting people and places, globally, is both an affirmation of our inherent interconnectedness and also subverts exclusionary connections perpetuated by hierarchies of power. Sandercock and Senbel (2011:94) speak of city planning as ‘a layering of connectedness’. Faith communities can play crucially important roles, both in being part of the

layering and in helping to heal urban fractures through connecting what has become disconnected.

- Healing urban fractures: creating multiple centres – I concur with Cox’s (1965) assertion that the church’s primary urban role is that of being a servant, healing urban fractures. We need to vigilantly develop tools to discern the fractures, responsive spiritualities, and appropriate and bold strategies, networks and resources to overcome fractures. This would imply a deep and caring presence in fractured places, abandoned by state, market or church. Such affirmation would create multiple centres in what was deemed marginal; make visible what dominant narratives sought to hide; and connect these ‘new centres’ to build synergy and consensus from below.
- Reclaiming regeneration – Davey and Graham (2011:121) speak about the way in which urban spaces today are regenerated ‘on a globalized template’, dictated by ‘inward investment [...] with little regard for local impact’, steering in the direction of homogeneity, because it ‘works’, at least for those who want to make profit. Faith communities need to reclaim the language of regeneration, insisting on the possibility of redeeming broken spaces in ways that are radically transformative, resisting exclusivist regeneration, while simultaneously addressing root causes that create decay or exclusion.

## ■ An All-embracing Planetary Faith

### ■ A Planetary Consciousness and Planetary Love

Planetary urbanisation is calling people of faith and entire faith traditions way beyond itself, to explore new ways of living, speaking and doing, together – deeply suspicious and contrary to forces of estrangement and death. Can we imagine, construct or animate new forms of just faith, prophetically present – resisting, subverting and constructing – amidst the effects of planetary urbanisation (Swyngedouw & Kaika 2014), with its huge costs both to humanity and creation?

Planetary urbanisation is calling for expressions of planetary love that are tenaciously holding onto a faithful presence in changing worlds, serving compassionately and living in just solidarity, while letting go of the necessity to exercise power over creation or humanity. Such forms of love can be discovered and nurtured in relationship to ‘planetary indigeneity’ (Sidaway, Woon & Jacobs 2014:8), which, based on a critique of colonised territories and spaces through imperial violence (Sidaway et al. 2014:8), deliberately retrieves indigenous knowledges as cues for our life together.

Such planetary indigeneity fosters a new kind of politics, searching ‘for alternatives in a relational, nature-centred ethic of care’ (Sidaway et al. 2014:10), characterised by alternative concepts of development, ‘radical alterity with respect to the relationship to nature/land’ (Sidaway et al. 2014:9) and ‘an emergent politics concerned about climate change and environmental futures’ (Sidaway et al. 2014:10). Sidaway et al. (2014:10) speaks of planetary indigeneity in its global, organised and collective forms as ‘a resource of hope for a new planetary consciousness’.

Unless faith communities can develop such planetary consciousness, fostering planetary love, they will hardly be able to engage appropriately with planetary urbanisation and its effects.

## ■ **Collideorscape, Wormholes and Minor Spaces**

I find Merrifield’s three elements for an effective ‘revolutionary rehearsal’ quite helpful in providing the subversive metaphorical language a planetary consciousness requires, beyond captivity to stale ecclesial forms. He speaks of the collideorscape (Merrifield 2013:106; in reference to Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* [1976:143]); the wormhole; and minor spaces. These could

be the metaphorical carriers for a volatile, activist faith to saturate an entire urbanising planet, germinating its soil with justice, wrapped in compassion.

Collideorspaces are described by Joyce (1976:43) as a collision *and* an escape, almost simultaneously, ‘a shaking up of things to give form to another reality, an escape into a changed perception, into another stage of liberation’ (Merrifield 2013:106). Such collideorspaces – creative encounters – are spanning the urban landscape today but can also be animated deliberately by movements from below or performed by fused groups. They are moments of volatile – spontaneous or organised – encounters, sowing the seeds of adequate ideas, temporarily withdrawing to allow for seeds to germinate, until the next encounter.

I understand such collideorspaces to occur both in the encounter between the fused group and those they are ‘against’, but collideorspaces can also occur between different members or groups of the fused group. Held together by common threads – in spite of the intensity of collision and momentary escape or retreat – they are brought together repeatedly, to regroup themselves as they enter the next or deeper level of revolution. This could apply to social movements, to ecumenical networks or to fused groups composed of social movements and faith-based groups, slowly and relationally fostering shared agendas and practices, through creative encounter.

Whereas collideorspaces refer to rather impactful moments of encounter, then withdrawal, frequently repeated and deepening in intensity, wormholes are different. Wormholes steadily work their way through the structures, layers and pretensions of the status quo (Merrifield 2013):

Wormholes are little troubling spaces that create vortexes within the macro-space of planetary capitalism. They are troublesome because they cause ruptures and rifts within the plane of capitalist immanence. In the wormhole, the specific gravity of the world market no longer applies; there the air and light are fresher and brighter. Wormholes bring rain to the arid zone of neoliberal desertification. (p. 108)



Wormholes, says Merrifield (2013:108), ‘blaze new spatial territories [...]’ with ‘new minor spaces that securely link and make bridges, or subterranean tunnels, between social movements everywhere’. The function of wormholes is to penetrate seemingly impenetrable spaces, to open up ‘minor spaces’ that are typically ‘subversive, intrusive, interventionist, troublesome space, troublesome for the dominant order, for “major abstract space”’ (Merrifield 2013:109–110). They represent the alternate possibilities; they expose the farcical nature of pretentious impenetrability or inevitability. Such alternate spaces are opening up ‘in the interstices of planetary urbanization, in minor spaces’ (Merrifield 2013:123).

How do faith communities allow, or even animate, collideorscapes to transform their own self-understanding, to disrupt death-dealing constructs, to open up the possibility for liberating encounters? How does faith carve out wormholes, causing ‘ruptures and rifts’ in the certainties of planetary urbanisation? How is faith refreshing in ‘the arid zone of neoliberal desertification’? How are deliberate, minor spaces created and then affirmed and heralded as spaces of liberating encounter, as sources for possible deep transformation?

## ■ Jesus Belongs to the Whole Planet

An all-embrasive planetary faith is only a possibility if we revisit the nature of Jesus. Nolan (1995) made this statement:

Jesus cannot be fully identified with that great religious phenomenon of the Western world known as Christianity. He was much more than the founder of one of the world’s greatest religions. He stands above Christianity as the judge of all it has done in its name. Nor can historical Christianity claim him as its exclusive possession. Jesus belongs to all humanity. (p. 5)

Jesus cannot be equated with state, church or market. Neither can Jesus be equated with Christian faith, as Jesus belongs to all humanity, indeed, to the entire planet. Based on Jesus’ self-identification, he can be found in particular in the fractures of

urban society, in those subsumed or excluded spaces where the 'waste' is dumped (cf. De Beer 2014). And from there Jesus stands as judge of every glocal institution that is hell-bent on excluding – and exploiting – the vulnerable in our midst.

The risen Christ is the planetary Jesus, the one who is in deep solidarity with those crucified and wasted by the spoils of planetary gains.



# Eco-critical Imagination, Indigenous Political Liberation and White Settler Decolonisation: ‘Animating’ Accountability as the City Congeals and the Heat Rises

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## ■ Introduction

How shall we think of indigeneity, land, settler colonialism and climate change in relationship to issues of race, class and religion, in the space of the academy and the grip of the city? I write in place, out of an academic subdiscipline that might be loosely called 'political spirituality' (more technically, 'eco-theology'), schooled for more than three decades by the harshly embattled location of inner-city, post-industrial Detroit. I offer as conviction, a basic impression, arising from a long pilgrimage into the layered history of the Strait, baptising this white-formed biped in the thick murk of African-American struggle elaborated on top of Native-American displacement. Recovering the capacity to learn sustainability from wild nature as 'teacher' - especially as decanted through indigenous culture - may well determine the destiny of our species as either viable or extinct. Riffing on the work of Gayatri Spivak, the galvanising concern in the writing might be glossed as the eco-critical irruption of the subaltern in the place of history, Global South eco-animism challenging Northern consumerist geocide, indigenous wiles and wisdoms haunting the wealth and weapons of the coloniser world of settlement and settlements and savagery.

Central to the exploration will be the role of story. Certainly, indigenous modes of giving narrative 'vitality' to local watersheds serve as touchstones. But equally crucial for us as modernity-enamoured creatures (given that you are reading this - and I have written it - by means of a vast hi-tech infrastructure called the Internet) is the bigger contrasting story that we already inhabit and that inhabits us. It typically comports itself, one way or another, as the story of 'civilisation', anchored in urban life. Gaining critical perspective on that default frame is part of Spivak's project, which we will supplement here, at some length, with the work of political scientist James C. Scott. Of particular note for our efforts will be the latter's recent book called *Against the Grain*, tracing the genesis of city-state social architecture and aggression in the conjunction of late Neolithic village sedentism,

plant and animal domestication and coercive labour formation. That historical thread of development will then serve to shadow the biblical story in quite different ‘relief’ than the imperial highlights we typically inherit and emphasise. And, finally, the possible import of such a narrative gumbo for practical faith will be given personal flavour in a brief outline of my own struggle to engage such in inner-city Detroit.

## ■ The Hour of Apocalypse

Most literally, while writing this, the calamity of Syria continues to roil global politics in international calculation and national delirium around the question of Russian tampering with the Trump election as the Big Powers continue their intractable face-off in plotting the fate of the late great planet under the heavy manners of climate comeuppance. Syria as raw wound in the world body, signifying so many wounds, so many ravages! It would be easy to grind down on the event – bullets and bombs, themselves of metals mined from whence, by what coerced hands, under bottom line duress and stockholder demand and caviar caresses of politicians and bankers, sold from the West into the morass of post-Iraqi Freedom struggles to suss out life in the space of a never-ending conquest. All the while the climate-bared Syrian sun overheats the soils, drying aquifers, driving farmers to city cauldrons of dreams and impossibilities, cooking up neo-liberal pain into a well-boiled refrain of resistance and despair, perhaps speaking the sole word understood in the boardrooms of pirated fat. Maybe we now inhabit a world where writing is just so much smoke and mirrors, a doodling on top of the designs of minds already seceded from both ground and community. At one level, ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) bloodletting is ‘postcolonial’ blowback on a colonisation that has actually never ceased its taking, the grotesque shape dominated ‘nature’ assumes (in human form) when forced one too many times to conform to the enslavements of production and re-engineering, dividend and steering column, pixel and

fractal and hedge fund hustle, channelling brain chemicals uncoupled from the awareness of compost as ultimate destiny and real beauty.

Perhaps beheading is an apocalyptic sign of the times, the mirror in which all of us 'moderns' – however 'post-' and 'colonial' and 'trans' and 'national' and 'civil' and 'isable' we may think we are – must now be comprehended (especially in light of our race, gender and socio-economic status). 'Beheading' of forests, mountaintops, crops and clouds! Slicing open of the dragon-mouth of Mother Earth, whose gullet we Gonzo porn-plunge! All for the ancestral minerals and viscosities we demand as our 'right' in the moment of our desperation to continue running in the very places that we so heavily and wantonly stand! This is precisely what most of us (who occupy the academy) do – in our very places of writing and teaching and speaking and lamenting the state of things. ISIL-like brutality (in the form of techno-capitalist fundamentalism) is exactly what I imagine we look like to the natural world around us, as indeed to its indigenous denizens whose codifications of local ecosystems are the actual 'culture' nature has (as says Yupiaq scholar Oscar Kawagley). I am married to a Filipina who grieves as I write for the incessant rounds of slayings of Lumad and Aeta and Manobo leaders of tribal peoples in her homeland – fuelled by Enlightenment-taught 'modern' understandings of who counts and who is a mere relic awaiting removal so that the minerals can be plundered for my Prius and your Apple. And their slaying is just the most recent outcome of the slow motion, state- and corporate-sponsored violence of 500 years' duration, whose terrors, in magnitude and continuity and effect, far outweigh the more spectacular backlash of 'terror' we all now lament.

So I write under the sign of Syria as terroristic emblem of the climate-beleaguered city. Economist Christian Parenti underscores the conjunction. Noting the 'new geography of climate change is pretty much like the old geography of imperialism with core and periphery', Parenti (2017:n.p.) details

the way neo-liberal policy has left Global South states on the frontiers of climate catastrophe, bereft (or more accurately, 'plundered') of the resources to deal with the eventuality. In consequence, says Parenti, people are forced to 'adapt freestyle on their own', gravitating in their desperation to 'ethnic, religious millenarian violence' (Parenti 2017:n.p.). The linkage is clear, if indirect. 'Displacement leads to poverty leads to deprivation and anxiety' leads to vulnerability to whatever demagogue of quick fixes can translate rage into religious revenge and promised remedy (Parenti 2017:n.p.). In Syria's case, climate change-induced drought pushed Sunni farmers off ancestral land into cities, where the Assad regime's austerity, currying favour with Western priorities, cooked up the crowded influx into a 'weaponised proletariat', hell-bent on religious reprisal against the Alawite elites (Parenti 2017). And now into this very same conundrum steps Cape Town in the new year of 2018, face to face with the Zero Hour of water apocalypse, feverishly scrambling in the shadow of a likely similar working-class explosion. And thus, our sub-motif for this writing – how do we comprehend the city in the sight of an entire biosphere in revolt?

## ■ 'Animating' Liberation Theology

In her 1999 publication entitled *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Past*, literary critic Gayatri Spivak (1999) at one point waxes oneiric, surprisingly invoking liberation theology in her laboured send-up of postcolonial theorising at the threshold of a new millennium (documents.mx). In her riff on Kant's project, she suddenly becomes nostalgic for what she herself deems improbable, a dream of what she calls 'animist liberation theologies [...] to girdle the perhaps impossible vision of an ecologically just world' (Spivak 1999:382). In her concern for 'transnational literacy' and in the process of championing (while querying) 'globe-girdling movements', Spivak opens a profound question for 'liberation' theory in our time (Spivak 1999:377–378, 374). Its subject must become at



once planetary in a vigilant political pushback on the forces of financialisation, while simultaneously taking the trouble necessary to re-enter local spaces of subaltern responsiveness in a posture of 'learning to learn from the original practical ecological philosophies of the world' (Spivak 1999:383). While Spivak's work has subsequently commandeered attention from my particular discipline and occasioned a conference (and a book entitled *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality and Theology*), it is patent that the challenge articulated concerning ethical engagement with animist indigenous knowledges (and struggles) for the sake of global survival remains a conundrum largely unaddressed in most eco-theological discourse.

The eye that reads Spivak's dense demand in my case gazes over post-industrial malaise. The context for my writing here is post-bankruptcy Detroit, home base for 30 years of living, working and theorising out of a devastated east-side neighbourhood, schooled by a 70-year tradition of black power and radical labour organising centred around African-American and Chinese-American activists, Jimmy and Grace Lee Boggs, more recently elaborating contacts and connections with Vandana Shiva's 'seed politics' in northern India and Zapatista innovations in southern Mexico.

Most immediately, my musings key off of a summer 2015 encounter between three constituencies whose collaborative political commitments in resisting emergency management takeover of the city since 2013, and more recently in fighting against draconian water shut-offs of poor people of mixed race, has given rise to a resolve to 'learn to learn from' each other's respective sources of inspiration. Local African-American and Latino(a) hip-hop 'heads', young Anishinaabe activists and Christian practitioners of a new 'watershed discipleship' ethic huddled in July heat with national leaders of each of these three constituencies, focused on questions of land and water in seeking to root local politics and intellectual theorising more profoundly in a spiritual orientation more 'animist' and 'poly-sacral' than modernist and univocal.

All told, this hothouse experience of activist involvement finds increasing urgency in the question Spivak raises. In the process of wrestling against 'race-gender-class exploitation' in the 'affective subspace' of the migrant underclass as well as the older ghetto and barrio neighbourhoods of black and Latino(a) poor – how hold metropolitan engagement accountable to conditions on the ground (economically and ecologically) around the globe among the Global South's and Arctic North's indigenous populations? Indeed, how do so with respect to native losses and pushback exactly on the spot of Motown's streets, where tankers ply daily, in transport of Canadian tar sands product to Marathon refinements in that oldest of Detroit settlements named Delray? How take account of such contemporary grief and resistance where mound builders anciently dug? Where Wendet offered thanks to sturgeon kin? Where Tecumseh pirouetted with his 1812 youth core in the woods around Fort Detroit – built there to enforce European occupation and control the trade of fur – comporting himself like the trickster deity Nanabozho, mesmerising the 'American' troops holed up there into surrender by 'shape-shifting' his small contingent into a seemingly monstrous embodiment in repeated shadowy appearances among the trees in front of the fort (Dowd 2002:12-15, 17, 19, 93, 272-273)?

Essentially, how do we engage with contemporary struggle in a way that does not once more eclipse the deep history and the present community of native dwellers and the questions their lifeways throw up before modern technocracies and urban densities?

Back behind the thicket of intervening agencies scrambling for power across the globalising stage (the nation state, international civil society, Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) collaborating with Bretton Woods organisations, the much-touted 'pax electronica', cultural studies programmes making careers on cartographies of Global South realities, telematic voyeurism of tribal orality, entrepreneurial 'pimping' of ethnic art, 'mainstreaming' educational initiatives, etc.) lies a fundamental ecological interrogation (Spivak 1999:370).

Given the layered and catastrophic crises fast sweeping in on the planet (peak oil, climate warming, species extinction, population overshoot), how alter our lockstep course (Perkinson 2015)? Where turn for hope and/or challenge adequate to the change required? Needless to say, given such an overview as this, I am not sanguine in the face of an Isaac Asimov Foundation invocation of the 75 million square mile urbano-planet Trantor any more than *Star Trek's* Borg nightmare named the Uniplex, or even the New Jerusalem of Revelation, reportedly 1500 miles long, broad and high. Henri Lefebvre's 'planetary urbanization' must be tempered with Michael Davis' *Planet of Slums* and even Elon Musk's terror-driven thrust to remove himself and a few other select billionaires to Mars (Asimov 1955; Davis 2006; Lefebvre 1970; Merrifield 2013:909).

Spivak is prescient in a practised manner that academic theory in general and liberation theologies in particular would do well to emulate. In elaborating her dream of animist liberation theologies, for instance, she is quick to note that 'theology' itself is an inappropriate term, as 'supernature' and 'transcendence' alike lead right back into the global dilemma (Spivak 1999:382). Indeed, she will insist that none of the 'so-called great religions of the world' stand adequate to the work as they are already too far compromised with global power flows (Spivak 1999:382). Alone on the present horizon of our vanishing historical past stands the witness of certain subaltern 'humanities' living in sufficient biorhythmic attendance on their ecologies to open a possible future for the species. Their deep contribution (despite the charges of romanticism such a claim inevitably draws, says Spivak, and in spite of all the intellectual capital agreements pillaging, patenting and reselling such knowledges) is persistent deconstruction of 'the opposition between human and natural' (Spivak 1999:383, 383 footnote 97). The fate of much of the planet may well depend on 'learning to learn from' such.

Spivak cautions on the ethical task, talking about how it requires the 'slow efforts' of a 'desire-changing' attentiveness

that amounts to love – what Derrida might otherwise call ‘messianic patience’. Such will constitute the watchword here (Spivak 1999:383, 383 footnote 97). How do we begin to move towards a recovery of communicative relationality with floral and faunal life forms integral to mutual survival, whose codes of regenerative exchange do not answer to any logic of development and whose nuances of reciprocity have thus far registered far more cogently in indigenous mythologies and ritual forms than in global theories of civilisational viability? What might ‘liberation mythology’ look like speaking towards the world’s ‘great religions’ (as indeed its metropolitan academicians) from inside an ‘animist’ (or indigenous) grasp of reality and in full cognisance of their place in contemporary globalisation?

At the heart of each enterprise is an even deeper question of liberation: What now does it mean to be human? What if it has never not meant living a form of collective hybridity in symbiotic relationship with a plant or animal community that mediates reciprocal (and commensal) relations with a local ecology and does so sustainably, only to the degree that relationship is also practised as a form of integral spirituality? An ‘animistic theology’ indeed!

The questions such a perspective raises are rhizome-deep and lifelong. Spivak conjures a zone of spirits, both living and gone, whose *raison* and pain will not be merely ‘comprehended’ in academe. Like pastoralist Abel of biblical fame, their living refrain and bloodstain speaks from the exact intersection of flesh and soil. Certainly, many of the 360 million current people on UN lists of ‘the indigenous’ exhibit something of the global dilemma. They are already crossed by lines of capital flows, caught in demands for lands bearing gems and oil, blitzed with the techno-fascinations of apps and social media. But many of them also, outside the romance of BBC’s *Living with the Tribes*, know things that the rest of us do not even realise we don’t know.

Learning how to know such will not come from a course in a classroom or Google time on the net. Neither will it come from

plumbing the spirit-depths of cracked-up concrete and broken street lights like a jazz horn or a hip-hop diss rap, as crucial and liberational as those innovations have been for the offspring of African populations enslaved in a previous iteration of capital's operation of plunder and now indeed for an entire planet of urban youth calling out the truth of their situation. It is rather, as Spivak (1999:369 footnote 78) so laconically (!) lambasts in a footnote, that '[a]boriginal practical [wisdom] of living in the rhythm of the ecobiome is hardly to be dismissed' as a mere flash of the past, but rather demands both protective political combat and 'one-on-one' loving contact, capable of changing both parties. The change anticipated demands relationship with a culture in place in a temporal flow that is slow. But she does dream of social movements of such that would girdle the globe in an 'animist' liberation, even as she qualifies the just outcome of that dream as 'impossible'. And perhaps more to the point, when on yearly trek to Kolkata to hunker down among neo-liberalism's subaltern survivors in a local educational forum, Spivak knows – as diasporic denizen of high academic theory – that she does not know and that all of her academic conventions and conceits are so much confusing flotsam. And seeks rather to learn in the local idiom! And such is my own minute experience of the hope.

## ■ Liberating an Animist Imagination

How imagine and work towards a globalised localism, an international movement of bioregional savvy and commitment? The animism is crucial to the vision. And here I will elaborate on top of Spivak's authoring of the thought. Not enough in what we now face to retool academic theory in the direction of responsible redeployment of materiality, as necessary as that may be. Permaculture design in cultivation and biomimetics in robotics will not by themselves a just world make. Like Spivak, I am equally concerned to halt before the only 'outside' that remains to neo-liberal logics and green-zone colonial projects

hell-bent on remaking the planetary surface into one-world-under-a-drone. That 'outside' is indigenous culture – as inadequate as the words may be, as already compromised in corporate infiltration and nostalgic imagination as the reality is. Reading James Scott on the 'arts of being ungovernable' discerned in the recesses of South Asian hill country, reading Vandana Shiva's schooling at the hands of Chipko women defending forests in northern India, reading of Shipibo synaesthesia in Peru and Moken island-hopping off the coast of Thailand and Hadza relations with the honeyguide bird in Tanzania presents a not-yet-extinct possibility (Charing 2008:2-3; Gebhart-Sayer 1986:196; Greenfieldboyce 2016; Leung 2005; Scott 2009; Shiva [1988] 2010).

And core to each of these older ways of being is story – a mythological clothing of the entire local biome in a layered mess of narration that renders not just plant and animal, but rock and hill, river and weather as living kin demanding respect and granting meaning. There is no way in so short a presentation as this even to hint at the difference such a canopy of story – inflating a local ecozone into a roaming homeland of wild spirits – makes compared to theology's monolingualism or the academy's 'scientific' hubris. The latter's universal abstraction and the former's insipid policing of transcendence are symptomatic of a much larger destruction of place that is the toxic by-product of modernity's drive to re-engineer and commodify for which the academy is largely a pampered acolyte and faith too often a cheer-leading servant. Emphasising 'story' in the face of corporate takeover of indigenous land, backed by government-sanction and police, followed by poured concrete and sunk pipe and clear-cut ranch and mined mineral – much less the frenzied hyper-development of mega-cities of tens of millions such as we witness around the globe – might seem hopelessly immaterial and powerless. Yet, without at least imagination of something different and local and sustainable, the possibility of resistance and alternative creation is simply stillborn. The remainder of this writing will offer a storied outline – notes on yet extant indigenous

'difference'; a deep history of resistance to our earliest shift from foraging and pastoralism to state-dominated mono-cropping; an invocation of the biblical witness to just such a turn away from urbanised domination; and an accounting of the meaning of such a turn in my own life.

## ■ Local Dwelling in Indigenous Compass

Two quick examples and a more extensive third – articulating 'indigenous difference' in response to large-scale 'natural' events like wild fires, tsunamis and hurricanes – will have to stand in for more extensive analyses, given space limits. A preacher friend of mine, at a recent conference hosted by an inner-city church in Detroit, upon hearing my own thinking about the hour we face today across the planet, recounted a recent visit to Alaska. The Inuit folk there, having heard report of the wild fires raging across California hills and engulfing entire cities like Santa Rosa in the fall of 2017, told him of their own fire experience. Recent summertime conflagrations in Alaska had also terrorised white urban dwellers in the area into desperate action – sweating out the onslaught as a looming catastrophe and fighting frantically to contain the flames. For the Inuit, however, the fires were not 'disaster' but 'revitalisation'. They pointedly told my friend that they themselves were not worried by such, knowing the flames would be extinguished by nature herself, on her own schedule, when the snows came. Wild fire, for them, was actually rebirth, part of a cycle of regeneration. If the flames did not scorch, the seeds would not be released, the willow would not grow, the caribou would not feed, and they themselves would not survive. They had long ago learned to build their homes on pilings out in the marsh and survived just fine, because they knew the terrain and its cycles, did not try to live where they could not survive, and knew how to read the moods and changes.

Similar testament to a pliable 'dwelling in place' emerged in the wake of the 2004 Banda Aceh tsunami 'catastrophe' in the Indian Ocean. Gathering 'news' just days after the strike, BBC

discovered a Sea Gypsy fishing folk tribe known as the Moken off the coast of Thailand, who had survived the wave just fine. No member of the tribe had ever seen such a phenomenon, but as soon as the sea receded prior to rising and roaring inland, the community instantly came to attention. They regularly told stories around their camp fires at night of a Human-Eating Water Creature and recognised the signs. Their ancestors had experienced such and memorialised the event in myth. The Moken turned for direction to the animal-kin with whom they shared their island home, observed what such 'elders' did in response and, imitating them, did not go down to the shore to investigate the recession but hightailed it to higher ground. This Big Water Creature was a being they could give place to, because they understood the planet is not theirs to own and bend but rather a gift to learn and know and respect, as merely one small community among a vast panoply of communities – finned and winged, furred and four-legged, crested and flowing or billowing and dripping – whose overall concert of living was an orchestration human beings did not conduct or control but participated in by way of those couple of notes of beauty they could uniquely contribute.

And then, much more immediately, from the midst of the sweep of storms through the Caribbean in the fall of 2017, there appeared the following 'minority' witness. As the United States (US) mainland gasped for breath during the one-two 'hit' of hurricanes Harvey and Irma on the Gulf Coast of Texas and the entire length of the Florida peninsula, three articles appeared within days of each other. The first, entitled 'God Blesses Houston', deftly recounted how survivors of Harvey repeatedly offered gratitude for the Almighty's answer to their prayers for 'salvation' (Thibault 2017). Culling through the self-congratulatory logic involved, author Thibault underscored the 'elephant in the room', asking why – if the storm was divinely sent – 'God made Harvey hit Houston in the first place', and traced two other possible culprits for blame. Noting conspiracy theory's immediate identification of 'Man' as responsible – by way of secret hi-tech manipulation on the part of 'evil elites' – Thibault laughs off the ludicrous implication. A power-bloc cabal, attacking the



central urban hub of their own oil-based profit-stream through ecoterrorism? Think again. Next up, he explores Nature herself – as 'God's unruly girlfriend' – once again 'getting out of hand' and the equally laughable refusal of science to name accurately – as 'global warming' – the algorithmic certainty of heating it derives from regularly measuring the unruliness. Increasingly hotter air plus increasingly warmer water equals gargantuan storms and record flooding. It doesn't take a genius...

But he also can't resist an aside. The 'Gulf's revenge' on Houston – after decades of draconian drilling, rape of the primordial sea floor, oily spills of Earth's lifeblood, mushrooming dead zones and suffocating toxins – can be read as divinely motivated. A strike at the exact epicentre of the violent aggression! A measured 'blessing', says Thibault, given the much heavier hand hitting other planetary unfortunates such as in Bangladesh (40 million displaced and 1200 killed in flooding at the same time) – a 'hard Houston lesson' designed to waken us from our 'ostrich act' of denial. But he also rues the irony of such a projection, as it is the poor who bear the brunt. And he leaves that reality dangling. I would rejoin along a more indigenous vein. There is nothing in wild nature that mandates our species receive special treatment, much less love. If we want to inveigle a 'loving' God in the equation as Author of Retribution aimed at oil industry hubris, invariably we are left to opine, 'but how could you order a gangster hit that targets so many innocents!?' I would rather wax ancient and sober – nature (as neither 'saviour' nor 'monster') in widescreen posture speaking back to such foolishness. I am not here to conform to your violent reordering of the landscape or make up for your immorality. It is not me who puts members of your species at risk, but you! By forcing so many into situations of vulnerability for the sake of a comfortable few! The question is not 'why do I bring on such unjust suffering', but 'why do you?' And 'when will you stop?'

Across the Gulf from the hit on Houston, Hurricane Irma angled up the peninsula of Florida two weeks later, after doing extensive damage in the north-eastern Caribbean. The day after the Category 5 storm dissipated in Mississippi, The Real News

Network published an uptake from the Florida outback, offering, for the argument being sketched here, what might be called a ‘wildlands counter-story’ to the urban irony of Houston. ‘How Florida’s Native Americans Predicted and Survived Hurricanes’ detailed the experience of one Betty Osceola, a Miccosukee Indian woman and Panther Clan member, living with her family in the Everglades, who grew up knowing how to interpret sawgrass blooms as oracles of impending storms, days before they actually arrived (Sainato 2017). Sharing her family’s memories on Facebook in the wake of Irma, she recounted how her Miccosukee and Seminole ancestors were ‘taught not to fear the hurricane’. As renegades from the Seminole Wars of the 1800s they had fought back against President Andrew Jackson’s genocidal attempts to relocate South Florida Indians and ultimately ‘disappeared’ into the Everglades wetlands as refuge, developing local knowledge and survival skills. Numerous stories of family encounters with big storms over generations culminated in telling her personal experience of Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Although berated in the aftermath by other Florida residents for not relocating to a safe shelter – with her husband and children – she refused to comply. Pointedly noting that in contrast to the devastation in Miami, the destruction in their camp in the Everglades was minimal, Osceola emphasised the misperception of all the well-meaning non-Indians arriving to ‘help’. Seeing little kids and no electricity, no running water, no air conditioning and no refrigeration, the counsel was continually advising to ‘go to a shelter’. But, as Osceola explained, what these well-intentioned folks did not realise was that the conditions they were observing were little different from before the hurricane hit. What they were seeing, she said (Sainato 2017):

[W]as our normal way of life. What they thought they were seeing was us having loss of basic necessities as a result of Andrew. Nothing changed for us. I am thankful for that. We lived in an area [*where*] if needed we could hunt and fish. We had a way to get food, we had a hand pump water well. We had firewood to cook with. Our chickees [*huts of palmetto thatch over bald cypress log frame*] were still standing. We were okay. We were self-reliant. And we still are. (n.p.)

In between these two commentaries on the aftermath of this conglomerate episode of 'climate communication' appeared a reflection on the historical settlement of Florida. Miami resident Michael Grunwald offered his take one day before Irma struck. 'A Requiem for Florida, the Paradise That Should Never Have Been' had as its byline: 'as Hurricane Irma prepares to strike, it's worth remembering that Mother Nature never intended us to live here' (Grunwald 2017:n.p.). Indeed. Grunwald goes on to trace the anomaly. As late as 1887, only 300 'hardy pioneers' lived in what an 1847 Treasury Department report had lamented as an impenetrable sawgrass marshland 'suitable only for the haunt of noxious vermin, or the last resort of pestilential reptiles' (Grunwald 2017:n.p.). The first white 'Americans' to visit - soldiers tasked with clearing out the Seminoles in the 1830s - had described it as 'a "hideous," "loathsome," "diabolical" "God-abandoned" mosquito refuge' (Grunwald 2017:n.p.). An army surgeon of the day opined that 'Florida is certainly the poorest country that ever two people quarreled for', while an early visitor to a recently incorporated Miami (the city was formally recognised in 1896) declared that 'if he owned Miami and hell, he would rent out Miami and live in hell' (Grunwald 2017:n.p.). But not to be outdone by mere 'Nature', an early governor by 1909 had trumpeted (Grunwald 2017:n.p.) '[w]ater is the common enemy of the people of Florida', and in short order the state went to war, 'vowing to subdue' the Great Mother, making vast floodplains safe for presidential golf courses and Disney World tourists, exurb dreamscapes and Mar-a-Lago escapades and plotting.

Safety, however, has remained tenuous and the war monstrous and continuous (Grunwald 2017). A 1926 hurricane flattened Miami, killed 400 and ended the coastal real estate boom; another Category 4 in 1928 churned Lake Okeechobee into a dike-ripping rage, killing 2500. Army Corps of Engineers efforts to sequester and redirect virtually 'every drop of water that falls on South Florida' (Grunwald 2017:n.p.) have resulted in more than 2000 miles of levees and canals, pumps and pipes, draining half the Everglades for the sake of boomtown suburbs and sugar fields,

expressways and farms, swimming pool culture and winter-vacation timeshares. They have also led to environmental catastrophes like the wet season rerouting of Okeechobee waters that resulted in the 2016 toxic algae bloom, shredding surrounding fishing and tourism industries, or Everglades drainage, now giving rise to dry season wildfires and structural droughts, affecting drinking water (Grunwald 2017). The largest environmental restoration project in history, authorised in 2000, has little to show. Grunwald concludes the piece, sober. This South Florida hallucination of development is probably unsustainable; the climate change threat existential. Yet the flood of sun-seeking 'pioneers' to the state remains continuous and oblivious, even in the face of sea level rise, storm intensification and estuary pollution. The 'collective amnesia' seems intractable and the 'market for paradise' uninterrupted. For, as he ruefully ends, '[m]ost of us came here to escape reality, not to deal with it' (Grunwald 2017:n.p.).

And here emerges one form of the question this writing is championing. In the just-rehearsed ensemble of response to climate crisis events like Harvey and Irma – will the 'real' realist please stand up? Governor Broward, declaring water a human enemy, and Army Corps of Engineers resolve to redirect the entire flow of the peninsula in service of a corporate wet dream of profit and a suburban delirium of leisure and distraction? Or a Miccosukee Indian woman, unafraid of hurricanes and not needing hi-tech shelter, reading sawgrass blooms as weather omens and living, simple and savvy, 'on the land'? I do not mean to argue that a planet of seven billion can return en masse to the wisdom and practices of the latter. I do mean to say that the former leads by many recent accounts of science to something near to extinction for us as a species. It is an open question for this author – not a taken-for-granted assumption – whether our planetary process of urbanisation is ultimately tenable. And certainly, it is a profound 'throwdown' for faith, how to comprehend God in the mix.

I do side at this juncture with an indigenous call for respect for older ways and humbler manners in relating to more ancient kin

like water and air, plant and animal, season and weather. However, we move 'forward', at this point, it seems utterly requisite to place an ear close to the ground and towards those who have known how to dwell on it, in the same neighbourhood, for generations at a time, without wholesale destruction mandating flight and colonisation elsewhere. I take, as a prime ethical test of the hour, the calculus of whether I can live without requiring, for my lifestyle and eating and very breathing, the de facto enslavement of other humans somewhere else on the face of the planet, whose labour and jeopardy are necessary to secure my food and safety (much less the violent destruction of other life forms, rendering species extinct at the rate of 200 per day now, the wanton volatilisation of minerals and fossils and degradation of water and air, bleaching coral reefs and acidifying ocean depths and depleting potable reservoirs and aquifers, and 'particle-ising' of the entire biosphere with such an onslaught of chemical combinations that some analysts have begun to talk of the 'death of birth' itself).

And the answer, to date, is no. I do not know how to live thus. I am incapable of 'dwelling in place' like Betty Osceola. And to that degree, I deem myself less than fully human. And I find myself increasingly eager to listen – not to the Bible, but to the holy writ of indigenous folk, etched in leaf and branch, wind swirl and water burble, and keen and chortle and snarl and growl of other kind, that even Christian theology in its ancient ken noted as the first 'scripture' the *Book of Creation*. But this First Book begs reading 'locally', within the boundary lines drawn by the ancestral meandering of life-organising water, in that particular '-shed' where one lives. And here, a line from Grunwald's fretful exposition proves prescient. In his testament that the mid-19th century Treasury Department found the Everglades singularly inhospitable, he elaborates to the effect that 'white men avoided it, because they viewed wetlands as wastelands' (Grunwald 2017:n.p.). The conceit is telling, because just such an evaluation governed our species' earliest experimentation with urban-centred structures of domination.

## ■ State-Driven Urbanisation as Human ‘Reduction’

James C. Scott's *Against the Grain* stakes out a claim potent for the argument here. Author of previous texts championing the marginal (with titles like *Weapons of the Weak, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, The Art of Not Being Governed*), Scott is concerned in his latest work to sift the evidence of our early shift from hunting and gathering autonomy to state-controlled coercion. Focusing most of his attention on the Mesopotamian floodplain as the site of the first urbanised ‘statelets’ beginning somewhere around 3300 BCE, Scott’s intention is to disrupt the taken-for-granted narrative of ‘progress’ and ‘advancement’ from supposedly primitive foraging to supposedly civilised agriculture, with plant and animal domestication as the gilded technique of supposed ‘revolution’ (Scott 2017:7–9, 44). Certainly, we long ago began our romance with ‘domestication’. By 500 000 BCE we were well on our way to becoming pyrophytes – a ‘fire-adapted’ species – ‘outsourcing’ digestion to the flames of cook fires, allowing us to spend less energy on processing food internally and more on developing brain mass (Scott 2017:38, 44). Within another 100 000 years we were ‘employing’ fire to clear parts of territories, encouraging the growth of various quickly colonising plants as food and as browse to attract certain animal species favoured for hunting. But fire has also remained a fickle partner – regularly erupting outside our intentions and going her own way – submitting to ‘domestication’ only episodically.

Domestication as a prime directive of sorts, however, only begins to gain traction – as the root word, *domus*, ‘household’, would indicate – in the form of sedentism about 12 000 BCE (Scott 2017:73, 267). Settling into a particular area as forager folk, clumped together in small-scale village life (where wild plants could be readily harvested, such as in south-eastern Turkey) set the stage for more rigorous efforts at re-engineering and niche construction that begin to show up around 9000 BCE. Here the historical record may be testifying to an early response

to climate change, the 'cold snap' of the Younger Dryas (10 800–9600 BCE), perhaps galvanising a turn to different subsistence strategies in the area of the Fertile Crescent. Cultivation and pastoralism register in the record at that time as the first (scattered) instances of concerted domestication of plants and animals. But it would be another 4000 years, as Scott is quick to point out, before such experiments give rise to agrarian economies and even longer for hierarchical state-formation devoted to coercive surplus extraction supporting elite lifestyle and urban organisation (Scott 2017:4, 46).

It is not the mere fact of dwelling together that marks the qualitative change towards oppressive statehood. Quasi-urban dwelling in 'towns' of around 5000 residents is in evidence by 6000 BCE – itself perhaps influenced by another (century-long) cold spell from 6200–6100 BCE (Scott 2017:4). And by 5000 BCE, agrarian villages relying on field crops and livestock are putting in an appearance (Scott 2017:71). These depended in part on the domestication, some 2000 years earlier, of the major 'founder crops' of cereals and legumes (lentils, peas, chickpeas, bitter vetch and flax) as well as intentional 'husbanding' of goats, sheep, pigs and cattle (Scott 2017:6, 44, 73). But such domestication is also not alone the decisive shift. Humans had already long been developing techniques to encourage the wild to yield bounty – burning to clear off unwanted plants, weeding to select for favourable species, pruning, thinning, trimming, transplanting, mulching, relocating protective insects, bark-ringing, coppicing, watering, fertilising and selectively harvesting – and, in relationship to animals, burning to create fodder attractive to game, sparing reproductive females, culling, hunting focused on migratory patterns and life cycles, managing streams to encourage spawning and shellfish beds, relocating eggs and young birds and fish, sculpting habitats, raising juveniles and so on (Scott 2017:66, 70). Everything, except harrowing and sowing – as Scott emphasises, noting the much harder labour involved in ploughing and 're-engineering' a field for concentrated production of a major staple like wheat or barley.

Asking how the shift from the former to the latter took place – how anyone enjoying the relative ease of a hunting and gathering subsistence strategy could be induced to engage in labour-intensive cultivation – Scott imagines a strong impetus offered by what he calls *décrué* or ‘flood retreat’ agriculture (Scott 2017:66–67). And here our previous highlighting of wetlands significance comes clear. The alluvial floodplain between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers in the complex deltaic waterways abutting the northern extremity of the Persian Gulf is almost uniquely fecund, according to Scott. Regular upstream rain cycles flooded the ‘Mesopotamian’ (‘between the rivers’) wetlands half the year, before receding and leaving in their wake a rich alluvium of silt, approximating a well-ploughed and prepared farmer’s field, but absent the labour. Here, mere broadcast of the favoured seeds of wheat or barley, after the flood had cleared out competing flora, would have given these particular grasses a head start, demanded little work and provided a rich harvest.

And indeed, looking to the climatological and remote sensing studies of these now desert-like areas of Iraq and Iran, aridity does not become a factor until around 3100 BCE (Scott 2017:49, 120–121). Until then, the relative warmth and wetness translates into high sea levels and strong seasonal flood pulses along the river channels and intricate deltaic tributaries. Persian Gulf tides, twice per day, push back on the riparian fresh water flow, causing backup, and over the remarkably gentle gradient of the lower Tigris and Euphrates, the effect is a ‘natural’ irrigating of the grasslands surrounding the marshes (Scott 2017:49–50, 260). Agricultural irrigation may have been learned, in part, from alluvial floodwaters themselves, where seeds broadcast on the first silt-zones to emerge from springtime floods are still inundated every 8 h or so by the regular tidal ‘pushbacks’. As this springtime runoff slows and floods retract in late spring, the seedlings – no longer reached by the pushback pulsations – can be transplanted to lower grassy areas, where the waters still collect twice per day. As the recession continues on into early



summer and these areas dry out, the plants will have developed roots sufficient to tap groundwater and no longer need the tidally generated irrigation (Scott 2017:260).

The situation in the Ubaid period (6500–3800 BCE) of early settlement is thus one where Mesopotamian populations are clustering in settled communities, on scattered 'turtlebacks' of land a few feet above the floodplain, enjoying the relative ease of living at the intersection of multiple food webs, including a shifting boundary between freshwater and marine-water ecozones, offering an incredibly rich diversity of wild foods (Scott 2017:50–52). Combining subsistence strategies of hunting, fishing, foraging and gathering across a variety of ecosystems, the populations are enjoying a 'wetlands paradise' (Scott 2017:47). Within easy reach are (Scott 2017):

[R]eeds and sedges for building and food, a great variety of edible plants (club rush, cattails, water lily, bulrush), tortoises, fish, mollusks, crustaceans, birds, waterfowl, small mammals, and migrating gazelles that provided a major source of protein. (p. 50)

Hunting – attuned to the rhythmic temporalities of fish, bird and mammal migrations determined by the water flows – required deep knowledge of the varied patterns and collective effort – but hard work for only a very brief season (Scott 2017:50–53).

And the upshot is twofold for Scott. Subsistence in such an environment is stable, rich and freely available in wild form. And the very breadth of this subsistence web and the cross-strategy skill set developed in learning such are 'insurmountable obstacles to the imposition of a single political authority' (Scott 2017:49). No hunter-gatherer in her or his right mind would trade such a lifestyle for the duress of full-blown cereal agriculture, serving and controlled by an urban centre (Scott 2017:8, 18). In fact, urban-based states eventually do emerge for the first time in the planet's history right here, but only, apparently, in response to a period of aridity following Ubaid warmth and wetness that lowers sea level and river channels and forces coagulation of populations away from 'between the rivers' fertility to river bank settlements of containment walls and tax authorities (Scott 2017:121).

Compared to the early ease and fecundity of wetlands living, these later city-state economies are unstable amalgams of drudgery, debt and disease – only held together by force and regularly experiencing upheavals of population flight, disease outbreak within, revolt, war and collapse. Resource demands foster upstream clear-cutting to supply wood for building, and growing deforestation results in heavy siltation and flooding downstream. At the same time, the silting up of river channels and simultaneous lessening of flows requires ever more elaborate and laborious human irrigation, resulting in increasing salinisation and eventual abandonment of once-arable land near the population centres (Scott 2017:31, 121).

There is not space to rehearse the comparison. But the profile around the globe is similar. Urbanised civilisation emerges historically as a frenzied slave-enterprise, driven continuously to aggress on nearby ‘free’ populations to replace its coercive labour base. It is parasitic upon earlier wetlands settlements, whose denizens have to be forcibly ‘de-skilled’ and regularly policed and controlled as captive workers (Scott 2017:117). They are roped into the drudgery of mono-crop cereal production of grain surplus to support elite living and army organisation and feeding, or coerced into canal digging, wall building, mining, quarrying, logging, monumental construction and textile weaving (Scott 2017:29). Life expectancy dwindles, skill sets disappear, food acquisition and subsistence knowledge simplifies and human beings become vulnerable to pestilential attack, soil degradation and climate change upheaval; human beings are, effectively – as later Spanish colonists in the Americas would so brazenly and (ironically) accurately phrase it – ‘reduced’.

## ■ The Biblical Tradition as Anti-urban ‘Re-Wilding’

And the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land I will show you’ (Gn 12:1). That being after Abram’s father had already taken the

family out of Ur of the Chaldeans to head to Canaan (Gn 11:31). Terah leaves Ur for the land, 'but', as the text says, settles in Haran. And then the son is told once again to exit the city for the hill country. Thus begins the particular witness of the biblical tradition to a certain combination of spirit and practice, of ritual and economy, of myth and politics. Ur is exactly one of the parasitical Mesopotamian city states Scott's genealogy of coercion illuminates, nestled in the alluvial floodplain, preying on surrounding peoples, undergoing regular revolt. Haran is an upstream urban formation, similarly dependent on wetlands' provision and captive labour. And Abe goes feral from each.

The reversion to herder life is not incidental to the biblical witness to divinity or the organisation of 'dwelling'. *Goatwalking* author, Jim Corbett, underscores the radicality. A forest ranger in the border lands between Arizona and Mexico in the last quarter of the 20th century and Sanctuary Movement visionary, provoking US churches to open their pews to refugee El Salvadorans fleeing the US-sponsored civil war devastating their homeland, a defiant prophet trekking the sands with his herds to intercept the desperate migrants before Immigration and Naturalisation Service agents could interdict and deport them back to likely death – Corbett insists the biblical witness is nomadic, in the pastoral sense of the term (Corbett 1991:175, 2005:108). A reversion to living on the land, outside city-state oppression, relying on herd animals for 'reintegration', economically and ecologically, into wildlands environments (Corbett 1991:4, 8, 85, 88, 2005:108, 119–121)! The covenant renewal epithet from Dt 26:5, likely reflecting ancient ritual assent to membership in Israelite polity, is precise, he will assert (Corbett 1991:4, 2005:221–222). The confession is structured with a certain emphasis (Perkinson 2013) – '*Arami oved avi* – [an Aramean wanderer (was/is my) father]. The Invocation of the Aramean Abram as *oved* – 'feral fugitive', 'outlaw nomad', 'renegade outwalker' – is more central to his identity than citing him as *avi* or 'father'. (And nothing in there about 'faith'.)

The upshot is this. The confession is not describing the father of this movement as (incidentally) a nomad herder but rather asserting that ‘nomad wandering’ is the founding action of the movement known as Israel. Anyone going ‘Cimarron’ from the state, indeed, the entire movement of early pastoralism in exiting the slave-labour of urban-controlled grain agriculture and re-habituating to living on the land with one’s herds, can be embraced as ‘father’ (Corbett 2005:108, 120, 1991:4). ‘Israel’ is exactly that kind of initiative! Joining the covenant community implies embracing that ancestral lifestyle value explicitly. And the Genesis accounts (written in exile long after the Deuteronomic ritual invocation) will play out the herder lifestyle emphasis quite explicitly in the double-panelled story of Abraham’s hospitality shown to visitors over against urban Sodom’s opportunism and abuse (Gn 18:1-19:38). The former’s welcome is arguably noteworthy not primarily as an individual virtue, but as a lifestyle practice; pastoral nomadism is renowned for its open-tent policy towards guests – ‘strangers’ are the only source of news from over the horizon, and it is likely the time will come when the need for shelter and hospitality and food will be reversed (Hillel 2006:78–81). And in contrast, Sodom’s advantage-seeking violence is emblematic of urban aggression and ‘business as usual’ almost everywhere.

The delineation sketched for the tradition’s founding act runs through the entire corpus as a continuing struggle. Life in the garden is good. The fall is a fall into settled agriculture characterised by hard labour. The primal murder is farmer Cain killing pastoralist Abel, with the former banished from cultivation to become the first city-builder. The logic of the city is underscored in the post-flood drive to fashion ‘elevation’ by means of artefact – the Tower of Babel as likely memory of Babylonian ziggurat shrines, atop which preside the ruling class elites ‘haloed’ by priestly ritual and royal regalia as quasi-divine sons and daughters, deciding the fate of the captive labour force ‘below’ them with impunity, expended in growing the food, digging the canals and building the monuments (Eisenberg 1999:69, 76–79, 83, 86, 90).

And in counterpoint to such coercion, Abram is told to leave and dwell in Canaan, where indigenous myth and line-of-site vision makes it more likely that the Lebanon Mountains provision of 'blessing' by way of storm and rain and snow will not be forgotten (Eisenberg 1999:75).

Likewise for the Exodus liberation story. Water-born Moses will lead out slaves building storage cities for Pharaoh's grain-hoarding, re-school them in wildlands living, eating manna (likely nutritious, honey-like aphid defecation that is collected by Arab Bedouin today and called *man*; Eisenberg 1999:15-16) and teaching them pastoral nomad skills, before delivering them to the Canaanite hills to engage in subsistence agriculture as a re-tribalised amalgam of ex-slaves and ex-peasants (renegade from the imperially dominated city-state systems on the seaboard). There they will become 'Israel', beholden to a Sabbath-Jubilee continuum of economic practice and eco-ritual, releasing accumulated debt, coerced labour, domesticated animals and ploughed land to 'return to themselves' as wild creatures, in a temporal litany of the sevens (every seven days, the seventh month of Succoth, the seventh 'Sabbath' year and the Jubilee year; Corbett 1991:81-86; 2005:220-223). That primal identity, covenantally immersed in a pastoral nomad memory of surviving on the land structured in Sabbath and Jubilee discipline, will become the axis of subsequent conflict between prophetic keepers of the tradition and continuing betrayal in opting for kingship and urban-dominated statehood – whether articulated in Amos' sycamore-pruning pastoralism (Am 7:14; 8:4-8) or Isaiah's naked-walking warnings (Is 20:2-4; 5:8; 61:2), Jeremiah's excoriation of besieged Jerusalem for repudiating the practice of 'release' (Jr 34:8-22; 12:1,11-12) or Daniel's assertion that the lands will have their Sabbaths (Dn 7:25; 9:2,24-26; II Chrn 36:21; Lv 26:34ff)! Eventually, John the Baptist will call the people back through the waters to the wild side of the Jordan (Jn 1:28, 10:40; Lk 3:3; Myers 2014; Tabor 2012). And Jesus – after his 'vision quest' there (Mk 1:4, 9-13; Jn 1:29-34) – will galvanise a peasant resistance movement disrupting synagogues 'business as usual' (Mk 1:21-28),

frequenting the outback (Mk 1:35–37), learning by the water (Mk 3:7,13; 4:1), receiving direction and comfort from a mountaintop storm encounter (Mk 9: 2–8), lamenting the Holy City’s future (Lk 19:41–44) and finally ‘occupying’ the Temple Mount in announcement of its demise (Mk 11:1–19), accompanied by thunder and then earthquake and eclipse (Mk 15:33,38; Mt 27:45,51–54).

It is only with Paul that the tradition makes a concerted turn towards the city, becomes the substitute practice and vision for urban enclaves of people – ripped, by the voracious Greco-Roman demand for slaves, from their own indigenous contexts and stripped of their cultures, leaving them homeless and mythless and in need of grounding in a shared narrative (I Cor 1:26–29). And with Constantine, that already ‘landless’ practice is entirely inverted into becoming a vehicle for the urbanised imperium, naming and then repressing, killing or converting non-martial rural dwellers as *pagani* heathens (Perkinson 2013:94). And the rest, as they say, is history.

## ■ Personal Struggle in the Midst of Urban Apocalypse

But it is a history that is now ‘eating’ us alive, with no simple recourse or ready-made ‘salvation’ in sight. In concluding, I can only offer a fraught and groping account of the ramifications of this wide-scope understanding of personal life. What is the upshot for me? With my wife – a fitful attempt to relearn from this older posture of our species, both by way of marinating in ancestral myths and grinding away at acquiring a few minimal skills of actual self-reliance – how to make shoes from deer hide, spin wool from alpaca by hand, make cordage from yucca and grow corn on borrowed land. Not that we hope at all to become self-sufficient but to grow in our hands-on recognition of the power of what is being lost and try to become capable of sowing a few seeds of worthiness for a future far beyond our own.

For me, as some mix of Anglo-Nordic-Celt, it is like dipping back into the deep past of Indo-European flight across the Asian

steppe to recover fragments of this same intuition about living in regal symbiosis with the biota and wildness of a not-yet-paved-over ecozone, finding (for instance) enough remnants of Cúchulainn water-ford poetics and Parzival-ian pastoral nomad chivalrics to anchor a fragmentary pride which is able to push back on white privilege and collaborate with indigenous colour in resisting supremacist violence without pretending to be able to exit the complicity.

For her as colonised lowlander whose people also colonised the hunter-gatherer highlander Aeta, it is a return to the archipelago of her birth, peeling off the layers of Peace Core imposition and missionary hubris to recover a babaylan medicine-woman orientation to life, organised now in a diaspora enterprise co-headed by her Santa Rosa-dwelling sister, galvanising kindred desire among disaffected Fil-Ams on this side of the waters to facilitate learning at the feet of such babaylan healers as still work in their original context in the Philippines, visited now each summer (Mendoza & Strobel 2013).

For both of us, spending 20 days per year with a half-native, half-white teacher, Martín Prechtel, survivor of the Guatemalan civil war, whose entire career since as New Mexico cattle rancher, horseman, corn-growing 'wild man', rock musician and visual artist, labouring continuously to perceive and conserve indigenous fragments and intuitions wherever such are still extant, now a virtuoso of this kind of historical recovery across the planet, majoring especially in retrieval of Indo-European shards of memory and practice, but equally immersed in Pueblo, Navajo and Tzutujil Mayan struggle to stay partially outside imperial takeover (Prechtel 2012).

## ■ The Politics of an Animist Turn

And of course, all of that is immensely privileged and problematic and at one level indeed, 'more of the same', in our day of rampant settler state dispossession and orientalist warfare and racist incarceration, as a theorist like Andrea Smith might insist

(Smith 2006). And so – for both of us, political commitment to black and brown and red struggle on the ground in core city Detroit is paramount! In recent years for me that has meant continual involvement on the street in resisting water shut-offs and foreclosures of families of black people – marching on JP Morgan Chase in downtown Detroit to try to secure a moratorium, interrupting city council deliberations on shut-off policy, organising water distribution centres in churches and community outlets, risking arrest in blocking trucks going out to turn off valves in neighbourhoods, getting arrested (Perkinson 2017). And all of it as mere support for and coordinated with movement leadership coming predominantly from older African-American women long on the front lines in the Car City, more recently joined by younger activists and artists of mixed race, making common cause in the crucible of emergency management assaults on city assets and impoverished citizens.

Most recently, in the summer of 2015, that collaborative street engagement across multiple constituencies ushered in a gathering to learn from each other’s sources of inspiration. Collaboratively named the ‘Detroit Spirit and Roots Gathering’, the three-day event sought to cross-pollinate stories especially from hip-hop artists, Ojibwa activists and Christian ‘anarcho-primitivists’ sharing a common politics around the bankruptcy in this hour of neo-liberal apocalypse. Far too intense to even summarise here, the encounter was sharply fraught, richly tense and complexly negotiated. Issues of cultural appropriation, and a default privileging (in spite of all intentions to the contrary) of both white ‘fragility’ and settler myopia, nearly shattered the gathering. But enough listening and embrace ensued to allow the cauldron of intentions and experiences to cook up without entirely boiling over (hot and rattling as the steam did become!).

In outcome – a major question began to make itself paramount. At its roots, the land beneath our soles bears a witness not yet fully comprehended in the activist intentionality of most of us who are non-native occupants of the Car City. The beginning of our action is our feet and they tread someone else’s soil.



The context remains settler colonialism in this nation state and its violation must become ground zero for our theorising. One young 'collaboration in thinking' declaims for critical projects writ large that, '[d]ecolonization is not a metaphor' (Bowman 2017; Tuck & Yang 2012). Until the land is returned to those from whom it has been stolen, all other projects threaten merely to perpetrate more of the same. Initiatives like Occupy, Re-Opening a Sense of the Commons, Community Gardening, and Homesteading all work with what remains native land, thus continuing the settler enterprise, and so easily make its hegemony seem normal. Until we go back to the root of takeover, all alliances, all collaborations, all friendships in the movement must be seen as provisional and subject to an indigenous intentionality that must not be asked up front to okay the continued presence of any of us who are not native. Yes, it makes a profound difference whether we arrived by choice or in a shackle. But the land and its occupation remains the prerogative of native say-so.

As decolonisation scholars Tuck and Yang insist, the ethic for now is one of incommensurability (Tuck & Yang 2012:28-36). Our work does not proceed by first figuring out how to ratify our settler presence here but begins by positing its overturning. An actively embraced limbo is the necessary position that any of us who are non-native must assume, if we would collaborate with the likes of movements such as Ojibwa Water Walks (around the Great Lakes Basin), Dakota Access Pipe Line (and other pipeline) Resistance, Idle No More or the impetus to repudiate the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (Newcomb 2008; Zauzmer 2016). And such movements must become the litmus test for our thinking about movement work in general, if not for our actual time and energy.

What might such mean for the academy? I can only speak from my own tiny platform of struggle and effort in an inner-city, majority-black, Christian seminary. Where I teach (Ecumenical Theological Seminary), little of this is extant. I try to make it so. I am learning to reread the Christian tradition from the ground up. Under the influence of Corbett's writings on pastoral nomadism, in collaboration with watershed activist Ched Myers as friend and

co-conspirator, cautioned by Donna Haraway's 'chthulucene' weaving of kin, listening long and hard to the likes of Winona LaDuke's 'sacred relations' and Vine Deloria's 'vision-questing' and focusing specifically on scholarship about the history of the strait (such as the work of Kay Givens-McGowan on sturgeon ritual and Richard White on the 'middle ground'), I now posit the bioregion as the unit of social existence and political organising and theoretical hermeneusis par excellence (Deloria 1999:120; Givens-McGowan 2003:27; Haraway 2015:159-161; LaDuke 2005; White 1991). In rereading the literature to which my scholarship is beholden, how reimagine the line of conflict Jewish scripture traces within itself (reviewed above) between those engulfed in imperial machinations and those seeking to exit such by way of their Bedouin-beloved herd animals and Baal-schooled small farming initiatives, from the point of view of the River Jordan watershed itself (Havrelock 2011)? How grant animals and plants and waters and clouds agency in the retelling of holy writ? And then in an attempt at 'self-composting', how reread Christianity from the margins of its imposition on indigenous peoples? Perhaps Cargo cults and Rasta rags and Vodun drawings and ghost dances need to become the canon by which my 'discipline' deconstructs the canon of orthodox domination. An anticanon that opens beyond itself to return us to something of an indigenous sense of animation! But such a rereading must itself begin by learning to learn from those others who still dwell in an animated theatre of eco-reciprocity. That means also embracing their politics. And ultimately, of course, the question is one of how we commit to live in place in the present.

How are eco-criticism and indigenous studies invited to engage my own little segment of the academy (Teves, Smith & Raheja 2015)? So far, in only the most incipient attempts at mythically animated reimagination and direct-action collaboration (although some 300 pastors responding to a call by Standing Rock elders to show up in support in the fall of 2016 did initiate a ritual burning of one of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery papal bulls). And that, I think, is a grave problem!

Let me close with an extended quote from Arundhati Roy, writing in *Walking with the Comrades* (Roy 2011):

Here in India, even in the midst of all the violence and greed, there is still immense hope. If anyone can do it, we can do it. We still have a population that has not yet been completely colonised by that consumerist dream. We have a living tradition of those who have struggled for Gandhi's vision of sustainability and self-reliance, for socialist ideas of egalitarianism and social justice. We have Ambedkar's vision, which challenges the Gandhians as well as the Socialists in serious ways. We have the most spectacular coalition of resistance movements with experience, understanding and vision. Most important of all, India has a surviving adivasi (native) population of almost 100 million. They are the ones who still know the secrets of sustainable living. If they disappear, they will take those secrets with them. Wars like Operation Green Hunt will make them disappear. So victory for the prosecutors of these wars will contain within itself the seeds of destruction, not just for adivasis, but eventually, for the human race. That's why the war in Central India is so important. That's why we need a real and urgent conversation between all those political formations that are resisting this war. The day capitalism is forced to tolerate non-capitalist societies in its midst and to acknowledge limits in its quest for domination, the day it is forced to recognise that its supply of raw material will not be endless is the day when change will come. If there is any hope for the world at all, it does not live in climate change conference rooms or in cities with tall buildings. It lives low down on the ground, with its arms around the people who go to battle every day to protect their forests, their mountains and their rivers because they know that the forests, the mountains and the rivers protect them. The first step towards reimagining a world gone terribly wrong would be to stop the annihilation of those who have a different imagination – an imagination that is outside of capitalism as well as communism. An imagination which has an altogether different understanding of what constitutes happiness and fulfilment. To gain this philosophical space, it is necessary to concede some physical space for the survival of those who may look like the keepers of our past, but who may really be the guides to our future. To do this, we have to ask our rulers: Can you leave the water in the rivers? The trees in the forest? Can you leave the bauxite in the mountain? If they say they cannot, then perhaps they should stop preaching morality to the victims of their wars. (pp. 212-214)

# Babaylan Healing and Indigenous ‘Religion’ at the Postcolonial Crossroads: Learning from Our Deep History as the Planet Grows Apocalyptic

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*The time we live in today is one of epochal transition as far-reaching as the one from hunting and gathering to settled agriculture 11,000 years ago, and from agriculture to industry 300 years ago.*

- Grace Lee Boggs

*Remembering excluded voices ... evokes the trickster. In this process, we are transformed and cannot continue to be who we once were.*

- Kremer & Jackson-Paton (2014:n.p.)

## ■ Introduction

I write this on the way home from a gathering of a Beloved Community I am part of in Detroit, Michigan, USA. A city that used to be the fourth largest in the world, built by a booming automotive industry, in its heyday touted as the 'Paris of the Midwest', home of the Great Industrial Revolution in the US, today Detroit is the poster child of deindustrialisation and urban decay, decimated by white flight, racialised violence, police brutality, redlining and – over the years – unrelenting neo-liberal assault on the city's economy. In the opening shot of the documentary film, *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*, the late long-time Asian-American activist, philosopher, elder and featured icon of the film, Grace Lee Boggs, says matter-of-factly, surveying the devastation of the once-grand city (Sorrels & Sekimoto 2015:n.p.), 'I feel so sorry for people who are not living in Detroit. People always striving for size, to be a giant [...] [T]his is a symbol of how giants fall'.

Meditations of the Beloved Community are never without the grief of what is going on in the city; black mothers burying their children in early graves, black brothers and fathers routinely getting hauled off to jail, homes with elderly and/or young children getting their water shut off, long-time residents having their homes foreclosed, gentrification causing skyrocketing property taxes and – happening as we speak – ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raids terrorising immigrant communities in our midst. With unemployment rates as high as 50%, the

question of whether to have heat in the winter or to put food on the table agonises poor residents.

On this particular morning, the tears were of grief around a young black mother, six months pregnant, considered by many in the community as a 'woke' sister (involved in various environmental and social justice advocacies in the city), was charged with two counts of felonious assault and slapped with a two-year mandatory minimum jail sentence for pulling a gun (licensed and without incident) on a neighbour in self-defence after the latter had tried to run her and her daughter down with a vehicle following an altercation. She had refused a plea bargain, confident of a jury acquittal, but instead received a guilty verdict, the self-defence motive rejected.

Everywhere we turn there seem to be states of emergency of one kind or another, fires constantly needing to be put out. As people of faith, we pray, we mobilise, we do what we can to respond, yet nothing seems enough. The much-touted corporate-sponsored urban renewal programme selling Detroit to prospectors as the new 'land of opportunity', enticing investors and young (predominantly white) 'cultural creatives' to set up shop in the newly 'freed-up' land, is the other part of the equation, more specifically the reality gentrification driving the disenfranchisement of poor (majority mixed race) city residents in what Jones (2004) refers to as the phenomenon of ethnic cleansing through 'urban renewal'.

I had come to Detroit about a decade ago from a much better resourced city, Denver, Colorado, to be in the same place as my partner (also a contributor to this volume, James Perkinson) after efforts to have him join me permanently in my place of work at the University of Denver failed to pan out. Before that, home for me was a faraway country, the Philippines, that often dreamt of this one – not in its present nightmarish state but in that mythical state of a 'land flowing with milk and honey' where 'you can be whomever you want provided you are willing to work hard'. Friends finding out that I gave up a tenured faculty position

in Denver to move to Detroit have no qualms asking me what drug I have been taking or whether I had totally lost my mind. Detroit, I must admit, is a hard place. Driving through its streets, one gets the feeling of being in a bombed-out city; indeed, its landscape of dilapidated buildings and partly burned-out structures has popularised a new form of tourism known as 'ruin porn' or 'ruins photography', defined by Wikipedia (n.d.:n.p.) as 'the capture of urban decay and decline in the post-industrial zones of the world' in a kind of perverse voyeuristic curiosity.

But Detroit is also a searing pedagogy about the end-logic of a civilisational system premised ultimately on the dynamic of conquest – the domination of nature, the exploitation of the Earth as 'mere resource' in an ever-growing emphasis on technology in human life, the rule of money and the relegation of others (the poor and people of colour) to the class of 'disposable populations' within the system's economy after squeezing from them every ounce of labour value possible.

In a historic conversation with world system theorist Immanuel Wallerstein at the 2010 US Social Forum held in Detroit, the then 95-year-old veteran Detroit activist, Grace Lee Boggs, (mentioned earlier) posed the question: 'What time is it on the clock of the world?' This was her way of foregrounding the crucial need for us to understand our place in history. Witnessing first-hand the outworking of the logic of industrial civilisation in Detroit's decline from being the centre of wealth creation and the cradle of the Industrial Revolution to becoming the first post-industrial city in the world, she named the time we live in today as one of epochal transition 'as far-reaching as the one from hunting and gathering to settled agriculture 11000 years ago, and from agriculture to industry 300 years ago' – intimating the kind of radical rethinking and reimagining of human life we have to do if we are to stem the tide of utter chaos, violence and eco-catastrophe that we see coming down in our world today.

The privilege accorded me as a postcolonial subject (I will say more about this peculiar positioning shortly) living in Detroit at this moment in history is that of being allowed a front seat, as it

were, to the unravelling of an old story that has all but lost its *raison d'être* but that yet refuses to die or yield to another story. As I like to tell my friends, Detroit is no anomaly but a sign. What is staring us in the face may well be an augury of the future of all major cities in the world a decade or so from now. Ours – devastating as it is – is merely an auspicious, if perverse, head start in the apprehending of the lessons, and our role as people of faith is to learn to read the signs, to find some other ground in which to root a new vision of the possible and hopefully to take part in the midwifing of a more heartening story than that proffered by the old story's architects and purveyors.

That old ground and new story are rooted in a commonly shared species-ancestry of indigeneity. The text to follow here will map these common roots by way of the intersections of faith and spirituality, urban and civilisational logic and the challenge of radical alterity as refracted through the lens of decolonisation and indigenisation.

Part of our process in our little Detroit Beloved Community is working through a workbook, titled *Ethnoautobiography: Stories and Practices for Unlearning Whiteness, Decolonization, Uncovering Ethnicities* (Kremer & Jackson-Paton 2014), which I have been asked to lead the group in exploring. The triple task of 'unlearning whiteness', 'decolonisation' and 'uncovering ethnicities' as described in the workbook are processes that I have found in both my teaching and personal practice as necessary in prying open the suffocating boundedness of modern ideology that limits understanding of our present predicament mostly to the constricting oeuvre of the last 500 years. The work centres on 'indigenous reclamation' – a way of returning us to a vision of a larger, more expansive sense of self that serves as an invitation for us to climb down from the pedestal of human supremacy. It is a process that involves reconnection with all that formerly sustained indigenous life on the planet, including return to embeddedness and relationship with wild nature, land-place, community, ancestry, mythic stories, dreams, spirituality, memory and imagination and so on – connections that, in modernity's emphasis on individualism and a truncated form of human



rationality, have had to be eschewed, denied, or replaced with dominating or distorted kinds of relationships, thereby creating the condition of 'normative dissociation', now the default condition of modern humans. Returning the self to a relationship of reciprocity with both human and more-than-human kin is believed to open a path towards recovery of indigenous wholeness, health and balance.

The narration here therefore will be ethnoautobiographical; the coming-to-awareness of a colonised Filipina subject growing up Methodist Protestant, modern schooled and educated, hailed into born-again Christian experience, then radically rearranged in her sense of the Sacred and of the world through a transformative encounter with indigenous life and spirituality. What this latter life-altering encounter with indigenous life has taught me, encoded in a living healing tradition in my home country known by the name *babaylan* (among many other ethnolinguistic references), is what I offer in this chapter. I offer it as a way of engaging the issues raised in this volume – among others, how differently to understand what has brought us to this place of apocalyptic precipice (some say as dire as portending the sixth mass extinction, with 25% of the Earth's total species disappearing in the last 500 years – a rate said to be 1000 to 10 000 times more than the normal)? How differently to tell the story of urbanisation or city-building at such a time as this? What possible glocal responses can come from abjected voices such as those of indigenous peoples that might open alternative horizons to those afforded by the global monoculture of consumption-driven 'progress' and ceaseless material advancement? How to understand what we mean by 'just faith'?

## ■ Out of the (Earth's) Womb and into Colonial Subjection

As already hinted, I work towards the deep tendrils of these questions by tracking their unfolding in my own personal journey at some length, recounting, in the process, the development of the contemporary indigenisation movement in the Philippine

academy and the birth of a more grass-roots indigenisation effort centred in an organisation called the Center for Babaylan Studies (CfBS), in the diaspora. Some of the narration that follows comes from an expanded version of the required self-introduction in our Beloved Community process (with parts appearing elsewhere in other published and forthcoming essays). The goal of the narration is instrumental, intending to provide cultural grounding and contextualisation for the discussion that follows.

I am a native of San Fernando, Pampanga, in Central Luzon, Philippines, the daughter of Esperanza Luna and Horacio Salonga Mendoza, second to the youngest in a brood of six (one boy and five girls). Our mother, with the assistance of the local midwife, gave birth to me (as she did all my other siblings) on a wooden *papag* [bed] in our cousins' basement where our family rented for years.

My father named me Susanah after Susanna Wesley, virtuous mother of Anglican minister John Wesley, founder of Methodism, our Tatang being an early convert to Methodism, against the Roman Catholic norm. My second name, Lily, ostensibly came from Eli Lilly, the US pharmaceutical company that produced the drug mistakenly administered to my mother as she was giving birth to me, intended to induce contractions but instead stopping them, nearly costing her life (a rather strange thing to be named after, if you ask me).

Both 'Luna' and 'Mendoza' are Spanish names, adopted by our ancestors when the Spanish colonial government decreed the systematisation of the selection and registration of names of Filipinos by having them adopt first and last names instead of having only one as was the native cultural norm.

The place where I was born, the Philippines, is named after a conquistador, King Phillip II of Spain, an indelible trace of more than 350 years of Spanish colonisation of the islands beginning in 1521. The particular piece of land where my ancestors had originally settled and that my family ended up inhabiting is called Pampanga, a province in Central Luzon, one of the major Philippine islands. Its native place name originated from the term

*pampang ilug*, meaning 'banks of a river' – an incredibly fertile land that grew almost anything planted in it – filled with rice, sugar cane, corn and all kinds of vegetables and fruit trees, its rivers and streams teeming with fish, shrimps, crabs and other riparian beings – at least in those days before full-on civilisation-building took over.

We are told that we are mostly descended from the Chinese who came from Taiwan, but oral traditions passed down through generations say we actually descend from a much older people – from the Malays migrating from the Malay Peninsula and Lake Singkarak in what is now West Sumatra, who settled by the riverbanks as early as 300 to 400 AD, with many more arriving in the 11th to 12th centuries. Interestingly, what is not mentioned in this story of my people's origins is that prior to our Malay ancestors' arrival, there was a much older people, called the Aeta tribes, dark-skinned, kinky-haired, skilled hunters and gatherers, who were already in the area 20 000 to 30 000 years ago, having migrated from Borneo using land bridges that began to be submerged only around 10 000 to 15 000 years later.

For many years, we lived downstairs in our cousins' basement. It was not until decades later that our family was finally able to afford to buy a small nipa hut in the barrio of Teopaco, next door to *calesa* drivers with their handsome horses and their backyard stables. The hut had the traditional thatched roof native to most places in the country, which kept it cool year-round, and bamboo-slatted flooring that allowed air to further circulate freely (to clean, you simply swept any dirt through the slats, no sweat!). We loved it. It was worlds apart from the dark, dank basement of our cousins – although even there, we made a life for ourselves, spending most of our waking hours outdoors climbing trees – fruit-bearing *saresa*, *caimito*, *santol* and *sampaloc* – in our cousins' yard and playing with our cousins and the neighbourhood kids. During rainy days, we spent time watching the nearby creek swell and roil while outdoing one another telling scary stories about the old man who lived in the house right next to it.

Some of my fondest memories are of sitting at our Apu Sinang's feet listening to her tell stories as we strung fragrant *sampaguita* leis or as we watched with fascination as she prepared her betel nut chew, breaking open the nut and sprinkling shell lime on the meat, then rolling the concoction in betel pepper leaf before putting the bite-size pouch into her mouth for chewing.

Then there were the home deliveries of fresh milk in unbranded glass bottles that you handed back when the milkman came back around the next time, as well as the early morning toot-toot announcing the arrival of Apay Tinapay on his bike, the hot *pandesal* vendor who magically kept the fresh-baked buns steaming hot in his big newspaper-insulated basket hanging by the side of his bike.

In our neighbourhood, we stood out as 'different' for being Protestants in a predominantly Catholic country. Although our mother was raised Catholic, she dutifully converted and became church organist of our local Methodist church upon marrying our father. For us, it meant being inured to a lot of wrong belief – or so we thought; the idolising of saints (particularly during town fiestas when elaborate processions were held in their honour), the fanatical self-flagellation of devotees during Holy Week, the veneration of Mother Mary, the belief in purgatory and what we regarded as many other 'superstitious' (pagan) beliefs that continued to thrive underneath Catholicism but were summarily zapped (exiled into the unconscious is more like it) in the heavily rationalised, sanitised observance of Methodist Protestantism. (Only much later would I realise that what are often labelled 'superstitious beliefs' among native folk are simply practices that have lost their mooring in stories.) In all this, the feeling of having a leg up over our Catholic counterparts came at a price – our exclusion from many community celebrations that looked like so much fun, if fearsomely 'idolatrous', 'irrational' and, at best, 'misguided' from where we sat on our self-righteous pedestal.

Notwithstanding the long reign of Spanish colonialists in my country, subsequent US occupation was what invariably shaped my family's cultural formation. Along with American Protestant missionaries who became our close family friends and the Peace Corps Volunteer teachers we had in the elementary grades, two older sisters taught Philippine culture at the Wurtsmith Elementary School (a US Department of Defense Dependents School inside the US Clark Air Base in the neighbouring town of Angeles) and routinely brought home American values, regaling us with army and naval songs, country music, good housekeeping and other civilising influences. I still recall my excitement every Fourth of July when the military base in our province opened its gates to the public (the only time Filipinos were ever allowed entry into the base), when our sisters took us with them to take a peek at the sprawling, manicured grounds – the vast camp grounds appearing to us like a whole other country – and we would get our complimentary treats of apple, chocolate bar and hamburger sandwich wrapped in stars and stripes handed to us in little brown bags. This closeness of our family to the white world of the Americans (through Protestantism, the Peace Corps Volunteers and the influence of the US bases) served as some kind of cultural capital *vis-à-vis* our Catholic cousins and neighbours. Yet, strangely enough, it was I who secretly envied our Catholic cousins, who, though with lesser means than us, seemed to be freer in spirit, laughed more easily and had no affectation whatsoever.

Our Tatang worked as a sales representative of the Philippine Bible Society and our Ima earned a small income on the side as a piano teacher. To supplement our family income, our Tatang raised pigs and chickens. I still remember the fun of searching out eggs in the early morning that the hens had laid and having my turn at collecting kitchen scraps from the neighbours, pail in hand, to supplement the store-bought commercial feeds that my father reserved for the pigs. With my five siblings, I shared duties feeding the pigs and the chickens.

In the kitchen, I routinely assisted my Ima in killing chickens when we needed to cook one, helping to hold it down while she

slit its throat and waited for the blood to drain onto a bowl with uncooked rice that my Ima would also then cook and make use of later (no part of the fowl ever went to waste). Thus, I never had the luxury growing up of not knowing that a life had to be taken in order for us to live. When it came time for the pigs to be slaughtered, it was an especially hard time because somehow you would have bonded with the feisty creatures through the daily chore of feeding, but it also caused us never to forget that their life was what allowed us to go to school, as proceeds from the sale of the meat were what was used to pay for our tuition.

Being a lover of animals, birds, trees and plants, our Tatang kept a lush garden in our front and back yards. He also dug a huge compost pit at the back of our modest nipa hut where we would throw in kitchen scraps and other organic material and wait for it to 'cook' and magically turn into this rich organic nutrient that is good for growing things. And because we were surrounded by *calesa* drivers (drivers of horse-drawn carriages who kept their stables right in their own backyard) we also regularly collected horse, or sometimes carabao, manure to use as additional fertiliser in the garden. Those were the days when I had no fear of dirt, nor was I overly squeamish about manure or rotting things. (For before the massive invention of disinfectants, insecticides and all kinds of modern chemicals, what was one's defecation was simply another's food.)

In those days, we did not have refrigeration. As a result, my mother would always go to the wet market each day to buy fresh fish and vegetables. Some of the fish she would cure with vinegar and garlic, along with salt and pepper, and set the pieces out to dry, giving us delicious *daing* [dried fish] for breakfast the following morning.

Our Ima sewed all our clothes. At Easter and Christmas, we could always count on having new handmade dresses, courtesy of our mother. I do not remember us having much of store-bought possessions. Our toys growing up were mostly found

objects – sardine tin cans that we turned into go-carts using soft drink bottle caps as wheels, *gumamela* leaves that we pretended were tea cups and soft twigs of the *saresa* tree that became our convenient hair curlers. And because we did not own a television set then, we made up our own entertainment, having a contest on who could find recognisable shapes and figures among the thick cumulus clouds, inventing animal shadows on the wall with adept hands using a flashlight at night and, best of all, sitting at the feet of our Apu Sinang, listening to her tell stories.

Life was good.

Until I got to college and became exposed to life in the city and realised all of a sudden that we were 'poor' – never mind if we never had to skip a meal, had decent clothes to wear and pretty much had all our needs met.

The city was a whole other world altogether – fast-paced, competitive and impersonal, its landscape dominated by imposing cement structures and buildings and flashing neon signs at night. One could not get around just by walking; you either had to take the bus or another gasoline-fuelled vehicle, which always made me feel nauseous – accustomed as I was mostly to walking or riding the horse-drawn *calesa* back in my home province. Seeing my *collegiala* classmates from the exclusive girls' schools arrive in their chauffeur-driven cars, while I had to take public transportation, gave me my first taste of painful disadvantage – something I experienced as a cause for shame.

I also learned quickly that I lacked the cultural markers of 'class' because my Kapampangan-accented English speaking made me sound *promdi* [from the province]. As the revolutionary writer Frantz Fanon (1967) said:

[7]o speak the colonial language means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization [...] To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. (p. 8)

It was precisely what my twisted rebellious tongue never allowed me to do – to fully take on that foreign world, the exclusive world of the elite or, in today’s parlance, the upwardly mobile folk who knew how to assimilate successfully into that world’s idiom.

My handmade clothes also readily marked me as being out of synch with the ready-to-wear, industry-sewn fashion of the day. It was the moment I first became ashamed of my mother’s sewing (something that now fills me with great sorrow) when I hankered for store-bought clothes instead. When my mini-skirted older sister, who was quicker to adapt to city culture than I was, came home one day boasting proudly that she had been mistaken for a ‘Theresiana’ at a college dance party (St. Theresa’s then being one of those wealthy exclusive girls’ schools), that sealed even more my awareness that either I would work hard to find ways to shed my *promdi* ways and be part of the in-crowd or else find an altogether different basis for self-worth as an individual striving to belong.

It is this sudden awareness of an invisible unnamed measure determining who is and who is not a worthy human being that became both the source of my intense struggle and my intellectual fascination to try to figure out.

In college I became a ‘born-again Christian’. Despite growing up in church and in Sunday School, I learned that prior to consciously ‘accepting Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour’, I had only been a ‘nominal Christian’, no matter my devotion. Becoming born-again through one of the campus ministries began what would become one of my life’s great adventures, discipling many in Bible study and leading many of my peers in the task of ‘biblical integration’. Tutored by bright Christian intellectuals, I, in turn, became an ardent evangelist and a self-appointed missionary to the intelligentsia for much of the decades that followed, mentoring graduate students, diplomats-in-training and faculty members in biblical integration. Although I finished my masters in Philippine Studies and for many years



became centrally involved in a state-sponsored 'Cultural Liberation Program' (under then-President Ferdinand Marcos), I took in much of the nationalist discourse mainly through the lens of 'incarnational' theology, adroitly learning Filipino native 'culture' (still in the singular at the time), only to have it serve as a vehicle for furthering Christian missionisation. Born-again evangelicalism presented a clear and all-encompassing narrative that gave a grand meaning and purpose to life. In its culture-transcendent and universalist articulation (imported from the British and North American theological traditions of the campus ministry I became part of), it provided certainty and comforting assurance.

Or so it seemed. Yet, unbeknownst to many, for much of my Christian life, I was beset by a wrenching sense of being 'weighed and found wanting'. In private, despite my spiritual leadership in circles, my Christian walk was far from life-affirming. Much of my prayer life was consumed with morbid self-introspection and grovelling supplications, always asking for forgiveness for a sense of generalised failure whose source was a mystery to me. It was a malady that no amount of preaching of God's unconditional love could soothe or alleviate, no matter how fervently my mind sought to believe such assurance. It was only later that I began to understand the nature of that mysterious affliction when I heard the Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paolo Freire, say in an interview, '[w]hen all the representations around you have nothing to do with your own reality, it is like looking into a mirror and finding no one there'. Indeed, growing up under colonial institutions (the US having systematically inscribed its Western cultural ideology into all our institutions, education in particular) was an exercise in self-alienation. In a kind of reverse ethnocentrism, one learned about oneself and the world from the view from the outside, so much so that one grows up split, with one's native subjectivity abjected, driven to the margins, while conscious awareness is consumed with this other world that had nothing at all to do with one's lived experience.

Whether speaking of the dynamics of encounter with city life or with Euro-Western Christianity and modern education, what I have found is that the terrain of encounter, far from a level playing field, is saturated with coercive power. In the Philippines, a purportedly 'postcolonial' country where the foreign colonisers have long gone, such conditions of domination continue to inflict much of their damage viscerally, mostly out of conscious awareness. Our notions of worthiness, of what it means to live meaningfully, of what constitutes wholeness and well-being, have all been effectively hijacked, supplanted by other notions that purport to be universal (not culture-bound) and the only legitimate ones. How this dominating process happens largely through the power of symbolic representations (alternatively theorised in the literature as 'ideology', 'hegemony', 'regime of truth', *doxa* or 'normativity') would become my animating scholarly passion, tracking meticulously the discursive production, naturalisation and universalisation of what often turn out, in the end, to be merely historically and culturally contingent assumptions.

## ■ Indigenous Encounter: Pathway to Release and Freedom

The unexpected irruption into my all-Christian world of what I consider a spirit visitation from another world would serve as my gateway out of self-negation into a newfound freedom. I, too, like the renowned Christian writer C.S. Lewis (1955), was 'surprised by joy' – but pointing in a quite different direction than his.

The occasion was a graduate course in the humanities titled 'The Image of the Filipino in the Arts', taught by an ethnomusicology professor, where I encountered for the first time the amazing artistic creations of our indigenous communities that were least penetrated by modern development and Christian missionisation – their intricate weaving designs, the wild vibrant colours of their textiles, their basketry, dances, songs, chants, mythic stories and

so on – and what they signified in terms of a different way of being in the world. I was stunned! Nothing prepared me for the power of that encounter with wild, untamed beauty – complex geometric designs that mathematicians noted could not have been wilfully conceived by the rational mind, mellifluous melodies able to call up grief out of all its hidden places, polyphonic sounds and rhythms coming from native instruments that not only sounded but looked utterly beautiful, dances as diverse as their ecologies of origination, intricate architectural structures that used not a single nail to bind parts together and so on, and all of these creations of beauty ritually sourced, many given in dreams, with materials taken from the wild only with the accompanying respect, honouring and asking for permission, and, always, in service of beauty.

I still remember walking back to my dorm room bawling my heart out, not knowing what it was that hit me from all the innocent descriptions of those works of art. It was as if my body knew something that my mind could not (yet) fathom. Only later would studies in Filipino Liberation Psychology [*Sikolohiyang Pilipino*], along with insights from Frantz Fanon, Carl Jung, Paolo Freire and other critical thinkers, provide me with the conceptual tools with which to make sense of that moment of epiphany. It was one that I now understand as a moment of profound recognition. Here, at last, was a people I could finally belong to and identify with, who were beautiful and whose lives were beautiful, contrary to their depiction in the textbook (colonial) narratives as 'backward', 'primitive' and 'in need of civilising'. That moment also gave me permission to finally get off the hopeless treadmill of vying for entry and inclusion into that other world – the world of the white colonial masters where successful assimilation would have meant grave psychic violence from the resulting dynamic of self-hatred and cultural deracination it invariably generated.

It was also the moment I came to understand that the sense of never being enough, of not being able to measure up *vis-à-vis* Western ways of being, was not simply my own, but one shared

(to varying degrees) by an entire people who have collectively undergone the violence of a protracted colonial history that is not really over but ‘a continuing past’ (Constantino 1978, from the book title). It would take another decade or so, however, before I came to understand that my Christian formation was part and parcel of that process of colonial subject formation. For the years that followed, I would pursue recovery of my repressed indigenous memory with the same passion and intensity as I did my Christian discipleship.

When a series of personal crises led me to apply for doctoral studies in the US, the cultural awakening that began for me in that class in the humanities prompted me to study the growing Philippine indigenisation movement both in the homeland and among Filipino scholars and community practitioners in the US diaspora for my dissertation topic. That study took the form of a comprehensive intellectual project pushing back on the dismissive stance knee-jerked by practitioners of the ‘post-theory’ discourses (of postmodernism, post-structuralism and postcolonialism) towards all movements for indigenous reclamation (conjuring spectres of ethnic cleansing and sectarian separatism) and at the same time offering a much more nuanced and contextualised analysis of the movement as it arose in the Philippine academy and was exported abroad among Filipino American scholars. My dissertation, now a book publication (cf. Mendoza 2002/2006), became the first programmatic examination of the Philippine indigenisation movement both in the homeland and in the diaspora, one that valorised the movement’s creative potential for knowledge transformation, at least in its insurgent (vs hegemonic) stage of formation, that is, while the movement was still struggling to birth something new. Beyond the impulse to counter the epistemic distortions of the US-introduced academic disciplines and their mangling of Filipino ways of being, I found fascination and comfort in the desire to give form to an alternative discourse on self and nation no longer beholden to Europe and

the West as its primary discourse partners. In other words (Mendoza 2006):

What would our discourse look like when we no longer feel the need to continually justify ourselves to others but instead begin talking among ourselves? What other kinds of issues, subjects of discussion, and interests begin to emerge? [...] What new perspectives might arise [...]? (p. 168)

In the US diaspora, the movement's rise in the early 1990s served as a belated popular awakening to a different mode of relation to Empire other than the default norm of assimilation, which had earlier garnered for the Filipino American community the moniker 'the invisible minority'. Among others, it witnessed the flowering of nationalist cultural pride and a more empowering sense of community among a people previously racialised and often consigned to the bottommost rung of the ladder of Asian-American ethnic hierarchies. Of particular significance was the rise of what Strobel (1996) calls, 'the born-again Filipino' phenomenon, that is, the power of the first-time (re-) connection with an older, more affirming genealogy than the figure of the 'little brown American wannabe' being akin to a religious conversion. Activist scholars took it further and avowed (Gonzalves as quoted in Mendoza 2002-2006):

It is never only exclusively about the subjectivity of the ethnic or the racial 'minority;' nor is it ever exclusively a critique of modernity's heavy trace of racism [...] It is also about recovering the political significance of style, language, food, religion, theology, and the arts. (p. 176)

The impact of the first-time exposure to this alternative discourse on Filipino subjectivity reverberated beyond the halls of the academy to the community, infusing such fields as mental health, social work, youth education and other kinds of cultural vocations with a new figuration of Filipino subjectivity, displacing much of the pathologising ascriptions of the old colonial framework premised on the 'cultural deficit model'. Formerly abjected Filipino cultural patterns that went against the rationalism and individualism of the West began to be recognised as actually

redeeming, for example, the values of *kapwa* or shared being (vs. atomic individualism), openness of *loob* or inner-being (vs. the exaggerated guardedness of the privatised self), *pakikiramdam* or intersubjective sensing or intuitive knowing (vs. low-context communication norms requiring verbal spelling out for clarity), *dangal* or honour (vs. the priority of getting a leg up over others), *bahala na* or tacit trust or courage in the face of adversity (vs. its colonial interpretation as fatalism and resignation) and so on.

For a time, the movement in both places generated a lot of cultural and intellectual energy, inspiring many young people (in the US, in particular) to take up graduate studies, excited not only to push back on the Western canon but to speak back to Empire. In the Philippines, particularly in the aftermath of the 1986 People Power movement that deposed the 20-year Marcos dictatorship, advocates of indigenisation successfully instituted Tagalog (vs. English) as the language of intellectual discourse.

## ■ Crying Out for Vision: Babaylan Rising and the Turn to Spirit

But movements grow and die. At the University of the Philippines that birthed the movement for indigenisation, Sikolohiyang Pilipino appeared to have lost momentum as Western experimental psychology one more time regained hegemony as the dominant model after only a decade of flowering. The strand in the discipline of history, *Bagong Kasaysayan* [New Historiography], for its part, did gain adherents across the country, but the strictly national and nationalist framework left untouched the question of state commitment to modernising priorities and what that might mean for the fate of the many ethnolinguistic communities still land-based in the countryside. As well, the heavy emphasis of the movement on nationalist integration unwittingly gave rise to an ethnonationalist backlash decrying the threat of cultural erasure of the various ethnolinguistic communities with the imposition of a putative

'national language' and 'culture' (in the singular). Ironically, although the indigenisation movement paid lip service to 'indigenous difference', when raised as a material concern in regard to the estimated 14 to 17 million indigenous population (belonging to over 110 ethnolinguistic communities) in the country, the vision was far less clear.

Meanwhile, in the US, a similar impasse appeared to afflict the movement. While still resonant as an alternative sense-making framework in community empowerment projects, what had been an influential nationalist resurgence seemed to go into a period of hibernation, as though begging for a larger vision beyond mere concern for identity politics and self- and community-edification.

That larger vision would emerge out of a confluence of events taking place mostly at the margins of the academy. In the US, the impetus arose from an auspicious meeting of (primarily) women writers engaged in various kinds of decolonising activist work among Filipino Americans, including feminist cyber activist Perla Daly, poet and publisher Eileen Tabios and American Multicultural Studies faculty member Leny Mendoza-Strobel. It was at this meeting that new questions began to be raised, such as, what now? What is the task after we have begun to decolonise? What is the larger vision? It is also here where the figure of the babaylan (healer or shaman) practitioner of an ancient precolonial healing tradition in the homeland begins to take on significance and breathe new life into the flagging indigenisation movement. Initially, the turn to the babaylan as a rallying figure began as a feminist antidote to the degrading images of Filipinas online (where typing in 'Filipina' in any search engine pulled up scantily clad 'mail-order brides' and exoticised dolls on pornographic sites or the other stereotype of nannies and domestic workers) (Daly 2013). The historic babaylan, many of whom were women, were healers, priestesses, ritualists, herbalists, mediators between realms and fierce warriors in resistance movements against colonial oppression. As such, they were deemed to epitomise an alternative, more empowering point of identification for Filipino women other than the prevailing stereotypes.

When opportunity arose for those of us involved in the indigenisation movement in the diaspora to attend a series of what were called ‘International Kapwa Conferences’ in the homeland that were uniquely designed to bring together in the same space academics, activists, cultural workers, artists and indigenous representatives from the various Philippine communities and neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Japan, Australia and even Native America for mutual learning, another moment of life-changing challenge materialised. It is one thing to learn of indigenous traditions from written studies; it is quite another to encounter their practitioners up close and personal. Suffice it to say, the first-time encounter with living babaylans and indigenous culture-bearers left a deep impression on all of us; for me, it was one that exceeded even the power of my earlier encounter with the indigenous cultural productions in the humanities classroom that I narrated earlier.

Coming back to the US at the conclusion of the first conference we attended, Leny Strobel, who headed our delegation, decided it was time to organise more formally and create a vehicle not only for disseminating the invaluable information that was shared but also to begin reflecting more centrally on what it meant for Filipino Americans in the diaspora to learn from living carriers of indigenous knowledge traditions such as the elders encountered in the Philippine Kapwa Conferences.

Thus, the CfBS was formed in 2009. The centre would be organised as an incubator and launching pad for scholarly research, culture-bearing creative expression and, eventually, for political advocacy around indigenous peoples’ rights. Initially, I was not part of these organising plans. Although an active contributing member in other discussion venues and a known theorist of the Philippine indigenisation movement, I was wary of romantic appropriation of a tradition (babaylan) I hardly knew about (not to mention the residue of having been raised Protestant and Christian and growing up believing such a tradition as largely ‘the work of the devil and of evil spirits’). Attending the formal launching of the CfBS in a 2010 conference



at the Sonoma State University, Strobel's home institution, however, I was astounded at the tremendous resonance it had in the community – something none of us had seen even in the heyday of the previous Sikolohiyang Pilipino movement. That first-time gathering, centred on the theme 'Honoring Our Babaylan Ancestors', brought together about 250 participants coming not only from the US but also Canada, with a few from the Philippines (including a babaylan and four indigenous elders). It was the beginning of a new movement that would catch like wildfire across the Filipino diaspora and gain substantial following in the years that followed.

The turn to the babaylan tradition among Filipino scholars in the US diaspora brought the challenge of doing intellectual work differently. Whereas most scholarly writings on the babaylan in the homeland were in the tradition of social scientific writing that was careful not to breach the norm of objective study, the personal journeys of those involved in the budding CfBS movement began embarking on scholarly work that became its own hybrid genre committed to modelling an ethic of 'embodied knowing'. Strobel's writing, in particular, was both literary and deeply personal, effectively translating theory into the idiom of the popular (cf. Strobel 2001, 2005, 2010). It was as if this whole other world of spirit (and of non-human kin) demanded its own language and forms of honouring. Again, I mostly stood witness to this unfolding transformation, my own conference contribution still in the usual mode of a paper presentation, albeit with a beginning turn to storytelling as an alternative form of subject exploration.

But the conference space itself, with the plenary hall adorned richly with exquisite indigenous fabrics, baskets, wooden sculptures, rice gods, colourful mats and other materials of prehistoric significance, immediately invited one into a different kind of awareness, hailing one into the fullness of embodied presence, not simply cognitive engagement. At the entrance, one was greeted by a visually stunning Talaandig altar set up in

the indigenous tradition of ritual offering to the spirits and ancestors. Then, once participants had quietly settled in, an Ilokano healer-researcher, dressed in traditional garb and speaking in his native tongue, opened the conference with a ceremonial incantation calling on the ancestors to bless the gathering. This was followed by an honouring of the babaylan ancestors through a ritual invocation of their names, as these were culled from history books written by the Spanish chroniclers. Clearly, this was no place for bystanders and aloof observers.

As the invited keynote speakers spoke, it became clear to me that these were not merely scholars, but ones whose lives had been personally touched and transformed by their tutelage to living babaylans. One in particular, Grace Nono, an ethnomusicologist and internationally renowned singer, artist and scholar, used to be well known as a pop music vocalist in the Philippine music scene, until the day she heard the chants of oralist-healers in one of the indigenous communities and felt something awakened in her spirit; she realised this was the kind of music she was meant to sing – and has sung ever since. Consequently, she spent decades documenting the chants of the babaylan among the various tribes in the Philippines, at the same time embodying and innovating in her own style and performances elements of the native musical genre. In her written work (Nono 2013), she throws down the challenge to those who would invoke the tradition not merely to get to know the babaylan as a historical or symbolic figure but to take interest in the quite-real struggles of living babaylans whose beleaguered conditions *vis-à-vis* corporate mining and other industries threaten their very existence.

Indeed – along with the conviction already awakened through the indigenous encounters at the Philippine Kapwa Conferences earlier on – it is this challenge of the need not only to study reified indigenous traditions for use as resources for cultural revitalisation abroad but to enter into relationship with the bearers of these traditions in their living material context and conditions that

created a new awareness in my own work. This is particularly the case around the question of the relationship between the heavy resource-utilising, consumption-driven, upwardly mobile middle class lifestyles of non-indigenous urban folks (like many of us in the Filipino American community) and the growing endangerment of indigenous peoples by mining, logging, industrial fishing and other corporate extractive activities whose end products primarily benefit the former – one that could be summarised by stating that they (indigenous peoples) live the way they do because we (urbanised consumers) live the way we do.

## ■ Why the Indigenous?

Over the years, my own studies have increasingly taken on an ecological turn in the face of climate change and the growing crises of species extinction and other indicators of ecosystems collapse, necessitating the revamping of all my teaching, thinking and scholarship to take this context seriously. This new trajectory led me to trace the roots of the crisis – not to inherent human venality but to the invented system and cultural logic of our modern industrial civilisation with its utilitarian view of nature (as mere 'resource' for the exclusive use of humans) along with its enshrinement of infinite growth, progress and development as the primary markers of what it means to be a human being in the world. This is a cultural logic that could only lead to predation and rape of the planet for short-term gain. As I wrote elsewhere (Mendoza 2013b):

I am referring to the core logic and culture of modern civilisation itself and its claim to monopoly of the only legitimate vision of what it means to be a human being on the planet. The presumption, of course [...] is preposterous, [*given*] modernity's very short career on the planet (at least relative to the totality of humankind's history), with roots in a mere 10,000 years of settled agriculture; inaugurated on a grand scale with the onset of the project of colonial conquest (1492 onwards); accelerating to its most productive moment in the era of the Industrial Revolution (beginning in the 1800s); and now hurtling into what some say is its dizzying last phase or final stage

accompanied by never-before seen time-space compression in the age of information technology and economic globalisation. A now globalised culture wedded primarily to wealth accumulation, individualism, private ownership, racial supremacy, and consumption as the taken-for-granted key signifiers of being human, it is a culture whose record of the past five hundred years has brought, ironically, not the promised thriving of all but rather the institutionalisation of inequality, violence, militarism, ecocide, and the patent rule of brute economic/financial/political power over any avowed democratic ideal in international and global relations. (pp. 3-4)

In my encounter with, and tutelage to, the indigenous, I have had the scales finally fall off my eyes. Far from being mere relics of the past whose destiny is to vanish in the face of inevitable progress, indigenous peoples stand today as the last remaining witness to a way of life whose record in our species history alone attests to any measure of sustainability and recognition of the sacredness of all life, not just human. Indeed, this is what ultimately separates us (urban and Christian) folk from indigenous peoples: our alienation from living Earth and our treatment of her and her beings (plants, animals, minerals, rocks, rivers, mountains, forests, etc.) as nothing more than dead asset or commodity. Which is why we could do what we do, building an entire civilisation on the blood of ancestors, blowing off mountaintops to abduct her daughters, turning magnificent grandfather trees into two-by-fours, damming living waters, and so on. Having exiled God to the realm of transcendence, we have declared his (gendering intended) creation as 'free-for-all' and the kinship ethic of indigenous peoples towards all beings (as encoded in their legends and mythic stories) as only so much anthropomorphising from ignorant folk who have yet to progress enough to understand nature as inanimate and therefore without spirit (what gives animism its bad rap).

And yet, our indigenous kin are the ones that have much to teach us. Theirs is a spirituality of honouring of all relations (both human and the more-than-human); of courtesy, respect and asking for permission; of not taking without giving something in return; of feeding the Holy in nature in order that life may continue

in perpetuity. Theirs is an ethic of generosity, gratitude and beauty-making in everything they do even in the midst of struggle and suffering. As I recorded in a journal entry at the end of a 10-day gathering with indigenous elders (S.L. Mendoza pers. comm., 15 August 2015):

I've glimpsed life-giving beauty – the building of a Manobo tinandakan hut using no nails, each piece of bamboo, nipa, or rattan, sang to and praised before harvest until permission is granted, master builders still retaining memory of the old way of doing things; a people who co-exist and honor the crocodiles on their marshlands as the Spirit Guardians of the waters (in stark contrast to the town mayor's bloodlust upon capturing – and eventually killing – the crocodile Lolong, touted to be the largest in the world); a woman indigenous leader being ministered to in ceremony by Muslim patutunong healers so she could finally accept her calling to become a healer herself; native youth taking up the mantle of leadership in fighting corporate encroachment of their ancestral lands; the laughter of Manangs and Manongs [*women and men elders*] as they told their stories, and the beautiful chanting of other elders in response. It is these kinds of encounters – with our Indigenous Peoples (and those working on the ground alongside them) – that now serves as the homeward beacon for me. Just like our indigenous brothers and sisters everywhere else around the globe threatened by the relentless incursion of our extractive economy into their territories, our own indigenous peoples in the Philippines struggle bravely to keep their beautiful ways of being alive amidst the assault. The grief (at their beleaguered condition) compels, but so does the grace, beauty, and courage of their spirit [...] Often harassed by forces beyond their control, they find ways to continue living indigenously anyway, nurturing the land with their beautiful rituals, dances, and ceremonies even in the face of death. (n.p.)

In the search for a new story to replace the dying one, we need not look farther. As mythic storyteller and writer Martin Shaw (2016:n.p.) writes, '[T]he stories we need turned up, right on time, about five thousand years ago'. The key is to re-member, to re-enflesh 'bone memory' – a primal knowing of our home in the Earth no matter our separation in civilisation. This is the resonance of the babaylan healing tradition for many Filipinos in the diaspora, the spark of recognition when encountering living ancestral traditions for the first time – ritual traditions that

embody Earth knowledge and encode memory of the ‘original instructions’ believed to have been given to all natural peoples for how to live in a good way in a given local ecology.

The task then is to re-member. It is the kind of remembering I have tried to do in my ancestral storytelling piece in this chapter – my way of healing my own separation from organic life as I became educated and urbanised, and from modernity’s soul-constricting individualism by reclaiming my own ‘long body’ (that calls to mind the admonition among the Haudenosaunee to only make choices and decisions with the next seven generations in mind and the wisdom of seven generations back; cf. Krippner 2014:xxiii). It is also what our little Detroit Beloved Community has committed to undertaking at this time – to no longer simply ‘work for justice in the world’, if by this is meant working exclusively for the thriving of human communities. For ‘community’ – as we are learning in our process of decolonisation and unlearning of whiteness as a world orientation – has no exclusions, just like my people’s understanding of *kapwa* as encompassing kinship relationship with all living beings in nature. In reclaiming our respective spiritual traditions from our ancestral origins, we come down from the pedestal of our modern hubris and supremacy (yes, including Christian supremacy) and recognise that it is we – not our indigenous kin – who have lost our way and who are in need of tutoring again in the old ways.

Shaw (2016:n.p.) expresses pessimism when he laments, ‘[a]s things stand, I do not believe we will get a story worth hearing until we witness a culture broken open by its own consequence’. But in Detroit, the quintessential (post-)industrial city, now a ghost of its former splendour and promise, this is what seems to have already happened or is happening, as we speak. I therefore write about Detroit as also a ‘place of fruitful gestation’ (Mendoza 2013a), one that, in the midst of collapse and disillusionment:

[A]ppears to be birthing a whole other culture, this time no longer the color of rust, steel and iron, but green. Organic life is slowly returning to the city, with its residents knowing the bitterness of betrayal by the false promise of development, unlimited growth,

wealth and prosperity. The miracle is that neighbors now are speaking to each other, forming communities, growing gardens and taking care of their poor and homeless. It is no accident that in the year 2010, it was chosen to host the second U.S. Social Forum, a gathering of 15,000–20,000 peace and justice activists looking to learn not only from the problems and challenges the city faces, but from models of humanity there already in practice. (p. 255)

Returning to Grace Lee Boggs' call to take seriously the epochal transition we are in currently, any re-visioning of urban or city life needs to be informed by the long view of the excluded voices of our time – those who, at this point in time, represent the only real alternative to the reigning logic of our time, that is, the voices of indigenous peoples. Such re-visioning is exemplified by this prayer meditation for Detroit from one of our Detroit Beloved Community members, the Rev. Bill Wylie-Kellerman, and with this I will end (Wylie-Kellermann 2017):

Die and arise. In your weakness is your hope. You are at an end and a beginning [...] Your industrial heyday has gone to rust. You will not see its like again. Now think small. Encourage the modest, an economy of creativity and self-reliance. Nourish the projects of human scale, the works of community and struggle. Let your empty lots bloom green; you will find there a hidden economy all its own. Sit light upon the river, but not as real estate frontage for the rich. Be in right relationship to its life, and through it to the region, to earth [*her*]self. For your sins, enough. Now you have my blessing. Sing to glory and come to life. (p. 12)

# Guatemalan Grass-Roots Theology as Resistance to Global Sacrificial Theology

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## ■ Introduction

Mimetic desire and urban society are two terms that I have not yet discovered together. Both come from different disciplinary backgrounds, and perhaps that is why these concepts have not met each other on paper. In this chapter, I will attempt to introduce these terms to one another and see if a conceptual paradigm can flourish that takes both concepts into account. It is

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important, however, that such an introduction not fall into the ethereal realm of ideas. If that happens, all of the possibilities to solidify the implications of mimetic desire as a concept and body of thought that could serve as a lens to see the urban would fail through the impracticalities of mere academic work. For that reason, what I will attempt in the next pages is to connect the academic ideas of different authors with the street to see if mimetic desire can provide a lens to reimagine the Guatemalan urban context from below as grass-roots theologies become a mode of resistance to the global sacrificial system. I will use my *vivencia*<sup>4</sup> as the starting point of the following reflections. Stories like the one narrated before are in the background of what I write. I have seen countless violent situations during my experience and work in slum communities, and I have also officiated at the funerals of teenagers who were tortured and killed by the organised crime syndicates of Guatemala City.

As the reader will see, urban society and its inequalities are the result of a sacrificial theology that is willing to sacrifice the most vulnerable in the name of progress. In Guatemala, we can see the urban centres needing more and more resources to sustain their functioning and production. It is in these urban centres, especially in Guatemala City, that decisions are made that affect all ways of life. In a sense, Guatemala has fallen prey to planetary urbanisation. As the urban increases its reach everywhere, its shapelessness, formlessness and boundlessness make it hard to know where its borders reside (Merrifield 2013:910).

Before I use René Girard's idea of mimetic desire as a lens to interpret urban society, let me begin by attempting to summarise what mimetic desire is. More advanced Girardian scholars may find the next few pages simplistic. This summary, however, attempts to make mimetic theory accessible for readers who may be entering into these waters for the first time. Mimetic theory is a complex body of ideas that takes into account

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4. *Vivencia* is the full experience of an event with all its possibilities.

different elements of the creation of human culture to understand violence. Mimetic theory contains a variety of concepts, and I will explore a progression that may help the reader grasp the basics of how it works.

## ■ Mimetic Desire, Violence and Urban Society

The development of a grass-roots theology in resistance to a global sacrificial theology is not a small task, because a global sacrificial theology is a system that is willing to immolate those who are considered as disposable to appease the gods of contemporary urban society. As I embark on this adventure, I am aware that my reflections and thoughts cannot resist a global system on their own. What I will attempt in the next pages is to develop the base of a Guatemalan grass-roots theology that can only be built with the help of emerging leaders working in the toughest places of Guatemalan urban society. As the reader accompanies me on this adventure, let me start with a story and an introduction to what I will endeavour to do in the next pages.

## ■ A Story About Violence

Violence is a social issue that a lot of people claim to understand; there are anthropological and sociological studies about its causes. But the truth of the matter is that violence ‘is the result of a peculiar deficiency, a lack of being that inevitably bring us into conflict with those whom we believe will be able to remedy it [...]’ (Dupuy 2013:43). I cannot say that I fully understand how violence works or how a sacrificial theology is formed, but what I can say is that I am in search of a better understanding of violence in order to also understand peacebuilding and conflict resolution as a vital aspect of a grass-roots theology in resistance of global sacrificial theology.

Violence is a pervasive issue in most of the communities where I have worked. On one occasion, I had an unforgettable encounter

with violence. One sunny afternoon in 2005, a friend of mine from the US and I were hanging out with teenagers from one slum community where we worked. Most of the guys were teenagers between the ages of 13 and 19 years, with the exception of 5-year-old Rigo and his 7-year-old brother. Rigo and his brother were playing with marbles on the ground. My friend and I were talking with the kids, cracking some jokes and having a good time laughing at the 'gringo' with the funny accent. One of the two little kids lost his marbles and wanted the other one to give him his. I assume Rigo was the one who had the marbles, but I do not know that for sure. As the two little kids were arguing about the marbles, the atmosphere unexpectedly filled with violence, and the next thing I saw was a fight between the two little kids.

I have seen kids fighting for toys before, but this time it was different, more vicious. Rigo's brother was on top with his fists closed, beating down on Rigo's face. I do not even know if I have the words to describe the scene. The fight was brutal. The guys we were hanging out with were fuelling the fight, cheering and yelling, 'Come on! Come on! Harder! Harder!' (2005, afternoon, male crowd). I did not intervene. Although I was really afraid the little kids were going to hurt themselves badly, I did not know how to react and stop the fight. Somehow, Rigo made it out of the beatdown and saw his mother walking down the street. Dropping his marbles on the ground, he ran as fast as he could to embrace his mother's legs. He was looking for protection. For a moment I thought, thank God she showed up – I do not have to stop the fight! Shockingly, when Rigo hugged his mother's legs, instead of finding care, security and love, he found a kick right into his belly and an angry voice yelling, 'Don't be such a pussy! Go fight your brother like a man! That is how you learn, you shithead!' (2005, afternoon, Rigo's mother). I could not believe what my eyes were witnessing. It felt I had landed in the plot of an intense Flannery O'Connor story.

Rigo's face reflected uncertainty, rejection, sadness, anger, fear and pain. Tears started rolling over his cheeks, and he had no option but to get back into the fight and take the beatdown. I do

not remember how the fight stopped. I remember Rigo's face bruised, a bloody nose and a swollen eye. All I know and regret is that I did not know how to take the shame of that little boy. Perhaps I did not want to take his shame and invest myself in his life by stopping the fight. I did not have the theological or life categories to understand violence or how to serve people who live in the midst of poverty and violence, let alone violence in the midst of rejection and shame. While I still do not fully understand this encounter, the implications of such experiences propel me to struggle with the Crucified Christ as the shame-taker, innocent forgiving victim and peacemaker.

It is important to recognise that once violence, fear and shame visit the human heart, they acquire their own momentum and developmental logic and need little attention and almost no additional investment to grow and spread (Bauman 2007). The journey towards an incarnational grass-roots theology in resistance to a global sacrificial theology needs to take shame and curse as a vital part of it. It is in allowing myself to be in that place of shame that the mechanism of violence is revealed and I am given the opportunity to be forgiven by God and others, and to forgive (Alison 2010). I could have been incarnated in Rigo's reality of violence, fear and rejection if I had entered that place of shame. It was in that place and moment when violence against Rigo could have been stopped. I did not do anything. I did not know how to be with him and for him. I cannot say that I know today how to face the violence that consumes impoverished communities in the Global South, especially when that violence is fuelled by a sacrificial theology that sees the most vulnerable as rejects and scapegoats in the name of progress.

## ■ Mimetic Desire and the Scapegoat Mechanism

Mimetic desire is the core that holds mimetic theory together. This concept, developed by René Girard, can be understood as the lack of capacity humans have to desire something on their own.

Humans, thereby, resort to the imitation of each other's desires. Girard proposes that 'human desire is not based on the spontaneity of the subject's desire, but rather the desires that surround the subject' (Palaver 2013:35), implying that our way of being in the world is defined by the other. Girard used different exchangeable terms to explain these dynamics including *triangular desire*, *imitated desire* and, as used in this chapter, *mimetic desire*.

As humans imitate each other's desires, they lead each other into rivalry. For Girard, violence happens when my desire of an object or person enters into rivalry with the desire of somebody else for the same object or person, meaning that both are imitating the desire of one another for the same object or person. This imitation could also lead the parties in rivalry into positive imitation of one another for the common good. However, when it comes to an object or person that two humans want to possess, the misplaced desires drive each person into rivalry and violence against each other. Then, because humans become obsessed with what they desire, they will do all they can to obtain the object or person they want regardless of the consequences, even to the point of killing to obtain the object or person of desire. In Girard's (2009:11) own words, 'the principal source of violence between human beings is mimetic rivalry, the rivalry resulting from imitation of a model who becomes a rival or of a rival who becomes a model'. Remember the story at the beginning of this chapter? The marbles were the object of both Rigo's and his brother's desire. Both of them wanted the same marbles. They imitated each other in their desire for the same object, and that led them into rivalry with each other to the point of violence to obtain the same marbles.

The problem is that, at some point, others begin to imitate the desire that takes us into rivalry with one another and we end up spreading not only our desire but also the rivalry and violence that is generated through the imitation of each other in a more transcendental way. When Rigo and his brother were fighting, those of us witnessing the fight became participants of

the violence in distinct ways. The teenagers cheering for the fight did not know they had been contaminated by the excitement of violence. That is why they were cheering and fuelling the fight. I was also contaminated by the spread of violence. My fascination with it froze me. I did not intervene to stop the fight and wanted an external force to stop the violence. Humans take their rivalries beyond the physicality of the conflict to the metaphysical realm, which then affects our understanding of the world and the other. It is at this point that the more intensified stages of desire carry an extreme potential for contagious spread (Palaver 2013), making the parties in rivalry want to differentiate from each other, seeing the other as a monster while simultaneously becoming a 'monstrous double' of the other (Girard 1977:143-162). This stage of metaphysical transferring of desires, or 'mimetic crisis' as Girard calls it, takes on a new spin that paves the way for those involved in the crisis to look for a surrogate victim of their violence, a scapegoat (Girard 1977, 1987). This crisis is a 'crisis of distinctions'; people want to ensure they are different from the others with whom they are in rivalry. The apparent differences affect the cultural order of any given society (Girard 1977), and as a way of restoring it:

[E]ach member's hostility, caused by clashing against others, becomes converted from an individual feeling to a communal force unanimously directed against a single individual. The slightest hint, the most groundless accusation, can circulate with vertiginous speed and is transformed into irrefutable proof. The corporate sense of conviction snowballs, each member taking confidence from his neighbour by a rapid process of mimesis. The firm conviction of the group is based on no other evidence than the unshakable unanimity of its own logic [...] All the rancors scattered at random among the divergent individuals, all the differing antagonisms now converge on an isolated and unique figure, the surrogate victim. (p. 79)

Girard's mimetic theory takes a key turn, as he understood religion to be the institution that controls violence by creating the rituals needed to contain violence and avoid a brutal carnage within primitive societies. The sacrifice of an innocent victim, then, becomes the religious institution that becomes a cathartic

element to keep violence in check (Girard 1977) through the execution of the scapegoat in a sacrifice. In other words, religion, the sacred, contains violence in two senses. The sacred becomes a container, a vessel, that holds violence in check while simultaneously becoming a violent means of protecting us against violence. Human violence is not a symptom of inherent evil (Dupuy 2013):

[/]It is the result of a peculiar deficiency, a lack of being that inevitably bring us into conflict with those whom we believe will be able to remedy it [...]. (p. 43)

Jean-Pierre Dupuy (2013) proposes that the heart of Girard's analysis is the idea that the sacred is a form of human violence that has been put as an external force, meaning that violence is out of human control and that the gods are regulating human fate.

In the preceding paragraphs, I attempted to summarise the process of mimesis between humans as proposed by Girard. In that process, I used two terms that are integral to the understanding of violence presented by mimetic theory, as well as the beginning of a global sacrificial theology, the *surrogate victim* and *scapegoat*. It is important, however, that the Girard reader does not fall into the temptation of oversimplifying the term *scapegoat*. The scapegoat is a mechanism at play throughout the metaphysical stages of the mimetic crisis. Girard, as quoted here, sees the scapegoat mechanism as a process capable of creating unanimity in a group that was divided by the mimetic crisis. It is in that unanimity that the victim becomes the one responsible for the mimetic crisis and thus the incarnation of evil itself. 'The monstrosity of the preceding crisis is now manifested in one single monster; we are dealing with one victim, which has become the scapegoat for the entire community [...]' (Palaver 2013:152). In the end, as the group gathers against the scapegoat, 'the persecutors always convince themselves that a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness, is extremely harmful to the whole society [...]' (Girard 1986:15).

The scapegoat mechanism is key to the understanding of violence proposed by Girard. For that reason, I will number four elements that will help us use Girard's anthropology as a lens to interpret urban society. Firstly, the scapegoat or victim must be vulnerable, someone who is different from the group and lacks the power to defend himself or herself against the majority. Secondly, the victim is seen as necessary to protect the goodness and cohesion of a society. Thirdly, the sacrifice of the victim will relax the masses and the tensions within any given human group. In summary (Girard 1986):

[A]ll our sacrificial victims [...] are invariably distinguishable from the non-sacrificeable beings by one essential characteristic: between these victims and the community a crucial social link is missing, so they can be exposed to violence without fear of reprisal [...]. (p. 13)

Finally, the story of the victim has to remain hidden.

At this point in our process of utilising mimetic theory as a lens to understand and interpret Guatemalan urban society, it is important that we understand that religion, the sacred, especially in its archaic forms, is the beginning of the social apparatus and institutions we have today and consequently the origin of a global sacrificial theology. Jean-Pierre Dupuy (2013:xv) has proposed that the sacred should be the light that shines on the adventures and misadventures of human reason. Dupuy arrives at this conclusion following Durkheim's understanding of religion as the origin of all great human institutions. If one were to follow Dupuy's proposal, one would have to agree that all human institutions or forms of rationality are inherently violent in one way or another. It is important, however, that we understand that Dupuy is not explaining the concept of the sacred, which Durkheim, Freud, Levi-Strauss, Girard and others explored in countless pages. Dupuy (2013:xv) shows us that human reason 'still has the marks of its origins in the sacred, however much it may regret this fact'.

Paul Dumouchel is another scholar who can help us enter into the realm of contemporary understandings of violence and the



way violence permeates urban society. Dumouchel approaches the conversation from an economic perspective. In his analysis of contemporary society, Dumouchel exchanges the term *sacred* for *scarcity*, opening the conversation of mimetic desire to a more practical, contemporary level. For Dumouchel, scarcity and the sacred are one and the same and are ambivalent in their meaning. The ambivalence lies in the fact that in contemporary society, scarcity is presented as the cause of violence in many social and political discourses, while simultaneously understood as the incentive to move forward and excel in economic growth. Economic growth, then, becomes the best defence against social conflict and chaos. Hence, scarcity becomes the institution that regulates the progress or demise of a society (Dumouchel 2014:ix). In the sense of the sacred, the ambivalence comes in seeing violence as a problem that needs a violent solution.

Taking into account the perspectives presented by Dupuy and Dumouchel, we set the framework to interpret contemporary forms of violence and urban society from a Girardian perspective. This implies, for the purpose of the analysis presented here, that violence is defined as the process of escalating rivalry between a model(s) and a rival(s) in conflict with each other, trying to eliminate one another for the sole objective of possessing the object of desire.

## ■ Violence: Global Forms of Violence in Urban Society

Before we enter into the understanding of violence and how it impacts urban society, let me explain a little bit of the process I have followed in writing this chapter. Firstly, I have forced myself to move around Guatemala City while writing. I have written from my studio at home, coffee shops in the more developed and wealthy parts of town, the central plaza in the historic district, during tattoo sessions to cover the tattoos of former criminals and in slum communities in some of the most forgotten areas of our city. Secondly, I have taken reading materials to the places

listed above and engaged in informal conversations with friends and strangers. All of this was done to understand and interpret violence as the source of a global sacrificial theology and see this theology at play in urban Guatemalan society.

Up to this point, Girard has allowed us to create a framework to understand and explore violence from an anthropological perspective. This focus, of course, opens the door to explore different forms of violence, understanding that violence comes from our misplaced desires in rivalry with others. It is impossible, however, to enter into the conversation of a global sacrificial theology without mentioning our current globalised imperial system and its forms of violence. For the heart and spirit of Empire, in the words of Míguez, Rieger and Sung (2009:130), 'is a sacrificial theology that demands and justifies human suffering in the name of the realization of impossible desires and objectives through submission to an institution falsely transcendentalized'. It is important to understand that this chapter is not the space to enter into the conversation of the forces of Empire that shape the urban, especially the market, as a self-regulatory 'transcendentalized' system. What is important to point out is that the heart of the global system that we live in is sacrificial in the sense that it is willing to reject, even kill, those at the margins of society in the name of progress and social cohesion. In the next pages, I will explore different forms and understandings of violence presented by different scholars I believe explore global forms of violence.

It is in this global system that the criticism presented by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek will help us understand different global forms of violence. Žižek (2008:66–73) goes back to the Heideggerian understanding of language as our house of being to connect two different kinds of what he calls 'objective violence'. Objective violence is the violence we do not necessarily see but feel, even when it has very concrete implications and representations in our everyday life. Firstly, objective violence (Žižek 2008:1) is symbolic violence 'embodied in language and its forms'. The way we speak can be violent and perpetrate

violence; and if we go beyond speech, language is an institution that also contains violence with the full ambivalence of the term. Secondly, Žižek (2008:2) calls 'systemic' violence to the 'catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems', meaning the rejection and sacrifice of those living in poverty as one of the omitted sins of late capitalist urban societies. The acknowledgement of language as an institution that contains violence is of high importance as the sacred and language are two of the most ancient institutions that are part of the development of human rationalities.

Finally, Žižek takes on a kind of violence that we are all too familiar with, subjective violence. Subjective violence is the perpetration of a violent action against somebody else, beating somebody down, killing, war and so on. A clear example of subjective violence is the interaction between Rigo and his brother. Interestingly, humanity is fascinated with the subjectivity of violence as its carnage separates us from the truth that lies beneath such violent acts – violence comes from inside the human heart and creates a false sense of moral outrage.

The danger of subjective forms of violence, for Žižek (2008:6), comes with the urgency to act when we face the enactments of subjective violence. The urgency to intervene does not allow us to think about the true nature of violence. There is no time to reflect. Violence hides itself from our sight, giving space for more hidden ways of perpetrating violence. In the case of Guatemala, those discrete forms of violence have transformed into humanitarian aid, Christian missions and the international cooperation for our development. In Žižek's (2008) words:

Let's think about the fake sense of urgency that pervades the left-liberal humanitarian discourse on violence: in it, abstraction and graphic (pseudo)concreteness coexist in the staging of the scene of violence – against women, blacks, the homeless, gays [...] 'A woman is raped every six seconds in this country' and 'In the time it takes you to read this paragraph, ten children will die of hunger' are just two examples. Underlying all this is a hypocritical sentiment of moral outrage. Just this kind of pseudo-urgency was exploited by Starbucks a couple of years ago when, at store entrances, poster

greeting customers pointed out that a portion of the chain's profits went into health-care for children of Guatemala, the source of their coffee, the inference being that with every cup you drink, you save a child's life. (p. 6)

One could say that the objective violence presented by Žižek is the very mark of the sacred, as understood by Girard, and then developed by Dupuy and Dumouchel. Then, subjective violence, meaning the overpowering acts of violence and the empathy with the victims of such acts, functions as a lure that prevents us from thinking. In this sense, empathy – not justice – becomes the justification of violence, thus putting us on the side of the executor (Žižek 2008:6). As subjective violence hides itself from our sight, we are faced with the same dilemma our ancestors faced: is good violence needed to stop the perpetration of subjective forms of violence that could annihilate our society? Should we do nothing, just sit and wait, as we are in the presence of violence? To the second question, Žižek (2008) answers with an emphatic yes!, further stating that:

There are situations when the only truly 'practical' thing to do is to resist the temptation to engage immediately and to 'wait and see' by means of a patient, critical analysis (p. 7).

Žižek and Dupuy have much in common in their understanding of violence. For both scholars, violence is, or becomes, a hidden mechanism. In the case of Dupuy (2013), violence, the sacred, is hidden and permeates all contemporary institutions as a result of human rational evolution. For Žižek (2008:213), 'violence is not direct property of some acts, but is distributed between acts and their contexts, between activity and inactivity'. In a sense, violence becomes hidden and relative to the context.

It is in the subjectivity of violence that we misunderstand violence as the mere act of hurting the other. Violence, however, goes beyond the point of its own subjectivity. Hannah Arendt (1969) tapped into the subjectivity of violence from the perspective of totalitarian regimes and how those exert violence as an instrument to control people. For Arendt, violence is an instrument in the hands of those who want to impose their

strength over others. Violence ‘always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues’ (Arendt 1969:51). For Arendt, violence is the tool for power to be exerted over people, especially when we talk about political power. The problem with the instrumentality of violence, as understood by Arendt, lays in the lack of understanding of the dynamics that create violence. Violence is much more than an instrument; ‘it is the result of a peculiar deficiency, a lack of being that inevitably bring us into conflict with those whom we believe will be able to remedy it [...]’ (Dupuy 2013:43).

Following up with the ideas of Zizek, Dupuy and Dumouchel, and using Girardian anthropology as a lens, I would like to attempt a brief interpretation of how academic ideas are tested on the street. Mimetic desire works in very subtle ways in the human heart. In the case of those of us who work with people living in communities marked by poverty and violence, we tend to think that we are the liberators of those under oppression. Even more so, we feed from the sentiments of belonging that we develop, imitating each other based on the needs of those we claim to serve. We develop co-dependent relationships where we need to be needed by the needy. In addition, our academic ideas of economic, emotional and social development are imposed on the poor, thus perpetrating more violence on people who have been hurt already.

As mentioned before, the dynamics at play in mimetic desire can take us to two possible outcomes. Firstly, we can develop positive mimesis, which can lead us to transformation and development, or we can develop negative mimesis, which leads to rivalry and violence (Girard 1987:290). In the case of the individuals and organisations who work to serve those in poverty, the imitated desire is the desire to help the other, the poor, the marginalised, the vulnerable and other labels that we want to put on those we serve. The significance of this desire is given by the model who desired the object in the first place. We all saw something we admire in those who serve people in need, and we

want that as well. We imitate each other in serving or helping the poor, and we enter into rivalry because the true desire behind our help is the desire to possess the poor. People talk about 'my children, my youth, my beneficiaries' and so on. When we take this into account, it is hard to accept the fact that we have made of 'the poor' the object of our desire. We are fascinated with the exoticness of 'the poor', so we enter into rivalry with one another because we want to access the resources available to 'help the poor'. As we develop programmes, projects and help for those in need, we are willing to accept all consequences to get the last bit of grant money for the programmes we run. Those of us involved in this kind of work start trampling upon each other, so we turn our eyes towards the ones we swore to help in the beginning.

Secondly, in making the poor the object of our desire, we have turned each other into a rival. At some point, when our attempts to change the world seem futile, we realise that the problems are bigger than what our organisations can tackle, and then we turn to somebody to blame for the lack of success our programmes have. It is at this point that the poor become not only the object of our desire, but also the scapegoat we need to re-establish the cohesion among those who work for the development of impoverished communities. In the end, if development does not work, if micro-credit does not work, if housebuilding projects do not work, it is and always will be the fault of the poor, or the government, or perhaps the rich, maybe even the global economic system or, in the case of Guatemala, everything is the fault of corrupt politicians.

After 15 years of working in the slum communities of Zone 3 in Guatemala City, I have noticed that positive mimesis is not as common as one would like to see. Sadly, individuals and organisations have turned the poor into the object of their desire and goldmine. For this reason, every organisation working in the area of Zone 3 zealously protects the beneficiaries of their programmes, even when this implies

a stunted development and loss of human dignity. As a friend in the slums once told me:

Joel, you can move down here tomorrow. I know where to take you so you do not work another day in your life. I know where you can send your kids for free schooling, breakfast, lunch and dinner. We do not need to work anymore. (A friend, undisclosed location, undisclosed year)

In the case of the slum communities in Zone 3 in Guatemala City, I led a study and community mapping process that helped us account for 29 organisations working in a 1-km radius. Interestingly, there are organisations that started their work almost 35 years ago. Today, the slum communities keep multiplying with all of the social issues that affect the fourth and fifth generation of slum dwellers and, alongside, NGOs keep sprouting. In the words of G. K. Chesterton (1934:92), 'If the poor are thus utterly demoralized, it may or may not be practical to raise them. But it is certainly quite practical to disenfranchise them'.

Positive mimesis would take us seeing those living in poverty as equals, not as the objects of our desire as we try to possess each other. It is sad to accept that I have fallen prey to the dynamics going on through mimetic desire. I, too, have objectified those living in poverty. It is important to remember that the least, last and lost of our society are bearers of the image of God. Our desire to serve and change the structures of our urban environments must be focused on the liberation of every human we encounter.

What I found in the midst of great despair in slum communities is violence with the mask of false generosity. I borrow the concept of 'false generosity' from the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. For Freire, the violence of oppression has a dynamism of its own. The oppressors hide the legitimisation of violence through their generosity towards the oppressed, thus creating a structure that allows them to perpetuate the unjust system in place. For Freire, the unjust system is the constant source of false generosity,

which is sustained by poverty, violence and death. This system has become so strong that those in power react negatively to any attempt to change the system for the benefit of those who have been oppressed for so long (Freire 2003:540).

All of the preceding reflections put us into a moral quandary. If we are working with people who are the bearers of the image of God, we should not objectify them as the placement of our desire. Sometimes, we believe that in working with the poor in the 'right way' we are free of the moral judgements and ethics of those who do not work in a sustainable or healthy way. We fall prey to the false sense of moral outrage that Zizek talks about. We engage the different forms of oppression and violence, diving in head first, without stopping and thinking about what lies beneath, thus perpetuating the system and falling into the game of false generosity. It is as if we believe we are beyond good and evil thinking and that we have not fallen into the trap of our moral judgement and mimetic rivalry. In a sense, we are better followers of Nietzsche than followers of the carpenter of Nazareth. It is important, though, to remember that working with the least, last and lost is one of the most morally relative kinds of work. It is so morally relative that we tend to do evil instead of good, even when we have the best of intentions. A sign of a grass-roots theology in resistance to a global sacrificial theology will take us to tackle the causes of false generosity and will rehumanise those who have been objectified for so long.

## ■ Global Sacrificial Theology

The term *global sacrificial theology* is loaded. Before I explain my understanding of the term, I have to acknowledge I am borrowing it from Míguez et al. (2009). I am using their theological proposals as the basis for expanding the concept in a way that helps me understand and serve my context in Guatemala City. We have the global, which I am interpreting as the process of planetary urbanisation in a late-capitalist society, which affects our



contemporary understandings of the city and the urban. In Guatemala, this process is better understood by the concept of the post-metropolis presented by Edward Soja (2000). For Soja, the city is becoming more and more difficult to represent as a geographical, economic, political and social unit. The borders of the city have become blurry, confusing our capacity to draw clear lines between the city and the countryside, rural and other geographical concepts and, I would add, national and foreign. The post-metropolis is, then, a product of intensified globalisation. The global becomes localised, meaning the process of moving from a city-based society to an urban society; and the local becomes globalised as inequality and oppression sprout as unwanted consequences of planetary urbanisation. This phenomenon makes the city an ambivalent term, as it is simultaneously a real and imagined place, a place nonetheless (Soja 2000:150).

There are nuances, of course, to the development of colonial cities, and Guatemala City was founded under colonial ideology. For example, the colonial city was built with the purpose of controlling subdued cultures and land. Centralisation of power, politics and economics happened in the city. Contrarily, cities like Manchester were built and achieved their status as cities through the Industrial Revolution. Guatemala City still has vestiges of colonial ideology, as the country's political, economic and religious power are centralised in Guatemala City. It is important to understand that, even though Guatemala still has remnants of colonial ideology, planetary urbanisation is blurring the lines that used to divide the Guatemalan countryside and the city. As communication networks blur the distinctions between the city and the rural, Guatemala develops more inequality between the different sectors of its population, being the fourth most unequal country in Latin America (Justo 2016).

Secondly, we have the sacrificial part of the concept. This is seen from the Girardian perspective of sacrifice as the foundation of archaic and modern societies. Míguez et al. (2009:37), quoting

Friedrich Hayek (2011:98), propose that the system of contemporary sacrificial religion ‘increases the desire of all in proportion as it increases its gifts to some’. Progressive societies, as understood by Hayek (2011) in his *Constitution of Liberty*, come with a price, the service of the rich experimenting with new and more fulfilled styles of life, while the poor wait for those styles of life to be tested and approved. What Hayek could not measure with his ideas, as Míguez et al. critique, was the pervasive nature of mimetic desire and rivalry, which has paved the way to develop a social and economic system that by design is willing to sacrifice groups of people in the name of progress through an impersonal, falsely transcendentalised system like the market.

The system proposed by Hayek is the prime example of mimetic rivalry. The desire that guides the global sacrificial theology of late capitalism is not natural. It does not come from the essence of human dignity. It is a constructed desire that ends up confusing desire and need, thereby leaving aside the needs of the most vulnerable members of society as supposed commodities to be attained. For Míguez et al. (2009:40) ‘the sacrificed are those who appear less competent, who resist the laws of the market, and those who seek to regulate the market’. This sacrificial perspective opens the conversation again to different kinds of violence within the system in place. In a structure that is designed to leave the weak and vulnerable aside, the violence of the weak, or of those who are in opposition to the impersonal system that marginalises them, is labelled as violence. In contrast, the violence of those in power, the ones who test a style of life before the poor, is legitimate (Míguez et al. 2009:61). In other words, it is not violence. As Arendt suggested, it is the instrument of those in power to impose their will. Even more so, it is a kind of violence that restores the threatened order of planetary urbanisation.

A clear example of the difference between acceptable violence and not acceptable violence happened in November of 2016. *La Sexta Avenida* [Sixth Avenue] is a pedestrian stretch of city

streets located in the historic district of Guatemala City. During the last 15 years of the Guatemalan armed conflict, La Sexta became a very chaotic place as street vendors, criminals and low-end stores flooded what once was an exclusive part of town. After the signing of the peace accords in 1996, Guatemala City's mayor, Alvaro Arzú, who happened to be the president when the peace accords were signed, started a process of 'cleaning' and 'ordering' La Sexta. As time went by the old vendors were displaced and safety was improved, making La Sexta a desirable part of town again. In the last five years, though, La Sexta has become a contested space in Guatemala City. Rumours say that the mayor and his friends are buying property in the historic district, becoming the owners of Guatemala City and designing what progress and economic growth look like. Sadly, there is no way of actually proving this real estate hoarding of properties as the public information about properties in Guatemala City is not really open to the public. It is virtually impossible to know who the owner of a building without a judicial order.

People who are part of the informal economy tend to sell their goods as they walk the pedestrian street of La Sexta, while the formal business and restaurants have taken all the accessible locations to do business. The mayor, however, has entered into a rivalry as he feels the informal street vendors make his La Sexta look ugly and dirty. So, in November 2016 the mayor of Guatemala City decided that it was time to clean La Sexta once and for all. He took the municipal police to the streets and started walking down La Sexta to forcefully remove the informal street vendors. The police wore riot gear and formed lines standing their ground as they walked and pushed away the informal street vendors. This, of course, was not well received by the vendors and they responded with violence. The municipal police then took action and gassed the sellers as they fought for their right to work and sell their products.

The press covered the events in an intriguing way. They portrayed the events with headlines saying, 'Riots destroy the street art of La Sexta' or 'This is what La Sexta looks like after

the riots'. These perspectives led the general population of the city to believe the riots and destruction were only the fault of the informal vendors of La Sexta, thus criminalising the vendors for being poor and not able to have a locale to sell their products. The headlines reinforced the stereotypes of people living in poverty as violent criminals who refuse to enter the system in a way that can benefit all Guatemalans. The violence perpetrated by the mayor and police was seen as good and needed, as it controlled the situation and brought peace back to the city. In contrast, the violence of those defending their right to work was seen as destructive, insolent and against the common welfare of Guatemala City. Once more, those who could not afford to be a part of the system were scapegoated by the majority of Guatemalans.

The system of global sacrificial theology is founded in scarcity, which is 'the universalized abandonment of the solidarity obligations that used to unite the community' (Dumouchel 2014:34). In other words, scarcity is the spiritual and economic institution that says that there is not enough for everybody. In contemporary urban society, scarcity is presented as the cause of violence in many social and political discourses, while simultaneously understood as the incentive to move forward and excel in economic growth. Economic growth, then, becomes the best defence against social conflict and chaos. Hence, scarcity becomes the institution that regulates the progress or demise of a society (Dumouchel 2014:ix). Scarcity is an institution in itself, not a social construct. Scarcity is beyond the concern of the economic domain, and it is instituted by separating and creating a distance between the communal and individual consequences of human actions and violence, leaving those actions outside of the realm of human responsibility. In the systems of progressive urban societies, archaic violence and religion have not disappeared. Their form has shifted and changed. Violence has become institutionalised in a very special way and transformed into envy and impotent hatred by those who have been forgotten by the system. It has become resentment as Nietzsche proposed in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

In summary, '[s]carcity is the social construction of indifference to the misfortunes of others' (Dumouchel 2014:51).

The problem in a system like the one we live in is that the exteriority of the members of society, meaning the isolation created by breaking the bonds of solidarity, transforms all individuals into potential sacrificial victims. As the reader may remember, the exteriority is the missing social link between the scapegoat and the rest of the community. As Dumouchel (2014:50) has argued, 'by abandoning traditional obligations, we ensure that no one will avenge those who are the objects of our violence'. In the case of the informal vendors of La Sexta, nobody was for them, no one stood up for them as victims of a system that excluded them based on their inability to afford to enter into the system. This violence, in theory, is ensured to be contained, unlike in archaic societies, as there are now institutions, aka the justice system, designed to control the sprouting of contagious forms of violence among rivals. In other words, the law will avenge the first murder from the start (Dumouchel 2014). Hayek's ideas have become more concrete; thus, we are faced with the emergence of impoverished, miserable, excluded people to whom we have done no intentional harm. Sacrificed victims keep appearing and we are the ones who sacrifice them through the means of our apathy. These victims are outside the mimetic rivalry. As those in power and in the middle class are obsessed with eliminating each other, those outside of the rivalry are left to their own demise as the bonds of solidarity are already broken. These third parties, as Dumouchel (2014) calls them, are not seen as our own victims, as in the present system we do not see the correlation between our actions and these consequences, between our unconcern, apathy, indifference and the poor.

Finally, we have the 'theology' part of the term. Jean-Pierre Dupuy (2013:1) opens his book, *The Mark of The Sacred*, with a truthful yet scary statement that 'our societies are machines for manufacturing gods'. This asseveration recognises the human potential for violence, as one of the marks of the sacred is the

exteriorisation of violence as something that is completely other to our humanity. From the beginning of human societies, we have created divinities as the entities that control our fate, whether it is for success or our demise. Dupuy proposes that the evolution of human rationality took us to the place of putting humans in the place of gods as we adopted a secular perspective. This movement in world view has allowed humans to go beyond themselves in order to exert a power over themselves (Dupuy 2013:2-6). This power to create self-transcendence has fostered the evolution of what is sacred through the ages. In the beginning, the sun, the giver of life, was a god that needed to be appeased so that the hunter-gatherer societies could have good outcomes for their survival. The same exteriorisation of human transcendence has created different gods for today; we call those 'the market' and, for the purpose of this reflection, 'the urban' or 'progress'.

When I started writing this chapter, I had one image in my head: the tower of Babel. In the account of Genesis 11:1-11, humans want to become famous by building a tower that will reach the sky. This, in my perspective, marks the birth of the god of urbanisation. We have been fascinated from the beginning of our existence with equating progress to the greatness of our urban environments. For example, recent discoveries have shown that our land, in Guatemala, was more urban than we ever imagined. The birthplace of Mayan civilisation happens to be bigger than archaeologists thought it was, and now it is believed to be a megalopolis that could have hosted a civilisation of 15 million people. Contemporary Guatemala keeps worshipping and paying dues to the gods of urbanisation. Cement is being poured all over the city as high-rises keep going up like flowers growing in a garden. Just in the first trimester of 2018 there are 60 new apartment high-rises going up at the same time in Guatemala City. This Guatemalan garden, however, is full of despair and suffering. According to the World Bank, 59.3% of people live in poverty and 23% live in extreme poverty. The theology that we have created paves the way to

see the other as a possible victim to be sacrificed in the name of progress and urbanisation.

In summary, global sacrificial theology is the birthplace of planetary urbanisation. It is, in fact, the system that has made of urbanisation the god that best represents the capacity humans have for greatness to be created on the back of slaves, the poor, children, men and women whose bonds of solidarity have been severed from the wider community.

## ■ **A Grass-Roots Theology in Resistance: Communities of Practice and Desire**

As we have seen up to this point, the current system of planetary urbanisation is based in a sacrificial theology. It is willing to dispose of anybody who opposes it, and it will embrace the furthest consequences to preserve the status quo. For that reason, it is important that a grass-roots theology in resistance to global sacrificial theology understands how the system works. That is why I have taken extensive space to explore different forms of violence and the mechanism behind it. It is important, though, that in the midst of theologico-practical resistance we name what is hurting us, '[f]or without the courage to name our pains, we are also without words to articulate our deepest joy, soaring hopes, and creative imagination' (Fernandez 2004:3). It is in naming our pain that we start resisting the powers that have forced us to be in silence. It is important, however, that we also open the space for those who have been violated by the system to name the ways in which they have also been perpetrators of systemic violence to others. In one of the slum communities I worked, a team of researchers and I found out that the neighbourhood committee leaders were asking for sexual favours in exchange for helping single mothers. Communal transformation has stalled as the leaders refuse to acknowledge their participation as perpetrators of violence to their female neighbours.

As we start resisting the forces of a global sacrificial theology, we ought to open up spaces for pain to be voiced. These spaces have to be open to the voices of those who have been shunned by the sacrificial system that institutes them as the obstacle of progress. These voices have the capacity to disrupt normalcy within the system of planetary urbanisation. For Míguez et al. (2009) and Dumouchel (2014), the voices that the system needs to hear comes from those who have been left behind. However, it would be unfair to say that the power of the humble, poor, excluded, of the current sacrificial victims, is the power that will destroy contemporary sacrificial theology. This would place a ridiculous amount of responsibility on shoulders that already carry the sins of all. It would be just another burden to be carried by the poor (Míguez et al. 2009:22), hence sacrificing them once more.

The Centre for Transforming Mission of Guatemala (CMT Guatemala by its initials in Spanish) is the place where I develop my faith practices to serve my city. It is with the CMT Guatemala team that we have developed different ways of naming our pain in a way that includes the voices of the sacrificial victims of our society. We try our best not to place an unfair burden on those excluded by Guatemala society as we theologise with them. One of those ways of voicing our communal pain is through what we call *cemetery reflections*. The cemetery reflections are tours through Guatemala City's General Cemetery. The General Cemetery has the tombs of different Guatemalan personalities that have shaped the course of our country. One can find presidents of old, writers, poets and many influential figures. The majestic tombs where these personalities are buried clash with the common burial grounds, where the poorest of the poor are buried. In addition, the back of the cemetery collides with the 'living dead', Guatemala City's garbage dump, where approximately 7000 people work in inhumane conditions to sustain their lives. These clashing images are the background for conversations that reflect four representations of the Guatemalan



collective woundedness, that, as a community, we have named the social-economic division, the racial wound, the religious disunion and the wound of the internal armed conflict. As we walk with different groups of people, we enter into the collective woundedness of Guatemala City. We have talked about our pain with businesspeople, students, academics, religious people and short-term missionary groups. We have all come to the point of accepting that we have hurt each other even if we did not mean any harm to each other. It has taken us 10 years of cemetery reflections to get to a place where we can acknowledge that the current urban capitalist system in Guatemala is hurting us all in different ways.

We have also arrived at the understanding of oppression and violence as the birthplace of our current system. It is in this way of thinking that Eleazar Fernandez (2004) has been of great help in understanding how oppression works. For Fernandez, oppression and violence work in a way that makes it difficult to create structural change. Change is possible, nonetheless. Fernandez names the system of oppression as an interlocking system, meaning that working on one form of violence is not enough to create systemic change. The system is interlocked between classism, racism, sexism and the abuse of nature. Fernandez proposes that the theological work of reimagining humanity has to be done in a holistic way by reimagining our humanity in the midst of the interlocking structures of oppression. Fernandez (2004:5) invites us all to be atheists in the current system, 'in the face of the idols of death of our time, prophetic atheism is a mark of our Christian faithfulness'. We see the cemetery reflections as an atheist act in the midst of a system that sacrifices those who live marked by poverty and violence to the god of urban progress. It is through the naming of our pain that we are able to identify the gods of urbanisation and progress as the idols they are.

Another way we resist and unplug from the rivalry and violence of the current system is by removing the scapegoats

from the system. We have developed a brief version of a workshop in Girardian anthropology that serves as the catalyst for conversations regarding violence. The way the workshop is structured takes the participants through a progression that starts with an introduction to Girard's theories, then to the scapegoat mechanism, to then acknowledge that we all have people we are willing to sacrifice for our own benefit. We name our scapegoats starting at the personal level, then the societal and structural levels. What has been interesting about these workshops is people's responses, especially those who work with communities marked by poverty and violence, when we touch public scapegoats who they consider as needed sacrifice. On one occasion, one of the attendants yelled at me, saying, 'I am angry. I am mad at you because you are asking me to surrender my scapegoats as a step towards peacebuilding'. All of this is done in a way that takes us through the gospel, in a way that allows us to read the Bible through Jesus' eyes. I do not have space in this chapter to explore it, but the practical hermeneutical implications of all that is mentioned in this chapter are deeply rooted in non-violent ways of reading scripture.

Both examples presented here, the cemetery reflections and the workshops, allow us to create communities of desire that will hopefully lead to positive mimesis. At CMT Guatemala, we focus on the development of communities as we understand that our theologising and actions alone cannot pose enough resistance to the current global sacrificial system. A community of desire is based as a centred set community. This implies that we do not need to believe in order to belong. If someone wants to work and contribute to the social and spiritual renewal of Guatemala, they will be welcomed regardless of the religion they profess, their political affiliation or sexual orientation. A community of desire in resistance to global sacrificial theology has a Eucharistic shape; there is space for everyone at the table, even for those we consider our foes. These actions seem

very simple. It is, however, with great intentionality and effort that grass-roots leaders have opened their hearts to others who are different. The temptation will always be to replicate the patterns of the oppressors onto others. It is easier to exclude than to make community with others. If removing the exteriority of those at the margins is part of a grass-roots theology in resistance, then the exclusion of others becomes a sin; in the words of Miroslav Volf (1996):

[A]n advantage of conceiving sin as the practice of exclusion is that it names as sin what often passes as virtue, especially in religious circles [...] We exclude because we are uncomfortable with anything that blurs accepted boundaries, disturbs our identities, and disarranges our symbolic cultural maps [...] We exclude because we want to be at the center and be there alone, single handedly controlling the land [...] (pp. 71-74)

If the Eucharistic shape of urban mission calls exclusion a sin, then we are faced with the choice of entering into the sacrificial system or unplugging from it. There is no space for the righteous exclusion of anybody, thus avoiding the formation of virtuous unanimity against others who seem to be different in any way, shape or form. If we fall in the temptation of uniting against a new scapegoat, we will reinforce the system once more.

In conclusion, a grass-roots theology in resistance to the global sacrificial system has three signs of hope. Firstly, it takes shame and curse as a vital part of it. A theology in resistance is not afraid to get dirty. The theologian in resistance is not concerned with comfort. The theologian is preoccupied with breaking down the idols of urban capitalist society, even if the idols are inside the church. Secondly, a theology in resistance will tackle the causes of false generosity and will rehumanise those who have been objectified for so long. In rehumanising the other, the grass-roots theologian will know to make a clear distinction between self-sacrifice and self-giving. A self-sacrifice will reinforce the system.

In contrast, the gift of oneself to others implies an understanding of the sacrificial system, the refusal to become a victim and doing so without resentment.

Finally, a theology in resistance to the global sacrificial system claims the power and responsibility of removing scapegoats. It does not matter who is the sacrificial victim to appease the rivalries. A theology in resistance will always struggle to rehumanise those who are about to be sacrificed. During 2015, Guatemalans went out to the streets in resistance through peaceful demonstrations to ask for the resignation of the president and vice president at the time. There was proof of both of them being involved in a massive corruption scandal, and Guatemalans had had enough. We went to the central plaza of the historic district every Saturday of 2015. What was interesting to me during that time was that, even though the protests were peaceful, the power of the mob was violent and sacrificial. We were all asking for the 'execution' of our leaders in order to restore the peace and transparency of government institutions. Our desire for justice turned into a desire for vengeance as our leaders became so monstrous that we did not want to be connected to them. Guatemalan society exteriorised the president and vice president in such a way that anthropologists could have studied the co-relation between archaic kingship rituals and sacrifice, and Guatemalans asking for their leaders to be taken by the justice system. The mimetic crisis in Guatemala came to such a high point that our leaders were responsible for all the ills of our society. As a consequence, the judicial system was pushed to accept the cry for blood coming from the people, thus presenting the evidence to impeach our leaders and start the trials to put them away in jail.

The response of our people was of festive excitement and victorious unanimity. We went out to the plaza again, but to celebrate the victory and executions of the causes of all of our evils and misfortunes. What we failed to see was the reality of the sacrificial dynamics that took us to the point of executing our

leaders before the gods of urbanisation and progress. I am not saying here that the president, Otto Pérez, and the vice president, Roxana Baldetti, did not have any responsibility in the exclusion and death of countless people because of the corruption that kept hospitals out of medicine stock, or that of children who died of malnutrition because of the corruption that did not deliver the fortified foods. What I am saying is, we fell right into the sacrificial reinforcing of the global sacrificial system. We ostracised our leaders because they were just like us. There was no difference between us and them, and we wanted someone to be blamed for the rivalries and violence that came from our hearts and have made of Guatemala what it is today.

During the televised imprisonment of our vice president, the cameras caught the images and audio of Roxana Baldetti falling apart as she realised the conditions of her imprisonment. The audio captured her cries of desperation for just a few seconds, and as soon as that happened all news channels cut the scene and went back to the analysis of the political implications of her imprisonment. For the scapegoat mechanism to work, the story of the sacrificial victim needs to remain hidden. Even more so, the humanity of the surrogate victim needs to be veiled for the sacrifice to work. The scenes briefly captured by the news channels could have broken the animosity against Baldetti by showing her humanity. That is why I believe that, in an unconscious decision, they immediately cut the possibility of seeing Baldetti as a human once more. A theologian in resistance will always emphasise the humanity of Otto Pérez and Roxana Baldetti. The struggle for such rehumanisation of the victims happens as we remind our peers and ourselves that our leaders are just a reflection of who we are. In the end, we are just humans who do not know what to desire outside of imitating the desires of others. Once we enter into rivalry to obtain the object of our desire, we will comply with corruption and reinforce the system of a global sacrificial theology.

I hope that I was able to connect the academic ideas of Girard, Dupuy and others with the street in this chapter. In the process of reading Guatemalan society through the lens of mimetic theory, I have learned that a prophetic imagination does not limit our capacity to rehumanise those who benefit from the system of global sacrificial theology. It is, however, with acts of prophetic atheism that we resist the idols of urban progress and the gods that keep asking for the sacrifice of the vulnerable, meek and humble. Let us keep an eye out for those sacrificial victims, regardless of where they come from. We need to remember we can be the victims of violence while simultaneously perpetrating it to others. We ought to follow Jesus, the forgiving victim who was resurrected without fire and storm to avenge his death and make his executors pay.



# Households of Freedom? Faith's Role in Challenging Gendered Geographies of Violence in Our Cities

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## ■ Introduction

Myths of a 'golden urban age' have increasingly drawn more women to cities, often imagined as places where streets are

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paved with excellent opportunities. Urban settings have been lauded by some as good for all women, typically contrasted as progressive, against a stereotyping of the traditional rural space as inhibiting women's rights and opportunities. However, a more critical gender lens (Chant 2013) highlights the heterogeneity of women's experiences in many cities and their ongoing vulnerability to multiple forms of violence within this space. This chapter offers a contextual reflection on the endemic violence against women and girls (VAWG) that shapes South African urban realities and the need for urban theology to speak up if it is to remain true to its commitment to intersectional liberations grounded in lived realities (De Beer 2014; Hankela 2014).

In 2014, with a special collection in HTS, entitled 'Doing urban public theology in South Africa: Visions, approaches, themes and practices towards a new agenda', Swart and De Beer called for a new agenda to be introduced in South African public theology, namely one that prioritises the urban. They (Swart & De Beer 2014) argued that:

[P]ublic theology in South Africa has, despite its established position today, not yet imbedded itself in, and intentionally engaged itself with the contextual challenges of our country's cities and urban environments by and large. (p. 11)

Despite this call to take note of contextual challenges, issues of VAWG in cities – which have consistently been highlighted in global discourse – remain underexplored. This is despite recent reports and official statistics showing that VAWG is reaching pandemic proportions in post-apartheid South Africa, with over one in five women experiencing domestic violence (Sibanda-Moyo, Khonje & Brobbey 2017; Statistics South Africa 2017). This specific issue is tied to the wider exploration of cities themselves as gendered. It is important to note that this needs to be seen as a gendered continuum and not as a binary. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer and Others (LGBTQ+) violence is another disturbing manifestation of gender injustice

also seen in South African spaces. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore this troubling and interconnected manifestation of violence, it reinforces the call by the authors for urban public theology to think not in binaries but along continuums.

This chapter suggests that complex interlinkages exist between public and private violences against women and girls in urban spaces, often underpinned by deep-seated harmful social norms about masculinity and women's 'place'. Empirical research undertaken by one of the authors shows that urban settings remain key sites of VAWG, often forming vicious cycles of intergenerational abuse, shaped by overcrowding and lack of privacy in many urban homes. Respondents insisted that churches have an important role to play in transforming, rather than reinforcing, the misogynistic roots of these gendered violences. But they also noted that churches are currently failing to fulfil this role, for their public voice should disrupt these patterns and not reinforce them or protect perpetrators. Scholars have noted that South Africa is beset by mobile 'geographies of violence' (Scanlon 2016:1), shifting between public and private domains.

The chapter draws on feminist theologian Letty Russell's metaphor of a 'household of freedom' as a potential resource to assist urban public theology to avoid the androcentric reiteration of a false public-private dualism. Instead, it offers possibilities that can focus attention across the continuum on the nurturing of multiple safe habitats for the most vulnerable. Reclaiming this metaphor, with its roots in the socially disruptive practices of early house churches, may assist faith actors and institutions to play important theological roles in nurturing creative forms of gender-just faith. By doing so, emerging urban theology discourses can help to tackle the roots of gendered violence and contribute to the global conversation on faith and transformation of all shared spaces.

## ■ An Urban Public Theology Rooted in Lived Experience

In calling for the need for urban public theology in South Africa, Swart and De Beer (2014) emphasise the need for it to be rooted in the lived realities of people:

[S]uch deepening attention to context should inevitably involve a far more pointed concern with the reality of the urban and the way in which this reality will increasingly hold the key to the dreams and hopes of a more flourishing and inclusive South African society. (p. 1)

Therefore, this chapter starts with an overview of empirical work done in South Africa, reflecting on the *lived experiences* of sexual violence of people living in six different urban communities. This is done to emphasise that our call for urban public theology to directly concern itself with VAWG is not merely academic but is because this is a daily reality in women and girls' lives. We argue that considering the urban cannot be done without engaging with the violences experienced by women across both rural-urban and private-public continuums. We suggest that if the work of urban public theology in South Africa is to complete the 'unfinished task of liberation' (De Beer 2014:1), with particular attention to its spatial dimensions, then this task will remain incomplete without a gender lens. A lack of specific attention to this is arguably itself a 'violent silence which perpetuates exclusion' (De Beer 2014:1).

However, it is also not enough to merely add gender into the existing parameters of urban public discourse, in an 'add women and stir' approach. If urban theology's starting point, as its proponents suggest, is to be situated within concrete sites of struggle, then the household forms one key contested site in South Africa today. If our vision of the city is to 'place humans at its core' (De Beer 2017:8), this requires gendered interrogation if an androcentric lens is not to unwittingly shape our definition of the human. Without this lens, public theology may perpetuate a displacement of women into unsafe and marginal spaces where systemic abusive patterns remain

shrouded by a false veneer of privacy. If the politics of space is a key locus of struggle in post-apartheid cities, women's intra-household struggles to find and to own their space, and to inhabit existing shared spaces safely, must be intentionally engaged. Urban public theology, if it is to be 'a disruption of an elitist conception of the city and the socio-spatial political order' (De Beer 2014:5) in the name of liberation for all, needs to link its politics of spatiality not only to race and class but also to gender, in ways that can disrupt the public-private binary rather than reinforce it.

In 2013, one of the authors (Le Roux 2013) conducted research on the role of Christian churches in sexual violence in South Africa.<sup>5</sup> Funded by Tearfund UK, qualitative work was conducted in six communities in South Africa.<sup>6</sup> Five of these communities were within cities (Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg and Durban), while one was peri-urban (Bredasdorp). The communities were diverse in their racial make-up, comprised of an English-speaking mixed race<sup>7</sup> community, a refugee community with refugees mainly from the Great Lakes Region, two Zulu communities, an Afrikaans-speaking and mainly coloured community and a mainly black African informal settlement with a history of xenophobic violence. Using structured interview questionnaires, in-depth semi-structured

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5. The Unit for Religion and Development Research at Stellenbosch University, with whom both authors are affiliated, has been doing research on this issue for the past 10 years. Focusing on faith-based, and particularly church, responses to VAWG, it has conducted empirical research in various countries, including South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Uganda and Colombia.

6. Data used here with Tearfund's permission and with recognition that they funded the original research project. The views presented in this chapter, though, are solely those of the authors.

7. The term 'mixed race communities' is used here to connote communities that emerged as a consequence of specific apartheid policies, in particular, *the Population Registration Act of 1950* and *Groups Areas Act of 1950* (see Ebr-Vally 2001:44-52). These communities descend from African, Asian and European people, and it is an accepted and non-pejorative way to refer to communities of this descent.

interviews, focus groups and nominal groups, the research explored how community members understand and experience sexual violence, and how churches are part of and responding to it. Overwhelmingly, the study showed that sexual violence was perpetrated predominantly against women and girls.

In all six of the communities, irrespective of race or class, everyone agreed that sexual violence is a problem of pandemic proportions. However, counter-intuitively, people in the community remain very hesitant to talk about it, reinforcing the sense that this issue is framed as a 'private' one where everyone knows what is happening, but nobody discloses it. Female survivors pointed out that generally the police are not seen as effective, leading to low levels of reporting because of community stigma as a result of reporting, and yet impunity for the perpetrators. This undergirds the systemic pattern of abuses where survivors are failed at multiple levels. Responses reflect a sense that there is a wider lack of public accountability within the justice system on this type of violence against women where even when people in the community are aware of what is happening, they turn a blind eye and do not report.

Contrary to dominant narratives of public 'stranger danger', but in line with statistical realities, the household was seen as the most dangerous space. Fathers, stepfathers, uncles and cousins were identified as the most common perpetrators, with youth, children and women being targeted in their own homes by people they knew well. Generations of women have been sexually violated by family members, from a young age and continuing into adulthood, often perpetuating intergenerational cycles of violence. One survivor explained how all of the women in her family had been raped repeatedly and how all of the men in her family were perpetrators:

If my dad was not a dead-beat dad, if he was like a dad that was responsible for the family, and wasn't also abusive to my mother, it would not have taught me that that's the norm [sic]. Nobody really, even up to my brother, nobody really showed us a leadership from a male role [sic], being a role model I should say [sic]. Because my uncles

in their own times also abused their wives. My mother was abused by her husband from the time we were small. (Female survivor, Durban, 2013)<sup>8</sup>

This issue of repeated victimisation came across in all the communities. Violence at household level is rarely reported, as it involves people who are financially dependent on the perpetrator(s); therefore, survivors usually remain within reach of perpetrators. Rarely did a survivor have only one experience of sexual violation, even those not engaging in what is seen as 'risky behaviour'. Women themselves, already victims, can also become complicit in the abuse of girls within an unsafe household because of these complex, relational, economic realities of who holds provider power:

The mother has gotten, what you call, into a relationship with a stepfather. The stepfather is putting food on the table and they are all depending on this and the mother is looking away, because if she talks, this man is going to take the support, the food from the table. So, this child cannot tell the mother because maybe she has tried [*telling the mother*] and [*the mother*] has not [*done anything about it*]. (Female survivor, Pietermaritzburg, 2013)

The drivers of sexual violence are also linked to the spatial and socio-economic consequences of apartheid and racial segregation. A number of participants explained how overcrowded housing, especially the too-small Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses, leads to adults and children sleeping together in one room. This leads to children copying parents' sexual practices and is also a fertile ground for sexual abuse. Drug and alcohol abuse and poverty were seen as other key drivers. Furthermore, the fragmented nature of the communities, with different factions only working for their own welfare, means that there is no joint effort to address sexual violence. But participants also identified discriminatory social norms as drivers, particularly cultural beliefs that identify men as

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8. The quotations used in this section are from the primary research data (transcribed audio from interviews and focus groups) collected in 2013. This was also reported on in a research report published in 2013 (Le Roux 2013).

superior to women. It is apparent in the misogynistic language common in these communities, with the way people speak about women serving to strengthen the narrative of male superiority and often reinforced by church teachings:

So, I think it is a crucial thing because I think it is our mind-set, our upbringing, our culture all cut out in our language and how we talk to one another. So, if we want to have genuine mutual respect and mutual submission [...] not about the one being in power over the other and to get there we have to relearn how to talk to one another. (Female NGO leader, Durban, 2013)

When asked to reflect on how their churches were responding to sexual violence, the participants were unanimous: very little. This is seen as a result of churches not seeing sexual violence as an issue it should be addressing, as it is only concerned with so-called higher matters, such as prayer and Bible reading. According to the participants, churches do not take sexual violence seriously and do not apply the Bible contextually to the issue. Participants consistently spoke of the misogyny of churches and their theologies, their complicity not only in ignoring the reality and silencing those who speak out, but their own role in perpetration. According to the majority of participants, many church leaders were themselves guilty of perpetrating sexual violence. However, they remained unchallenged by the wider church leadership because these perpetrators were persons with authority. But churches can only have the credibility to address sexual violence in the community if they confront and eradicate the sexual violence in their own churches:

Fundamentally what needs to happen is a whole paradox shift in the cultural, in the religious area in terms of the way men see women and there are some unbelievably weird teachings in the church, as you are probably aware of. One of the things of course is 'wives listen to your husbands'. I believe anything preached from the pulpit gives moral oxygen to those. They will breathe it in and go and say that the church has said, 'you must be submitted to me'. Now they will translate it into whatever way that they feel that the person should be submissive. So, I think that has a large [*impact*]. It is an overlooked area that we have a huge influence and responsibility as those who

are in public space, you know. If you get up on the pulpit, you are in a public space because there were public people there before you and you are influencing minds. You are influencing a mind-set. (Male church leader, Durban, 2013)

Although some level of pastoral care is offered at times to survivors, in practice there is a reluctance to engage with real situations or to ask hard theological questions around why this pattern is endemic. This suggests a need to move from merely pastoral care only to theological engagement also. A community leader in Bredasdorp explained the church's limited engagement as follows:

[O]ther reverends or other churches they just check their scriptures that Jesus died, what, what, finish and *klaar* [...] They rather say like 'we are praying for those in hospital', 'praying for those who were in prisons'. But they do not come [*out and say*] 'why is the person in prison, why is the person in hospital?' They don't come to that [...] point. (Male leader, Bredasdorp, 2013)

Therefore, it is surprising that, despite overwhelmingly negative experiences of church, church leaders and congregation members (especially by survivors), participants remain convinced that churches can and should play a central role in addressing sexual violence. They expect churches to take action through awareness-raising, intervening in violent and unstable households, assisting survivors, engaging theologically by revisiting the texts that are read and how they are interpreted, and, most critically, confronting sexual violence publicly within their own constituencies:

The church should be playing a big role but it isn't always so. There is a big gap between community members and church members. Church members think they are perfect, they think they don't have to connect with community members. It might be due to the way they interpret the scriptures. (Male community leader, Cape Town, 2013)

Violence and abuse within marriage was highlighted by leaders participating in a focus group in Cape Town as an area where the church held authority and the potential capacity to speak out and intervene. However, this conviction that the church could be



a refuge remained in tension with the reality expressed by survivors that often its leaders themselves remained complicit on the issue:

The church is an anchor for the community, it is their refuge, it is actually the only refuge in the world that we are now living in, and if the church have such things going on, the pastor sits on the internet the whole night and looks at pornography, and Sunday morning he preaches so he gets his salary, who will then be interested in the church, because I mean, there are no examples. (Female survivor, Bredasdorp, 2013)

What this research shows us is that VAWG is a daily reality within the partially private spaces of South African households, schools, churches, campuses and workplaces and is often underpinned by misogynistic ideologies reinforced in public pulpits and continuing silence on sexual violence by many religious leaders. Recent events have highlighted that these patterns of lived experience continue today. For example, young women staged a 2018 protest at the Central Methodist Mission church because of the silence of church leaders in the face of reports of repeated sexual harassment by someone in a position of church authority. As one of the victims poignantly said after the protest in an interview with News24 (2018:n.p.), 'You call them *tata* [father] and they treat you like a piece of meat',<sup>9</sup> saying that she was disappointed in this place that she had called home and had only gone public in the face of refusals to act within the church. A series of sexual allegations reported within the Anglican Church going back decades led South African Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba to publicly announce in March 2018 a series of consultations to strengthen multisectoral procedures for dealing with cases of sexual abuse in the churches (Ritchie 2018). But promises have been made by churches on this before and have not translated into structural action.

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9. See <http://www.702.co.za/articles/290018/listen-sexual-harassment-claims-at-church-emerged-months-ago>

The houses of our urban churches remain to this day unsafe spaces for many women and girls. The concreteness of these lived experiences emphasises that the appeal to urban public theology to concern itself with VAWG is rooted in the current, constant lived realities of women and girls in South African communities, households and churches. How can one speak of making our cities safe and free and not address the violence in many of the hidden spaces of the city that most consistently threatens and limits women's safety and freedom? A theology of the urban requires what Graham and Manley-Scott (2008:1) term 'the prompting of "vernacular" theologies that reflect the rhythms of everyday experiences of the city's inhabitants', including, we suggest, all its women and girls.

Feminist theologian Letty Russell's (1987) starting point for a reflection on households of freedom, to be explored later in this chapter, is the claim that authoritarian hierarchies of the public city are intimately bound to hierarchies of the private household. She terms this public-private binary a 'false dualism', often reiterated in our sacred texts and traditions. She argues that it leads to a false democracy based on the ongoing oppression of families that creates homes of bondage (Russell 1987:25). This is why we began with the lived reality of those many 'privatised' spaces of oppression within our urban spaces. To explore this dualism further, we turn to an analysis of the wider South African context with its specific urban history.

## ■ South Africa's Gender-(un)Just Cities

South Africa, where both authors live, offers an example of historically segregated and colonial city geography in ongoing and urgent need of urban transformation - a term that gained traction in the post-apartheid transition phases of the 1990s. Williams suggests that, because of the legacy of decades of apartheid racist planning first institutionalised in the *Group Areas Act* of 1950 and only overturned in 1991, there is an ongoing

structural need to undo this legacy within cities (Williams 2000). As a result, he (Williams 2000) notes that:

[T]he future of South Africa is inextricably linked with the future of its cities. It would, therefore, be no exaggeration to suggest that the South African city reflects the state of the nation and the welfare of its people. (p. 167)

The apartheid system systematically built on early colonial patterns of domination to engineer a separatist geography involving a number of facets. These included the national legalised co-optation of valuable urban land and resources by white men, the relegation of black families to rural homelands and the deliberate racialised re-engineering of cities through forced evictions and removals. This led to segregated areas of affluence and poverty living side by side but inhabiting different worlds (De Beer 2014; Williams 2000). The contentious development of a pass system controlled the mobility of those perceived to be racially inferior and enabled laws and governments to police the bodies and movements of one group for the benefit of another.

This apartheid racist geography, layered over an existing colonial pattern, also had gendered dimensions in a number of ways, but these intersections are rarely fully acknowledged. Large numbers of black women were relegated to the rural areas, while black men lived in urban overcrowded hostels for months on end. This created a disconnect between where they stayed (urban) and where their home was (rural), with townships forming 'liminal' spaces of temporary residence for the purposes of providing cheap labour for cities, which were reserved primarily for white citizens.<sup>10</sup> This was further shaped by the reinforcement of a split-gendered legal system of customary law application in rural homelands and colonial law in cities. This decades-long relegation of black women to the rural areas often

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10. While the implications of this complex township space are beyond the focus of this chapter, Vuyani Vellem (2014) offers a provocative contribution to an urban black theology in ways that resonate with our points here.

shaped a static understanding of both gendered and cultural roles, which arguably bleeds into the new dispensation. Davies and Dreyer (2014) note that:

The complexity of South Africa's social and political history has contributed to conditions that lead to various kinds of interpersonal violence. Since the end of apartheid, researchers and policy makers have increasingly focused on girls and young women's experiences of violence in households, including sexual violence [...] [T]he transition to democracy has redefined gender and sexuality in ways that challenge traditional and cultural views of masculinity. (p. 3)

They draw on a 2008 study with Xhosa youth that suggests that men's 'disempowering sense of irrelevance in the domestic sphere' shapes the high levels of violence in South Africa today (Wood, Lambert & Jewkes 2008:47). It connects this to longer history of colonial rule, where losing agricultural land, increased migrant labour and a developing cash economy reshaped traditional patterns of male authority. Wood et al. (2008) note that, for many men:

[P]articipation in a violent lifestyle and the instrumental use of aggression against women and girls became one way of wielding power in a racist, capitalist society from which they were excluded. (p. 49)

The need for urban transformation in post-apartheid South Africa opened up possibilities for the reshaping of multiple power relations. However, in practice the focus remained predominantly on racial transformation, while questions of gender (although raised) were seen as secondary and at times even became invisible in the transformation process. This was arguably a lost opportunity. For example, while the Women's National Coalition did excellent work in the 1990s, resulting in strong constitutional provisions for a non-sexist society and preventing a return to an idealised gendered past of customary traditional laws and policies, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process failed to engage explicitly with a gender lens (Meintjes 2009). Despite responding to many women's suggestions, it 'did not heed the group's call for a more integrated understanding of the gendered

nature of struggles and a gendered methodology in research and reporting' (Meintjes 2009:106).

National discourses of reconciliation often focused on narratives of forgiveness, theologically inflected, that despite recommendations did not follow up on practical restitution and needed structural changes. This has been seen as a contributory factor to ongoing high levels of VAWG in private and public spaces to this day (Scanlon 2016), with the failure to use a gendered lens turning attention away from multiple local power relations, for the sake of a high-level discourse of national unity (Meintjes 2009, 2012). Scanlon (2016:8) notes in this context that reconciliation processes that do not tackle wider social justice issues can become preoccupied with individual human rights violations only and may fail to confront entrenched legacies of gendered socio-economic inequalities and violence. Gendered harms were not probed and ongoing consequences of apartheid laws that had treated many women as minors and disallowed them from owning land were ignored.

As a result, we suggest that South Africa still needs to take closer note of the need for a gendered lens on urban transformation as part of its unfinished intersectional work of liberation. Although post-transition, South Africa was seen formally as a women-friendly state, with progressive gender legislation domestically embedded and senior political representation by women (nearly 45%) achieved through an effective quota system, effective implementation of gender laws and policies remains a clear concern (Meintjes 2009:103). Real material and economic transformation remain elusive for many women, with feminisation of poverty, high unemployment and few female economic leaders (Meintjes 2012). Feminist scholars point to an erosion of women's cultural gains in recent years, with a patriarchal backlash seen against women's autonomy (Gqola 2015:15).

This lack of systemic attention to gendered harms arguably shapes current-day VAWG statistics here (Meyersfield & Jewkes 2017). For example, the 2016 South African Demographic and

Health Survey showed that 21% of ever-partnered women 18 years and older have experienced physical violence from a partner, while 6% have experienced sexual violence from a partner. In the 12 months preceding the study, 8% of women experienced physical violence from a partner and 2% experienced sexual violence from a partner (Statistics South Africa 2017). Yet VAWG is arguably severely under-reported in South Africa (Meyersfield & Jewkes 2017). A 2017 report by the South African Medical Research Council entitled *Rape Justice in South Africa* demonstrates that rape remains a significant societal issue with severe under-reporting of sexual assault, suggesting that only 1 in 25 South African women even report their rape to the police, arguably because of extremely low conviction rates and the strong likelihood of secondary trauma within the system, reinforcing what our 2013 study had suggested.

Scanlon (2016:1) notes the ongoing chasm between the promises and realities of South Africa's reconciliation narrative in specific relation to ongoing gendered realities, where some of the highest rates of VAWG in the world continue to shape the post-apartheid dispensation 20 years on. She critiques South Africa's reconciliation process as potentially contributing to the shifts in the 'geographies of violence' seen for women from public to private spheres. This contemporary saturation of violence against women here and now is captured well by Pumla Gqola (2015:80), who points to the manufacture of a 'female fear factory' in post-apartheid South Africa, which, while dominated by a political rhetoric of women's empowerment, remains deeply culturally conservative. She notes that increased public representation by some woman remains allied to a 'cult of femininity' in the so-called private realm, with women expected to 'exhibit traditionally female traits' (Gqola 2015:65). A rigid reinforcement of this public-private binary is often utilised to reinforce different expectations on women depending on the space they inhabit. For example, a senior female executive is often still expected to submit to her husband in all things when she gets home.

However, these spaces are also being reclaimed from below. Recent protest actions by young women on university campuses such as the Rhodes Reference List<sup>11</sup> (Seddon 2016) have been challenging the normalisation of forms of VAWG and the underlying ideologies of patriarchal power that justify VAWG in multiple spaces. Nevertheless, patriarchal power remains deeply connected to space and place. Women, especially those also vulnerable through race, class or sexuality, are often still expected both to ‘know their place’ and to be responsible for avoiding dangerous spaces. Creating cities safe for women may require focusing not only on external safety measures that protect women but also more on what discriminatory social norms still seek to limit the places they may step into. This global debate around safe cities for women may offer important insights for South Africa, which was rated D in a recent ActionAid report, locating it at the very bottom of their safe cities for women scorecard across 10 countries in relation to putting measures in place to address VAWG in urban public spaces (Falu 2017:28–29). It is therefore to this wider discourse that we now turn.

## ■ Gender (in)Justice in Cities: Ignoring the Private Spaces

Jarvis, Cloke and Kantor (2009) suggest that ‘cities function as key sites in the production, reproduction and consumption of gendered norms and identities. At the same time, cities are themselves shaped by the gendered embodiment and social realities of gendered daily routines – at home, in public and on the move’ (Jarvis et al. 2009:1). For example, fear of harassment on public transport can lead to women remaining home as a result, but this lack of mobility then shapes the citywide patterning

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11. On 17 April 2016, a list of 11 male names entitled ‘Reference List’ was posted anonymously on Facebook at Rhodes University. It gave no descriptions or made any allegations. However, students identified that rape allegations connected them and demanded a suspension and investigation of the individuals on the list.

of public transport to suit the needs of men only. Jarvis et al. point to this co-constitution of city and gender identity as requiring joined-up approaches. These enable a gender lens to be mainstreamed into urban planning discussions to also generate new ways of seeing cities as gendered – and thus leaving no one isolated.

Specific concerns about women’s safety and their roles in urban city spaces have a long genealogy. Taylor (2011:1) charts a formal, global ‘safe cities for women’ movement emerging in the 1970s, with women in various countries worldwide organising protest marches to ‘take back the night’. This has gathered increased momentum in the last decade. Yet British feminist urban geographer Sylvia Chant (2013) highlights the need for such movements to have a critical gender lens that acknowledges the heterogeneity of women’s urban experiences. Taylor (2011:57) emphasises further that the complex intersections of race and class with gender in these spaces are shaped by ‘long-standing colonial geographies’. Gendered inequalities often persist in cities, despite a prevalent myth of the ‘golden city’ as a modern urban space offering all women the freedom and opportunities denied in many traditional rural spaces (Chant 2013:9). In actual fact, she notes that intra-household dynamics within high-density urban spaces often remain harmful and high risk for many women.

The UN Women Global Initiative to Make Cities Safe for All Women, launched in 2010, has piloted initiatives around the world that take a gendered approach to cities more seriously.<sup>12</sup> It focuses on women-friendly transport, practical safety measures, women’s empowerment, gender-sensitive planning and VAWG. This attention to gender in city spaces is welcome. However, Chant raises concerns that gender equality is increasingly being

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12. The *New Urban Agenda (Habitat III)*, agreed at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito, October 2016, reinforces the idea of a right for all to a just and sustainable city (see <http://nua.unhabitat.org/>). It has been noted since that ‘it is fundamental that in this agenda, women’s voices are heard, and their experiences considered when shaping the city’ (Falu 2017:1).



instrumentalised to serve a neo-liberal ‘smarter economics’ market lens (Chant 2016:4). This can be in danger of seeing women and girls primarily as potential economic contributors to the city (in terms of what they do for the city), rather than holistically through justice lenses as gendered, rights-bearing individuals (in terms of what the city does for them) (Chant 2013):

[/]t is important to bear in mind that, although mobilising investments in women can have huge impacts on the generation of wealth, there is also a serious danger of instrumentalising gender to meet these ends. As such, if women are to enjoy a ‘golden urban age’, then gender rights and justice should remain uppermost in urban prosperity discourse and planning. (p. 24)

What we see is that the notion of a ‘right to the city’, popularised in the 1990s and still used today, including the right to use and the right to participate, often lacks sufficient attention to the underpinning patriarchal power relations, which are often ethnic, cultural and gender-related (Fenster 2005). Fenster (2005) notes that city discourses of citizenship can be blind to these power relations on women’s rights to the city being realised in practice, requiring linking rights in both public and private spaces:

[W]hat women’s narratives show is that even in ‘private’ their right to use is denied. This shows that we must look at the right to use from both private and public perspectives in order to fully understand the roots of the restrictions of the right to use. Therefore, the discussion around the right to use public spaces and the right to participate in decision-making must begin at the home scale [...] in spite of the idealised notion of the ‘home’, the ‘private’ – the women’s space, the space of stability, reliability and authenticity – the nostalgia for something lost which is female, home can be a contested space for women, a space of abuse of the right to use and the right to participate. (p. 220)

Recent empirical reports by non-governmental organisations such as ActionAid and Promundo (Falu 2017; Taylor 2011; Taylor et al. 2016) suggest an urgent need to emphasise the interrelated continuum of VAWG within cities and to trouble the binary of

separate spaces (private vs public) as well as its fixed gender stereotypes (Jarvis et al. 2009). Paying attention to this full continuum focuses on the underlying harmful social norms and patriarchal institutions that underpin, legitimate and tolerate VAWG in multiple shared spaces (Taylor 2011):

[T]he dangers that women experience in public and private spaces are closely linked. For example, male control in the domestic arena can restrict women's mobility in public spaces. Violence against women and women's urban safety risks are normalised through social norms and attitudes that permit – and even justify – disrespectful, discriminatory, and violent treatment toward women. Normalisation is reinforced through impunity of perpetrators and lack of accountability of those who should provide protection. Women are blamed and held responsible for the violence and insecurity they experience. Men were identified [*by research participants*] as perpetrators, but also as potential allies and decision-makers. (p. 8)

Until women feel safe in their own homes, the building blocks of all cities – schools, communities, campuses, places of worship – will also remain unsafe. An approach to violence against women that takes note of the multiple interrelated levels where this violence is concretely experienced also requires a gender-relational analysis (Myrntinen, Naujoks & El-Bushra (2014)).<sup>13</sup> This emphasises not solely the safety and empowerment of women, who are then made responsible and even blamed for their failure to remain safe, but also unpacks the assumed 'unsafety' of male perpetrators and the gendered social norms that arguably legitimate and underpin VAWG. As Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (Safe Cities Global Initiative 2013:2), UN Women Executive Director, acknowledges in their 2010 Safe Cities Global Initiative policy brief, 'we have to work with communities to change harmful social norms and attitudes, and social institutions that discriminate and tolerate violence against women'.

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13. 'A gender-relational approach goes beyond focusing on women and girls only, to examine the complex relationships between gender and other aspects of identity such as age, class, sexuality, disability, religion, marital status and geography. It notes that gender identities are constructed jointly by men, women, and sexual and gender minorities in relation to each other' (Myrntinen, Naujoks & El-Bushra 2014:5).

Unfortunately, despite paying rhetorical tribute to the continuum of VAWG from private to public spaces, as well as the need to challenge harmful social norms, much discourse around safer cities for women tends to focus on VAWG in the public domain only. It foregrounds issues such as sexual harassment in public, unsafe transport, bad lighting and the need for better policing of public spaces. For example, despite what was stated in the previous paragraph, UN Women also prioritises the public sphere in their Safe Cities work, as noted by Morsy (2012):

UNWOMEN will limit the understanding and scope of 'Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women' to gender-based sexual harassment and sexual violence against women and girls committed in urban public spaces. (p. 156)

Global movements such as #MeToo have also shot to social media prominence in 2017. The stories shared emphasise the reality of sexual violence and harassment across the continuum of homes, workspaces, schools, campuses, churches and church-run social services. These movements have arguably amplified the local voices of some women to mobilise shared resistance and reclaim agency, highlighting that survivors come in all shapes and should not just be reduced to one sensationalised stereotype.

If the public-private binary is maintained rather than deconstructed, well-intended prevention approaches may focus predominantly on addressing only visible public symptoms, reshaping infrastructure to 'keep women safer'. This allows an avoidance of the more complex task of tackling the deeply rooted ideological underpinnings that shape social norms and attitudes that lead men and boys to see women and girls as legitimate targets and influence a lack of reporting by and support for survivors. Arguably, cities will never be safe for women unless these underlying harmful, gendered social norms are challenged and transformed. Social attitudes to women and girls are often formed and reiterated in

so-called private spaces, which need to be tackled together in ways that refuse the perpetuation of a simple public-private divide on VAWG.

VAWG in urban spaces should also not be reduced merely to physical abuse and harassment. Questions of structural economic violence form embedded patterns of power that underpin this violence, where women predominantly remain insecure tenants within homes owned primarily by men. This arguably remains a structural form of patriarchal control within households themselves, based on a model of the male head of the household that builds on public land-related ideas of men as the chief of the land and king of the kingdom. Women live under the fear of forced evictions and homelessness for them and their children if they take a stand against violence by male partners, who are also often the landlords within that space. Strategies of survival, patriarchal bargaining and acceptance of violent practices within the home are based on acceptance of these unequal power relations. Chant (2013) notes that women's lack of ownership or entitlement (to land) and their fear of homelessness can perpetuate domestic violence. She insists that 'the more "private" space of housing is an indispensable part of this picture' (Chant 2013:23) and suggests that female ownership and tenure security can play a major role in strengthening women's positions within the house.

Jarvis et al. (2009) suggest that, while many cities are journeying towards becoming gender-just spaces, they have not yet arrived and that a discriminatory social norms approach can mobilise bystanders at all levels to take action to tackle pervasive VAWG. They note that, while cities do not generate VAWG, they can either heighten risk factors and/or create opportunities to deal with it. This need for engaging discriminatory social norms as a constructive strategy resonates with the themes raised by South African urban participants earlier and their suggestion that churches can and should play a role here. It is to this question that the following section will turn.

## ■ What's Faith Got to Do with It?

What the previous sections show is how real and relevant the safety and freedom of women is within our cities – *in both public and private spaces*. Any attempt to transform urban spaces into safer spaces of freedom will have to prioritise how multiple urban spaces are experienced by women and girls, including schools, churches, campuses, workplaces and homes, reflecting a continuum of violent geographies. As discussed earlier, transforming violent practices, both within and outside households, requires deepened engagement with gendered social norms around how people construct and value men and women differently. This is arguably why religion and religious communities, such as churches, are an essential player in addressing VAWG, as they have been shown to impact people's social norms and to be a key driver of action and behaviour within societies (Bartelink, Le Roux & Palm 2017).

South Africa also remains a deeply religious and hegemonically Christian country. According to 2010 statistics by the Human Sciences Research Council (Rule & Mncwango 2010:n.p.), over 80% of South Africans attend church regularly and 76% hold to very strong Christian beliefs about God and Jesus as 'the answer to all the world's problems'. Churches remain the most trusted institution in both rural and urban settings for 83% of South Africans today, a figure significantly above that of the trust placed in the government, police, defence force, media or law courts (Rule & Langa 2010). This space and the faith ideologies within it therefore have the influence and potential to either reinforce or disrupt harmful social norms around gender. Much as progressive strands of religion played a role in reshaping public narratives from monarchy to democracy, so they could also support transformative gender constructs and help to reshape ongoing social norms around the shared spaces of the household. But this requires the amplification of what Hankela (2014:1) terms 'liberational voices' that insist on an intersectional paradigm that 'destabilises dichotomies' often still taken for granted, such as

the public–private divide. In this way, gender could become a more visible factor in the urban debate and can highlight ongoing androcentric biases in its very framing.

However, religious communities have an ambivalent history in relation to engaging issues of social justice, especially within the South African context. Christian churches were instrumental in upholding apartheid, but minority prophetic faith voices were also key to opposing and dismantling its theological legitimations. This is typical of what Villa-Vicencio (2014) calls the ‘split personality’ of the church; while some churches and believers prioritise social action, others avoid it and prioritise institutionalised rituals, doctrinal purity and the status quo. This also appears to be the case when responding to VAWG in the post-apartheid dispensation. A number of theological voices called for gender and sexuality to be public issues addressed prophetically as part of post-apartheid church struggles (De Gruchy & De Gruchy [1979] 2004; Maluleke & Nadar 2002; Pityana & Villa-Vicencio 1995), with a call by Albert Nolan for a reconstruction and development programme for the family itself (Nolan 1995):

Families can be the very places where racism, sexism, patriarchy, selfishness and greed are being passed on from one generation to the next [...] the church needs to start a movement to renew family life as a place where the rights of women and the rights of children are deeply respected. (p. 155)

Unfortunately, empirical research post-apartheid suggests that most churches have, in the main, failed to respond to this ongoing task to engage prophetically on these issues in an institutional way. They remain trapped in a haze of ambivalence around human rights issues that mitigate against coordinated practical action in these new struggles (Van der Ven, Dreyer & Pieterse 2004).

South Africa has a long history of socio-religious reinforcement of multiple hierarchical social orders and identities in relation to colonisation, race and sexuality as well as gender. It should not be underestimated how the dominance of religiously legitimated, gendered constructs support and reiterate heteropatriarchy in

ways that are conducive to normalising existing patterns of gendered violence. Hierarchies of gender are still normalised and reinforced in many religious spaces, particularly tied to the spheres of home and family. This can be seen, for example, in the Mighty Men and Worthy Women religious movements of Angus Buchan, which endorse a problematic protectionist model with the man seen as the God-ordained head of the household (Pillay 2015). An urban public theology here that seeks to disrupt elitist sociospatial city patterns and offer full spatial liberation (De Beer 2017) must also refuse to be co-opted into a private-public binary in ways that can normalise violent silences against women. In this task, Letty Russell offers some alternative theological tools to help liberate both the public and the private sphere from violence.

## ■ From ‘Houses of Bondage’ to ‘Households of Freedom’

Thus far, this chapter has argued that South African cities can only become gender-just spaces if work is done on addressing the harms suffered by women across the public-private continuum. This has been shown to be particularly shaped by the sociospatial history of South Africa. It has suggested that churches can potentially be influential in promoting gender justice within urban communities but that currently their role has often remained harmful. Even within the emerging spaces of urban public theology, this silence is noteworthy. In this concluding section, some theological clues are offered that may assist emerging urban public theology to deepen its gender engagement and equip urban churches to be assets and not liabilities on these issues of gender justice within cities.

Feminist theologian Letty Russell forms a recognised part of the canon for urban public theology in South Africa today.<sup>14</sup> Her contribution, in line with many other feminist theologians, insists

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14. Course outlines for tertiary programmes in this field, offered in both Pretoria and Cape Town, reference her work as a core text (De Beer 2018).

on taking experiences seriously as an authoritative source, and she reminds us that our location and where we stand inevitably shape how we both inhabit and see both our theological heritage and our cities, within which so many of us are now located (Russell 1987:29). In her 1987 book *Household of Freedom*, she points to the danger of a theological reinforcement of what she suggests is a false duality between the polis of the city state, traditionally the arena of only free, white, propertied men, and the *oikos* or household, seen as the arena of wives, children and slaves (Russell 1987:25). She ties this androcentric pattern back to ideas of authority of 'founding fathers' underpinning much of Western civilisation (Russell 1987:25). This forms a patriarchal paradigm in which both household and city become entangled, often authorising monarchical domination in politics, culture and household - reinforced down the centuries by many other colonial powers seeking obedient subjects. Russell (1987:25) also notes that Greek culture, while modelling a more democratic polis, still held to a monarchical *oikos* (household) where the master rules as the natural order of things. She suggests that the biblical texts of the New Testament, especially the Pastoral Epistles with their 'household rules', are greatly influenced by both these models and that subsequent readers continue to be shaped by them. She notes that these models of timeless authority often remain rooted in the past, believing that an orderly household always requires someone to be 'in charge' (Russell 1987):

[/]It is important to remember that all households are linked together in God's *oikos* or world house. The false dualism of the city polis (of free men with property) and the household *oikos* (the arena of women, children and slaves) ruled over by 'free' men that is found in Greek society condemns the *oikos* to be a household of bondage, a miniature replica of what was to become the larger household of Caesar that spread across the Roman empire. It also leaves the polis to be a false democracy based on oppression of the families and the workforce of the society. (p. 25)

Instead she suggests that we must orient ideas of authority not to the past but to the shared future, if authority is to be seen



differently in God's world house. When authority is understood as a top-down dictatorial patriarchal rule shaped by a kingdom motif, then, just as Caesar rules the kingdom with an iron fist, so the man rules his household. This model of authority creates 'households of bondage' (Russell 1987:26). She calls, instead, for the reclaiming of an alternative scriptural tradition of the 'open house' as a household where freedom dwells, as possible alternative to this oppressive dualism. It begins with what she terms a 'biblical understanding of God's householding (*oikonomia*) of the whole earth' (Russell 1987:26). Here God is reimagined as a liberator in covenant partnership, rather than co-opted to legitimate a sovereignty of dominating power (Russell 1987:26).

For Russell (1987:35), this requires a shift of our 'household' paradigms at all levels, from top-down authoritarian models of power-over to partnership models of power-with. This theological lens enables the exercise of authority in both public and private realms to be seen as a participation in God's householding and as partnering activities for freedom and not for bondage. This household of freedom foregrounds concrete human interactions in all parts of society across the public-private continuum and can offer ways to challenge the ongoing oppressive experiences of households by placing freedom at its core. She reclaims a tradition of covenant partnership between God and humans that draws on Jubilee images of released captives and liberating journeys, rather than on static hierarchies of domination and subordination (Russell 1987:28).

Russell insists that God's authority is always evoked on behalf of the outcasts of the social household and not as a tool to dominate. She ties this to the subversive vision of the New Testament of the household of God where all genders live in community with one another in shared power. For Russell (1987:26), only if churches become places where these households of freedom are experienced do they become a sign of God's *oikos*. Russell's theological deconstruction of the authority patterns historically present in both polis and household may

offer ways to systematically navigate and contest the mobile geographies of VAWG seen in post-apartheid South Africa.

Deepened engagement with this spatial metaphor may assist urban churches to negate the false dualisms that prop up patriarchy and offer a resource in their journey towards a gender-just faith. De Beer (2008:192) points to the need for urban theology to model the alternative community of the household of God, as one that reflects greater spatial justice and defensible life space. Russell's gendered critique of the hierarchical household offers a reminder that, if we are to see the world as God's household, we must ensure that we also interrogate what sort of household is being imagined and who benefits within that house. We suggest, drawing on Russell's metaphor, that our cities will never become households of freedom within God's wider world house of our shared planetary space until actual concrete households are also reimagined away from bondage towards free spaces. Russell notes that the household is an ambiguously gendered space, often seen as man's castle (denoting kingly ownership) but also framed as a feminine space within which women are expected to remain and nurture life. By reimagining God as the good housekeeper who seeks out and cares for forgotten persons within all houses, she offers an alternative tradition, reinforced in sacred texts (Russell 1987):

When our relationship to God is what matters ultimately, we can dare to live in patterns other than those provided by the customs and traditions of our own culture. Many of those traditions render household an ambiguous term [...] the patriarchal household separate from public life but still constituted as 'man's castle' [...] the household of God where the church of the fathers came to replace the early egalitarian house church as the servant of Constantine and Caesar's household [...] At the same time though, the household [...] is understood in every culture as place where human life is to be nurtured [...] if there were a household of freedom, those who dwelt in it could find a way to nurture life without paying the price of being locked into roles of permanent domination and subordination. (p. 41)

This theological insight is arguably in need of urgent application to the contemporary South African context, where, despite its new constitutional democracy, many of the social practices still reiterate apartheid ideologies of intersectional hierarchy and can reinforce rigorously policed ideas of 'difference' in the realm of gender. When faith actors in South Africa use naturalised theologies of domination and subordination shaped by imperial patterns of thinking that underpin gendered patterns of dominance and violence as God-ordained, they remain complicit. Russell (1987:72) challenges the prevalent idea that authority has to be dominating and offers a new paradigm of shared authority whereby the place we call home reflects a new quality of relationship between men and women (Russell 1987):

[T]his new house of authority belongs to God, the housekeeper of all creation. Against the old house of patriarchal bondage, God stands as the one who suffers the cost of sin and domination and rebuilds creation itself through the work of Jesus Christ. (p. 72)

For Russell, we are all invited to join as partners in the work of cleansing the Temple as the house of God, becoming house revolutionaries to rebuild creation as a house of freedom and a place that all of us may one day call home. This sociospatial vision of a house of freedom for all resonates with the early liberational tradition of African National Congress founder Pixley ka Seme, when he told South Africans in 1911 that 'we are all children of one household and we must learn to live together' (cited in Asmal, Chidester & Lubisi 2005:34).

Russell offers a reminder that our metaphors matter. Believing you live 'in the master's house' creates a very different image to being on the liberating journey towards a new home of gendered freedom. She notes that, if households are to sustain life at all levels, on this journey towards freedom we must all participate in the shared task of home-building. Churches are called to choose between the radical vision of a home of a discipleship of equals, or of a reinforcement of the hierarchical household rules that require obedience from slaves to masters and women to men.

In light of the gendered cycles of violence that are a deep concern in South Africa (Davies & Dreyer 2014:5), Russell's (1992) later reflection on the city as a battered woman must also haunt us. She insists here that churches must show concrete acts of solidarity with all who struggle to break the chains of these cycles of violence against women in all spaces (Russell 1992:154). Women's screams, she suggests, are an essential part of the cries of all those who remain oppressed and reflect the voice of the Spirit, which needs to be given voice (Russell 1992:154). This reclaims the theological idea of the Holy Spirit as an advocate for justice, taking to the streets to hammer out a new message of hope, not only for our public streets but also for the private hidden alleys of women's lives, where they are often seen as second-rate occupants or insecure tenants even in their homes, where they are not often legally named as the owner. In the South African context, the ever-shifting geographies of violence mean that much violence against women still takes place in the hidden corners of the city where their voices are stifled, silenced or go unheard.

## ■ Conclusion

If our cities are to be spatially transformed into 'households of freedom' within a South Africa that nurtures cities as safe homes for all women who live here, then the actual homes within those cities also need to be radically transformed as places of shared structural power that are free from gendered violence and its theological underpinnings. Urban public theologies in South Africa need to avoid reinforcing a false dualism of the public-private binary on which myths of stranger rape and dark alleyways flourish, to be resolved merely by increased policing, women taxi drivers and better street lighting. The most dangerous alleyway for many women remains the one in the household where they are often insecure tenants. The man who makes them want to scream in fear is unlikely to be a stranger and more likely to be someone they know and are even financially dependent on.

If churches do not find ways to talk about these streets and these men, they will remain unable to respond to or address the violences that women and girls experience on a daily basis. Churches exist in almost every urban street in South Africa. As the survivors in our earlier study and those speaking out today remind us, their influence around gender constructs reaches into families and homes, sacramentalising marriages, births and child-rearing patterns, with pastors the first point of call for ethical guidance. They can be important role players in the journey towards gender-just homes, communities and cities as concrete households of freedom. Alternatively, they can continue to maintain the master's house. The same is true for urban public theology.

# Churches, Urban Geographies and Contested Immigration in the United States

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## ■ Introduction

The portion of the US population residing in urban areas has increased noticeably during the last 100 years, expanding from 46% of the US population in 1910 to almost 81% by 2010 (US Census Bureau 2000, 2010). These urban populations tend to be younger, poorer, less frequently married, more frequently

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college educated and significantly more racially and ethnically diverse than rural populations. It is also in urban contexts where the vast majority of new immigrants to the US reside, with 85% of immigrants residing in the 100 largest metropolitan areas in 2010 (the top five areas being New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago and Houston) (Singer 2011). The immigrant population in the US is substantial in fact, numbering almost 44 million in 2016, or approximately 13% of the US general population (as compared with 10.3 million in 1900, which was also 13% of the population at the time). The US's immigrant population includes an estimated 11.5 million undocumented immigrants, 81% of which resided in 171 largely urban counties numbering 10 000 or more undocumented immigrants per county (Zon, Batalova & Hallock 2018).

Many coastal cities and several large metropolises within the US interior have served as major immigrant gateways for more than a century, including New York, Boston, Philadelphia and San Francisco (on the US coasts) and Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati and St. Louis (in the US interior). The immigrant influxes that established these cities as major immigrant hubs during the 1800s and early 1900s came mainly from Global North contexts (and from Asia). Although some of the ethnic groups that came to the US through these earlier waves of immigration faced challenges to their integration and acceptance within the US (especially immigrants coming from Asian countries and southern Europe), American ethnic prejudices proved less intractable than the racial prejudices that would confront the latter-20th-century immigration waves of brown and black peoples coming from the Global South (including from southern Asia).

The challenges to newly arriving black and brown Global South immigrants have been most evident and pronounced in more newly targeted immigrant destinations in the south-eastern and Midwestern US – places such as Atlanta, Georgia; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Indianapolis, Indiana (to name a few). As large numbers of black and brown immigrants have settled in cities and towns previously unaccustomed to large Global South populations, bringing with them distinctive social worlds and collective claims

on economic and social opportunity, their presence within these contexts has been met oftentimes with resistance. These new 'immigrant gateway cities' and the states (and subregions) in which they are located have become ground zero for some of the fiercest contestations within the US over immigrant rights.

The chapter here examines racialised US thought and practice specific to immigration and citizenship, especially as operative within south-eastern and Midwestern immigrant gateway contexts. The analysis explores tensions related to race and socio-economic life within these contexts, as well as the role of religious and political leaders in either fostering or dispelling these antagonisms, often directed at newly arriving immigrants. The analysis concludes with theological affirmations of inclusivity towards immigrants from US Catholic and Protestant leaders.

## ■ Linkages Between Immigration Policy and Social Opportunity in Gateway Contexts

Global South immigrants in recent decades have begun settling in various US cities and regions not previously viewed by their respective countrymen and countrywomen as favoured US destinations. South-eastern and Midwestern contexts where ethnicities and national origin distinctions had long since been collapsed into flattened versions of American whiteness and blackness were not perceived previously by many Global South immigrants as places hospitable to their cultures and concerns. But with increasing Global South immigrant numbers in the decades after the US's liberalising 1965 immigration reforms, and with an expanding commitment to multiculturalism in the decades after the mid-20th century civil rights and identity politics uprisings, new geographies for immigrant settlement became real possibilities.

By the latter 20th century, new concentrations of Global South immigrants were discernible in states such as Indiana,



North Carolina and Georgia. Between the years 2000 and 2010, the population of foreign-born persons from Africa grew from 7308 to 18 959 in Indiana (a 159% increase), from 20 369 to 48 472 in North Carolina (a 138% increase) and from 40 423 to 74 556 in Georgia (an 84% increase). During that same time period, the population of foreign-born persons from Latin America grew from 77 457 to 143 142 in Indiana (an 84% increase), from 239 853 to 413 888 in North Carolina (a 72% increase) and from 300 357 to 515 382 in Georgia (a 71% increase) (Federation for American Immigration Reform 2017). Many of these new immigrants resided in the states' major cities, including Indianapolis, Charlotte and Atlanta. Metropolitan Atlanta, in fact, had the fifth highest percentage increase among the nation's largest metro areas between 2000 and 2010 in foreign-born residents. Its overall increase was from 10% to 13.5%.

The increasing numbers of Global South immigrants in these new gateway contexts were accompanied by a noticeable pushback by local citizens against the racial, cultural and sometimes religious diversifications brought about through the presence of persons often regarded as 'social others'. Although Global South immigrants with demonstrated professional skill sets have found greater acceptance within the contexts into which they have emigrated, Global South immigrants (especially, but not exclusively, undocumented immigrants) have tended to be regarded by their host communities less as social contributors than as fiscal burdens, cultural threats and economic competitors. This was especially true among the predominantly working-class to lower-middle class native-born American populations comprising Midwestern and south-eastern Bible-Belt states such as Indiana, North Carolina and Georgia.

Perceptions of immigrants often do not match the cost-benefit realities with respect to new immigrant social impact within these contexts. For example, Indiana's immigrant population (whether legal or undocumented) was estimated in 2014 to have earned \$8.1 billion, on which they paid \$702 million in state and local taxes and \$1.6bn in federal taxes. Rather than

focusing on economic contributions by new immigrants, the Republican-controlled Indiana State Senate issued a report criticising \$131m per year in estimated state spending on services to immigrants, including education spending (which itself contributed to a more well-trained work force) (Wang 2016). In North Carolina, a 2014 report showed 7.9% of businesses in the state were owned by immigrants, including almost 33% of Charlotte's 'main street' businesses. North Carolina's Asian-owned and Latino-owned businesses alone accounted in 2012 for \$13.5bn in sales and 79 000 employees, and the state's Latino population paid a total of \$2.5bn in federal, state and local taxes in 2013 (Fyler 2016). A 2014 report from the Federation for American Immigration Reform pointed out, however, that the cost to North Carolina for services to undocumented immigrants is about \$2bn per year (about half of which was for K-12 education), while state taxes collected from undocumented immigrants only amounted to about \$288m per year. Although suggesting the fiscal burden to the state would be lessened if undocumented immigrants gained legal status, the report concluded the 'only sure way to reduce the fiscal burden from illegal aliens is to reduce the size of that population' (Martin 2014).

Although there are many practical considerations that must be taken into account in public responses to new immigrants, responses have often been dominated by an 'immigrants-as-threat' trope. Although this emphasis is in no way unique to new gateway contexts, such characterisations of immigrant populations have gained in intensity with expanding numbers of undocumented immigrants crossing into the US primarily from Mexico and Central America and a growing resistance to Muslim immigrants brought about by concerns over terrorism.

Long before these more newly contested populations were the focus of anti-immigrant attention, however, US citizenship status and benefits were being hotly contested and conferred in a discriminatory manner to a succession of new waves of immigrants - dating back to at least the late 1700s. During the

initial decades of the US republic through at least the 1830s, only propertied white males could be classified as rightful US citizens, given that they alone possessed the right to vote. Native Americans were formally denied US citizenship prior to the 1924 *Indian Citizenship Act*, except occasionally in exchange for land. Although African Americans were not technically excluded from citizenship by the Constitution, black slaves were designated as three-fifths of a person, and free black people could rely on few constitutional rights prior to the civil war. Black people were officially excluded from citizenship when the US Supreme Court ruled in the 1857 *Dred Scott* case that black people (whether slave or free) could not be considered US citizens because they were not part of the 'sovereign people' to whom the Constitution was intended to apply. The long and tortuous path to formally consolidating black citizenship required a civil war and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution freeing black people from slavery, along with the 14th Amendment, which formally established that (Legal Information Institute n.d.:n.p.) '[a]ll persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside'.

This constitutional stipulation, commonly referred to as 'birthright citizenship', has met with numerous challenges over the years and continues to be fiercely debated. On one side (and with undocumented immigrants as primary target), there has been strong opposition to benefits accruing to undocumented immigrants in the form of employment, publicly supported healthcare and educational provisions, and citizenship status conferred upon children born within the US to parents who are not legal citizens. Persons on this side of the debate have advocated stricter border enforcement as well as the denial of public benefits, employment opportunities and citizenship possibilities (including birthright 'loopholes') to persons residing in the country without proper documentation. Some on this side of the debate have called also for mass deportation of persons who lack legal citizenship status. On the other side of the debate have been persons who

have resisted these strict approaches and have promoted policy measures instead that would safeguard human rights and humane treatment for undocumented immigrants, including possibilities for amnesty and pathways to citizenship.

While these debates receive national attention, in recent decades they have tended to be fought out at local and state levels. Some states have become representative of a pro-immigrant rights position (such as California and Illinois) and some an anti-immigrant rights position (Arizona and Alabama). California and Illinois, for example, are among a half dozen or so states formally designating themselves as ‘sanctuary’ states for immigrants (meaning they refuse to cooperate with federal attempts to apprehend and deport undocumented immigrants). At the opposite end, Arizona (2008–2010) and Alabama (in 2011) passed the most restrictive statewide laws in the country on immigrants, with stipulations that included verification by businesses of employee immigration status; police permission to inquire into immigration status of persons during police stops about whom there may be ‘reasonable suspicions’ as to their status; forbidding of landlords from renting to undocumented immigrants and employers from hiring undocumented immigrants; requirements that public elementary, middle and high schools annually tally and report students with undocumented status; and the blocking of state services and benefits such as welfare support and in-state tertiary school tuition.

Georgia and Indiana are also among the handful of states that bar undocumented immigrants from receiving in-state college tuition rates and that authorise police to question persons about their immigration status. Along with Ohio and North Carolina, they are among 26 states as well that opposed executive actions during Barack Obama’s presidency that would have provided work permits and protections from deportation for roughly 4 million undocumented immigrants (Park 2015). Similarly, in a state-by-state assessment by the University of California Global Health Institute of social policies bearing upon undocumented immigrants, Ohio, Indiana, Georgia and North Carolina were classified at or

near the bottom among states with respect to nine indices of social support for these persons:

1. child health insurance and prenatal care
2. supplemental nutrition programmes
3. in-state tuition
4. scholarships and financial aid
5. workers' compensation laws
6. employee work authorisation
7. driver licensing
8. opposition to federal restrictions on states that grant driver's licences to undocumented immigrants
9. collaborations between immigration officials and local law enforcement agencies.

The study assessed whether state approaches along each of these indices had an inclusive or exclusive impact on undocumented immigrants, assigning a +1 for inclusive approaches and a -1 for exclusive approaches. Georgia and North Carolina scored -5, Indiana scored -6 and Ohio scored -7 (designating it as the most exclusive state on these matters) (Rodriguez, Young, and Wallace 2015).

Nevertheless, in the same manner that certain states have defied federal crackdowns on undocumented immigrants, some cities within immigrant restrictive states have resisted state-level anti-immigrant policies. For example, in contrast to North Carolina's anti-immigrant climate at the state level (including its ban on 'sanctuary' policies), the city of Charlotte in 2013 was one of a few (and one of the first) North Carolina cities to declare itself a 'welcoming city' for immigrants. By designating itself a 'welcoming city', this promoted (among other things) immigrant entrepreneurship, citizenship and increased cooperation between law enforcement and immigrant communities (Fyler 2016). In 2015, the city council's immigrant integration task force proposed the issuing of municipal identity cards to undocumented immigrants that would provide them with proof of identity and allow them to utilise public library services and pay for public transportation. The proposal was widely opposed at the state level (Glum 2015).

The state of Indiana has also taken a hard-line approach on immigration matters. In 2015, Mike Pence, who was then the Indiana governor, refused to resettle Syrian refugees fleeing violence in their home country. After the 2016 election of Donald Trump as US president and Pence as vice president, immigrant influxes into Indiana (and other states) was further slowed by the Trump–Pence administration’s refusal to process new refugee applications, resulting in a precipitous drop in the number of refugees being resettled across Indiana, including in Indianapolis (McCoy 2017). Resistance to these anti-immigrant trends within Indiana sprang up from (among other places) Indiana business leaders, heavily concentrated within the state capital, Indianapolis (Wang 2016).

It is important to point out that local resistance to state and federal anti-immigrant policies was driven in many of these Bible-Belt south-eastern and Midwestern contexts by local faith communities. In fact, battles over immigrant policies have been just as contentious (if not more so) within faith communities as they have been within the public sector. Religious contestations over immigration issues at both the local and national levels are outlined in the following.

## ■ Religious Contestation Over Immigration

America’s vacillations between an open, inclusive context and insular, exclusive context have been long-standing and oftentimes have fed off religious concerns. From its early years as a pilgrim refuge from religious persecution and its subsequent decades as a place of ‘white’ Christian freedom to its mid-20th century immigration reforms that reduced exclusionary barriers towards persons from diverse ethnicities and non-Christian faith traditions, conceptions of ‘who America is intended for’ and ‘who America is obligated to’ have been rooted strongly in religious sensibilities.

America’s religion-derived intolerances towards new immigrant populations (which stand in flagrant contradiction to the nation’s historical rooting in external population influxes and

pursuits of religious freedom) have been both long-standing and readily invoked. In the early American colonies, Puritans erected religious and political barriers to coexistence with their fellow immigrants aligned with other traditions, such as Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Quakers or Mennonites. The presence of these traditions within Puritan New England was largely dissuaded, and these traditions became concentrated to the south of New England in the mid-Atlantic territories (New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey) or further south in Maryland and Virginia.

Intolerances between Protestant traditions, however, paled in comparison to intolerances to influxes of Catholics by the late 1700s (especially from southern Europe). Even prominent 'progressive' clergymen – such as Lyman Beecher and distinguished 19th-century Presbyterian minister, seminary president and father of renowned anti-slavery author Harriet Beecher Stowe – inveighed against Catholics, declaring their traditions 'averse to liberty' and their religious leaders 'dependent on foreigners opposed to the principles of our government'. Underscoring the perceived urgency of the matter, Beecher (1835) stated:

[/]t should appear that three-fourths of the foreign emigrants whose accumulating tide is rolling in upon us, are, through the medium of their religion and priesthood, as entirely accessible to [*foreign*] potentates [...] as if they were an army of soldiers, enlisted and officered, and spreading over the land. (p. 56)

On 22 September 2015, almost two centuries removed from Beecher's Catholic forebodings, Pope Francis's arrival in the US for an official papal visit was greeted with an outpouring of enthusiasm, including from President Obama, the Congress and hundreds of thousands of American spectators within the cities he visited. Ironically, 2 days prior to Pope Francis' arrival in the US, Republican presidential candidate and influential evangelical lay leader Ben Carson made a statement on network television reminiscent of Beecher's trepidations about presumed encroachments of immigrant religious influence. Carson remarked

on National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) *Meet the Press*: 'I would not advocate that we put a Muslim in charge of this nation. I absolutely would not agree with that' (Carson 2015a). The following day, Carson posted a follow-up statement on his Facebook page that attempted to clarify and disaggregate what even several of his allies regarded as a sweeping condemnation of Muslims: 'I could never support a candidate for President of the United States that was Muslim and had not renounced the central tenant of Islam: sharia law' (Carson 2015b). In that one short September 2015 week, there was high-profile evidence of two centuries of progress in American appreciation for Catholicism but, at the same time, clear indicators of American retrogression into a long history of nativism that has now identified Muslims as the group intruding upon the US's 'Western' Christian space.

Carson's anti-Muslim statements pandered to pronounced anti-Muslim sentiment that has become strongly correlated with evangelicals and with US conservatives more widely. A 2014 Zogby poll showed 63% of conservatives viewed Muslims unfavourably, as compared with 33% of Democrats and 39% of Independents (Zogby 2014). Similarly, a 2014 Pew Forum survey that asked Americans about their feelings towards Muslims (with 0 representing the negative end of the scale and 100 representing the positive end), the average rating from the general population was 40, with an average rating of 30 among white evangelicals (Pew Forum 2014a).

As the data suggest, there is a receptive American audience for nativist and xenophobic messages – and Carson is not the only prominent US evangelical leader recently preaching to that congregation. A series of diatribes by North Carolina-based Rev. Franklin Graham (son of renowned and recently deceased evangelist Billy Graham) have been incendiary in their assessments of Muslims. Graham has referred to Islam as a 'very wicked and evil religion' and as 'a religion of war' and has branded Muslims as persons who 'hate Israel and [...] hate Christians'. Graham says 'this isn't just radical Islam – this is Islam, and a "storm is coming" to America in the form of acts of Islamic terror' (Chapman 2015).



Moreover, Graham posted a statement on his Facebook page in July 2015 that addressed the issue of Muslim immigration to the US. 'We should stop all immigration of Muslims to the U.S. until this threat with Islam has been settled', said Graham (2015):

Every Muslim who comes into this country has the potential to be radicalised - and they do their killing to honor their religion and Muhammad [...] During World War 2, we didn't allow Japanese to immigrate to America, nor did we allow Germans. Why are we allowing Muslims now? (n.p.)

Although his July comments were condemned by a number of evangelical leaders (LeClaire 2015), the post received more than 167 000 likes, and it was reposted by at least 57 000 Facebook users.

There have also been African-American clergy vocally opposed to the influx of undocumented immigrants into the US, while expressing varying degrees of sympathy with the plight of these immigrants. Clergy affiliated with groups such as the Black American Leadership Alliance (BALA) or its predecessor groups the African American Leadership Council (AALC) and Choose Black America have been resistant to the presence of undocumented immigrants and to policies or perspectives that might encourage them to remain in the US - including *US Senate Bill 744*, which contained amnesty provisions for undocumented immigrants. At a 2013 press conference at the National Press Club, several clergymen with the AALC suggested correlations between the growing presence of undocumented workers in the US and declining employment among African-American labourers. For example, remarks by William Owens, who also heads a group called the 'Coalition of African American Pastors', cited concerns raised at one time or another by A. Phillip Randolph, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan and Coretta Scott King about potential economic downsides to large-scale immigration to the US. Jesse Lee Peterson, a Los Angeles minister and activist also speaking at the press conference, moved from the more general implications by the past leaders cited by Owens to a more specific narrative about conflict between black people

and undocumented Latinos in Los Angeles, which led him to conclude the following (African American Leadership Council 2013):

We are calling on the Congressional Black Caucus, President Obama, and others to not support amnesty [*for undocumented immigrants*]. The last thing we need in our country right now is another amnesty. We need to shut the borders down, keep these illegals out, so we can bring black Americans up to standards so they can earn their way, they can take care of their families, and not rely on the government or someone else to do it for them. [...] We need to think of black Americans, the citizens of this great nation [...] and the lack of opportunities they have. (n.p.)

Despite efforts by the AALC to tie its perspectives to broader black leadership traditions or constituencies, these efforts received seemingly scant and fleeting attention from what was mainly a handful of media sources.

By July 2013, AALC activists followed up their April press conference with a March for Jobs, organised under the auspices of their successor organisation, BALA. The march brought together roughly 1000 activists (most of whom were white) who were opposed to Senate Bill 744 and to what were perceived as concessions within the bill to undocumented immigrants – with speakers at the march including Senator Ted Cruz (Texas), Senator Jeff Session (Alabama), Rep. Steve King (Iowa), former Florida congressman Allen West and 2012 Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain. In the run-up to the march, BALA founder and former Department of Justice immigration lawyer Leah Durant played up the significance of the upcoming march in these terms (Lee 2013):

Our opponents are fearful that the fight against illegal immigration, which has traditionally been considered part of a conservative agenda, is now attracting the broad support of everyday Americans – blacks and whites, religious and non-religious, Democrats and Republicans, men and women who run the gamut from progressive to conservative. (p. 1)

Durant's characterisation of expansive support for the march's anti-immigrant, anti-amnesty agenda was clearly not borne out

by the march's attendance, nor could it begin to compare with the broad-based gathering of hundreds of thousands of persons on the Washington Mall a few months later commemorating the 50th anniversary of the social justice-oriented 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Actually, US public opinion along racial lines about immigration matters is more complex than may be suggested by the outsized voice and visibility of either conservative or liberal immigration pundits. Multi-year polling data from Gallup show black people and white people to have similar opinion profiles on several measures of support for immigrants. For example, 72% of white people and 70% of black people in 2015 viewed the flow of immigrants to the US as a 'good thing', and 87% of white people and 89% of black people favoured allowing undocumented immigrants residing in the country to acquire citizenship if they met certain conditions. The Gallup data also showed, however, that 85% of white people and 84% of black people favoured increasing security at the US border, and 88% of white people and 82% of black people favoured requiring employers to check the immigration status of their workers. Meanwhile, Latino responses on these questions placed a somewhat stronger emphasis on approaches that facilitated social opportunities for immigrants coming to the US in search of a better life. Eighty-one per cent viewed current immigration to the US as a good thing, 92% favoured citizenship for undocumented immigrants who are in the US and a noticeably lower percentage than black people and white people supported increased border security (74%) and immigration status verification of workers (65%) (Gallup 2015).

At the level of religious leadership, although at least a segment of black religious leaders has favoured a harsher approach to undocumented immigrants within the US, they have faced an uphill battle in gaining substantial African-American support for an anti-immigrant platform. Actually, black clergy have been more discernibly vocal in support of immigration reform. Clergy within the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC),

which is one of the more liberal historic black denominations, have spoken out in favour of a generous approach to undocumented immigrants. Speaking in 2013 about the denomination's perspectives on immigration reform, PNBC president Carroll A. Baltimore, Sr. stated (Faith in Public Life 2013):

What I hear from people in the pews is that no one should be trapped in second-class status, regardless of race or where you were born. Now is the time to build a road to citizenship for aspiring Americans. (p. 1)

In 2014, a New York City coalition of mostly nondenominational black clergy partnered with the Black Institute and the Black Alliance for Just Immigration to mobilise support for legislation to provide undocumented immigrants in New York City with state driver's licences and municipal identification cards that would make them less susceptible to harassment by police and more likely to gain employment (Blackstar News 2014). Black clergy have also been key participants in immigration reform rallies in major US cities, including 2015 mobilisations in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. One of the leaders involved in the San Francisco rally, Rev. Brian Woodson of the Bay Area Christian Connection, articulated his own and others' objectives (KNTV-NBC News 2010):

We who work for a living simply want to be able to live off of our work, and we don't want to have to die in the fields. That's an old American story that should not be repeated among any ethnicity. (p. 1)

Clergy have mobilised locally in support of immigrants in other cities as well, including Midwestern cities such as Indianapolis and south-eastern cities such as Charlotte and Atlanta. Indianapolis clergy, for example, have organised protests in response to President Trump's efforts to terminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme, a programme established in 2012 through executive order by Barack Obama that prevents certain persons who entered the US illegally as minors from being immediately deported. In March 2018, a crowd of protesters led by an interfaith group called Faith in Indiana

gathered outside the Indianapolis offices of Indiana's two US Senators, calling for congressional action to prevent deportations of undocumented minors and the deportations of undocumented parents of immigrant children born in the US as legal citizens. Protesters marched through downtown streets, blocking traffic and singing songs such as 'We Shall Overcome', with dozens of the protesters arrested by local police (McGill 2018).

Clergy advocacy in Charlotte on behalf of immigrants has been even more widespread. Clergy leaders connected with a local interfaith organisation called Mecklenburg Ministries have facilitated ecumenical workshops to encourage Charlotte-area congregations to be hospitable to newly arriving immigrants, mainly through social service outreach programmes and culturally sensitive religious programming internal to congregations (Deaton 2008). Denominations such as the Presbyterian Church in the US, the United Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church have also pushed beyond social services to policy advocacy in support of immigrants, whether acting unilaterally through their denominational channels or in partnership with one or more denominations (Bishop 2009). These local Charlotte-area church actions are sometimes connected to state-level church advocacy, especially through the North Carolina Religious Coalition for Justice for Immigrants. This coalition facilitates an annual statewide clergy breakfast where immigration matters receive attention, and they have also produced an official statement 'in response to rising anti-immigrant rhetoric and sentiment', which has been formally endorsed by nearly 400 clergypersons and 1000 laypersons across the state. The statement reads, in part (Belle 2014; NC Religious Coalition for Justice for Immigrants 2014):

We deplore any governmental action which unduly emphasizes enforcement as the primary response to immigrants entering this country or which criminalizes persons providing humanitarian assistance to migrants. We encourage the state and local governments of North Carolina to provide for fair treatment and protection of our state's immigrant population, including access to

education and mobility. In addition, we are troubled and grieved by the separation of families and other forms of suffering that continue to take place as a result of immigration raids. (n.p.)

In Atlanta, there has been strong faith-based advocacy in support of new immigrants, including from the Catholic Archdiocese, the Concerned Black Clergy association and several interfaith groups such as Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta, Interfaith Community Initiatives and Neshama Interfaith Center. The Catholic Archdiocese formed an immigration task force in 2013 tasked with helping Catholic congregations prepare for what was expected to be large influxes locally of new immigrants as a result of anticipated immigration reform (Nelson 2013). While the Catholic Archdiocese has brought a strong focus on Latinx immigrants, the Concerned Black Clergy has lifted up the plight of new immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa. In 2010, for example, a group of black clergymen protested outside Atlanta's Immigration and Custom Enforcement office, denouncing the nation's treatment of undocumented immigrants, especially Haitians at the time, and calling on Barack Obama to move towards enacting immigration reforms promised during his election campaign (Schram 2010). After the election of Donald Trump and his anti-immigrant policy moves, Atlanta's interfaith leaders have emerged as especially active in challenging these policies, issuing a statement in response to his executive order on immigration. Among other demands, the statement by the interfaith leaders stated the following (Jean-Louis 2017):

We call on President Trump to rescind this abhorrent and unconstitutional executive order. Every member of Congress must denounce its provisions, including the imposition of a religious test for entry, and urge its immediate withdrawal. Every American citizen must take every possible action to oppose this violation of the USA's values. (p. 1)

These local-level acts of religious resistance to the US's landscape of anti-immigrant policies and sentiments are foundational to achieving broader, macro level immigration reforms within the country. These broader reforms will require not only systematic

and strategic political activism but also a systematic articulation of a normative vision of community rooted in political and religious instincts at the heart of more universal conceptions of humanity.

## ■ **Towards a Public Theology of Global Community Inclusivity**

American conceptions of national community have reflected quite strong exclusivist tendencies, but an equally strong (if not stronger) inclusive trajectory has existed as well. In fact, the 'mainstream' of American thought since the mid-20th century (at least within American leadership sectors) has leaned noticeably towards conceptions of human community, permitting a more permeable sense of cultural boundaries. Community inclusiveness with respect to culture achieved explicit expression in the form of the promotion of multiculturalism beginning at least in the mid-20th century. Emanating from the academic sector, this movement to embrace cultural diversity and difference within the US spread into many other sectors as well, including the employment, entertainment, political and (eventually) religious sectors.

With changes to the cultural and demographic landscape pressing in from all directions by the mid-1960s, and with religious hegemony within the US of Judeo-Christian traditions becoming a less taken-for-granted feature of that American landscape, American faith leaders increasingly noted and weighed in on these changes. African-American religious leaders perhaps more than any other group of US religious leaders pointed to the potential importance for the US of diverse global faith traditions. African-American clergy such as Howard Thurman, Benjamin E. Mays and Martin Luther King, Jr. travelled to India during the early to mid-20th century to engage with Hindu leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, with their subsequent leadership within mid-20th century pursuits of civil rights and human rights in the US reflecting the influence of Gandhian and Hindu thinking, especially

related to non-violent resistance. Mid-20th century black religious leaders also played a key role in bringing greater public attention to the emerging influence of Islam within the US, especially via the high-profile activism of Nation of Islam leader Malcolm X and the very public conversions to Islam of prominent athletes such as world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali (formerly Cassius Clay) and Hall of Fame basketball star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (formerly Lew Alcindor).

King stands out also for public commentary that outlined a religiously diverse, globally connected vision for America. King (1967b) stated in a 1967 publication that:

We have inherited a large house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together – black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu – a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interests, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace. (p. 177)

In a speech given that same year that provided the most extensive assessment of the US's role in the world, King again challenged Americans (and specifically the US government) to renounce the cultural, political and religious arrogance animating its approach to international affairs. King (1967a) remarked:

I cannot forget that the Nobel Prize for Peace was also a commission [...] that takes me beyond national allegiances [*and beyond*] the calling of race or nation or creed. (p. 8)

King in this speech called America instead to 'a world-wide fellowship' based upon 'unconditional love' for all people, which he viewed as 'that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life' (King 1967a:8).

In the half-century since King and other mid-20th century champions of religious and cultural inclusiveness provided their strategic inputs towards a multicultural, cross-cultural repositioning of American life, a hospitality towards religious and sociocultural outsiders has become more apparent on the part of American faith leaders across the



spectrum of faith traditions (including across the spectrum of American Christianity). Indicators of this can be derived through general population data from sources such as the 2014 US Religious Landscape Survey. These data show several trends suggestive of greater American openness to non-Christian faiths, including an increase in Christians married to spouses from other faiths (3% before 1960 vs. 6% in 2014), and 70% of Americans affiliated with a religion or denomination said they agreed that ‘many religions can lead to eternal life’ (Pew Forum 2014b). Moreover, general population data from the 2014 Zogby survey cited earlier on American attitudes towards non-Christian faith groups indicated 51% of Americans had a favourable view of Buddhists and 44% had a favourable view of Hindus. This was not dramatically different from the percentage of Americans with a favourable view of Catholics (58%) or of Presbyterians (60%) (Zogby 2014).

While faith leaders’ perspectives are captured no doubt in these recent data, a more direct indication of their contemporary perspectives has come in the form of seemingly well-received public statements by high-profile leaders on religious and cultural pluralism. For example, during Pope Francis’ September 2015 visit to the US, he challenged Catholic Bishops in one of his speeches to lead the way in receptivity to immigrants. ‘From the beginning’, Pope Francis said (in Williams 2015):

[Y]ou have learned their languages, promoted their cause, made their contributions your own, defended their rights, helped them to prosper, and kept alive the flame of their faith. Perhaps you will be challenged by their diversity. (p. 1)

Similarly, in his speech before the US Congress, he stated (in Francis 2015):

We must resolve now to live as nobly and as justly as possible, as we educate new generations not to turn their back on our ‘neighbors’ and everything around us. Building a nation calls us to recognise that we must constantly relate to others, rejecting a mindset of hostility in order to adopt one of reciprocal subsidiarity, in a constant effort to do our best. (p. 1)

The Pope's US visit, including these speeches, was celebrated and hailed by a wide plurality of Americans.

If the Pope's remarks serve as a measure of American Catholic attitudes on religious pluralism, Barack Obama's public statements on transcultural and transreligious diversification are illuminating his identifications with mainstream US Protestant cultures. On 01 July 2010, Obama delivered a much-anticipated speech on immigration reform, outlining the administration's and much of the country's desire to address the growing number of undocumented immigrants through an approach that insured humane treatment, civil rights and reasonable prospects for social advancement while at the same time more effectively securing the nation's borders.

'Being an American is not a matter of blood or birth', said Obama (2010:1). 'It's a matter of faith. It's a matter of fidelity to the shared values that we all hold so dear.' Referencing the contested nature of US citizenship, he went on to say (Obama 2010):

Each new wave of immigrants has generated fear and resentments towards newcomers [...] Our founding was rooted in the notion that America was unique as a place of refuge and freedom [...] But the ink on our Constitution was barely dry when, amidst conflict, Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, which placed harsh restrictions of those suspected of having foreign allegiances. (p. 1)

In further connecting the need for immigration reform to imperatives of faith and morality, Obama stated (Obama 2010):

I've met with leaders from America's religious communities [...] people of different faiths and beliefs, some liberal, some conservative, who nonetheless share a sense of urgency; who understand that fixing our broken immigration system is not only a political issue, not just an economic issue, but a moral imperative as well. (p. 1)

The introduction of Obama at this speech was made by Bill Hybels, an evangelical pastor of Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago, Illinois – a congregation considered to be the third largest in the US, based upon an average weekly attendance of

more than 24 000 persons. In introducing Obama, Pastor Hybels (2010) remarked:

A recurring triad in the Christian scriptures is the mandate from God to show appropriate concern for widows, orphans and aliens. In recent years the challenge of caring for the 'stranger within our gates' has escalated to new levels of confusion and frustration because our current immigration laws leave millions of people with no practical way to come out of the darkness. (p. 1)

In concluding his remarks, Hybels signalled his support for the content of the immigration reform being proposed (Hybels 2010):

[T]oday is a day of hope. Today an earnest bi-partisan conversation begins that those of us in the Faith Community have been praying about for many years. We urge the members of Congress to consider all parties who are affected by this escalating issue. We ask you to act with a spirit of urgency and unity to chart a tough but fair path for the millions of people who entered our great nation with the same kind of dream my grandparents did a century ago. (p. 1)

As someone considered to be one of the most influential ministers in the US (especially among evangelicals), Hybels' support of a more inclusive approach towards 'outsiders' could be viewed as strategic to shoring up a majority coalition in support of a politics and a theology of inclusiveness. Another strategic component of that coalition is African-American clergy, and their support for immigration reform as outlined in Obama's speech was equally strong, if not stronger and even more expansive. An important network of activist clergy, the African American Ministers Leadership Council (2013), who are affiliated with the lobby organisation People for the American Way, responded to Obama's speech in this way:

We are a people and a nation of hope, a beacon of light. This light has been visible, viable, and valued. We must move beyond what divides, inflames and demonizes. Families must be reunited, employment must be safe and fair for all, fear and intimidation must be eliminated, and the testimony and culture of this generation must be fundamentally changed to embrace diversity, respect, hope and courage. (n.p.)

They also conveyed agreement with the proposed legislative reforms while suggesting broader cultural reforms will be required as well (People for the American Way 2010):

We appreciate the reflective tone of the President's remarks, and agree with his thoughtful conclusion – while responsible legislation is needed, there is an even greater need to inform and educate the American public about who the immigrant is, what the immigrant has contributed to the advancement of this nation, and how the immigrant will be a part of the building and defense of the next chapter in our history. (p. 1)

It is safe to say there is a clear American following as well for the more inclusive public vision articulated in these instances by Barack Obama and Pope Francis, a vision that enjoys support from prominent religious leaders and (if the polls cited here are correct) by what seems to be close to a majority of rank-and-file citizens. Ideally, it will be this more broadly construed conception of the public rather than the narrowly construed conceptions conveyed through various American nativist traditions that will win the day within this currently contested ideological context.

## ■ Conclusion

### ■ Notes

1. Median age: urban 45, rural 51; poverty rate: urban 14%, rural 11%; married: urban 50%, rural 61%; bachelor's degree or higher: urban 29%, rural 19%; racial and ethnic diversity: rural white population 77%; US (total) white population 63%. *Source*: US Census Bureau (2012).
2. The *Immigration and Naturalization Act* of 1965 moved away from some of the numerical quotas restricting Global South immigration into the US, resulting in significant increases over subsequent decades in Global South immigrants to the country. Evidence of the bill's impact was that the number of documented immigrants arriving in the US between 1965 and 2000 were three times the number during the 30 years prior to the 1965 bill, and European immigrants as a proportion of total immigrants to the US declined from more than half of

total US immigrants during the 1950s to only 16% of total US immigrants by 2000 (see, e.g., History Channel 1965).

3. See, for example, Immigration Forum (2015), which estimates roughly one-third of Indiana's foreign-born Latino population and roughly one-fifth of its African foreign-born population resides in Indianapolis; see also Brookings Institution (2000). On Charlotte, see Fyler (2016) and Data USA (n.d.).

# Dwelling as Just Faith: Migrant Housing, Precarity and the Activities of Faith- Based Organisations in Tshwane and Atlanta

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## ■ Introduction

The planetary urbanisation thesis critiques universalising and stage-dependent accounts of the growth of many cities across Africa, Asia and North America (Brenner & Schmid 2014a, 2014b, 2015). It sees cities as platforms or assemblages where diverse urban processes intersect and get remade, always in motion and emergent, rather than categories that may be assumed to pre-exist. In one reading the city and its institutions are involved in the simultaneous implosion and explosion (remaking) of capitalism. For Merrifield (2011), planetary urbanisation is about a simultaneous exteriority and interiority:

The urbanization of the world is a kind of exteriorization of the inside as well as interiorization of the outside: the urban unfolds into the countryside just as the countryside folds back into the city [...] Yet the fault-lines between these two worlds aren't defined by any simple urban-rural divide, nor by anything North-South; instead, centers and peripheries are immanent within the accumulation of capital itself. (pp. 468-469)

Scholars posit a crisis of epistemology, begged by the constitutive nature of urban processes that are always becoming and never finished, begging ethical questions about who is responsible to whom and to what ends cities are working.

Migrants, and processes of mobility, are largely and paradoxically strangers to this debate. While demographically constitutive of many cities, the agentic and creative ways in which migrants contribute to the material and symbolic dimensions of urban processes receive little attention. This, we argue, is a significant conceptual oversight. Migrants, especially those maintaining transnational connections with home regions, live and embody the simultaneous exteriorisation and interiorisation hypothesised under planetary urbanisation. Migrant housing plays a crucial role in building and sustaining connections with the city and society. Housing impacts experiences of assimilation, legality and citizenship, social

cohesion, economic advancement, political integration and, increasingly, precarity. While many government and non-governmental agencies, and individuals, are somehow involved in directly and indirectly intervening in housing markets and housing provision explicitly for migrants, it is often the faith-based sector (faith-based organisations [FBOs]) that assumes the broadest portfolios, covering material assistance, language training, legal advice, social networking, spiritual guidance, cultural coaching and, in some cases, actual housing. Understanding how migrant housing is provisioned and experienced, with particular reference to FBOs, is a helpful step in building a constitutive account of planetary urbanisation.

Against this background, our chapter has two more modest goals. Firstly, we describe and compare how migrant housing is provisioned by FBOs and experienced more widely in the selected neighbourhoods of two similarly sized cities – one in the US and one in South Africa. We develop and test an argument that FBO activities in relation to migrant housing are not simply restricted to the operation of urban land markets but circulate power as part of planetary urbanisation (Merrifield 2013). This is conceptually significant because it counters overly top-down and macro-focused accounts of planetary urbanisation.

Secondly, we introduce the ethical implications of reading migrant housing as a constitutive process, part and parcel of the mutual becoming of migrants, communities and the urban. If migrants co-create homes and communities, what roles and responsibilities do FBOs and other stakeholders have in supporting, regulating or influencing such a process? Can housing be simply understood as an economic commodity if it is constitutive of migrant identity, social cohesion and so forth? This is a significant goal because major international dialogues are informing policy recalibrations as cities and regions face up to the challenges and opportunities of planetary urbanisation (UNHR 2015).



Our chapter is organised as follows. The next section describes and critiques current accounts of migrant housing. We then introduce our comparative research design and study sites of Tshwane and Atlanta. We define the term *migrants* as those who cross international (e.g. Zimbabwe to South Africa and Mexico to the US) and domestic or autonomous region borders (e.g. West Coast US to South-east US and mainland China to Hong Kong) with an intention to remain at least temporarily in the destination. These ‘cross-border’ migrants will include economic migrants, transnational migrants, seasonal workers, asylum seekers, students, family reunifiers, domestic workers and refugees, but exclude commuters and tourists. *Transnational* refers to those who intend or do move between and maintain two or more homes in different political jurisdictions. The section after that describes and compares how migrant housing is provisioned by FBOs and experienced more widely in Tshwane and Atlanta. The final section outlines an ethics of dwelling as a layered process of becoming and belonging and calls for greater attention to such a praxis of just faith.

## ■ Towards a Constitutive Reading of Migration, Housing and Planetary Urbanisation

Traditional approaches to reading the quality or fragility of housing use the concept of housing security to consider economic costs, safety, accessibility and overall liveability (Urban Institute 2015). Critical theorists also use the broader idea of precarity to describe how structurally derived power is experienced as different forms of vulnerability in cities. Precarity can be defined as ‘instability, lack of protection, insecurity, and social or economic vulnerability’ (Rodgers & Rodgers 1989:5). As such, security, insecurity and precarity are seen as quantifiable and instrumental outcomes of the operation of housing and urban land markets that provide levers and points of articulation for

liberal and neo-liberal interventions that reduce state involvement and marketise or financialise markets. In a sense, urban and social policy 'models' and 'responds' to this landscape of security and insecurity by, for example, upgrading physical infrastructure; providing access to social support, such as childcare to enable residents to seek employment; revising regulations and ordinances; and subsidising access to capital, land and title, among others.

Migrants are a group that faces specific circumstances in housing markets. While migrant and non-migrant housing outcomes are impacted by recession, reductions in state social provisions and the financialisation of housing markets (Hankins et al. 2014; Immergluck, Carpenter & Leuders 2016; Raymond et al. 2016), migrants have distinctive and often uneven legal status with respect to access to supported housing, employment rights, children's education and other civil rights (Anderson 2010). The legal status of new arrivals has long-term impacts upon their employment, with knock-on effects for housing choices (Goldring & Landolt 2011, 2013). Thus, migrants are more likely to rent and experience high turnover rates (Lewis et al. 2014). Some face discrimination and prejudice and experience forced evictions and removals. And, as we note in the following, those seeking asylum with official refugee status may encounter local resistance to their arrival in certain communities. The pervasiveness of the discourse that frames and understands migrants in terms of their legality and semi-legality perhaps makes it unsurprising that governments, international organisations and the faith-based sector also stress the role of legality in addressing migrant housing issues, through formal regulations such as retitling programmes that aim to enhance housing security among migrants (De Soto 2000).

Beyond legal status, a growing body of research holds that transnational migration lends distinctiveness to the housing situation of migrants. Transnational migrants are recently

arrived persons who intend to maintain a home in their origin or departing place while building a new home in their destination – persons who use social networks to live lives simultaneously across borders (Bailey 2001). They often find housing unaffordable partly because they carry debt to family members or organised traffickers for the costs of their journey. Most are obliged to remit scarce earnings to family and home communities and lack information on accessing employment or housing. Strong social network support leads many to settle in affordable areas with other migrants. However, such housing may be of low quality with poor services and low accessibility to urban opportunity. Most generally, such transnational processes expose migrants to a wide range of structural vulnerabilities in everyday life (Bailey et al. 2002). The dimensions may be material (e.g. access to economic resources, healthcare, shelter, food, warmth and fresh water), sociocultural (e.g. exposure to xenophobia and prejudice and opportunities for building community and solidarity) and experiential (e.g. well-being, anxiety and dislocation) (Bailey et al. 2002; Roy 2011; Rygiel 2011).

Urban researchers have turned to the idea of precarity to describe the structural nature of the vulnerabilities experienced by migrants in cities. *Precarity* can be defined as ‘instability, lack of protection, insecurity, and social or economic vulnerability’ (Rodgers & Rodgers 1989:5). Indeed, the housing experiences of migrants in cities have been read as part of a wider condition of precarity with dimensions that are material (e.g. economic), sociocultural (e.g. xenophobia and prejudice) and experiential (e.g. existential uncertainty) (Roy 2011). Material dimensions include access to economic resources, healthcare, shelter, food, warmth, fresh water and so on.

Research increasingly suggests that the conduct of everyday life is key to understanding the structural ways in which vulnerabilities are experienced by migrants (Waite 2009). Bailey et al. (2018:100) argue that everyday life is ‘subject to

multiple governmentalities which, in the case of migration, may arise from social, cultural, religious and political discourse, formal and informal policy, and modes of regulation'. That is, we propose to use the lens of migrant housing to study the intersections, negotiation and circulation of governmentalities that underpin precarity and expand the account of how everyday experiences of migrant housing may be implicated in the circulation of power as part of planetary urbanisation. We follow Vasudevan (2015) and argue that the intersection, negotiation and circulation of diverse governmentalities arises from everyday experiences of migrant housing, including its provision and discursive framing by FBOs. We focus on how the practices of FBOs in provisioning and framing housing, and migrants in using housing, come together to co-create ways of being and becoming in the city.

This constitutive account is buttressed by two strands of existing research. Firstly, among many undocumented and semi-legal migrants, asylum seekers and overstayers, the fear of deportation combined with social obligations to remit leads to pressure to reduce housing costs and locate flexible and sometimes invisible housing (De Genova 2004). Here a premium is put on the flexibility of tenure and access to trustworthy social networks. Ongoing experiences of such housing build new and often dependent social relations (e.g. reliance on unscrupulous or absent landlords or exploitative family relations), economic relations (e.g. use of pay day lenders and parasitic economy) and spatial-temporal relations (e.g. including a rise in experience of and expectation of permanent temporariness; Bailey et al. 2002). In these cases, housing experiences reconstitute the social, spatial and temporal bases of everyday life in material and symbolic ways and circulate precarity beyond the housing situation to all aspects of daily urban life.

Secondly, related to the way in which experiences of housing involve intersection and negotiation of governmentalities is the production of the newcomer status of recent migrants.

Like deportability, this status makes migrants vulnerable in disciplinary and biopolitical ways. Such status is buttressed by legal codes (eligibility for citizenship is typically restricted or denied for those with limited time in a community). Research suggests it is also produced through the encounters newly arrived residents have with government, social services and civil organisations set up to provide them with support and assistance. Social policy targeted at housing for migrants, as we illustrate in the following section, often assumes housing is an *a priori* urban subsystem amenable to instrumental and market-indexed manipulations. This is problematic in two ways. It ignores the possibility that, through acting as information and cultural gatekeepers, often using inaccessible written and spoken language, support institutionalises 'other' migrants by accenting their 'newness' and 'newcomer status'. It also ignores the myriad and creative ways in which migrant individuals and families exert their own housing agency. This happens in material and symbolic ways. We recognise that migrants are resourceful in negotiating diverse sources of precarity (Sigona 2012):

[U]ndocumented migrants [...] are resilient and resourceful [and] [...] shape and adapt daily routines and mundane social interactions to changing circumstances, precarious livelihoods, and the protracted and concrete possibility of being deported. (p. 51)

To this we would add the everyday reality of being a newcomer. Migrants are not simply passive subjects being shunted from pillar to post at the behest of capital or the state.

In summary, we argue migrant housing (its use, experiences, provisions, discourses, etc.) refracts and circulates power as part of planetary urbanisation (Merrifield 2013). Studying the precarity surrounding housing and everyday life and how it is negotiated supports a constitutive reading of urban processes (Robinson 2005). This constitutive reading challenges a theory of knowledge that separates migrants as agents from institutions and cities as structures. Our view, in concert with post-structural approaches more widely, rejects the assumption that the city is a binary category

of analysis in favour of tracing how urban processes are always emerging and becoming. We go beyond structure–agency dualisms to consider how power flows through changing social, spatial and temporal relations, with ethical implications. The next section describes how we illustrate our argument with empirical data.

## ■ Case Study Research Design

In approaching migrant housing, we selected FBOs as important but under-studied institutions with a long pedigree of serving migrants and migrant communities. FBOs utilise a range of material and symbolic resources to mediate vulnerability and suffering in cities. This includes practices of faith and spirituality. Thus, choosing to study FBOs also allows us to explore how spirituality is a potential resource at the disposal of migrants, which, as Findlay (2005) implies, may be associated with the intersection of multiple governmentalities (including sovereign, biopolitical and pastoral) on account of its ‘susceptibility to manipulation’:

[E]motional spaces may transcend both the physical and other dimensions of the social. Spirituality, as an example of one emotion, like all dimensions of being, is susceptible to manipulation by those who seek to valorize their social and political positions. But it also has the potential to be hugely empowering [...]. (pp. 436–437)

We seek to understand how FBOs work by comparing the activities of FBOs across two cities of approximately the same size where the sector has been historically influential. Pretoria is the administrative capital of South Africa and part of the metropolitan municipality of the City of Tshwane (hereafter: Tshwane), which is inhabited by 3.28 million people. Together with Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and other smaller urban regions, it comprises the Gauteng City-Region with more than 14 million inhabitants and still fast growing (GCRO 2018). A quarter of South Africa’s population lives in this region, and more than a third of South Africa’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is generated here, although the region only makes up 2% of South Africa’s land area. Tshwane hosts more than 80 diplomatic

missions from across the world and three prominent universities, attracting young people from across the country and even the continent, seeking to enrol at these institutions. The centrality of Tshwane, and of the Gauteng City-Region, of which it forms a part, makes it very attractive to both transnational and rural-urban (South African) migrants. Forty-four per cent of the population of the Gauteng City-Region is comprised of migrants (StatsSA 2012:39), of which 10% could be regarded as transnational (StatsSA 2012). The majority of transnational migrants by far come from Southern African Development Community countries (Peberdy 2013:8), with sizeable populations from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi (Peberdy 2013:9).

In the US, Atlanta is the ninth largest metropolitan statistical area with a population of approximately 5.8 million people. Host to the busiest international airport in the world, metropolitan Atlanta has one of the top 10 largest economies in the country and has numerous Fortune 500 companies headquartered in the region. As a 'Sunbelt City', Atlanta has remained an attractive destination for intranational migrants, particularly residents from 'Rustbelt' cities in the north-east and the Midwest of the US, as deindustrialisation continues to remake urban economies. And, increasingly, Atlanta is an important destination for international migrants. Indeed, the metro area is being transformed by international in-migration. Between 2000 and 2010, metropolitan Atlanta experienced a 69% increase in its foreign-born population (Atlanta Regional Commission 2013). Within the metropolitan region, the percentage of foreign-born residents is approaching 15% of the total population. This transformation is taking place in a metro region that has historically been dominated by a white-black paradigm (e.g. Stone 1989), where, according to the US Census, as of 2010, 55.4% of the population was classified as white people and 32.4% as black people. For much of the 20th century, the suburban reaches of the city were dominated by white residents, while the majority of black Atlantans lived in and around the central city (Hankins & Holloway 2018; Keating 2001). Since the 1990s, this dynamic has changed rather dramatically,

with the suburbs becoming increasingly populated by black people (with an increase of nearly 1 million black residents between 1990 and 2010; Hankins & Holloway 2018) and host to diverse immigrant groups (Adelman & Jaret 2010). Drawn from different world regions with contrasting experiences of globalisation and colonialism, Tshwane and Atlanta have distinctive newcomer migrant dynamics and housing landscapes and offer a lens onto the various responses that FBOs have made to facilitate – whether directly or indirectly – migrant housing.

In each city we focused our field research on specific neighbourhoods to illustrate the diversity of migration and housing situations. In Tshwane, we studied Pretoria Central, which comprises a number of neighbourhoods with a high concentration of transnational migrants, and Mamelodi East, which is marked by rural–urban migration and enormous growth of informal settlements. Pretoria Central is a key place of arrival for transnational newcomers to the city. Not only is the Department of Home Affairs in this area, where transnational migrants from different provinces need to register and obtain legal documentation, but over the past two decades these neighbourhoods have become known as welcoming to transnational migrants. Pretoria Central is divided into six political wards. In these areas, only 73.2% of the population comprises South African-born citizens. Almost 27% of the population are transnational migrants. In the Salvokop–Pretoria West neighbourhoods of Pretoria Central, 34.1% of the population is made up of transnational migrants, while 30.5% of Marabastad and the Central Business District and 30% – 34% of Sunnyside East is inhabited by transnational migrants.

In Atlanta, we studied Clarkston as a neighbourhood where FBOs have been particularly active. Since the 1990s, metro Atlanta has been host to a refugee resettlement site in Clarkston, which is an incorporated municipality approximately 10 miles north-east of downtown Atlanta. Clarkston has emerged as a significant gateway city to refugees, colloquially referred to as



‘the Ellis Island of the South’ (Long 2017). In fact, a recent article in the British newspaper *The Guardian* offers a description of Clarkston, a city of approximately 13 000, which has been the recipient, if only temporarily, of over 40 000 refugees in the past 25 years (Long 2017):

Look beyond the 1970s strip malls, apartment complexes and parking lots, and there are sights rarely seen elsewhere in America. Beige storefronts are topped by signs in Amharic and Nepali scripts, with evocative English translations: Balageru Food Mart, African Cultural and Injera Grocers, Numsook Oriental Grocers. Women gather nearby wearing bright African headscarves, and others cross the street in traditional Asian silk dresses, long black hair braided down their backs. (n.p.)

For much of the 1990s and early 2000s, Clarkston received approximately 2000 refugees per year. This dramatic change in what had been a bedroom community to downtown Atlanta (located along a railroad and near active bus lines) was met with resistance by some of the long-time residents, documented in a series of *New York Times* articles and a book authored by Warren St. John (St. John 2009).

In each area we conducted a series of long interviews with migrants, many of whom are recently arrived (i.e. have been in the city less than 1 year) and with FBO representatives. We also draw on a focus group with what we term *resettlement advocates* in Clarkston.

## ■ Precarity and the Activities of Faith-Based Organisations in Tshwane and Atlanta

This section describes conditions of precarity surrounding migrant housing and connects these to FBO activities.

### ■ Precarity

Pretoria Central, from the outside, may seem a promising place of opportunity, boasting the headquarters of different national

government departments, the South African Reserve Bank and even the Union Buildings, from which the national government is administered. However, people often face high degrees of precarity as they carve out a living in this area. Legal and administrative obstacles, the struggle to find a secure and sustainable source of income, and limited access to decent and affordable housing for non-South Africans all contribute to this precarity. These challenges, together with a tendency to criminalise ‘foreign nationals’ or refugees or to cast aspersions that are rooted in deep cultural stereotypes, further enhance the material and symbolic character of the precarity migrants face.

Peberdy (2013:22) describes the response of residents of this city-region to the presence of transnational migrants, describing how ‘[d]isturbingly, almost a third of respondents (32%) said that Gauteng is for South Africans only and foreigners should be sent back to their own countries’ (cf. GCRO 2011).

Unemployment in these areas is between 52% and 53%. Of the transnational migrants responding to a Quality of Life Survey conducted by the Gauteng City-Region Observatory, 29% indicated unemployment, which is lower than the median percentage of unemployed people in the area, while 13% indicated informal employment. When people are employed, their income levels tend to be low; however, 73% of the respondents who are employed earn below R 6400 per month and 56% earn below R 3200 per month (Gauteng City-Region Observatory 2011), which is below the minimum wage as specified by the Department of Labour (cf. 2018). What is informative about these figures is that the vast majority of transnational migrants – at least the 73% earning below R 6400 per month – would qualify to live in social housing projects, if only they were South African citizens. Yet, crucially, the National Social Housing Policy (Department of Human Settlements 2009) makes no provision for people who are not naturalised South African citizens.

In terms of housing, 84% of transnational migrants in Pretoria Central indicate that they live in formal residential accommodation, ranging from 37% owning residential property

to 32% renting in public or private accommodation, 14% living informally and 18% indicating other forms of accommodation, which might include temporary shelter or being homeless. These figures give an indication of the varied housing types inhabited by transnational migrants.

Apart from the 37% indicating private ownership, the nature of housing or security of tenure of the other 63% varies considerably. In Salvokop, besides a high number of backyard dwellings occupied by both South African and transnational migrants, there is also a small informal settlement with around 300 dwellings, almost exclusively inhabited by migrants from places like Lesotho or Zimbabwe. The precarity they face, without access to water or sanitation, is acute. We are aware of certain buildings, not complying with any of the municipal by-laws and hardly suitable for human habitation, fully occupied by transnational migrants. We are also aware that in neighbourhoods like Sunnyside many buildings experience a high degree of overcrowding because of the number of transnational migrants occupying a single unit, in order to share the rental costs.

The large percentage of transnational migrants residing in Pretoria Central neighbourhoods suggests an indication of some hospitality in these areas, perhaps running counter to a widespread and negative discourse from longer-established residents in the Gauteng City-Region. However, as a result of these generic negative stereotypes about transnational migrants, the concentration of migrants in these areas reinforces stereotypes about inner-city neighbourhoods.

Social and cultural precarity is also a theme in everyday migrant life in Clarkston. In the Clarkston area of Atlanta, and despite vetting and support from the US State Department, the introduction without much local consultation of households from Somalia, Bhutan, the Congo, Ethiopia and Burma, among others, has led to an unprecedented transformation in the social relations of the area. This is further inflected by tensions between black and white longer-term residents. The social fabric into which refugees

are being woven – or from which they are being rejected – in Clarkston exposes them to a kind of ‘precarity of belonging’, which over time has been ameliorated to some degree by the duration of the influx of refugees and the social, cultural and economic institutions that the waves of refugees have built (Long 2017).

A second key source of precarity is the increasingly hostile housing environment in the metro Atlanta region. In many cities across the United States, renting is on the rise, as home ownership has fallen to 62.9%, a half-century low (Raymond et al. 2016). By 2015, Atlanta’s homeownership rate had dropped to 43.6%, down from 51.3% in 2010 (McCarthy 2017). At the same time, in recent years Atlanta has suffered a growing housing affordability crisis with little to no public assistance available to the vast majority who are classified as low-income. According to Immergluck et al. (2016:1), between 2012 and 2015 alone, median rents rose 23.4% in the south, and a growing number of households spent over 50% of their household income on rent, making them ‘severely cost-burdened’. Monthly rents, which range from \$800 to \$1200 among the refugees we interviewed in Clarkston, represented well over 50% of their gross monthly income, and in some cases closer to 70% of their monthly earnings. Raymond et al. (2016) point out an emerging eviction crisis in Atlanta, where landlords use the fees associated with evictions to improve their bottom line. Eviction threats are particularly daunting for immigrants and others with little knowledge of Georgia tenant laws (which are relatively lax) and little willingness to engage legal representation, as our conversations with immigrant and refugee advocate representatives attested.

The resettlement advocates we interviewed experience the tumult in the landscape of property ownership, which changes with market conditions. This is particularly acute in suburban areas that are not incorporated, where public support is limited to non-existent and market-rate housing is the only option for newcomers to the city. Taken together, migrants who are newcomers are particularly subject to unstable housing opportunities, which churn with the restlessness of the urban landscape.

For example, in the Buford Highway area, a region that has become ripe for redevelopment, whole apartment complexes, which were traditionally affordable and home to Mexican and Central American transnational migrants, are being bulldozed as prices rise around the redevelopment of a recently closed General Motors factory that is being redeveloped into a 'mixed use' retail and residential area (Mitchell 2018). The instability in the region is emblematic of a particularly neo-liberalising metro area, where subsidies and protections for the marginalised are often non-existent – and particularly absent for transnational migrants. Indeed, as we describe in the following, the role of non-governmental organisations, including FBOs, is critical in providing much-needed services and guidance to the region's in-migrants, acting as agents of urban change as they facilitate the well-being of Atlanta's migrants.

Migrants also face economic precarity in Atlanta. Because refugees receive time-limited federal support, it is crucial that as many working-age adults find employment as soon as possible. If, for example, there are two working-age adults in the refugee family, the chance of the family being able to obtain employment and support the family increases. If, on the other hand, there is only one able-bodied working adult, who is also a single parent or supports elderly dependents, the potential for precarity increases (as the initial federal \$925 per person support is not replenished). Of course, the availability of work is a key dimension of vulnerability. In the case of many refugees who arrive in Clarkston, finding work in chicken-processing plants, located an hour north of Clarkston and commutable by private transportation, is a common first employment opportunity (as well as one that is gruelling and, in some cases, dangerous). The refugees we interviewed identified a lack of English skills as one of the biggest barriers to securing employment in the US.

In both cities, migrants face material (housing access and costs, overcrowding, economic) and symbolic (stability of housing tenure, stereotyping, fragility) dimensions of precarity. These are compounded, as reported elsewhere, by migrants' 'less than full' legal status, which has a spatial dimension

(non-South Africans cannot access public housing; likewise non-US citizens cannot access public subsidies for housing) and a temporal dimension (newcomer migrants are susceptible to unstable housing markets and evictions).

## ■ Faith-Based Organisation Activities

In South Africa, FBOs include churches, mosques and temples. They respond to migrants' needs in varied but often holistic ways, and here we briefly introduce housing provision, social services and spiritual care, advocacy and policy work. Ntakirutimana's (2017) research on the Salvokop neighbourhood reported that churches tend to provide social and practical services but did not offer support in terms of actual housing conditions, whether it is to help provide access to decent housing or to advocate with them for secure tenure. One FBO in Salvokop specifically supports local residents with childcare and employment preparation, while another FBO provides access to healthcare through a medical, dental and eye clinic. In one sense, faith-based communities in Salvokop have stepped up in terms of relief and even community development interventions but perhaps do not adequately engage or address systemic issues people or neighbourhoods face in a decisive or systematic way.

In a reflection on churches in Pretoria Central, De Beer, Smith and Manyaka (2017) note the narrow focus of ministry failing to address issues of precarity systemically, with the exception of four churches that indicated 'some form of advocacy work' without elaborating on the content thereof:

In terms of church activities most churches indicated standard forms of ministry such as preaching, worship, prayer and Christian education. Very few churches indicated any diaconal work with the exception of 4 churches who gave food to the poor, donated to orphanages and did hospital ministry. Four churches indicated some form of advocacy work. (n.p.)

Over and above the provision of social services, faith communities seem to provide many transnational migrants with spiritual care,

a sense of belonging, access to counselling services and sometimes administrative support. In researching churches in Pretoria Central, De Beer et al. (2017) indicate that a large percentage of churches in Pretoria Central are either led by transnational migrants or the membership is predominantly comprised of transnational migrants. Sixty per cent of the membership of the Apostolic Faith Mission Word of Life Church is Shona-speaking from Zimbabwe.

Ninety per cent of members from the Grace of God Ministries speak either French or English and 10% speak Lingala. Half of Grace Exploration Church and Christ Populate Ministries were transnational migrants from other African countries. Churches like Deeper Christian Life Ministries and the Redeemed Christian Church of God were 90% – 98% Nigerian. Grace of God Ministries was 98% Congolese. In addition, churches indicated membership also coming from Uganda, Malawi, Kenya and other African countries (cf. De Beer et al. 2017). In Sunnyside, an Ethiopian Orthodox Church replaced an old white Afrikaans-speaking Seventh Day Adventist Church and is full to capacity on Sundays. And the three mosques in Pretoria Central are all welcoming of migrants from Somalia, Pakistan and elsewhere. Thus, our initial research into the extent to which people's participation in local church helps mediate access to secure housing, either formally or informally, suggests that faith communities do help to mediate the social and relational networks required to provide a safe landing for migrants to the city.

It is unclear to what extent FBOs contribute to housing that is liveable, tenure that is secure and policy or housing provision that is integrative of transnational migrants. For example, we could not find any specific shelter or housing project created specifically for transnational migrants, by any of the faith communities. We did find initiatives that served migrants, among others, using creative methods. For example, Yeast City Housing (YCH) is a faith-based social housing company that was started by a consortium of churches in Pretoria Central. Currently, the housing units they have developed are all

concentrated in Pretoria Central. Governed by the National Social Housing Policy, they are unable to accommodate transnational migrants who are not yet naturalised citizens, because of the policy disallowing that. This creates a serious challenge and on occasions YCH was able to keep some units out of the pool of subsidised housing units, deliberately with transnational migrants in mind. However, that means having to source other funds to enable that, which is not always possible. YCH also has a number of special-needs housing projects, aimed at people with more specialised immediate needs, including frail elderly people, palliative care, community care for people living with chronic mental illness and sheltered housing for homeless women or girl children. In these cases, the social housing subsidy was given to the institution, and YCH uses its own discretion in terms of whom it can accommodate. In their special-needs facilities YCH accommodates any person who is in need of housing provided they have space, regardless of nationality.

Ntakirutimana (2017) cites the example of an 82-unit social housing development in Salvokop that was able to accommodate people formally, in brand-new self-contained units, at a cost similar or even below the monthly rent people had to pay for the right to erect a backyard shack. Based on this example, Ntakirutimana (2017) demonstrates the viability and replicability of social housing for shack dwellers, but the policy constraints pertaining transnational migrants remain, excluding the large number of shack dwellers in Salvokop from accessing formal social housing.

Based on his reading of faith-based responses to housing precarity in the Salvokop neighbourhood, Ntakirutimana (2017) emphasises the need for more advocacy and policy work in partnership with the local community. Such work would include that consideration be given to expanding the parameters of the social housing policy, engaging local government to make land or buildings available for the purpose of housing transnational migrants generally or refugees and asylum seekers specifically or other forms of housing advocacy, as many migrants experience



daily transgressions committed against them in terms of their inherent dignity or their ability to access justice.

Advocacy can address eviction. Because of the insecure tenure of backyard dwellers or shack dwellers, evictions are always pending or upmost in people's minds. The Tshwane Leadership Foundation, an ecumenical FBO, on more than one occasion collaborated with the inhabitants of informal structures in Salvokop and the Lawyers for Human Rights, to resist evictions. One can argue, from one perspective, that this has contributed to the decay of a neighbourhood that 20 years ago was fairly stable. Housing precarity today is much more acute and the pressure on existing infrastructure has increased. The advocacy work was done as an affirmation of people's right to the city and an attempt to affirm people's right to belong and to access the city. That, perhaps, should only be regarded as a first step, and that advocacy that is only reactive, without also proposing and even developing infrastructure to address housing precarity, might be incomplete.

Ntakirutimana (2017:n.p.) emphasises the role of the community itself, including transnational migrants, saying, 'the residents of Salvokop have a pivotal role to play in the rebuilding of their neighbourhoods'. Faith communities can play a significant role either in accompanying processes in which transnational migrants organise themselves or in facilitating such processes of community organising or capacity-building, which includes educating communities in issues around legislation governing housing policy or the integration of transnational migrants into South African communities or the building of viable and inclusive communities for all who live in them.

As in Tshwane, a large variety of FBOs are involved in various ways in migrant support in Atlanta. Some of the major organisations that serve immigrants and refugees in the metro Atlanta region include the International Rescue Committee, Catholic Charities, Friends of Refugees, Center for Pan Asian Community Services (CPACS), New American Pathways, the Latin American Association, World Relief Atlanta and Lutheran Services of Georgia (see Table 7.1).

**TABLE 7.1:** Atlanta non-governmental and faith-based organisation support for migrants.

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>About</b>	<b>Service area</b>	<b>Faith-based?</b>
<b>International Rescue Committee (IRC)</b>	'The IRC responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover, and gain control of their future'. (website)	International and metro Atlanta; local headquarters in Northlake	No
<b>Catholic Charities Atlanta</b>	'Since 1953, Catholic Charities Atlanta has served over 1 million people with a holistic combination of accredited social services that remove barriers to self-sufficiency and wholeness. We are faith-based and serve our neighbors professionally, compassionately, and regardless of faith or background'. (website)	Throughout the metro-Atlanta area: offices in Smyrna, Chamblee, Northlake,	Yes
<b>Friends of Refugees</b>	'Empowering refugees through opportunities for well-being, education and employment'.	Clarkston	Yes
<b>Center for Pan Asian Community Services (CPACS)</b>	'Our mission is to promote self-sufficiency and equity for immigrants, refugees, and the underprivileged through comprehensive health and social services, capacity building, and advocacy'.	Metro-Atlanta headquarters in Chamblee	No
<b>New American Pathways (NAP)</b>	'Helping refugees and Georgia thrive'.	Metro Atlanta with headquarters in Northlake	Partially: one of the organisations that merged to form NAP was a Christian organisation; currently, NAP is secular
<b>The Latin American Association (LAA)</b>	'The mission of the Latin American Association (LAA) is to empower Latinos to adapt, integrate and thrive. Our vision is "Opportunity for All."'	Metro Atlanta with offices in Lawrenceville and Athens	No
<b>World Relief Atlanta</b>	'World Relief Atlanta has worked since 1979 to empower the local Church to serve refugees and immigrants in the Greater Atlanta area'.	Metro Atlanta with offices in Stone Mountain	Yes
<b>Lutheran Services of Georgia</b>	'Lutheran Services of Georgia helps find, strengthen and create homes for people in need in Georgia'.	Headquarters in downtown Atlanta; offices in other cities in Georgia; with an Atlanta Refugee Services located in Clarkston	Yes

The US State Department provides the relocation assistance organisation \$925 per refugee admitted to the US. In the case of refugees coming through Clarkston, one of the refugee resettlement organisations, such as the IRC, Catholic Charities Atlanta, World Relief, Lutheran Services or NAP, would receive \$925 per person in the household in advance of their arrival. The relocation agency must use this money to secure an apartment, furnish the apartment and provide basic foodstuffs for the family's arrival. Refugees are greeted at the airport by trained volunteers of these organisations and delivered to their newly furnished apartments. Within 30 days, the family can apply for food stamps, which includes a monthly food subsidy, and otherwise any able-bodied person in the family is expected to find work to provide a source of income for the family and to be able to pay the monthly rent.

There is unevenness in the resources that different FBOs provide incoming refugee families. Some organisations solicit support from volunteer organisations and/or churches, and often churches will 'adopt' a refugee family. As one FBO resettlement advocate commented, her organisation was always trying to find churches – in a non-proselytising manner – to assist with providing goods and services to refugee families. As she put it, 'you get a church involved [in supporting a family] and stuff just flows in'. A resettlement manager for a large, secular refugee service organisation confirmed that oftentimes, the parking lot in front of the agency offices is full of donated furniture items from churches – sometimes too many items for them to process and distribute to families in a timely manner. In other words, churches provide important material resources, in the form of a coffee table, rice maker or bedroom set for refugee families as they navigate life in the southern US – but not every family is paired with a church, which can result in uneven opportunities and costs for refugee families trying to build their lives.

As in the case of Tshwane, churches have played important social roles in the refugee communities that have emerged in and

around Clarkston. As Nye (2012) highlights, at the Clarkston International Bible Church (CIBC), there are 11 distinct and separate ethnic congregations. She quotes the pastor of CIBC as famously teaching, ‘Jesus said heaven is a place for people of all nations. So if you don’t like Clarkston, you won’t like heaven’ (Nye 2012:33). Indeed, in recent decades the churches in Clarkston have expanded from traditional Christian denominations (e.g. Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist) that were dominated by either black or white congregations to a wide variety of ethnic denominations, including, for example, an Ethiopian Orthodox Church and non-Christian houses of worship, such as a mosque established by Afghan refugees.

Resettlement advocates told us they conducted very practical negotiations with landlords, as we illustrate below, advocacy on behalf of refugees and broader engagement in housing policy. In fact, resettlement advocates are a key pivot in the refugee experience of housing. The resettlement advocates work together across agencies, and the advocates we interviewed revealed that they hold monthly meetings to make sure they are working in tandem to get the ‘best deals’ from landlords – to utilise their bargaining power as the representatives of hundreds of potential tenants – and to share resources and information across their respective agencies to best serve their refugee households. As one refugee resettlement advocate put it, it is all about relationships with landlords, ‘relationships based on faith and trust’.

The resettlement organisations reported negotiating specific leases on behalf of refugee families – where, for example, monthly rent may be less in the first year as the family is getting established. As one representative stated:

[O]ne of the things we did was negotiate a 10-month price. Or like we would work with [*the management company*], and I actually brought [*the leasing office*] some numbers to show, you know, the average wages [*of the family*] the first year, how many are employed and, you know, basically what rent price we’re looking for. And [...] if we have two [*people working in the household*], you know, they could pay

a little bit more, if we have one employable, you know, we're looking for this rate. And this is just the initial lease. And that kind of worked well. (focus group with N.T., February 09, 2018)

By working carefully with the landlord, this resettlement manager reported being able to 'control the prices' that the apartment management companies charged the refugee households. In effect, these advocates were steering the private housing market to facilitate refugees in securing safe, decent housing. As one refugee advocate suggested:

Then we'll use our current apartments and managers as [...] references. And you can talk to them, this is how we do it, this is how the program works [...] We did see a couple of management companies buy three or four apartments in Clarkston. That actually helped us, because we could reach out to their sister properties to help with housing. (focus group with N.T., February 09, 2018)

And, by extension, the resettlement organisation could expand its geographical reach by placing refugees in apartments newly owned by a management company familiar with the situation of refugee households. As one resettlement advocate pointed out, given the uncertainty of the housing market, the agencies were always looking for new potential apartment complexes, as those in Clarkston are increasingly full or becoming too expensive for refugee - or other low-income - households to afford.

This is particularly challenging, however, in the tumult of Atlanta's rapidly changing housing market. In fact, one of the representatives of a resettlement organisation reported that:

[/]n Clarkston these past twelve months we saw a lot of apartments being bought and sold by different management companies and [so] that we develop a relationship with these apartments, we explain our program. So they understand that our clients [*refugee households*] are coming without work, without credit. And then when the management changes we just start all over from scratch, and it can be especially difficult if we have clients in that apartment complex who need ongoing services and help with the leasing office, and reporting maintenance issues, to kind of reestablish that. [...] But when [*the apartments*] get bought, they renovate and they increase the prices. (focus group with C.D., February 09, 2018)

As another advocate confirmed:

And during the transition you see a lot of turnover in the individual offices. Which I assume just like the chaos of all the change, people just leave. And that's hard, too, because you know [*you*] might get new management, you talk to the new management and they're on board and then the next week you call and then they're gone. (focus group with N.T., February 09, 2018)

Thus, the resettlement advocates spend a lot of time working with private leasing offices to negotiate reasonable terms for their refugee clients – only to have ownership and management offices change.

Despite their struggles with changing management, resettlement advocates point out that refugees are generally seen as desirable tenants because ‘they don't fall behind on their payment. Second, they hardly go and complain’ to management. Indeed, a topic of conversation among the resettlement advocates was encouraging refugee families and immigrants to assert their rights to decent housing (to, for example, working plumbing fixtures or the absence of vermin).

As one resettlement advocate pointed out, the context from which many refugees have come matters tremendously in their experience of their new places in Clarkston. He draws from his own experience as a refugee:

The thing is, people have come [*from*] different [*contexts*] before they come to U.S. So I'm a refugee myself. I've lived thirteen years in refugee camp before I came here, and I cannot describe how – what kind of lifestyle I've lived for thirteen years before I made it to this country. So people have gone through that, and when they come through this place, where they have at least a house which is safe enough; the roof is not going to fall off. So people feel that it's a bit secure, and they feel safe, it's better. You don't have to walk miles to get drinking water, you have [*water from*] the tap. You don't have to go miles for firewood, you can cook [*food*] right inside your house. So those – people do calculate all those things – but we, as an organization, we have this orientation. We do culture orientation with all the new clients and explain what are the OK things that they can accept and what are the things they should not

be accepting. And make sure of that – and we go and do housing inspections before we move the clients. That is the first part. We get the apartment number and everything, our staff [*members*] go and do the inspection [*to see*] whether it is in the condition that we can move our people or not. Because it is, after all, it's fed[*eral*] money, [*and*] we need to make sure each dollar is spent in the best way. [...] So we make sure we go and do the housing inspection, and if we feel there's some repair that has not been done, we go to [*the*] leasing office again, '[*p*]lease fix this before [*our families*] move in'. (focus group with T.C., February 09, 2018)

Thus, the resettlement advocates work to ensure that the apartments are safe and functioning by typical American standards. Another resettlement advocate reported that her organisation always performed a 30-day home visit following the initial move-in to make sure the apartments were being maintained – both by the family and by the management company. She described it like this:

Last year when we had a lot of clients coming from very rural areas and living in refugee camps, we did have a big increase in the apartments not being – maintenance not being reported or [*issues with*] cleanliness and hygiene. So at the thirty-day home visit the case manager would assess the apartment and the condition, and if needed, they would let me know if an additional orientation was needed. So I would send someone from their culture, who speaks their language to do an extra orientation. Like go in the home, even go to the Dollar General Store [*to show them*] how to buy the cleaning supplies and how to use them, because culturally it can be a sensitive topic when you're cleaning a bathroom and talking about showering and hygiene and taking the trash out and cleaning, and that helped a lot. (interview with N.T., March 09, 2018)

This resettlement advocate took care to honour cultural norms of the refugee family while also providing coaching on the cultural norms expected of apartment tenants in the US.

Indeed, resettlement agencies' work went well beyond simply finding a clean, safe and (ideally) conveniently located apartment. As many of the resettlement advocates shared, their services, available to refugees for 5 years – but often going well beyond that half decade – included a range of opportunities for refugees,

including English-language classes, youth development, afterschool care, health clinics and legal assistance. Of the resettlement advocates we interviewed, many themselves had been refugees and felt close to the experience and able to relate to the emotional, physical and spiritual stress of resettlement.

The resettlement advocates worked with other organisations, such as CPACS, to advocate for better housing policy with the different municipalities in which immigrants and refugees live. For example, in the city of Brookhaven, CPACS is working to pass inclusive zoning, which requires developers of new multifamily housing construction to dedicate a portion of their units to low-income residents. In addition, these organisations include counselling and, in some cases, legal services, to ensure refugees and other immigrants understand their housing rights.

In summary, FBOs in Tshwane and Atlanta play influential roles in mediating both material and symbolic precarities associated with migrant housing. Often, their action is indirect and facilitative, such as negotiating 10-month rents and plugging newcomers into social support networks. In both cities FBOs are attuned to uncertain and ambiguous external contexts, including legal access issues in South Africa and the restless housing market in Atlanta. FBOs demonstrate flexibility and resourcefulness in advocating, often involving former migrants in their activities, but most commentators feel more advocacy needs to be done to counter evictions and other structural obstacles.

There is also the possibility that new sources of precarity arise from the work of FBOs, including the tendency to front-load support for newcomers and increase social dependency upon particular networks and pathways, the transmission and coaching of particular ideologies and social norms, and the co-option in the operation of parasitic housing markets by assembling relatively docile populations of renters for property developers. In the following we critically consider how migrants and FBOs together navigate the tumultuous urban landscape and its multiple governmentalities to remake it together in a process of mutual becoming.



## ■ Recovering an ethics of dwelling

This section interprets the collective and constitutive actions of migrants and FBOs to conditions of precarity experienced through housing using the idea of an ethics of dwelling as a layered process of becoming and belonging. We take a small step to sketching an ethics of dwelling, made concrete in an accompaniment of the quest for and practice of dignity and sociospatial justice.

In a Heideggerian sense, *dwelling* refers to both building and care (cf. Heidegger 1971:147; Dungey 2007:239; Zigon 2014:757). It is not just the product or edifice but also a constitutive process of becoming and belonging. In that sense the collective actions of migrants, hosting neighbourhoods and the varied responses of FBOs all contribute to dwelling as a multilayered process (cf. Karjalainen 1993). Moreover, ethical dwelling renders agency, the provision of services and care, and the creation of accessible housing and advocacy to prevent displacement or exclusion as necessary but not sufficient conditions. As above, existing faith-based agencies and resources fall short of retrieving, organising or mobilising dwelling. An ethics of dwelling will require deliberate actions or interventions on the part of actors if they are to help mediate the culmination of dwelling as both care and building towards home. Dungey (1993:241) describes it as '[b]ringing together the activity of building, the place it creates, and the relationships it nourishes, Heidegger calls the abode of the ethical disclosure of dwelling'.

An ethics of dwelling implies not only mutuality (in a social sense) but mutual accompaniment (in a sociospatial sense). An *ethics of dwelling* refers to the becoming of the migrant self, the migrant's family and non-local community, the hosting neighbourhood, and also the faith community and pastoral companion. It is a process of mutual becoming, reconfiguring who we are, alone and together. There is a sense in which it is a coming to ourselves in the other, an ethical form of interiorising

the other and exteriorising the self which is fit for planetary urbanisation. But, crucially, Dungey (1993:242) also reminds us that dwelling implies ‘a condition of ethical relations and considerations’ – that is, being together in space. The way(s) in which we work out being together in space is key.

Mutual accompaniment can be seen both as our way of seeking ethical dwelling and as an expression of the quest to become human. Hankela (2014), in her empirical study of the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, which at the height of xenophobic attacks against transnational migrants accommodated up to 2000 people, speaks of it as ‘being human in a Johannesburg church’ or, perhaps, rather a journey of learning how to become human – how to live and share dignity – together. Dignity in this sense is an ‘ethical imperative’ with ‘political implications’ (Zigon 2014:762).

What might mutual accompaniment look like? The lived spatiality, or quiet politics (cf. Hankins 2017), practised by backyard dwellers, shack dwellers and other (homeless) migrants gives us insight into the agency they possess, the choices they make and the reason for those choices, the spaces they choose to inhabit, and how they mediate sociospatial relationships creatively on a daily basis. As Buhler notes (2014), precarity shines the light on the multiplicity of constraint and suffering; how migrants ‘smile’ and exert agency and aspiration is a necessary counter to understanding housing and eviction issues in contemporary South Africa. She (Buhler 2014) argues for an:

[U]nderstanding of the capacity which people have to improve their own lives [...] Through their aspirations the people I worked with smiled at the precarity they faced in their ordinary lives. They built houses they were proud of; houses that they imagined would protect them from the sickness and suffering they experienced. Their houses were both a way of improving their lives, but also an attempt at creating a home in Hangberg and a sense of stability. (p. i)

These migrant houses ‘smile back’ and perhaps hint at how to be human surrounded by fields of precarity.

We note that accompaniment is different from an instrumentalism that needs to know out of curiosity or control (cf. Palmer 1983:6-9) in order to find quick solutions for the complex governmentalities surrounding migration and housing. The accompaniment that stems from an ethics of dwelling is grounded in loving cohabitation of the Earth, loving-dwelling together or mutual solidarity, which will mean dwelling in the ongoing tension between immediate solutions to dissolve the crisis and constructing (perhaps over a longer period) new and more dignified, viable, sustainable and just futures and homes. The accompaniment required by an ethics of dwelling is not pastoral in the sense of individual caring only but requires a profoundly political pastorate of engaging the stigma of 'the other' and related sociospatial exclusion or fragmentation, animated by our interlocutors helping us to navigate how and where dignity is to be affirmed or claimed, sociospatial justice to be mediated, care or building to be offered.

Often, migrants, in particular those who are unable to purchase or own property of their own (the 63% in Tshwane), are confronted with the absence of viable or just options, essentially leaving them to their own devices. Hankela (2014), however, in focusing on the agency of migrants or refugees in a Johannesburg church, notes how they are not merely vulnerable strangers but also contributing fellow humans. Faith-based responses would do well, in light of the indignity and precarity dealt with in the absence of liveable options and also the sense of agency and initiative displayed by migrants themselves, to consider the kind of mutual accompaniment that would embody ethical dwelling through how it intervenes in housing precarity. The involvement of former migrants in FBOs in Clarkston is perhaps one example of such accompaniment.

How can we use such an ethics of dwelling to interpret the collective actions of migrants and FBOs to conditions of precarity and to guide future interventions? We close by proposing an ethics of dwelling expressed in mutual accompaniment that combines key elements of radical hospitality such as care and

embrace, protection and advocacy, construction and housing. Radical hospitality is to become present to migrants in an open and receptive way. Dungey (2007:257), in drawing upon Heidegger and Derrida, speaks of democratic hospitality, saying it is to 'recognize the Other as being here, with us, and for whom she is'. It is, says Dungey (2007:257), to "say yes" to "whoever shows up". This is a first step in accompanied dwelling, even before accessing other rights, as this opening up for each other in mutual responsibility constitutes a moment of 'rightfully belonging' (cf. Dungey 2007:257). Radical hospitality starts with a recognition of the Other, who until that moment often lacks recognition (Dungey 2007):

Lacking 'legal' standing, the Millions of others are marginalized in a sort of ambiguous economic and political netherworld. Indeed, it is the very ambiguous, adumbrated life they live on the margins of the community that not only adds to their lack of recognition, but also frustrates the attempt at political solution. (p. 257)

Radical hospitality is a political openness too. Once recognised and embraced, the possibility of care exists. Such care is concretely mediated in a community of relationships (Dungey 2007):

Ethics is not an abstract, objective condition that we seek through reason or rules, but a webbing of relationships held together by the care and responsibility that first discloses who we are, and then extends from us to others. (p. 258)

In such concrete acts of care, dwelling is being practised as becoming and belonging. Now, in a community, or web, of relationship, protection and advocacy become much more viable options, as our care will extend to protect the basic rights of all those who are recognised in relationships of mutual responsibility and accountability. Not only will we protect and uphold their rights but also work relentlessly for advancing the rights ascribed to transnational migrants, by virtue of them being human. Such advocacy that insists on casting the net of inclusion wider is a further contributor to the process or experience of becoming or belonging. It is an embodiment of 'dwelling as an ethical

imperative' (Zigon 2014:758) as well as an 'existential imperative of humanness' (Zigon 2014:758), simply acknowledging, affirming and mediating our human belonging together.

At some point, if not naturally occurring through the relational web or mediating of rightful access, there might come a point of construction of physical dwellings to mediate physical housing. In Heidegger, care and building form two elements of the process and experience of dwelling. Care without building loses substance, disabling dwelling, and building without care loses soul, disfiguring dwelling. Says Dungey (2007), once again:

Ethics is a circulating economy of care and involvement [...] this circulating care is revealed through our capacity to dwell, which entails the cultivation of human relationships and the building of houses and structures intended to shelter and nourish these relationships. (p. 258)

In this sense, even the process of construction and housing are not merely technical essentials but acts contributing to nourishing while dwelling together.

In summary, an ethics of dwelling is a praxis to foster a posture and process of mutual accompaniment involving and constituting migrants, families, communities and FBOs. Such a praxis, as an intervention in tune with the crisis of epistemology others have linked to planetary urbanisation, could become an expression of a just faith, grounded in an ethics of dwelling and informed by the interlocation of migrants, as well as by glocal conversations of faith and research.

## ■ Conclusion

FBO activities in relation to migrant housing are broad and not simply restricted to the operation of urban land markets. In both Tshwane and Atlanta, migrants face material (housing access and costs, overcrowding, economic) and symbolic (stability of housing tenure, stereotyping, fragility) dimensions of precarity. These are compounded by migrants' 'less than full' legal statuses,

which further circulate spatial and temporal sources of precarity. Despite being little studied, we found that FBOs play influential roles in mediating both material and symbolic precarities associated with migrant housing. Often, their action is indirect and facilitative and is attuned to uncertain and ambiguous external contexts. FBOs demonstrate flexibility and resourcefulness in advocating, often involving former migrants in their activities, but may circulate new forms of precarity concerning social dependency, the transmission and coaching of particular ideologies and social norms. Read holistically, our field evidence suggests migrants and FBOs together navigate the tumultuous urban landscape and its multiple governmentalities and, as such, jointly contribute to urban emergence and becoming.

There are implications for how we understand, in a policy sense, the activities of FBOs in the provision and framing of dialogues about migrant housing and for how we think through in epistemological ways the relationship between migration, housing, faith and planetary urbanisation. Reading the city constitutively led us to interpret our findings through the lens of an ethics of dwelling. Containing an explicit normative component, this responds to the crisis of epistemology in planetary urbanisation theory by calling for a praxis that fosters a posture and process of mutual accompaniment involving and constituting migrants, families, communities and FBOs. We conclude that a key challenge under planetary urbanisation is to reimagine migrant housing responses through dwelling as an ethics of just faith.



# The Informal God: Outside Schools of Theology

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## ■ Introduction

The reflections that form the basis of this chapter represent two very different journeys that intersected with one another in Kibera, Nairobi's largest informal settlement. Colin's journey into

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Kibera began through working with a local theological college and yet sensing that the model of theological education on offer seemed too distant – physically, culturally, socially and theologically – from the realities of churches and their leaders who lived within the city’s informal settlements. That sense of unanswered questions led to the creation of the Centre for Urban Mission, where part of the theological college was eventually relocated into one of Kibera’s many urban villages. Sheth was, at that time, a pastor of one of Kibera’s many informal churches and became one of the Centre’s first students. Since that time he has become a theological educator grappling with the challenges of what truly authentic theological education might look like if it is to draw on the experience, gifts, perspectives, wisdom and imagination of those who live at the economic margins of urban life.

This simple movement of part of a theological college into an urban slum raised, over time, a number of questions, some of which are explored below. The shift of location created a space that has come to challenge our perceptions about the nature of theological education and to question how the locus of power and presumptions about the sources of wisdom have so often shaped and defined the education process. It is our contention that the formal institutions and sectors of our society, including those related to theological education, have organised themselves in a manner that excludes whole sectors of society. This is not a problem that is unique to Kenya or to the city of Nairobi. In a world of almost 2 billion slum dwellers, the distancing of communities from those institutions offering theological education, and the apparent exclusion of their voices from the discourse that shapes and informs our theological understanding, is simply one further facet of a wider global process evidenced in the marginalisation of communities who live with the daily realities and indignities of urban poverty. If theological education is to be relevant and regenerative in this rapidly globalising world, then traditional models must be challenged and new models of praxis developed

and adopted in order to effectively engage with and challenge the emerging social order.

## ■ Contextualisation and Theological Education

We begin with Stephen Bevans' (2004:3) assertion that 'There is no such thing as theology, there is only contextual theology'. All theology emerges from within a context. Two critical questions emerge from this. The first relates to whether that context is acknowledged, whether we can recognise and be transparent about the social, cultural and economic environments that shape the landscape of our theological thought. The second will take us further, not only asking what context shapes our theology but also asking whether we are willing and able to have our perceptions challenged through hearing and privileging those voices that emerge from 'the underside of history'. This is a theme we will return to later.

Recognition that all theology is contextual leads us into the broader question of what the process of contextualisation looks like. Scott Moreau (in Dyrness 2016) describes it as:

The process whereby Christians adapt the forms, content and praxis of the Christian faith so as to communicate it to the minds and hearts of the people with other cultural backgrounds. The goal is to make the Christian faith as a whole - not only the message but also the means of living out our faith in the local setting - understandable. (p. 20)

While acknowledging that Moreau points to the importance of contextualisation relating to a living out of the Christian faith rather than a mere communication of it, William Dyrness points to the way in which this notion of contextualisation is still framed within the limited paradigm of communication. The emphasis is on an understanding of the Christian faith. Dyrness (2016:20) observes that such an emphasis 'often restricts the ability to see something new emerging in these places'. He goes on to argue that the most important question to ask is not how the gospel is

placed in or communicated within a particular culture but how do we respond to what God is already doing in a given culture? The moment we ask that question we move from the positions of power, focused on the agency of the one communicating, or for that matter teaching, towards a posture of listening that focuses on the agency of the Spirit at work within the life of a particular community. Contextualisation as a process, then, requires a deep listening, an observing, a presence within a community that will seek to understand long before it seeks to be understood.

What is fascinating is that while much ink has been spilt in the debates about the nature of contextual theology, little of this seems to influence or inform discussion on the implications of this for the contexts within which theological education takes place. What happens if, for instance, one takes Bevan's phrase, 'There is no such thing as theology, there is only contextual theology', and replaces it with, 'There is no such thing as theological education, only contextual theological education'. In other words, can we recognise the significance of acknowledging that all theological education is contextual, that its processes, shape and content, its fundamental assumptions are derived from context?

If we accept this proposition, then further questions emerge:

- Whose interests are served within the education process?
- Whose realities shape and inform the process?
- Whose are the lenses through which scripture is read and interpreted?
- In whose language, thought forms and syntax does our theological conversation take place?
- What vision of Christian community, of church, does this process seek to serve?

Such an acknowledgement would recognise that a one-size-fits-all model of theological education would be untenable, not simply in terms of the content of what is taught, but in terms of the entire educational process. These questions are fundamental to thinking about theological education, but our suspicion is that debates about contextual theology seldom challenge the paradigms that shape theological education.

While Bevan's models are helpful in mapping the different methodologies that are employed in the way we contextualise theology, they do not press us towards a particular posture, the adoption of a position that intentionally privileges the voices most frequently silenced or ignored in the process of theologising. Here we look not simply for a contextual model but a model that takes as its starting point the alienation and exclusion of entire urban communities and that privileges the faith perspectives that emerge from that experience.

If we begin to unpack why theological institutions seem to give little attention to what might be involved in contextualising theological education from the perspective of the urban margins, we see that a critical question is where colleges are located, the history that brought them into being and the constituencies that they were designed to serve. I, Colin, now live in the UK but the challenges to contextualising theological education in Kenya seem to be not too dissimilar to those here in England.

The city of Oxford, where I work, has more residential Anglican theological colleges than the whole of the north of England put together. The problem, if it is even perceived as such, has its roots in a history of Anglican ministry where ordination required a degree from Oxford or Cambridge. Much has changed since then, but the church has still struggled to overcome a culture of elitism that surrounds Anglican ministry and whose origins are at best unchallenged, if not reinforced by existing models of residential training. If that elitism is to be addressed, whether in Kenya or the UK, we must take more seriously the importance of place and the notion that where we learn is as important as, and a component of, what we learn. New and relevant models of theological education must start from a basic premise, that location matters.

## ■ A Theology of Place

The central theme of the Hebrew Scriptures, Brueggemann (2002) argues, is the theme of land. Taking a swipe at salvation history as a dominant theme of biblical theology, he argues instead that

interpreters have been insensitive to the preoccupation of the Bible with placement (in Inge 2003). Against much of what he perceives to be abstract thinking in biblical theology he makes the case that land is a central, if not the central, theme of biblical faith. Land, Brueggemann argues, is space with meaning.

In the New Testament, we find ourselves confronted with the Word who has become flesh. Torrance (in Inge 2003) argues that the:

[R]elation established between God and man in Jesus Christ constitutes Him as the place where God meets with man in the actualities of human existence, and man meets with God and knows him in his own divine being. (p. 51)

This meeting place of God and humanity takes place not in abstraction, but within the specifics of time and place. The incarnation is revealed in Bethlehem of Judea. The life of Jesus, his birth, ministry, miracles, teaching, travelling, trial, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension are all made known to us within the specificity of place. Place matters, whether in his home town where he can do no miracle, where some perceive that no good can come, or in the city over which he weeps. Incarnation, God revealed in the stuff of human history, happens not in some unspecified space but in the concreteness of place where lives have been lived and stories told. The gospel is revealed but also relived, reinterpreted, retold against the background of place. The reality of four gospels points to the way in which different contexts, different communities and places, give shape to the gospel message. Our search for genuinely contextual representations of the gospel emerges from the theological foundations of the incarnation, the knowledge that revelation happened and can only be authentically grasped and represented within the concrete realities of human experience.

The gospel always comes to us in a place and the nature of that place profoundly shapes our expression and reception. This truth seemed most apparent to me when a group of Bible teachers from the UK came to Nairobi to teach a course on

preaching at the theological college of which the Centre for Urban Mission is a part. On a wet afternoon we walked them through the mud and across the then-open sewers that constituted the route to the Centre. Arriving through the door, visibly shaken by what they had seen and experienced on their brief walk, one turned to the other and posed the question: 'How does anyone preach the gospel in a place such as this?' (UK Bible Teacher, Nairobi, undisclosed year).

Sometimes it takes the 'otherness' of place, the unfamiliarity, the sheer strangeness of being 'away from home' to remind us that place changes things. Without being confronted with that otherness, we are also in danger of assuming a neutrality or insignificance of place, unchallenged as we are by the familiarity of the known. The known so easily becomes perceived as normative, a seemingly a-contextual place, and we thus lose the insight of how our own beliefs and understanding, and the gospel we communicate, are shaped by the places we inhabit.

While the question was posed of how the gospel might be communicated, the very act of asking it concealed the more profound questions that theological education needs to grapple with. The visitors were vexed by a question of communication. How is the content of the gospel transported into this place? How do we adapt our message such that it might fit within or be heard within this context? Behind that question we must ask ourselves what the nature of the gospel is as it emerges from the life and work of the Spirit within this community. We might also ask how the message of the gospel engages with a place, a city, where it was estimated at one point that 55% of the population occupied just 5% of the residential land (USAID 1993:1). For informal settlement dwellers around the world, land becomes a critical question of survival, of human rights. Land distribution becomes one of the most concrete expressions of spatial injustice. What is the gospel in this context? Theological education that fails to

engage with the questions that arise from this lived experience risks at best being irrelevant and at worst, by its silence, tacitly supporting structures of oppression.

The question our visitors failed to ask was, how can we discover the gospel afresh, how can we discern it with new eyes, as we encounter the presence of God, who precedes all of us in this community? This is, in some sense, a kenotic question. It requires a self-emptying of preconceptions, a recognition that our expertise, knowledge and wisdom may have less universal currency than we had assumed. It places us in a different posture, where educator and learner enter into a mutual discourse where wisdom is not dispensed by the benevolent and learned outsider but discovered more deeply and richly through our shared experience of God, present and discerned from within our diverse contexts. Interestingly, our visitors asked this question of one another, but not of the Christians they encountered there. And it is here that we see most clearly what is at stake. The very notion of 'informal God', as will be explored later, confronts the question of how God speaks to the church out of contexts of urban poverty and marginalisation, out of contexts where forces of global capitalism threaten human dignity and survival.

## ■ Curriculum and Place

In James Rebanks' (2016) autobiographical account of life as a shepherd in the English Lake District he describes his early years of schooling as being marked by an 'abyss of understanding' between students and teachers. At the nadir of this abyss was the presumption that education is a form of social advancement and that schooling might help children from an economically poor farming community rise out of it and 'do something better with their lives'. Western education is largely rooted in a concept of social advancement or education to progress. While traditional forms of education reflect a desire to socialise and equip children and young people to appreciate, remain and contribute to the

life of their community, Western education has generally been seen as a route up and out. It is heralded as the key to a holy grail of social mobility.

While Western models of education may have much to commend them in terms of creating avenues for greater access to opportunity, they risk perceiving marginalised places as environments of rescue, places to progress out of, rather than communities that have an inherent worth, wisdom and perspective that can challenge the hegemony of Western concepts of what constitutes the good life. There is a failure both to interrogate the aspiration that is offered or to appreciate and value the place and people who are supposed to pursue this aspiration. In other words, we have a model of education in which place becomes aspirational rather than actual in the lives of students and learning requires the insertion of knowledge into a community, rather than the discovery of the wisdom inherent within it.

Saskia Sassen (1999) notes the particular way in which globalisation produces an ‘over valorisation’ of certain parts of a city and its economy over and against others. By this she means that certain places, occupations and forms of economic activity become far more highly valued than others, creating ever-widening gaps between people and places. The result is that the economically and socially marginalised context is not seen as a place of value. Its imagination is defined as limited, its perspective constrained. It is not viewed as place from which to learn but a place to which learning is carried as a vehicle for departure. Nathaniel’s brief dismissal of Nazareth (Jn 1:46) reflects our deep-seated prejudice of communities at the margins. The incarnation challenges that to the very core.

This notion of education as social elevation is not unique to so-called secular institutions. It is equally a feature of theological colleges. These institutions can similarly find themselves caught up in a kind of pincer movement that offers progression in ways that neither robustly interrogate institutional values, assumptions and perspectives nor seek to



learn from and value those whose experience of the world has been formed from the underside of history. A 'decent' theological education that still leaves a pastor living and working in an informal settlement, with little social or economic advancement, will be viewed by many as a failure. Imbumi Makuku, a pastor from the Reformed Presbyterian Church, who had been living and ministering in another of Nairobi's informal settlements, noted (in Smith 2015):

The decision to move into Mukuru Kayaba was not understood well by colleagues who thought I was throwing away a good education [...] which fitted me most for a middle-class church. (p. 173)

The phrase 'fitted me most for a middle-class church' is telling. In the particular context of Nairobi we have to ask whether theological institutions that serve the church and the city conduct their 'God talk' in ways that speak out of, as well as into, the realities of life of the million or more slum dwellers who live within the city's informal settlements. Does theological education largely operate in a way that takes little cognisance of these communities other than providing a theological escape route?

Abdul Maliq Simone (2004a) makes the critical observation that up to three-quarters of basic human needs are provided informally in African cities. Through the informal economy, urban populations gain access to food, housing, transport, healthcare and education 'outside the institutions, frameworks, practices and policies sanctioned by the state' (Simone 2004a:69; Schram, Labonté & Sanders 2013). The point is made that the informal economy is central to the economic life of most African cities. More than that, despite often-hostile government policies, informal settlements are places of social and economic innovation, workshops of creativity, that contribute to the whole life of the city and without which cities could not survive and prosper. Simone (2004b:70) challenges the perception of the formal economy as real and normative. Instead he asks whether the informal sector might provide a basis for an alternative and more sustainable urban configuration.

All this is not to deny the appalling inequalities or the injustices that are manifest within these communities, but it is to recognise that, in spite of these realities, these are communities that contribute to the life, welfare and shalom of the city as a whole. It is not only in the economic life of the city that we see the contribution of the informal economy. Religious life too is expressed through the structures and practices of the informal economy. Churches have emerged within these communities that have adopted the patterns of the informal economy. However, while economists have been quick to capture the value of the informal economy for the development of the formal economy, churches and the wider religious establishment seem to have been less willing or able to hear, recognise or be challenged by the faith, life and witness of these communities of faith (Smith 2007).

In what follows, Sheth notes the way those at the economic margins of the city find themselves doubly disadvantaged by existing models of theological education. Firstly, the educational and economic systems often mean they are denied access. Secondly, where there is access, the ‘language’ of the theological discourse is one that seldom resonates with the experience of those whose life is lived at the margins.

## ■ Theology from Above: Power and Privilege

As Colin has observed, schools of theology come with language, concepts and practices that oftentimes struggle to find relevance among people on the streets. With terminologies developed to communicate ideas or concepts of God that only those in academia understand, they remain foreign to the people they are supposed to minister to. This dissonance is created when reflections on scripture and on God are taken from above, from positions of power and influence, of advantage and privilege, as opposed to from below, where the pain, struggles and experiences of people actually exist. Cesar Lopes (2014) notes, ‘[...] [t]heology

done from below is not doing theology for the powerless, but with them'. However, this does not advocate for a complete moratorium on theology from above, but it is an endorsement of a theological process that takes context seriously. Prescriptive singular theological thought can only lead to the kind of perspectives articulated by the UK Bible teachers who Colin describes visiting Kibera.

The reality is that God is at work among his people on the streets, sometimes in ways that the academy is blind to. It becomes institutionally deaf and blind, incapable of answering that critical question, 'How do we respond to what God is already doing in a given culture?' (Dyrness 2016:20). Every single day, the people of God experience God in the marketplace, at home, in schools, in the field, among others, in words that only the individual understands. In the informal settlements, God's people meet God through their neighbours who help them with salt or maize flour when the family has none. Praise and worship spontaneously are offered to God as they experience these acts of care and support through good neighbourliness. People on the streets want to relate to a God who identifies with their situations and at their level. Unfortunately, as Myers (2001) explains:

[D]ecades after Paulo Freire introduced the perspectives of popular education, the pedagogical practices that prevail in North American seminaries (and similarly in schools of theology in Sub-Saharan Africa) still tend to breed dependence rather than empowerment, privilege content over process and nurture intellectualizing rather than praxis. (pp. 49-52)

Power and privilege continue to dictate who accesses the education offered by the schools of theology and how it is perpetuated in society. The current theological system of education, by and large, promotes intellectual ecclesiastical elitism and favours the rich, which further disenfranchises disadvantaged communities. The impact of this system is far-reaching because it extracts bright students from poor communities, educates them and incorporates them into their

system, a process that further disempowers the very communities they seek to evangelise. The informal urbanisation that Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America are now witnessing continues to expose power differentiations and the inequities that exist. The case for Kenyan informal settlements helps to capture the reality of much that goes on in other informal settlements.

Colin noted the way Western models of education are geared towards upward social mobility. This process tends to lead to a denuding of the human resources of communities rather than their enhancement. Magali Larson (1977), writing on the rise of professionalism in theology and theological education, observes that the goal of most current seminaries is professional credentialing for parish ministry and/or for academic teaching. She (Larson 1977) says:

Because marketable expertise is a crucial element in the structure of modern inequality, professionalization appears also as a collective assertion of special social status and as a collective process of upward mobility [...] [*ts*] 'backbone' is the occupational hierarchy, that is, a differential system of competences and rewards; the central principle of legitimacy is founded on the achievement of socially recognized expertise, or, more simply, on a system of education and credentialing. (p. xvi)

Myers (2001) further argues that the production of knowledge has become a 'standardized commodity' in the modern university, steadily displacing the older ethos of apprenticeships and guilds with that of credentialing monopolies. And ministers and theology professors are virtual charter members of this elite class of 'knowledge professionals'. Larson identifies the three main components of the ideology of professionalism as individualism, elitism and a psychology of entitlement. Thus, 'education is now the main legitimizer of social inequality in industrial capitalism' (Larson 1977:7).

While this is happening, most of the pastors and church leaders in informal settlements have not been able to go for any theological and/or leadership training because they are

semi-literate and cannot be admitted to theological colleges as they cannot meet admission requirements. In their attempt to meet the standards set by the Commission for University Education in Kenya, colleges exclude potential change agents based on high school grades. Performance is increasingly being gauged purely by academic qualifications, which fail to account for the wide diversity of forms of gifting and of human experience. As a result, these leaders will always miss the opportunity to be equipped to meaningfully serve their communities.

On the other hand, those who have been trained discover the training is not relevant for the dynamics of their urban context and is more suited to the realities of rural or suburban contexts. In recent years, a lot of material has been written on the new population trends and yet theological colleges have not sufficiently embraced the reality of urbanisation, and new urbanisms, to develop courses that will address this reality and equip ministers. To further complicate the situation, most of those who have been trained in those colleges often vacate informal settlements, having been drawn to churches in middle class or affluent parts of the city. Moreover, of those who remain, the levels of poverty have pushed over 60% of these leaders to do part-time jobs in order to supplement family income from the little stipend they receive from church.

The economics of theological education is also a key issue. Because of high poverty levels in the informal settlements and the unceasing daily pressure to provide for their families, many church leaders cannot afford the time to commit to theological education, as is presently offered. The way current models of education are structured means that courses are offered at such times when church leaders are working in order to provide for their families. Besides serving as pastors, evangelists, bishops and elders, these leaders work as night security guards, tailors, small entrepreneurs and carpenters, among others. The time demanded from them by these trades leaves little room for a model of theological education that does not take these factors into consideration.

## ■ The Story of Hagar

In order to provide a shift in focus and explore alternatives, we turn to the story of Hagar in the Bible. It provides a biblical perspective, among several narratives in scripture, of God's conversations and encounters with non-Jewish people who sought his help at different times and for varied reasons. In the story we are introduced to the idea that the Lord often crosses boundaries and disregards the popular stereotypical beliefs that attempt to confine him. He reveals himself to be larger than what finite minds can contain. We discover that the narrowing of our beliefs ends up crippling or incapacitating our faith and experiences.

Genesis 21 offers a narrative of a family situation that pits the privileged against the poor, disadvantaged slave girl. Hagar, who is considered a 'nobody' by Abraham's chosen family and who serves as a slave girl, is driven away from the home by her mistress. She leaves with her son with no notion of where she will go. When she runs out of food and water and cannot bear to watch her child die, the Lord hears the child's cry and remembers them. Her first encounter with God in Genesis 16 made her the first person, according to the biblical narrative, to give God a name. It is clear that it was outside of the formal, conventional manner that the Lord acted towards her and her son. He continues to act in that way to date. God's grace is obviously evident in the slave woman's life, as the 'preferred' and loved woman is denied the honour of childbirth.

In that passage is a God so informal that it was easy for Abraham and Sarah to miss him in the whole picture. In a similar way, we can observe how our 'ideal' God, or the God that organised religion teaches, is the God that the academy religiously passes on to students. Sometimes it can become uncomfortable to relate to or identify with such a God. Institutionalised religion projects a predictable and familiar God – just as the Pharisees, Sadducees and teachers of the law did. They failed to comprehend and embrace a God who could not

be contained or captured in their formal traditions, norms and teachings that had, for generations, been handed down as true and binding.

The God who sees Hagar is the God who sees the struggling, jobless young people, single mothers and poor families that have informal settlements as their home. He is constantly on the lips of the poor as testimonies of his kindness are shared. On the streets those who have encountered him never shy away from making it known in their churches through testimonial narratives and songs. The ululations and shouts that rend the air during such moments speak of gratitude to God and confirmation of his nearness.

This same activity of God can be connected to Jesus' hometown, Nazareth – a poor town but one in which the saviour of the world grew up. At the periphery of religious activity, Nazareth was not perceived as a town that could be home to the Messiah. How could God have failed to notice the best of neighbourhoods in Israel at the time, with beautiful and formal order that befit his status? It denotes that people and places that are forgotten, rejected or eschewed appear to attract him more. As paradoxical as it may appear, the Lord seems to be most evidently present among the poor, contrary to popular reasoning that suggests the opposite. Liberation theology's 'God's preferential option for the poor' is herein acted out. This is further illustrated by the image of grace being like water flowing downhill and pulling up in the lowest places, the lowest places here representing poor communities that have been left out by the dominant culture of our theological institutions.

In *No Center, No Periphery: A Regional Approach to Mission*, Mande Munyoro (2016) argues that there is no centre any longer. The growth of the church in Sub-Saharan Africa cannot be said to be a product of the formal (academy) but of a propagation of the gospel by individuals and groups who are outside the schools of theology. As John Wesley (Christian Classics Ethereal Library n.d.) said:

I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare, unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. (n.p.)

This means that the city and the rural, every continent and nation, and all cultures and subcultures must receive significant attention by the academy.

This declaration by Wesley widens the scope of the mission field as it mainstreams the whole world as God's field of mission that the academy must embrace. Hagar, Nazareth and Kibera represent people, groups and places that fall outside of the formal societal arrangement but that nonetheless experience God's grace. The academy, with its current arrangement, ignores the informal sector and concentrates on the formal sectors of society. While emphasis is put on the institution with its numerous anti-informality bottlenecks, there is an active presence of God in informality. In this respect, the academy itself becomes a mission field as it itself requires transformation.

Myers summarises, by using the term *populist*, instead of *informal*, the shape of informal theological education and the informal God alternative that Hagar, Nazareth and Kibera represent (Myers 2001):

The problem is that those of us who have chosen populist over seminary-based theological pedagogy have had to figure out how to operate with little or no institutional support (this has prompted my colleague Bill Wylie-Kellermann to refer to us wryly as the 'lumpen professoriat'). We are too practical for the seminaries, too political for the churches and too evangelical for most activist organisations. So we itinerate, facilitating workshops, seminars, conferences, and retreats that become excuses to invoke a sort of 'floating alternative seminary.' We employ a pedagogy of popular education, in which participants sing and pray; critically reflect on issues from the perspective of their different contexts and traditions and histories; and re-read the scriptures in order to embody them in the world. We collaborate with musicians, performance artists, body workers, and liturgists, and use different media in order to offer a range of voices and approaches. In this work, worship, analysis and practice meet again and embrace. (p. 50)



## ■ The Unending Tension

Having served as a pastor in Kibera, one thing that stood out clearly for me was the tension between the formal and informal. Fellowships and churches seemed to function well in unofficial forms until a sense of formality was introduced. The people seemed to enjoy relaxed, friendly or unofficial ways of engagement, above systems that threatened open, free and relaxed environments for communal life and meaningful relationships. They seemed to thrive whenever and wherever freedom and spontaneity were encouraged. The oral culture of the community encouraged 'loose' contracts among residents, and individuals or institutions that chose formality were considered to be either proud or more Western in orientation.

Within such meetings and arrangements, the name of God is constantly mentioned, sometimes in ways that border on blasphemy, like *buda wa juu*. This is the beauty of native or street languages that have the right words for laypersons to express their emotions and thoughts to describe God. One will notice the difference in the languages so that the language used in church is not the one employed in common use at home. It almost seems like schools of theology and churches are sacred places where 'sacred language' is required to talk about God. This sacredness of religious language as championed by the academy and ecclesiastical orders works to dichotomise life for the people and makes worship and discipleship unauthentic.

This struggle can be exemplified by how churches in these communities operate. Most churches in the community do not have official registration with the government, do not have auditable financial accounts and do not have bank accounts, yet they continue to operate. Although some members of the congregation would question such practices, life seems to be going on as though those are insignificant issues. Socio-economic and cultural realities at the grass roots have produced an urban subculture within the informal settlements that supports life for

the people but that stands contrary to beliefs and practices of the dominant culture of the bourgeois and upper-class citizens of the city.

Formality and informality find themselves in much more serious tension when hermeneutics comes into play. The traditional seminary education, which disconnected students from their context of study and emphasised the biblical context as the beginning point of theological reflection, stands in contrast to the school of thought that holds that context (often changing) should be the starting point.

Mesters (1995:416) describes the way base Christian communities in Brazil read the scriptures and notes that the poor and oppressed find within the scriptures an undeviating kinship with their own life and experience. He observes that the poor begin with their own experience of struggle and service, on the streets and from their experiences of life. These are the things they bring with them into their reading of scripture. He suggests that the poor discover a reflection of their own lives and experience within the text. The Bible becomes their book in which they discover liberation from sickness, demons, pain, suffering, lack and scarcity.

This informs the manner in which independent Pentecostal and Charismatic churches order and conduct their services. Everything within their oral liturgy leads to a time of ministration to individuals. Dreams, visions, testimonies, songs, sermonettes and prophecies are intended to help alleviate the suffering of the worshipper and teach them to ward off any attack. 'Prophetic' churches, where the causes of a worshipper's woes can be identified and deliverance offered, continue to attract many poor people. Such theology speaks into a worldview where witches, demons or curses threaten one's future. Individuals, through the ministry of the 'Man of God', are then taken through a time of deliverance that addresses their need. Unfortunately, this worldview of difference, cultural realities and existential needs of the people remain unaddressed

by schools of theology that sometimes rationalise or explain them away. However, some forms of prosperity theology take advantage of the vulnerability of the poor and the 'Man of God' becomes another form of oppression. The task that schools of theology have is to move towards bridging this existing gap between the formal and informal so that balance is struck.

## ■ The Growing Frustration

An often-voiced concern from a number of congregations is the apparent lack of teachers' or ministers' ability to relate scripture to daily life. They often complain that they do not attend training or come to church to look for some scientific, foreign solution to their pressing issues. They are not waiting for an abstract idea of a God far removed from them and who delights in being prayed to but does not act on their behalf. This is because 'well trained', well-meaning pastors and theologians from the academy, with lofty ideas and powerful oratory skills, fail to connect with the simple ordinary people who form their congregations because their ideas are alien to the context. There seems to be a presentation of a God who is less concerned with the heart than the mind, one who does not concern himself with sick bodies but demands tithes and offerings to sustain his ministers and their ministries. The Bible teaches observation of the latter without neglecting the former.

In order to connect the Bible, God and people in education and in ministry, language is primary. The starting point in all these is being able to speak to people in a way that they can understand. Theological and spiritual formation happens when people are able to understand God deeply through a language they know, a language that communicates with their innermost being. Street language in most of our cities is not the same as the classroom language in schools of theology. God who is the author of all languages can be known through those languages. God would never speak to any person using a language the

person does not understand. For instance, in Kenya, and especially Nairobi, the street language is Sheng, and it is common to hear young people refer to God as *buda*, while the official instructional language in schools of theology is mainly English. Interestingly, the older generation find Sheng unpalatable to them, arguing that it is for uncultured and ill-disciplined young people. The point is whether one is able to fully appreciate the gospel message if they can't connect through language.

Theological education, which has concentrated heavily on training the clergy while neglecting the laity, requires transformation. It is not enough to develop terminologies and concepts in the classroom that will never make sense to the common people. Because everyone does theology at their own levels, structured God talk should be made simpler and accessible to people in the marketplace, at home and on the streets. Even the language of clergy and laity, as helpful as it has been, somehow succeeds in widening the gap between ministers and their audiences, the formal and informal, between the academy and the marketplace. The heart of theological education should be to help form believers theologically and spiritually in order to live out their faith authentically and meaningfully, and this happens when it is done with the people themselves and not just for and to them.

Relevant cultural forms of communication should be intentionally adopted to communicate the gospel message in life-giving ways. Although reading and writing have become part and parcel of human culture, an oral culture of communication must not be ignored. Through stories, songs and proverbs, just like Christ used them in his messages, most of which are unwritten, their richness and effectiveness cannot be understated. Certain songs that have been considered unscriptural still resonate with worshippers. *Shetani nitakusema kwa baba* [Satan, I will report you to my father] is one such song. It is an expression of the need to overcome the enemy's works and live a life of rest and prosperity. Although most of the mainline churches widely use 19th- and 20th-century hymns, a number of local worshippers do

not understand their theology and, moreover, these songs do not minister to them in the same way as when 'by heart' songs are sung.

## ■ Outside Schools of Theology

The subtitle of this chapter is 'outside schools of theology'. Sheth notes the way that for many faith communities in Nairobi, their informal context places them outside the schools of theology. Just as they are outside the formal banking system, healthcare, legal systems, education and employment, so they find themselves outside the provision of theological education, either priced out by the market or excluded through their own history of informal education. We have noted that this exclusion is not a unique feature of Nairobi but is just one more example of the wider social and economic forces of the global economy that lead to wholesale marginalisation of urban communities from almost every aspect of urban life.

In this sense, the church mirrors social structures rather than prophetically offering an alternative. However, for those who manage to find their way into the system there is the sense that they remain simultaneously inside and outside the school. Sheth notes the way they find themselves in a context in which the discourse about God is conducted in a language that is not theirs or where their experience, their encounter with God, the life of their community and the witness of God present within it seems in some sense absent, discounted and ignored. The God of the theology school appears to know nothing of one who comes to them as *buda*.

This sense of being present but not really present, speaking yet feeling spoken for, is brilliantly captured by Robert Young (2003) in his discussion of postcolonialism:

Have you ever felt that the moment that you said the word, 'I', that 'I' was someone else, not you? That in some obscure way you were not the subject of your own sentence? Do you ever feel that when

you speak you have, in some sense, already been spoken for? Or that when you hear others speaking you are only ever going to be the object of their speech? Do you sense that those speaking would try to find out how things seem to you, from where you are? That you live in a world of others, a world that exists for others. (p. 1)

We are then left with the question of whether theological education in informal settlements must be something that takes place 'outside' the schools of theology. The concept of being the outsider is double-edged. There is this sense of being excluded from the rights and privileges of urban life. A sense of exclusion that in ancient urban societies was most visibly demonstrated through the existence of city walls. Outside the city walls is the province of those excluded, the destitute and dispossessed, pushed even from the very margins of life inside the city. Such places included Gehenna, Jerusalem's ever-smoking rubbish dump, and that of greater horror, the place of torture and death, Golgotha, the place of the skull. Yet Selby (1991:58) poignantly reminds us that 'outside the camp', where those excluded are to be found, is also the place of Christ. Christ comes to us as one excluded, as the outsider. He is in this sense perhaps most visible, most palpably present, in the places of exclusion, at the margins, on the edge.

Sheth notes Mester's observation of the way in which the poor discover 'undeviating kinship with their own life and experience'. Croatto (1984) similarly speaks of a 'kerygmatic nucleus' to describe the way those at the margins are closer to the heart of the gospel and therefore those best placed to be its interpreters. While not going quite this far, Orlando Costas (1989) argues that it is those at the base and the margins of society who are most able to understand the meaning of the gospel.

From this perspective, we are bound to question the perspectives of outside-inside, centre-margins that define many urban societies. Theologically, margins become centres. If we are to take that seriously, to embody that, then theological institutions

need to be situated primarily at the margins as the context in which the gospel might most clearly be discovered and faith most readily explored.

One possible outcome of situating theology schools in the context of an informal settlement, if there is real engagement with context, is that urban poverty becomes an issue of theological enquiry. Two billion slum dwellers is a theological issue, but one the church, globally, seems to devote little attention to. Manuel Castells (2010) speaks of multiple black holes of social exclusion around the planet, yet such places seem to hold as little currency in the church as they do in the global economy.

It is of course possible to physically relocate an institution without ever undergoing the more difficult work of understanding how place might reshape and determine the process of learning that goes on within it. We can place a theological college in the heart of an informal settlement and still leave students feeling they have in some sense 'already been spoken for' or leave staff from within that community still feeling that they must forever sow, propagate and cultivate the exotic fruit of another place, ignoring the rich and diverse crops that otherwise flourish within their own communities. Is the answer then that the theological discourse that takes place within the informal settlements must somehow exist in parallel or apart from the schools of theology that serve the wider church?

Andrew Walls' (2002:72) description of the 'Ephesian Moment' describes the process by which the 'dividing wall of hostility' was broken down as the church discovered that its full identity, and the very nature of the gospel, could never be captured or contained within one single cultural form or expression. His argument is that a more complete appreciation of who Christ really is requires a pulling together of the various perceptions that occur within the different cultural contexts where he becomes known. In other words, we need to experience the diversity of the church to gain a fuller grasp of the true nature of

Christ and his gospel. This diversity is not limited to the realm of culture. Walls (2002) goes on to state:

The Ephesian moment also announces the church of the poor. Christianity will be mainly the religion of rather poor or very poor peoples, with few gifts to bring except the gospel itself, and the heartlands of the church will include some of the poorest countries on the earth. (p. 81)

If we follow the logic of Walls' argument, then a failure to see and hear the gospel as it is lived, expressed and proclaimed from within the informal sectors, from the urban margins, will result in the impoverishment of the whole church, not just one part of it. Sheth's articulation of the frustration of 'ordinary Christians' who find that those trained in 'the academy', with its dualistic separation of thought over action, cannot connect with their lived experience is a message for the whole church. In the sheltered environment of the academy it is possible to think only in abstractions, to explore faith as theory, as competing ideas. But when a theology school intentionally takes as its context the realities of an informal settlement, learning with and from that community, expressing and articulating faith from the lived experience of that community, then such luxuries, if they are such, are unavailable.

Similarly, if we choose to privilege the margins over the economic and political centres, then we need to explore what it means to privilege the language of these communities. Sheth notes the way Sheng is the lingua franca of the communities where he ministers and yet this language is somehow ruled out as a legitimate language with which to communicate faith. Are we to privilege our reading of Luke over Mark because the Greek is better? If we take seriously the positioning or, better still, emerging of theology schools in the informal settlements, must they be required to adopt a language other than that to be found in the words and songs 'of the heart'?

What then might this concept of informal God inside the theology school look like? In what follows we offer an inside and outside perspective.



## ■ A View from the Outside

In exploring this question, two former general secretaries of the Church Mission Society in the UK may give us some clues or at least an indication of the posture some of us may need to adopt if we are to explore the question from the outside. John V. Taylor (1963), writing about Christian engagement with other faith communities and their scriptures, commented that ‘you have not understood them until you have been compelled to interpret your own gospel in entirely new terms’ (Bosch 1988). His position is one that recognises that in the presence of the ‘other’ we have to be open to the possibility and embrace the reality that the gospel comes to us in new and unexpected ways. If we are to apply that principle to theological education in the informal settlements, then those of us outside that context, but who seek to engage with it and learn from it, must be radically open to the possibility that our own theological understanding may need to be reinterpreted in entirely new terms. At issue here is posture.

Writing in the introduction to John Taylor’s *Primal Vision*, Max Warren comments (in Taylor 1963):

The first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men’s dreams. More seriously still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival. (p. 10)

We therefore need to return to the question posed by William Dyrness (2016) and begin by asking the question of what God is doing in a given context, in this instance, informal settlements, and being open to hearing and learning how that might cast fresh light on the way we understand and obey scripture. Sheth notes the reality that even on the streets God is at work among his people, sometimes in ways that the academy is blind to. Theology schools within the informal settlements can be the very places where that presence and activity are discerned and new understandings emerge.

Is it possible for the academy to engage in that process? Is there a space for mutual learning where local wisdom is not drowned out in the overly confident language of academia? For that to happen I think we would need to examine the question of posture. Such a posture is not to deny the gifts that ‘the academy’ may bring to any given context but it will require that the academy discovers its true self. That is, it embodies what it means to be a place of learning, not simply a place of teaching, and recognises that the learning emerges from the action of the Spirit within the community, a learning that can challenge its deepest, often unrecognised, assumptions. With Freire (1996), it will need to be open to forms of theological education that emerge as a response to the questions posed from within rather than framed from without. It also means recognising where change and transformation come from and how change is envisioned. Ugandan theologian Emanuel Katongole (2010) describes a ‘theology of relocation’, where change is understood to come not from the exercise of power from the centre, but from the divesting of power and wealth to the margins. Physical relocation is only one small part of a much deeper process. A relocation of the heart and mind requires something more, a profound level of listening, conversion and commitment. Bonino (1980) expressed it this way:

There is no socially and politically neutral theology; in the struggle for life and against death, theology must take sides. I have to ask myself: What is my ‘social location’ as theologian? Whose interests and concerns am I serving? Whose perspective on reality, whose experience am I adopting? (And, because it is a conflict, against whom – temporarily and conditionally, but no less resolutely – am I struggling?) (pp. 1154–1158)

If the academy and the people who make it what it is are to contribute in any way to the development and advancement of theological schools in informal settlements, then Bonino’s words perhaps provide a suitable starting point from which to begin asking the questions. To engage in this theological discourse we must begin from a posture that seeks to adopt a perspective that

sees life and faith from within the realities of these communities. Such a place is uncomfortable; it is a place that asks difficult questions of some of us. Some we struggle to answer with real integrity. It challenges perspectives, assumptions and privileges and demands to know, not simply what you believe, or what you think know, but where you stand and whom you stand with.

## ■ A View from the Inside

My experience is that of someone who has now lived and ministered in Kibera for 23 years, doing ministry before receiving any seminary diploma and now serving while a PhD candidate. In comparison, my ministry seemed to do better when I served as an untrained preacher than after I joined a school of theology. A temporary paralysis occasioned by multiple arguments and an emphasis on praxis that almost entirely contradicted my ministry practice resulted in stunted growth, if not decline, in church attendance and ministry functions. This is heavily attributed to certain theological educators whose emphasis on reason rather than balance between reason and the Spirit's leadership produced confusion and negative self-evaluation of my ministry. However, I finally came out of it after years of struggle.

This serves to highlight the critical role that schools of theology play in shaping and reshaping or influencing a church leader's worldview and ministry focus. It means that simply locating theological education in an informal settlement does not mean the teaching emerges from the wisdom and worldview of that community. It can be physically present yet still alien in its perspective, disabling in its inability to appreciate and affirm what is there. My theological education practice in the informal settlements has brought to fore the role of personal experiences in ministry and praxis engagement, where leaders identify with me as one of their own and appreciate the process of praxis that affirms and challenges existing practices. It all begins with developing a curriculum with the leaders, setting appropriate

class schedules and collectively agreeing on teaching methodologies that make learning possible. Students come with their experiences and existing knowledge to a table where the teacher is a learner and the student is a teacher.

Theological education in informal settlements must be treated as sacred, a duty that requires calling and grace. Theological degrees do not necessarily qualify graduates to become teachers, especially when they are from seminaries outside the context of training or have no experience serving in similar contexts. I contend that what is holy must not be treated with disdain for, as the proverb goes, 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. As Colin has highlighted, the attitude one adopts when designing a theological curriculum for ministers and identifying educators has significant implications on the outcome of the education exercise.

Paul Cornelius (n.d.), in discussing the transformation of theological education, argues that the quality and commitment of teachers or faculty will be called into question in the transformation model, because what is required is not so much teachers for the classroom as mentors for ministry and lifestyle. He acknowledges that although academic qualifications will continue to be a factor, experience, age and most of all a commitment to mentoring through practice and living will be the most important factors. Faculty will be required to design coursework, learning tasks and assessment criteria that will involve more than just imparting knowledge and information in exams.

Henri Nouwen (in Mogabgab 1981) questions the way academic obligations are put on students when he notes (in Mogabgab 1981):

As teachers, we have become insensitive to the ridiculous situation in which adult men and women feel that they 'owe' us a paper of at least 20 pages. We have lost our sense of surprise when men and women who are taking courses about the questions of life and death, anxiously ask how much is 'required'. (p. 20)

He (Nouwen in Mogabgab) goes ahead to propose:

We are not asked to teach a discipline like Mathematics, Physics, History or Languages, but we are called to make our own faith available to others as the source of learning. To be a teacher means indeed to lay down your life for your friends [...] To be a teacher means to offer your own faith experience, your loneliness and intimacy, your doubts and hopes, your failures and successes to your students as a context in which they can struggle with their own quest for meaning. (n.p.)

Theological education must be with informal settlement leaders as opposed to doing it for or to them. Theological education with the community is what makes the difference when we discuss 'outside the academy', where theological formation does not override spiritual and ministerial formation. Issues that affect Kibera such as land, injustice, oppression, poverty and unemployment, among other ills, which are often left out in curricula of most schools of theology, can best be addressed when theological education is done with the people.

An important dimension in theological education today must have a shift in focus from educating only leaders theologically to extending education to the whole church. An emphasis on leaders alone divorces the clergy from the laity and renders the church incapable of being relevant in and to their contexts because lay Christians carry out most of the ecclesiastical work. The aim is to actualise the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974 (The Lausanne Movement, n.d.), which is that '[e]vangelization requires the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world'.

# At Many Tables of Discernment: Faith and Shalom in the Polis

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## ■ Introduction

*Planetary urbanisation* refers to more than the development of cities all over the globe; rather, it is the result of the complete urbanisation of society (Merrifield 2013:909; based on Lefebvre 2003). It is a process so encompassing that whether one lives in a city or not, the urban way of life with its focus on production, markets, new technologies and business cycles impacts our very way of being. Our very development as people has

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become so entwined with the urban project that life has become inconceivable without it.

Linking this concept with Isaac Asimov's Trantor, a giant planet with 40 billion inhabitants, all living in one city of 75 million square miles, one could be forgiven for having somewhat dystopian nightmares (Merrifield 2013). However, while there is much to lament about the urban environment, there is also much to celebrate. In the 2016 documentary *Within Formal Cities* the filmmakers, two architect graduates, go on a five-city trek around South America exploring the positive difference that architecture and urban design can have on urban informal settlements. The approach they documented has not only improved what some would call slums or *favelas*, but the social and economic trajectory of the families living there have also markedly improved (Within Formal Cities 2016).

Despite the many issues associated with urbanisation, there is room for optimism around what is possible at the tables of discernment globally, within countries and locally. UN Habitat has been involved in setting the global direction of the development of cities for over 40 years. The most recent expression of its work is the collaboratively formed *New Urban Agenda* (NUA) (UN Habitat 2016), a document demonstrating the majority of the world's commitment for all to experience (live out) their right to the city. However, as people of faith, we have often been lacking in our understanding of the systems of the cities we inhabit. If we are to make effective responses at the tables of discernment, then we need to grow in our understanding of the city, including the important contribution local governments and civil society (faith groups included) can make to its development.

The reason for our engagement as people of faith is that the hope and optimism evident in documents like the NUA is akin to God's hope expressed throughout the scriptures, most clearly seen in the ancient Hebrew term *shalom*. When, as a body of believers, we are able to grasp the holistic nature of this term and its simile the *kingdom of God*, we find revealed before our

eyes both a rationale and a blueprint for our active involvement in the shaping of cities and indeed urbanisation.

Lastly, this chapter would like to show that an embrace of the hope that is present in our urban environments and working in partnership with others who share the same hope (from whatever background they may come) will help us find a different quality of faith that will help shape its expression in the world.

## ■ **There is Hope! The New Urban Agenda**

What is the NUA? For the more cynical, the document articulating the NUA can still have dystopian overtures. However, that is not its intent. Ratified by most of the world's governments at Habitat III, the document outlines an aspiration for cities (UN Habitat 2016):

We share a vision of cities for all, referring to the equal use and enjoyment of cities and human settlements, seeking to promote inclusivity and ensure that all inhabitants, of present and future generations, without discrimination of any kind, are able to inhabit and produce just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements, to foster prosperity and quality of life for all. We note the efforts of some national and local governments to enshrine this vision, referred to as right to the city, in their legislations, political declarations and charters. (p. 3)

Habitat III was a microcosm of this aspiration. Some 40 000 delegates from around the world took part. Lunchtime was a highlight, lining up in the warm Ecuadorian sun with like-minded people from every continent on the planet. People from diverse ethnic, social and economic backgrounds all engaged in conversation around a shared intent, to be part of shaping cities where everyone can thrive and flourish.

Although the language is conservative and contains many broad statements pointing to well-being for all, the intent behind the NUA is the belief that there is enough for everyone to live well. This includes capital, food, land, capacity and resource for a



growing population, and an increasing urbanisation to produce that sense of well-being for all.

Across its 175 clauses, the NUA repeats again and again the importance of including and enabling every person to benefit from the development of cities and human settlements (UN Habitat 2016):

[L]eave no one behind (14a); addressing multiple forms of discrimination (20); eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions (25); the right to adequate housing for all as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living (31); strengthen[ing] social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and understanding, tolerance, mutual respect, general equality (40); promot[ing] institutional, political, legal and financial mechanisms in cities and human settlements to broaden inclusive platforms (41); full and productive employment and decent work for all (43); promot[ing] an enabling, fair and responsible business environment, based on the principles of environmental sustainability and inclusive prosperity (58); promot[ing] the integration of food security and nutrition needs of urban residents, particularly the urban poor in territorial planning, to end hunger and malnutrition (123); implementation of the NUA requires an enabling environment [...] based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination, accountability, respect for human rights and solidarity, especially with those who are the poorest and most vulnerable. (p. 126)

Towards this end, Rieger and Henkel-Rieger (2017:2) outline a concept of deep solidarity, stating that the current market system only works for a few and that if we want to see change more of us need to stand together to create it. While they wrote this in the context of labour, the principle holds true for the aspirational community and societal change outlined in the NUA.

A key theory or tool to help unpack the NUA and understand the nature of the change needed is the concept of sustainability. The diversity of the term is reflected in the breadth of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations Development Program 2018), encompassing everything from the eradication of poverty, to clean water and sanitation, to climate action and of course cities.

## ■ Sustainable Urbanism and the New Urban Agenda

Imagine the city as a permeable circle or open system. What would be on the inside of the circle? What pressures would be on the outside? The questions are hard to answer because the city and effects of the urban environment are all around, like the air we breathe. Inside the system are schools, businesses, all tiers of government, buildings, public spaces, healthcare, the justice system, social services, religious institutions, modes of transport and the infrastructure necessary to support them, sporting clubs and other community organisations, many different forms of entertainment and media, the overt and not-so-overt economy. There are people who are acted upon and who act upon the system in an infinite number of ways. Outside the permeable circle there are forces like the global economy, the global media, higher tiers of government and planning, global politics, multinational business, the Internet, international aid and development, the United Nations – and the list goes on.

For each of the elements both inside the system and acting on it there is a table of discernment that people of faith can actively participate in. However, to participate appropriately, Christians need to be well informed, understanding and engaging with the language of the sector, and approaching it with an attitude of humility – looking to connect and partner with people of peace who share the desire for shalom even if they do not name it that way.

While for people of faith shalom is a helpful theological reference point, it is not so for businesses, governments or in conversations about the environment. One approximation that makes sense across these spheres is the vision of sustainability.

## ■ Working Sustainably

Sustainable development has become a buzzword with a definition that is difficult to pin down. However, with the environment in firm

view the concept of sustainable development dates to the mid-1960s. One take on the concept's development started with the idea of appropriate technology, popularised by Schumacher (1993:139,144,147). Subsequently, it has been refined through various conferences, commissions and summits. Perhaps the most significant report was the Brundtland Commission in 1987 and its subsequent report, *Our Common Future*. The report recognises the complexities of sustainable development but sets the goal of meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life (Brundtland 1987:2.1.4). These basic tenets were reflected in the Millennium Development Goals, the now ratified SDGs and the NUA.

The latter two documents particularly reflect important aspects of development as understood by Petersen and DeVries (in Khalili 2011:13). They understand that local objectives must be set according to negotiated economic and social values as well as taking into account the need for the welfare of citizens and societal cost-benefit analysis (Petersen & DeVries cited in Khalili 2011:13). Essentially, for development to be sustainable the effect on the people must be considered. How well any planning authority achieves this is debatable. This presents a possible role for the well-informed individual believer or local church. The informed faith community can become an advocate for and work towards sustainable urbanism.

## ■ A Pathway Towards Sustainable Urbanism

New or sustainable urbanism was a reaction to the private vehicle-centred development of cities prominent in the 1920s through to the 1960s. Jane Jacobs in her seminal work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* is scathing about the state of US city planning in the 1960s. She saw that all levels of housing had fallen victim to the same planning principles and had created slums, general social hopelessness, dullness, regimentation, vapid vulgarity, dead cultural and civic centres, directionless

promenades and expressways that divided cities (Jacobs 1961:14). She advocates for a set of principles formed in the laboratory of cities and not in the classrooms of academia. Jacobs (1961:14) believes that these principles need to be shaped by ordinary affairs such as safety and city streets, what makes a great park, why some slums regenerate while others remain the same and the role of the neighbourhood in the city (Jacobs 1961:14).

Jacobs (1961:62–63), for example, highlights four elements that should form part of sustainable local neighbourhoods:

1. Diversity: A district and as many of its internal parts must serve more than one primary purpose. This will allow people on different schedules and who are there for different purposes to use many of the same spaces. For example, a church that becomes a drop-in centre during the week.
2. Short streets: Giving the opportunity to turn corners frequently adding to interest and connectivity.
3. Mingle buildings of various ages: In order to create variety in the economic yield that each building must produce. This will promote mixed use. The mingling needs to happen closely together.
4. Dense concentration of people: This includes people who reside in the district and those visiting. The population must sustain the diversity.

The concepts of new or sustainable urbanism have been refined; however, Jacobs' thinking remains core. Understanding a community as an ecosystem helps to flesh out Jacobs' principles. Sustainable communities strive to replicate nature itself, generating substances that provide food for the system, minimising the production of harm, living off current income, and respecting and preserving diversity (McDonough; cited in Beatley & Manning 1997:87).

Helping this process, sustainable urbanists advocate for a compact urban form, reducing the burden on the natural environment. An urban form not only impacts on the environment, because a compact urban form will affect the social infrastructure in very different ways to the current urban sprawl or a

decentralised city form. New urbanists advocate for increased density in inner-ring suburbs rather than increasing the urban sprawl. The implications for Asimov's Trantor are not clear. However, as the planet urbanises decision-makers and planners need to have liveability as their primary reference point.

## ■ Social Sustainability

While *urban sustainability* is a broad term, central to the NUA is the concept of liveability or social sustainability. Missimer, Robert and Broman (2016), in developing their framework of strategic sustainable development, recognise that the concept of social sustainability has been under-theorised with no overarching definition. While they themselves stop short of a definition, they draw on Folke et al., who use a complex adaptive systems lens to explore how the social system responds to abrupt change or crisis. With this in mind, Folke et al. (in Missimer et al. 2016:38) contend that within the social system individuals can meet their own needs; however, there must be a functioning social ecology around them. They conclude that the key elements in this ecology are 'trust, common meaning, diversity, capacity for learning, and a capacity for self-organisation' (Missimer et al. 2016:38).

## ■ Building Cities from Below: Taking Ownership Locally

While exploring the theory and the macro level of social sustainability, people's experience of it will be in the neighbourhood, their local community. A community can be defined as (Van Eymeren 2017):

[A]n interconnected web of relationships, structures and institutions, where people can gain a sense of belonging and can work on and live out their place and purpose in the world. (p. 148).

Though idealistic, the definition is underpinned by Folke's understanding of a functioning social ecology or the relational web that sustains a community – relationships at the personal level,

between people and groups, people and institutions, between groups, groups and institutions and inter-institutional connection. Community development workers are concerned with the strength of these relationships and what they produce towards the ongoing development of the community (Ife 1995).

Wyndham City Council, an outer western municipality of Melbourne, initiated a strength-based planning process, Wyndham 2040 (Wyndham City Council 2018). The consultation brought together people from all over the community with the aim of unearthing the strengths of individuals, the groups they were a part of and how they saw the connections between different entities in the city. It was a forward-focused consultation and as such linked into the future aspirations of the community and how the groups they were aware of could possibly be leveraged to reach goals the whole community wanted to see achieved. The result was a well-informed regional-based community plan. As with all plans, the proof will be in its implementation. However, the municipality is off to a promising start, with many residents feeling an ownership of what has been deliberated.

Through processes like the one engaged by the City of Wyndham, there is potential for increased levels of transparency, trust, social inclusion, collective action and social networks all working to increase urban sustainability.

## ■ Participation in an Open Planning Table

Participatory processes like the one engaged by Wyndham include grass-roots responses such as asset-based community development (ABCD). The astute faith community can also use this process as a method of engagement that can facilitate community involvement at many local tables of discernment. It involves an optimistic look at the community, recognising within every person ability, perspective, gift and skill.

Similarly, 'every organisation and institution has the ability to serve the community, with the potential of being stretched past their original purpose to become fully involved in the development process' (Kretzman & McKnight 1993:138).

ABCD is a flexible process with five basic principles:

- asset mapping
- relationship building
- focus on economic development and information sharing
- developing a common vision
- partnering with outside resources.

## ■ Developing an Asset Map

An asset map is a way of documenting the strengths that are present in a local community and is a helpful form of community research. Many civil society groups, social service organisations and churches seek to work in local communities according to their own agendas rather than seeking and working with the aspirations of the local community. When talking with individuals it is important to uncover the skills they have, what they enjoy doing, what they might be able to teach others and what might generate some income for them. This method of inquiry sits well with community-oriented research such as appreciative inquiry (Cram 2010). An appreciative inquiry approach asks:

- What do people enjoy about living in their community?
- What do they see that is working well?
- What would they like to see over the next 3-5 years?

Included in the asset mapping process is the generation of a list of organisations and businesses. Churches and small not-for-profits, sporting and recreation clubs, and neighbourhood organisations are all included at this level of inquiry (Kretzman & McKnight 1993:110). The last stage in creating an asset map is to connect with the various institutions in the community, such as schools, hospitals, departments in the local municipality and other key community groups or organisations that form the bedrock of the community.

## ■ Building Relationships

As mentioned earlier, the relational web or lack of it within a community will be a key determinant of the community's sense of well-being and its ability to develop sustainably. Unfortunately, particularly within the Western world, the relational web present in communities is often, at best, quite weak and more generally rather fragmented. This fragmentation has led to a raft of social side effects. For a community to be transformed, the relational web needs to be healed. One step towards that can be relationships established around common interests, skills and abilities. With the development of an asset map, the community development worker can begin to link or network people together.

The Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis decided to stop 'helping people' (i.e. providing welfare that ultimately left people disempowered) in favour of creating a process that would regenerate the community. Using ABCD principles, the church employed community listeners. Their role was to go out into the community and simply listen to people's stories and aspirations. They then began to facilitate dinners, meetups and other ways of connecting like-minded people together. This generated gardening clubs, small enterprises and many other groups. The church hall was transformed from an empty shell during the week to every nook and cranny being used for the development of community endeavours (King 2015).

## ■ Economic Development and Information Sharing

As individuals' skills are unearthed, an opportunity emerges for the development of microenterprises that can increase individual and community sustainability. Long-time community workers Ash and Anji Barker spent 12 years living in Klong Toey, Bangkok's largest slum. As a social worker, one of Anji's foci was on the development of local skills for the generation of income.



Two notable successes among many were Klong Toey Jewellery (Roy Rak Beading 2014) and Poo's Cooking School (Cooking with Poo 2016). Both utilised the skills of local people to generate personal and community income. Poo's Cooking School received a Certificate of Excellence from TripAdvisor in 2015. Poo, who continues to live in Klong Toey, was befriended by Anji when she used to cook and sell food in front of her house. By unearthing her skills further, Anji helped Poo see there was a way to create a better income. Poo is now supporting some 27 other social enterprises, each employing and empowering local people to own their strengths and abilities.

The other aspect of this principle is information sharing. The astute community development worker must get to know the nodes of formal and informal communication within a community as well as how to leverage those to promote projects and share the story.

## ■ **Developing a Common Vision**

Recapping the process, the asset map has been developed and is continually updated. This has given the facilitation group (hopefully a partnership between church, community group, neighbours and others) a good picture of the strengths of the local community. People are beginning to use their skills and gifts to start microenterprises as well as being encouraged to see how they may contribute to the larger development picture. Relationships have been forming between people of like mind, and as such a group interested in community gardening may have formed or a group has gotten together to clean up a local park or put on an event aimed at drawing people together. Networks have also been strengthened between different organisations and institutions. Pride forms in the local community as people are encouraged to buy local and appreciate the skills and products from within their own community. Communication is also happening effectively and people are beginning to get on

board with projects that interest them. Slowly the community is taking on a new positive vibe. Now it is time to begin drawing the different energies together to think about the community as a whole; to dream together about what the community could look like in 3–5 years; and then, to begin to plan towards it (Van Eymeren 2017:157).

Jeanette Malcolm is the founder of Invercargill's South Alive, a New Zealand not-for-profit aimed at community regeneration. With an aid and development background, she set her sights on the local community and began a process of working with council to see the community move forward. In 2012, very early on in the process, she invited the community to a local meeting where the idea of developing a group to regenerate the community was floated. The concept was well received; however, people believed the proof of concept would be in what it delivered. The first win was the planting out of a barren roundabout at the entrance to the community. With most roundabouts around Invercargill already planted, the fact that this one was barren sent a very clear message to the community. Today, the organisation continues to focus on four key concepts:

1. upgrade
2. community
3. resourcefulness
4. governance.

The team, which consists predominantly of local volunteers, divides itself into groups that run projects around:

- children and youth
- creating stronger neighbourhoods
- the arts
- housing
- improving the look of the neighbourhood
- community orchards
- fruit and nut trees
- marketing and events
- the creation of a dog park (cf. South Alive n.d.).

## ■ Partnering with Outside Resources

Many of the communities that have benefitted from processes like ABCD have been economically depressed and have been used to receiving ‘solutions’ to issues such as health, addiction, employment, poverty and even land use from government and social service organisations. Community development done in the way of ABCD empowers communities to begin to design and implement their own solutions. However, there may come a time when outside expertise is needed. The community will then be able to build a partnership with those who can provide the service needed. Note the difference in language – the community is not sitting idly by waiting for something to happen but is actively seeking what it needs to reach its goals (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993:353–354).

With planetary urbanism, a developing phenomenon, a remedy against a Trantorian future is for faith communities to take a facilitating role in processes like ABCD. However, these faith communities need to be aware of the complexities at play at a local level, subnationally, nationally and globally.

## ■ Understanding the Complexities of Local Development

If civil society, including the church, is to take a lead in the developing of communities in line with the principles of the NUA, then building the capacity of local and regional governments is an essential step. This increases in importance because of the underwhelming response of individual countries to the agenda (Trundle 2016). At the Habitat III conference, the leaders of innovation and commitment to the agenda were, in fact, civil society and academia. Rather than despairing at the lack of national level take-up of the agenda, there is an opportunity for a ground-up approach to development, which has not been present globally for some time.

If civil society is to take a lead in the implementation of the NUA and its positive implications for communities be realised, then subnational and local governments need to be empowered to support these initiatives. In global financial, city and regional leadership circles there is much conversation and debate about how the agenda will be implemented and how this implementation will be monitored. A key to the debate is at what level the implementation will be delivered. There is a push from the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments (GTF), formed through the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, that at the subnational level, local governments be given the policy freedom to raise their own funds for development (De Paula 2016). However, if mechanisms such as public-private partnerships (PPPs) for the delivering of development become more commonplace it could be problematic for city authorities that are weak institutionally, lack technical or people resources or have incompatible legal frameworks to cope with a decentralised financing system (De Paula 2016). There is also the danger that these partnerships could benefit certain stakeholders and not the whole community.

In response, the GTF has recommended that national governments create suitable legislative environments for this shift in approach to sustainable development and that the dialogue between national and subnational governments become more transparent. Secondly, they recommend that national governments build the capacity of subnational levels of authority, enabling them to do the financial management necessary to account for funds allocated for development. Lastly, the GTF believe that a global fund for basic services should be established and that this would better facilitate the public governance of essential services, meaning less reliance on PPPs.

Considering the nuances and outcomes of top-down versus bottom-up development as described above, Greenspan (2016), writing in the *New Yorker*, highlights some of the tensions between the two. One top-down approach can be traced back

to Le Corbusier and the Athens Charter, published in 1943. Moved by the poverty he saw evident in then-developing cities like New York, he proposed as one of his 94 tenets that ‘high rise apartments placed at wide distances apart liberate ground for large open spaces’ (Le Corbusier, cited in Greenspan 2016). This linked with another of his tenets, which advocated for slums to be torn down to make way for high rise buildings, showing his process of bringing order to the streets and lives of the poor.

This type of public housing has continued with very little consultation of those who would call them home. They dot the landscape of major world cities such as London (Grenfell Tower), New York, Chicago, Sydney and Melbourne, to name just a few. There is much anecdotal evidence to show that these towers, rather than promoting a less chaotic environment, add to it. Reasons for this are complex and include the social environment in which the tower is located, housing management, income mix of the residents, and community-building initiatives present on the estate.

At one end of Brunswick Street in Fitzroy, Melbourne, stand four imposing towers. Each is 20 stories tall and houses approximately 1000 people. Over the last 50 years they have provided a permanent place for multiple generations of families experiencing poverty. The towers have a large amount of green space, including a public park where children play and locals from the surrounding neighbourhood bring their dogs. Yet present in the tower blocks and spilling out onto the surrounding streets is the evidence of pain, crime, isolation, disconnection, unemployment, poor mental health, domestic violence and drug addiction.

A few years ago, again with very little consultation, the Victorian State Government wanted to redevelop the site to enable private investment into what is seen as million-dollar views over the City of Melbourne. They created a master plan and sought to bring it to reality. After an outcry from residents all over the Fitzroy community, the plan was shelved.

One could debate whether the proposed redevelopment was a good idea or not. Pros and cons could be put on the whiteboard and consultations conceived. Whatever the outcome, it highlights the need for community ownership in the development process. The Fitzroy example also reinforces conclusions reached in Greenspan's article for the *New Yorker* that cities are open systems and plans need to be defined by flexibility rather than right and wrong answers. This thinking recognises the unique nature and makeup of individual communities and the importance of ground-up strategies.

In creating this flexibility and local focus, one of the core complexities is the tension between the neighbourhood and taking development such as transportation solutions to scale over a whole city. Jacobs was a strong proponent of the role of the neighbourhood. As outlined earlier, she believed in diversity, walkability, a mix of uses and a dense concentration of people (Jacobs 1961). She believed this would lead to well-being in a neighbourhood and stop the dirge of development in US cities at the time. These principles have been adopted in regeneration projects around the world and provide a helpful mix of focus between social and physical infrastructure. However, neighbourhoods are part of the broader complex system of the city and, as such, sociologists such as Sennett see great worth in the neighbourhood but believe for some issues like transportation that, while development can start at a community level, it has to go to scale and not everything can be solved in the neighbourhood (Sennett cited in Greenspan 2016).

The importance of partnership, including between neighbourhood and city, is encouraged in the NUA (UN Habitat 2016):

We urge all national, sub-national, and local governments, as well as all relevant stakeholders, in line with national policies and legislation, to revitalise, strengthen, and create partnerships, enhancing coordination and cooperation to effectively implement the NUA and realise our shared vision. (Clause 21) (p. 4)

Added to this there is a clear desire to partner with those who are on the margins and for them to be empowered and strengthened to bring what they have to bring to the planning table (UN Habitat 2016):

We will promote capacity development initiatives to empower and strengthen skills and abilities of women and girls, children and youth, older persons and persons with a disability, indigenous people and local communities, as well as persons in vulnerable situations for shaping governance processes, engaging in dialogue, and promoting and protecting human rights and anti-discrimination, to ensure their effective participation in urban and territorial development decision-making. (Clause 155) (p. 20)

These principles of partnership and empowerment are in line with strength-based community development, which focuses on the good already present in a community (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993:5). The methodology seeks to grow the capacity of the community to build on those strengths and in this way become the answers to its own issues and continue on the path of inclusive development.

As well as taking into account the factors acting upon it, the local community contains a diverse set of stakeholders that must be brought to the table if local issues are to be solved. Facilitating a diverse set of stakeholders to sit at the planning table is not just a 'feel good' endeavour; rather, it promotes a heterogeneity of perspective, skill and opinion that would otherwise not be discovered. Synergistic enquiry is a process of research and dialogue that recognises there are many sources of wisdom and that these sources need to be brought together to solve complex community issues (Wilson, Simpson & Van Eymeren 2012:4).

An example of synergistic enquiry took place during 2011-2012. There was a spike in the number of young people taking their own lives in the outer south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne (Watson 2012). Partnering for Transformation spearheaded a number of conversations aimed at highlighting the root causes behind this disturbing phenomenon. One conversation brought 50 stakeholders together from community sectors as varied as

police, schools, youth workers, social services, churches, local government and young people themselves. They entered into a process known as ‘world café’ where the participants’ varied perspectives to several questions were collected and synthesised (Clear Light Communications 2018). While a complex issue such as youth suicide cannot be adequately addressed in a day-long conversation, there was a depth of insight gained and perspectives learned as stakeholders heard each other. With the materials gathered from the conversations, the facilitators were then able to develop a roadmap towards connection, belonging, purpose and meaning, key concepts coming out of the day towards the prevention of youth suicide.

Local community issues are complex and often become citywide concerns, involving many stakeholders in the solutions. The NUA recognises this and sees local implementation as being key to its success. The agenda’s focus on the inclusivity of all, and especially those on the margins, resonates with many aspects of civil society, not least of all communities of faith. Despite, or probably because of, its broad-based nature the NUA is a beacon of hope to the development of cities. It encourages capacity-building; the inclusion of all stakeholders, particularly those on the margins; flexibility in approach; the importance of local and subnational government; and partnership at all levels. However, why is this important to people of faith? Why is it a beacon of hope to the world?

## ■ A Theology of Hope and the New Urban Agenda

As stated by Wright (2007):

[T]he surprising future hope which is held out to us in Jesus Christ leads directly and, to many people, equally surprisingly, to a vision of the present hope which is the basis for all Christian mission. To hope for a better future in this world – for the poor, the sick, the lonely and depressed, for the slaves, the refugees, the hungry and homeless, for the abused, the paranoid, the downtrodden and despairing and



in fact for the whole wide, wonderful and wounded world – is not something else, something extra something tacked onto ‘the gospel’ as an afterthought. And to work for that intermediate hope, the surprising hope that comes forward from God’s ultimate future into God’s urgent present, is not a distraction from the task of ‘mission’ and ‘evangelism’ in the present. It is a central, essential, vital and life-giving part of it. (p. 204)

The themes picked up by Wright are echoes of both Old and New Testament passages that counter the dystopian vision of planetary urbanisation and refer to God’s longings for the current state of humanity. In many traditional passages like Isaiah 65:17–25 that talk about the well-being or shalom of the community have been taken eschatologically, through the lens of both the resurrection and the returning Christ. Keeping that lens firmly intact, Wright adds another dimension to our hope. Yes, ultimately Christ will return, and the current state of the world will be perfected (Book of Revelation; Chapter 21). And while we groan with all creation for that day, the truly good news is we get to partner with God, working towards glimpses of that reality now (Wright 2007). This is another way of understanding what is meant by an inaugurated eschatology – a reality that is reflected in documents like the NUA.

Showing a correlation to the hopes and desires of the 40 000 people who participated in Habitat III, Wright (2007) says:

Mostly Jesus himself got a hearing from his contemporaries because of what he was doing. They saw him saving people from sickness and death, and they heard him talking about a ‘salvation,’ the message for which they had longed which would go beyond the intermediate and into the ultimate future. But the two were not unrelated, the present one a mere ‘visual aid,’ or a trick to gain people’s attention. The whole point of what Jesus was up to was that he was doing, close up, in the present, what he was promising, long term in the future. And what he was promising in the future and doing in that present, was not about saving souls for a disembodied eternity, but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so that they could enjoy, already in the present, that renewal of creation which is God’s ultimate purpose – and so they could thus become colleagues and partners in that larger project itself. (p. 204)

## ■ Two Narratives Competing for our Communities

The first narrative reveals an incredible optimism as evidenced in passages such as Isaiah 58:1–6, Isaiah 65:17–25, Jeremiah 29:7 and Luke 4:18–21. These passages point to an inaugurated eschatology where the kingdom of God is already present and active in the world. This hope is echoed in the NUA. They all hold humanity in high regard, believing in the possibility of common ground, harmony, a sustainable world and a future where all people are able to live well. However, one could be forgiven for not sharing their optimism. The second narrative sees a bombardment of negativity from television, print media, social media and even visually, present in any given neighbourhood. Flooded with pictures of suffering from all over the globe, crime from the suburb next door and corruption at the highest level in government, people are left floundering in a sea of despair.

Both narratives sit in the human heart. The former opens the possibility for engagement, working in partnership with others towards change and a general positivity. Focus on the latter narrative promotes fear, distrust and an atrophy of hope.

These competing narratives demand a choice. One path is to succumb to the negativity, become overwhelmed and ultimately withdraw from the world. Whether this withdrawal is a retreat inward towards a self-focused life or into a disengaged religion, the effect is the same – the negativity present in the world is enlarged. The alternate path is to follow the narrative of hope, recognising that our cities are part of a larger framework where God is present and has a plan and purpose sourced in his love for all creation (Newbigin 1978:30–31). As explored above, tools such as appreciative inquiry and ABCD help a theology of hope become a praxis of hope. However, to be effective practitioners of hope, as people of faith, we need a solid understanding of the source of our hope for the world, the kingdom of God.

## ■ The Kingdom of God

Biblical passages such as Isaiah 58:6–12, Isaiah 65:17–25, Luke 4:16–21, Matthew 5:9–16, Matthew 6:31–34, Luke 10:1–12, Acts 2:14–21, 43–47, and Revelations 21:1–17 reveal a beautiful picture of love, wholeness, community; synergy between God and humanity and indeed all creation; disease and death minimised; people being seen and valued and living lives of meaning; poverty eradicated; joy being close to the surface; and a sense of well-being normal. All of which, according to these passages, is possible in our current experience (Van Eymeren 2017:30–31).

Throughout history this has not always been the predominant view of the kingdom of God. Understandings have ranged from a totally future hope to an earthly utopia. Snyder (1991: Ch2, 3) helpfully outlines eight models that are representative of views from various traditions and times in history. His first two models paint a picture of a disengaged, future-focused God who is only interested in the eternal soul of the individual person. Combined, these understandings of the kingdom have created an unhelpful dualism between the material and spiritual worlds and set up a dichotomy between this world and the next or the kingdoms of nature and grace (cf. Moltmann 1981:208). This understanding gives the kingdom of God a place in eschatology but only limited influence in the current experience of humanity. This view gives a preconceived notion that the saved will go to heaven upon death, relegating heaven to being a static place rather than the dynamic and complete rule of God. If, which has been the case for generations, these beliefs are seen as true, then the mission of the church is limited to the saving of souls for the future (Wright 2007:202–204). While a personal relationship with God is an exciting part of God's kingdom being present in the world, our preoccupation with this aspect has affected the church's ability to contribute meaningfully to the creation of a better world. We have been preoccupied with only one aspect of the whole story.

A more helpful understanding of the presence of God's kingdom in the world is outlined in Snyder's (1991) seventh model (outlined in Chapter 8). The Kingdom as Christianised Culture shows that God's kingdom is a stimulus and has a programme for the transformation of society. Although not fully present, the kingdom is the inspiration and direction for people of faith as they work towards positive change. This model shows that there is a broader context to the kingdom than the inner life of the believer. It shows the importance of materiality, not only the presence of the spiritual. The model goes on to demonstrate that Christians are to work towards social transformation, not to create Christian enclaves as Model 6, Kingdom as Political State, suggests Snyder (1991: Ch7). In one of his parables, Jesus describes the kingdom as a leavening agent, like yeast. Jesus' message is that our values as his followers need to permeate all of society (Van Eymeren 2017:61). In this way, the kingdom illuminates mankind progressively over time, overcoming fear and ignorance and ushering in a better world.

There are three key features of this model:

1. Relevance: The work of the kingdom is seen as much broader than the church as God's intention is to redeem every aspect of society. This brings a strong ethical focus and a living out of the moral values of the kingdom.
2. Transformation: The kingdom's work is focused on social, political and economic realities and processes. God's kingdom has a social programme and there is a logical and necessary outworking of Jesus' teachings.
3. Optimism: The belief that social transformation is possible and that the gospel can be a force for peace and harmony. This includes the hope of justice in our world including just governmental structures and an equitable society.

Model 7 recognises that for these things to be achieved, God and humankind need to work cooperatively. In this way, the kingdom becomes progressively manifest in the present order. While the Old Testament prophets lamented, there is still much work to be done (Is 11:1-9; 42:1-7, 61:1-11); there are many current signs of

the presence of God's kingdom. The New Testament holds only a few references to the outworking of this model; however, Jesus' teaching on the kingdom and his social ethics provide a pathway to be followed (Snyder 1991: Ch2).

## ■ Shalom as a Way of Engagement

The clearest manifestation of this pathway is the ancient Hebrew term *shalom*. Westermann (in Yoder & Swartley 1992:24), an Old Testament scholar, describes shalom in the context of a greeting. He understands that shalom is asking about everything needed for a healthful life. This includes good health, a sense of well-being, good fortune, the cohesiveness of the community, relationship to relatives and their state of being, and everything else deemed necessary for everything to be in order. Further implications of the greeting show the intent not only to find out information but also to demonstrate the connection between the two people in the exchange. The motivation behind the question is not so much the well-being of the individual but the state of society, based on a common humanity. Put another way, shalom refers to the well-being of the individual in the context of their community.

Brueggemann (1994) believes that this concept can be the beginning of a new social imaginary. As such, a framework can be developed that talks very clearly with documents like the NUA. Based on passages like Isaiah 65:17–25, for a person to be experiencing shalom (or flourishing), they would in the context of their community:

- have their basic needs met
- have a sense of belonging to land and to people
- have their contributions valued
- be living a life full of purpose
- be enjoying celebration
- have a growing sense of spirituality or something outside themselves.

There is hope in documents like the NUA because they are a reflection of a deep longing for the type of world described by

the concept of shalom, which is a reflection of the kingdom of God. In its desire for just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable and sustainable cities, the NUA echoes concepts found in shalom, including a desire and action towards 'justice, peace, stewardship, the intrinsic worth of people and the responsibility for future generations' (Ives & Van Eymeren 2017). However, if people of faith are to partner with God and others in the creation of shalom and the implementation of the NUA, then a new shape of ecclesia needs to emerge, one that can create an alternative narrative to a dystopian Trantor.

## ■ The New 'Shape' of Faith: An Open and Inclusive Ecclesiology

To embrace both a theology and methodology of engagement, communities of faith need to embrace an openness and inclusive understanding of what it means to be church. This understanding is reflective not so much on what happens when the church is gathered but more its posture towards the world. This self-understanding needs to reflect love, our roots as revealed in scripture and through prayer, as well as authenticity, hospitality and a desire to go beyond the safe shores of the 'church harbour'. The following points are based on a chapter from my book, *Building Communities of the Kingdom* (Van Eymeren 2017).

### ■ Love

'They shall know you by the love you have for each other' (Jn 13:35) begs two questions for the local church. Firstly, as a congregation, do we love each other? And secondly, if we do, how do people get to see that love in action? As part of my community development practice with a Christian organisation, I coordinated community-wide festivals. Most of the churches in a local community would come together to put on a free day of entertainment, family games and food. It was an opportunity for the church to meet the community in a non-threatening way and

for the church to give a gift to the community. During training sessions, the team would be asked what time does the festival start? The trainer would then remind the team that the festival started when the first person arrived on the ground to set up. From there the atmosphere of the day was set. The way the team responded to each other was critical for the success of the day. If there was fighting and bickering, that would be plain to see; however, if there was love and generosity in the team, that too would be contagious.

Being ontologically honest, the church is already in the bonds of love because of the work of Christ on the cross and so passages such as 1 Corinthians 13 are not another list of dos and don'ts but a commentary on the reality we live in and a call to be true to it. There are many similar exhortations to love in Paul's writings (Ro 12:5,10,16; 1 Thess 5:11; Gal 5:13; 6:2), each a reminder that through the work of Christ, God's future is here in the present, not complete but here nonetheless. The response to this reality is to not be drawn into a holy huddle but allow love to flow out and be contagious (Guder 1989:149).

## ■ Being True to Our Roots

There is not space here to go into the full nature of the church. However, it is important to realise that each local expression reflects the whole universal church, taking that shape into its gatherings and mission in the world. Together, the church lives under a Christologically redefined *shema* or prayer. Put simply, it is the truth claim in Deuteronomy 6:4 that the church is connected to a God who is one and is commanded to love this God with all their heart, soul and strength (Hirsch 2006:89). This requires a sacrificial faithfulness. Because of this unique relationship, the church by nature is sacramental with the gathering itself exhibiting the incarnation of divine activity (Guder 1989:180).

Prayer takes this further still, encouraging the church to recognise its dependence on God as a person outside of itself.

Wright (2007:289–290) names two essential elements of prayer, namely mysticism and petition. Mysticism allows the person praying to enter a deep and intimate connection with God and the created world. It allows the church to embrace the pain of the world without being overcome by it. Petition, on the other hand, is praying for oneself and others, entering the ancient tradition of the lament. Some use lists while others use imagination or spiritual discernment to pray in this way. In each case, it is at times necessary to leave petitions at God’s door, seemingly unanswered.

People of faith can do this, trusting in the words of scripture that God hears their prayers and will answer them in his way and timing. It is not simple to trust God like this, yet it is freeing to rely on the narrative of scripture and be pointed to the goodness of God. If the church is to be present at the various tables of discernment, it must reflect the totality of its nature and mission as revealed in scripture, not limiting itself to a redacted other-worldly soteriology.

As such the local church is connected to the universal church and to a God who loves as seen in scripture and experienced through prayer. However, like the rest of humanity the church is broken, incomplete and not living out of its ontological reality, and so as we approach the tables of discernment we need to do so with authenticity.

## ■ Authenticity

Keith Miller (in Frost 2006) sums up the issue well:

Our modern church is filled with many people who look pure, sound pure, and are inwardly sick of themselves, their weaknesses, their frustration and the lack of reality around them in the Church. Our non-Christian friends feel either ‘that bunch of nice untroubled people would never understand my problems’; or the more perceptive pagans who know us socially or professionally feel that we Christians are either grossly protected and ignorant about the human situation or are out and out hypocrites who will not confess the sins and weaknesses (they know intuitively) to be universal. (pp. 97–98)



The call to be authentic can appear to clash with the call to be holy or set apart (Wright 2007:296). However, spending time in the biblical narrative shows that God uses very ordinary and flawed people to do quite out-of-the-ordinary things and that perhaps holiness is more about a willingness than a state of being, at least at this stage of the Christian journey. The alternative, being inauthentic, leads to alienation both at a personal and corporate level. If people of faith are to contribute well at the many tables of discernment, then there needs to be an honesty and a realism that flavours the engagement. Documents like the NUA enable Christians to come to the table but not to control it or promote a false sense of having all the answers. Both in the gathered congregation and dispersed throughout the many tables of discernment, people of faith need to acknowledge their humanness and sameness with each other and the broader community and to approach the tasks in front of them with a sense of humility.

## ■ Hospitality

Henri Nouwen describes the second spiritual movement of the disciple being from hostility to hospitality. The idea of hospitality has to do not simply with the spirituality of food but the whole way we approach the other or the stranger (Nouwen 1975: Ch4).

Servants Community Housing, based in Hawthorn, Melbourne, is an example of true hospitality. Across three large houses they accommodate 90 people, most with mental health issues. Many of these people would otherwise be homeless. The environment they establish is based on love and respect for the stranger. While there are house rules that need to be followed and shared meals, the resident is not expected to take part in any programmes or look for work. There is not even any preaching. Residents are treated with dignity and their autonomy respected. There are live-in managers and others who connect regularly, essentially checking in to make sure people are doing okay. For the most part, residents begin to feel safe, with some of their basic needs

being met. After a time, many begin to express desires to support community life or take steps towards transformation. The hospitality itself, the modelling of another way, the space to take it up or not is what in the end has proved determinative in so many moving forward.

Hospitality is the heart attitude of compassion put into practice. Like love, it is what needs to underpin engagement in the world – particularly when working with people who want cities to be places where others can flourish but come from very different perspectives, such as other faiths or even those of no faith. Hospitality allows Christians to be present in those environments without having to control or have their way. True hospitality allows space for the other to be themselves without the expectation of change.

## ■ Beyond Safe Shores

In some places the church is described as a ship, followed by the reminder that a ship is not meant to stay in the safe waters of the harbour but rather to set sail on the open water. Being at sea can quite often be a liminal (temporal or other-worldly) experience. The term, developed by anthropologist Victor Turner, has since been used by Christian authors such as Roxburgh to describe the experience of the Church (Roxburgh 1997):

Liminality applies to a situation where people (as individuals or a collective) find themselves in a transitional or marginal state in relation to the surrounding community or society. They are in that state because of their conscious awareness that their status, role and place within society has been radically changed, to the point that the group has now become largely invisible to that society. (pp. 23,24,221)

For the church, this can most clearly be seen in the transition from Christendom to what many would see as a post-church society. Victor Turner originally coined the term *liminality* to describe what happened for many boys during indigenous initiation rites. A group of boys would be sent off into the desert

or jungle to fend for themselves over sometimes a period as long as 6 months. During that time, they would not be visible to the community. In the end, they would come back not only as men, but as bonded men (Roxburgh 1997:23,24,221). The name of the bond was *communitas*.

A deeper form of community was what kept the boys alive and functioning as a unit. And so, it is crisis that creates liminality and ultimately *communitas*. The reality is the church has always been in a type of crisis – firstly, ontologically and experientially as it has sought to grapple with the tension between its essential nature and current condition (Kraemer cited in Bosch 2009:2). Secondly and more recently, though, particularly in the West, the church has been in a cultural crisis as it has been perceived to be increasingly irrelevant to modern life. This presents both a danger and an incredible opportunity – the danger of a gentle slide to non-existence and the opportunity to reinvent ourselves as the people of God in this time and space, and once again experience liminality and *communitas* as we recognise the now and not yet of our existence and work together with God towards stronger expressions of his kingdom in the here and now.

## ■ Friendship for the Journey

It is not a simple journey for the Christian church to position itself to be present and to make a positive contribution to the tables of discernment, from the global to the local. However, this is our mission in partnership with God. The Urban Shalom Society (USS) (2018), a newly formed global network of leaders, academics and practitioners, has committed itself to providing resources, training and consultancy to churches and Christian organisations who are committed to being at those tables. Gathering momentum at Habitat III, USS has held nine fora in different countries around the world, helping people of faith think about their cities differently and helping equip them to make a positive contribution in the development of communities and cities. On their website is a call to action that can act as a

tool for churches to begin their engagement. The group produces a journal entitled *New Urban World* where learning and stories of encouragement are disseminated. They are available to offer training and develop resources to serve particular contexts. The group is also involved in the creation of a multifaith council that will be a conduit for faith contributions on city development conversations from the local to the global.

The USS is one group, but there are many others who are seeking to make a difference to urban environments and contribute to the many tables of discernment.

## ■ Conclusion

Global or planetary urbanisation is a reality. The world has become forever impacted by the urban experiment with the development of markets, new technologies and business cycles. Asimov's Trantor paints a bleak dystopian picture of the future outcomes of this experiment. However, progress does not need to be in that direction. In 2016, the United Nations ratified the NUA, a document setting the tone for the development of cities over the next 20 years.

The document highlights a positive and inclusive agenda, recognising the contribution that all inhabitants of cities, including informal settlements, can make towards the flourishing of their environment. The language in the document picks up on the concepts of urban sustainability. For people of faith this language and these concepts can seem foreign. They are, however, aligned with the biblical concept of shalom or the kingdom of God in the world.

Sustainability has a strong alignment with the concept of flourishing or shalom as it is understood through the lens of the kingdom of God. In an urban context, sustainability brings together concerns over economy, place or environment, and social relationships. New urbanists advocate for a compact city environment with walkable neighbourhoods and mixed uses that

create a dynamism over large parts of any given day. Add to this the matrix of social sustainability, dependent on trust, the presence of common meaning, diversity, capacity for learning and self-organisation, and a picture more akin to shalom than Trantor emerges.

Theory is helpful; however, people's lived experiences of sustainability, particularly social sustainability, will predominantly be in their local community. Backing up this assertion, the NUA affirms the importance of local authorities and community (civil society) engagement in its implementation. Tools such as appreciative inquiry and ABCD allow for communities, and even the process of urbanisation, to be viewed through a positive lens. They also allow for whole communities to work together on a common agenda. Even the act of seeing and beginning to work in this way is a deterrent to a dystopian, Trantoresque outcome.

One of the groups present in local communities and civil society is the church. There is scope for the church to play a significant role in the implementation of the values of the NUA. However, largely as a result of a limited theology of engagement and a lack of understanding of urban environments, the church has largely been silent on issues related to urban development. Passages such as Isaiah 65:17-25, Luke 4:18-21 and Revelations 21 among others paint a picture of a flourishing urban environment where all are seen and valued, have their basic needs met, feel a sense of belonging, get to live a life of purpose and celebration with a growing sense of spirituality or meaning. Many in the church have taken these verses and concepts eschatologically. However, theologians such as N.T. Wright state that while our ultimate hope will be realised when Jesus brings heaven (the full reign of God) to Earth, we have an intermediate hope present with us now. That hope is echoed not only in the noted biblical passages but in documents like the NUA.

The common ground between documents such as the NUA and an accurate theology of the kingdom of God allows for the church to develop partnerships with others in civil society, local

government and beyond for positive local development. In order for a local expression of a faith community to engage well, its posture to the world needs to be seasoned with love, rooted in scripture and prayer, authentic, hospitable and a deep bond known as *communitas*.

Finally, global conversations focused on the implementation of the agenda outline the importance of local engagement. The church has an opportunity to be part of this engagement. In order to do so it needs to view the city through a lens focused on a generous understanding of the kingdom of God in the world. The people of faith in a community, then, need a practical working knowledge of sustainability and the tools of positive community development. With these things in place, the church has a vital part to play in the development of an urban environment counter to a dystopian Trantor and more in line with the biblical vision of shalom.



# Innovative Faith in an Urban Planet: The Use of e-Trading Platforms Between the Urban and Rural Poor in the Philippines. A Case Study

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*The old economic model has utterly failed us. It has destroyed our communities, our democracy, our economic security, and the planet we live on. The old industrial-age systems – state communism, fascism, free-market capitalism – have all let us down hard, and growing numbers of us understand that going back there isn't an option. But we also know that transitioning to some kind of a new economy – and, probably, a new governing model to match – will be a civilization-wrenching process. We're having to reverse deep and ancient assumptions about how we allocate goods, labor, money, and power on a rapidly shrinking, endangered, complex, and ever more populated planet. We are boldly taking the global economy – and all 7 billion souls who depend on it – where no economy has ever gone before*

– Robinson (2017)

## ■ Introduction

### ■ Trading Between the Urban Poor of Smokey Mountain and Indigenous Tribal People: Information, Innovation and Sustainable Impact

Elsewhere, I described the peace pact that was celebrated between the Kalanguya tribe from the mountains of Nueva Vizcaya and the people of Smokey Mountain (cf. Beltran 2015). Smokey Mountain was a huge garbage dump in the heart of the City of Manila, where I was the parish priest for 30 years.<sup>22</sup> Under the leadership of then-Mayor Jun Padilla, tribal people came to Smokey Mountain with agricultural products, hand-woven cloth, forest fruits and ornamental plants to trade with people who lived in Smokey Mountain and belonged to cooperatives (Beltran 2015:229). This became the first of the Smokey Mountain

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22. See Beltran (2012), in which I discuss a faith journey struggling for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

cooperative's trading attempts with indigenous peoples from different tribes and places. I interpret what started to happen in this way as a process that 'made use of technology and networking to harness the power of the free market' (Beltran 2015:229) while addressing social and eco-justice issues, exploring whether the global political economy is leading the world to death or to life.

Our experience of direct trading between subsistence farmers and scavengers in a garbage dump led to the question of how to sustainably create significant social, economic and environmental impact. How can we restructure agriculture into highly intensive household farming to increase production and advocate for massive credit, infrastructure and extension programmes for organic farmers? How can we industrialise our organic protocols to increase production and provide food without toxic chemicals and pesticides to more people? We found clues as to possible innovative alternatives to the dominant economic systems, if we were able to foster technologies that could increase incomes through appropriate distribution systems, connecting urban and rural poor communities intentionally.

In a context of planetary urbanisation, absorbed by global financial capital and dictated by the market economy, we have to ask new questions, such as 'how can we work together to create a moral and ethical economy – and economic alternatives from below – for this besieged planet?' Human cultural learning gives rise to a form of cumulative cultural evolution that, over centuries, gradually produces increasingly complex tools, technologies, bodies of knowledge and skills, communication systems and political and economic institutions. Urbanisation and the digital revolution have created a global ecosystem of interconnected cities and regions, and so we have to look for transformational, game-changing solutions in combatting global poverty by building sustainable social enterprises directly linking the urban and rural poor in ways that will break the cycles of poverty and marginalisation from below.

Deciding to confront these issues, we created a trading network between the urban and rural poor using Internet platforms.

The conceptual framework for this network where the rural poor can trade directly with the urban poor is the connection between globalisation and urbanisation, the intertwining of the urban and 'non-urban' economies and resolving the tension between GDP and sustainable development by using different bottom lines. In a real sense, this has become our contribution to an innovative alternative to dominant economic patterns. The purpose of this network was not only to innovate the ways in which income would be generated to address social challenges but also to innovate the very strategies used for social change. We cannot solve today's problems with yesterday's solutions.

In the convergent universe, the new paradigm is the network – network or die! Apart from other innovative outcomes facilitated by our trading network, the network in itself is the purpose. In the global digital economy, economic activities form an interconnected network powered by technology, artificial intelligence and robots. So we decided to harness the power of science and technology to transform slum areas and subsistence farming. We do so through organising a multiplicity of small-scale, uncoordinated efforts into a strong and focused movement, aimed at addressing local (and eventually global) poverty in a sustainable manner.

One specific area that could contribute to break cycles of poverty in the Philippines is a reimagined agricultural sector. For subsistence farmers, the harvest is a question of survival or starvation. It is ironic how those who grow the food might often be going hungry because of systemic exclusions from the market, lack of access to water and sanitation, and outdated agricultural methods or technologies.

But once organised in the manner described earlier, through the innovative use of technology, people access information and knowledge otherwise unavailable to them. Examples are data

collected from their mobile phones, the use of drones and sensors to analyse soil conditions, the creation of a robust e-Trading platform to ensure fast access to opportunities, the introduction of new and innovative agricultural technologies and – over time – the nurturing of a new generation of entrepreneurs, coming from poor urban and rural communities (Beltran 2015):

The idea is to provide critical information through digital devices and then harness the creativity of the urban and rural poor to solve problems in their communities. They can then change their societies in innovative ways using a mix of entrepreneurship and innovation. The strategy is to combine the best elements of both – creativity, sustainability, cost-effectiveness, and integrity – to redefine the development paradigms of the past. When the poor have a better understanding of their political and economic situation and the demands and constraints of their environment, they make better, more sustainable and more profitable decisions on their own. (p. 235)

In a purist social enterprise fashion, we seek to build the trading network into a social enterprise that is clear and rigorous about its triple bottom line, which entails securing sustained profits while focusing on social care and concern for those participating in the network (customers and employees), but at the same time being concerned with the well-being of the planet. The economy is embedded in complex ecosystems, and without understanding the close interaction between economic, social and environmental problems and processes, we would continue to fail at finding innovative and bold solutions. Ours is not only to facilitate personal change but to engage in large-scale systems change, if we are to safeguard our planet and fragile urban communities for future generations.

We seek to pursue the assertion made by Pope John Paul II (1991:n.p.), in his *Centesimus Annus*, that '[t]he best way to solve global poverty is to allow the poor to participate in the systems of production and exchange'. This is our theological conviction and developmental approach.

## ■ The Veritas e-Trading Network

Bernasek (2010) states:

If we ignore the important ways people cooperate to create wealth, we miss the most valuable source of wealth creation imaginable. Recognizing the true value of relationships, we can build stronger relationships and create and share greater wealth. (n.p)

The Veritas e-Trading Network is managed by the Veritas Innovation Network for Entrepreneurship and Sustainability. Veritas was established as an expression of the Divine Word Missionaries' commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. As a social enterprise, it can be described as follows (Beltran 2015):

It is a social mission-driven wealth creating enterprise with a triple bottom line (People, Planet, Profit) – technology-driven and creating economic growth coupled with environmental protection and social inclusion. Veritas has a social purpose combined with a minimum threshold of financial sustainability. Its principal objective is poverty reduction in order to improve the quality of life of the urban and rural poor. (pp. 236–237)

The goal of the Veritas e-Trading Network is to provide better and organised agricultural markets in an effort to break farmers out of the cycle of poverty and build sustainable communities using their own resources to meet their needs. We have put up incubator hubs, where the poor and millennials can discuss how to scale up their businesses. Veritas Organics markets organic products, including soap, herbal oils and beauty products that do not degrade the ecosystems. Well-being Options for Wholeness (WOW) Organic Restaurant has also been put up to offer food that is healthy, yummy and environment-friendly. Global franchising experts have finished a proposal for WOW Organic Restaurant to be franchised nationwide to provide healthy food at reasonable prices. The WOW headquarters and commissary were designed following green building guidelines with 'bamboo' as the theme. It will cost \$500 000 to build and investors have already pledged more than half of the required capital. WOW will donate 5% of

its profits towards feeding organic food to children with cancer and other diseases.

The work of Veritas is not only helping to establish communities for joint economic activity that facilitates poverty reduction and social transformation, but it also contributes to better personal health and the health of ecosystems. We believe that access to healthy food will help prevent diseases, while the health of communities and the environment will also be enhanced.

To increase agricultural productivity, smallholder farmers are supported through the network's innovative technologies and information access to deliver organic rice, fruits and vegetables to more and more people in the urban areas. In addition to increased production and sale of organic products, local communities are benefiting in other ways too (Beltran 2015):

Products are sourced locally, production and distribution systems are put into place to stimulate the local economy, and microfinance loans are given to benefit local farmers, especially women farmers. The women in the slum areas use their distribution networks to sell the product door to door. (p. 237)

In this way, Veritas, through its e-Trading network, turns market economies into market communities. It collaborates with bishops and parishes of large areas in the Dioceses of Cubao as well as Metro Manila, with government departments responsible for agriculture, as well as with a network of about 2000 families participating in the trading network (cf. Beltran 2015:237–238). Through expanding its footprint, the combined population of the areas covered is almost one-third of the population of the whole country. This enables us to do bulk purchasing, while government has pledged their support in the form of cheap financing, access to markets, extension education and the organisation of farmers. In addition, Veritas also advocates for land reform because the land reform law in the Philippines is too verbose, extremely complex, insufficiently radical, with many loopholes and with an absurdly extended timetable for implementation to make a dent in the empowerment of farmers.

Veritas has partnered with the Calabarzon Organic Exchange, which provides fresh, naturally grown produce from the surrounding provinces of Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon (Calabarzon). Energy costs of transporting the products are then minimised, personal exchanges between the farmers and the consumers are increased and the local economy is cushioned from food shocks when there are financial shocks elsewhere in the world. The goal of the farmers' market is to put up a system of fair trade in which communities can exchange surplus production for mutual benefit. Veritas has found out that only an integrated approach that looks at both demand and supply sides using an e-Commerce platform simultaneously can trigger successful agro-value chain development. Post-harvest handling, agro-processing and value addition should also be taken into consideration. Post-harvest losses resulting from poor storage facilities and lack of transport options are significant at present – with pests and diseases destroying an estimated 15% – 30% of farmers' hard work and preventing them from selling surplus crop or better feeding themselves and their families.

Veritas seeks to fundamentally and permanently transform the context, global in nature, that gives rise to the opportunities and challenges for which its solutions are designed. It does so through organising the urban and rural poor, using efficient and green technologies to increase market access and empowering participants with organisational skills that can be utilised for economic activities.

A number of strategic considerations have contributed to the momentum gained by the Veritas e-Trading Network:

- seeking to nurture a strategic culture
- strategic competencies
- strategic partnerships
- strategic logistics
- strategic processes – all in service of our triple bottom line (cf. Beltran n.d.:23).

Our *strategic culture* is rooted in the values of *pagpapakatao*, *pakikipagsandiwaan* and *pagkamakasaysayan* (integrity, solidarity and creativity). This kind of culture supports creativity, embraces diversity and promotes personal growth to foster innovation and sustainability. The emphasis of our *strategic competencies* is to nurture stakeholders to become knowledge workers, empowered and enabled to innovate. We build *strategic partnerships* in order to capture the total potential value of service in the marketplace. Through partnership we want to create real, repeatable benefits that build supplier loyalty and consistency and gain sustainable supply-based competitive advantage. This is backed up by *strategic logistics*, ensuring that the supply strategy is seamlessly integrated with marketing initiatives and management techniques. Finally, we facilitate *strategic processes* that could ensure proper management and excellence of performance in implementing our actual mission.

Our values, as described above, are rooted in the Trinity and intend to foster an economy of integrity, solidarity and creativity. These core values are a central part of our business strategy and critical for inspiring collective commitment. What makes our approach different is that we bring a value-based economic philosophy to the ‘value-neutral’ economic culture of the free market that is immune to any moral, ethical or religious code. Profit and financial gain become the sole measure of success and values and peoples are paid scant attention to. Our communal model is seeking to subvert the dominant model. We seek to incarnate spirituality in economic activity and to situate economic activity in a moral and ethical foundation.

## ■ The Veritas e-Commerce Platform

Oriah Mountain Dreamer (2001) states:

Show me how you take care of business  
without letting business determine who you are.  
When the children are fed but still the voices within and around us  
shout



that soul's desires have too high a price,  
let us remind each other that it is never about the money. (n.p.)

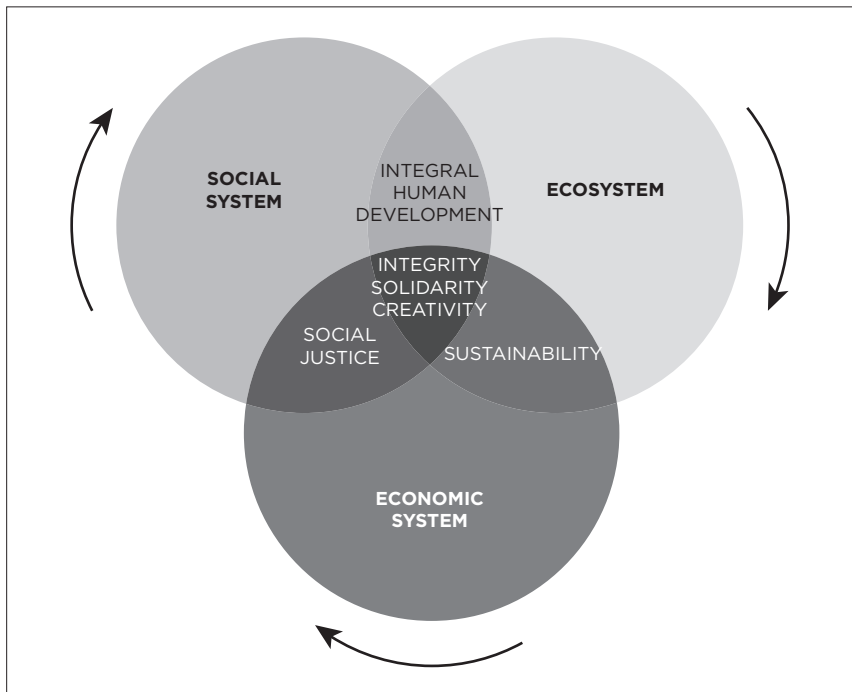
The motto of Veritas is: *Imagine. Innovate. Impact!* Veritas, as an innovation network for entrepreneurship and sustainability, continues to innovate in order to find solutions that could impact positively on the lives and well-being of the poor. One such innovation is the building of an e-Commerce platform including the use of artificial intelligence and data analytics to enable greater and more efficient financial access for poor communities. The e-Commerce platform was set to be ready to be beta-tested around the fourth quarter of 2018.

The Veritas e-Commerce platform uses a cloud-based e-Commerce technology that has the usual store management features, for example, product management, order fulfilment, online payments, coupons and customer relations apps, among others. It is designed to have customisation features that can offer personalised shopping experiences based on past shopping preferences. The platform is open source and has unlimited customisation options for greater usability and manageability. The platform will also use blockchain technology to provide organic farmers with access to all information on transactions that happen to their products all the way from farm to fork to put an end to exploitative market practices that leave farmers unaware of the real market prices of their products. Because the organic products marketed by Veritas come from large numbers of organic producers, consumers would become aware of the quality and safety of the products they buy and that when Veritas has labelled the food product 'organic' or 'halal', it has been strictly grown according to standards set by the government. They would also know from which farm the products came.

The Veritas e-Commerce platform offers a mobile-friendly shopping cart, seller mobile apps and many other mobile-based features available. Round-the-clock technical support via live chat and phone, as well as tutorials, along with the powerful Veritas community forum, is also being planned. It will have

digital wallets as another form of payment option. It will have a built-in analytics system, which is essential for every e-Commerce website. Focus on analytics is important to run an e-Commerce platform successfully. If you cannot collect relevant data, you cannot learn about customer behaviour, which is at the heart of all conversions. Data gathering is even more crucial for Veritas because farmers need predictive analytics for plant design. The urban marketing teams need to know long beforehand what kind of produce they are going to sell.

Only the right combination of business model and e-Commerce platform will survive the competition in a global political economy. The business model that underpins the Veritas e-Commerce platform is summarised in Figure 10.1.



**Figure 10.1:** The business model that underpins the Veritas e-Commerce platform.

Figure 10.1 depicts the convergence of the ecosystem with the social system and the economic system. We connect basic human needs to ethical, moral and spiritual matters in order to arrive at sustainable levels of consumption. In a political economic system where the everyday lives of more than one-third of the nation continue to be subject to overwhelming misery, chaos and disruption, Veritas advocates for a reorganisation of the economic and social system to allow a broader sharing of the gains of economic growth in a sustained and systematic way to preserve the health of ecosystems. Its strategies are based on actions promoting integral human development, social justice and sustainability, flowing from its core values of integrity, solidarity and creativity.

All this is understood in light of a new understanding of the universe ruled by physical laws built upon quantum mechanics. The paradigm shift now is from things to ideas, from hierarchy to networks, from information technology to interaction technology, and from seeing organisations as machines to viewing them as communities. From the mechanistic and rationalistic clockwork universe of Newtonian physics, we have moved to quantum mechanics and relativity.

In quantum physics, we know that space is curved, that gravity is the warping of space and time by physical mass, that time and space are not two dimensions but one linked frame of reference, and that time is part of the physical universe – a world where Newtonian cause-and-effect logic seems to have no place. Systems analysis and the development of chaos and complexity theories have spawned even more difficult ideas – non-linear systems do not behave like mechanical objects. These ideas are slowly permeating into economic theories at present. Seeking meaning is to answer the questions of purpose in a convergent universe, creating coherence out of chaos and providing a compelling vision of what tomorrow can bring. This is the context of the Veritas vision for a convergent economic system. Because what is now being born is a convergent economy, Veritas aims to be

value-based, network-connected and innovation-fuelled in order to provide spaces for sustained human and communal flourishing.

The Veritas approach has, as its central point of departure, affirmation of the poor as agents of their own integral human development. Veritas exploits market opportunities that exist among the desperately poor and provides them with knowledge, skills and technologies to give them the opportunity to help themselves. It starts with helping them understand why they are poor and involves them in the effort to create their own wealth. Through the Veritas e-Commerce platform, the urban poor are networked with small farmers who produce vegetables, grains and other crops to feed themselves and sell at the local market, at much greater scale and with much greater effectiveness. Rural farmers have avoided costly hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers and the false promises of industrial agriculture by joining the Veritas marketing network. Organic farmers increase the fertility of their farmlands through no-till organic farming methods such as organic fertilising. Farmers' profits grew, because there was no middleman taking a cut. And poor people got access to fresh, cheaper, healthy food.

Markets are often controlled by a cartel of a few large producers who manipulate prices to their advantage and the disadvantage of the small farmers, who often do not possess the ability to transport perishable goods and negotiate a fair price. This makes them easy prey for a trader, who picks up the produce at rock-bottom prices. We learned about this the hard way. Veritas started with around 20 evangelical pastors in Payatas, the garbage dump in Quezon City, who wanted to implement the vision of Veritas. They pooled their resources, and we were able to buy 20 sacks of rice to be sold in a small store. The merchants in the area got together, lowered their prices and in 2 weeks our store went bankrupt. Without economies of scale, the poor are easily swallowed up in a predatory system of economic activity. In addition, without access to markets, food goes to waste.

Globally, about one-third of the food farmers produce ends up 'lost or wasted' (Gustavsson et al. 2011) through a variety of causes. This is not different in the Philippines (Mopera 2016). Eliminating waste in the path food takes from farm to table could boost food available for consumption by another 50% (Science Daily 2011). Part of our resolve through the Veritas e-Commerce platform was to overcome some of these challenges through organising farmers and fishermen into a pool of strategic partners and connecting them strategically in Metro Manila to ensure access and the economies of scale.

Ecological economics has become a business imperative, manufacturing products and delivering services in ways that are restorative of natural and human capital. Intelligent investment in market mechanisms that subverts monopolies from the top and builds linkages from below can deliver enhanced profitability and a stronger economy, strengthen social capital and reduce social and human vulnerability, help solve the climate crisis and create a better future for the planet. Our e-Trading network and e-Commerce platform are about just that: desiring to nurture an ecological economics that contributes to healthy and sustainable ecosystems. Through putting up sustainable businesses, communities of the urban and rural poor benefit directly, transregional infrastructure is created, while our various initiatives are backed up by education and research for the common good.

At their deepest, the processes described here want to give expression to Pope John Paul II's (1991:n.p.) encouragement to the poor in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (#34), 'to acquire expertise, to enter the circle of exchange, and to develop their skills in order to make the best use of their capacities and resources'. Sustainable economic development presumes circles of trust and mutual respect. Veritas enlarges these circles of trust among the poor to sow the seeds of an economic system based on ecological and human solidarity.

## ■ The Global Political Economy

Kennedy (1968) states:

Our gross national product [...] counts air pollution and cigarette advertising,  
and ambulances to clear the highways of carnage.  
It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for people who break them.  
It counts the destruction of the redwood  
and loss of the natural wonder in chaotic sprawl [...] it measures everything in short,  
except that which makes life worthwhile. (n.p.)

The economies of the world have become more closely integrated into the global political economy, where international financial markets and transnational corporations control globalisation for their benefit. The complex global, technologically driven economies that form the arena for nation states to compete in capturing markets and key links in global supply chains force the poor to adapt to the dictates of the free market. This global political economy is an incredibly complex network of systems, and social entrepreneurs who find themselves acting despite the uncertainty and complexity want guidance that nobody can give in the face of all the contradictions, uncertainties and complications that economists are discovering. The core values of Veritas are designed to help its stakeholders find the way in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous context in a highly urbanised and globalised planet.

We live on a planet of inequality, often expressed between cities and rural places but also in and between cities. One of the areas in which this is expressed most is in relation to food access and hunger. About 870 million people in the world are hungry (World Food Programme 2013) and, as a result of acute or chronic hunger, 146 million children in developing countries were underweight, according to the 2009 UNICEF report titled *State of the World's Children* (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] 2009:122–125). Between 2005 and 2012 the Philippines had the

highest prevalence of food inadequacy among Asia's emerging economies (UNICEF 2010:17-18), reported in the *National Report Philippines*. The percentages of food insecurity, growth deficiencies, or disease as a result thereof are frightening (Stop Hunger Now Philippines 2018).

The uneven development of the Philippine economy, where the economy is controlled by a landed aristocracy and where financial resources are concentrated in the urban areas, is one of the reasons for the poverty of its people. A colonial history has concentrated land ownership in the Philippines in the hands of a few. They then run for office in the political arena. These lawmakers, almost all of them millionaires, mostly come from landed families. They then enact laws that protect the businesses, landholdings and political clout of their families. Corporations controlled by the elite make hefty campaign contributions during elections, let loose legions of lobbyists and pay off journalists to push through laws and rules that will help them maintain their privileged positions, often hiring goons to terrorise the voters. They have succeeded in blocking any meaningful land reform. More than 70% of the wealth in the Philippines is owned or controlled by a few hundred powerful families.

Subsistence agriculture cannot absorb the rapidly expanding labour force because there is no significant land reform, and the economy remains feudal. And so, close to 300 000 people migrate to Manila each year. Land prices become exorbitant. And so also, the migrants often end up in one of the 415 squatter colonies in Metro Manila. They make up 44% of the population, citizens with no place to call their own, living with the sword of demolition hanging above their heads both day and night.

Peasant families flock to the metropolis, only to join the swelling ranks of the unemployed. When large numbers of people are concentrated on a little piece of land, often subject to flooding and without basic infrastructure services, congestion and overcrowding are unavoidable. The squatter area then becomes another slum, one of those sprawling urban settlements filled

with rancour and despair, hate and disease, dank alleys smelling of urine and excrement, and criminals and drug addicts terrorising residents with threats of violence or murder.

The root cause of social problems in the Philippines is structural, with wealth being concentrated at the top, resulting in increasing inequality and social injustice (cf. Docena, De Guzman & Malig 2009). The benefits of economic growth being concentrated in the hands of a few hundred families also influences the way the rules of the economic game are played. In controlling political power, they shape the actions of government, monopolising access to wealth and power (cf. Simbulan 2005).

Poverty saps the people's reserves of self-control, and so a host of social problems arise in its wake. Lack of money, rampant crime and a degraded environment often exhaust the poorest of the poor. These factors weaken their self-control and so they think mostly in terms of short-term benefits and immediate gratification – they beget more children and the cycle begins again.

Poverty is about power and politics. Political systems are manipulated in return for economic benefit. Private interests and re-election are of paramount importance for most politicians. Such politics have little to do with the challenges faced by poor communities (Stiglitz 2012):

When one interest group holds too much power, it succeeds in getting policies that benefit itself, rather than society as a whole. When the wealthiest use their political power to benefit excessively the corporations they control, much-needed revenues are diverted into the pockets of a few instead of benefiting society at large. (pp. 104–105)

The prevailing myth is of unlimited economic growth, but for reasons of the common good and of social justice, there have to be limits to the market because of the limits of human rationality. The market has always assumed that human beings make rational decisions in purchasing goods, unaware of what neuroscience has discovered – unconscious motives often cause



people to act against their self-interest (cf. Ubel 2009; eds. Michel-Kerjan & Slovic 2010). People left to their own devices do not always make choices in their own best interests, or the best interests of others, and often fail to adequately consider the long-term consequences of their choices. Neither does the market think of the long-term interests of people and ecosystems. In fact, says Friedmann (1970), Nobel Prize-winning economist, the business of business is to make profit, not to engage in socially beneficial activities. The views of people like Friedmann have informed the capitalist machine to a very large extent, and as long as business makes profit, social and environmental costs are often little considered.

This reality prompted Pope Francis (quoted by O'Leary 2013) to say:

A savage capitalism has taught the logic of profit at any cost, of giving in order to get, of exploitation without thinking of people [...] and we see the results in the crisis we are experiencing. (n.p.)

The free market is not really free as it bestows economic freedom only on those who have access to financial capital (Stiglitz 2012). Apart from economic inequalities dealt by this dominant system, it also has huge environmental consequences. Although many corporations are waving the green flag of environmentalism, they still continue to wreak havoc on the environment. Nearly all large corporate chains are improving the energy efficiency of their lighting, heating, cooling and refrigeration; improving the fuel efficiency of their vehicles; increasing recycling and composting; purchasing electricity from renewable resources and taking other measures that save money and reduce waste (Markower 2009). All this so far, however, is not making a significant difference in protecting the environment. And many corporations, if they can get away with it, will go on utilising offshore tax havens to avoid paying taxes, export their toxic waste to poor countries and maintain factories there that pay starvation wages and that do not respect human rights (Rushkoff 2009). Rushkoff (2009) shows how the ethos of a speculative, abstract economic model leads to people

becoming disconnected from what matters to them the most and then engaging in behaviour that is destructive to their own and everyone else's welfare.

The free market demonstrates an indifference towards the poor, global injustice and ecosystemic crisis, single-mindedly chasing financial profit. Today free market capitalism has turned global – digital, web-based and able to find and make almost anything just about anywhere, propelled forward by new communications and transportation technologies like computers, fibre-optic cables and container vans. This has resulted in widening inequalities of income and wealth, heightened job insecurity and the growing devastation caused by global warming. Reich (2009) speaks of how contemporary global capitalism has resulted in the weakening of democracy and outcomes expressed in the common good, balancing both profit and social justice. Instead of corporations becoming more socially responsible, they will do whatever is necessary to lure customers and satisfy investors.

In addition to domestic inequalities and environmental disaster, debt service payments take up 40% of the national budget, and only a pittance is left for social services. More than 40% of the annual budget of the Philippines goes to paying the interest on these loans to creditor countries and institutions. The government has little to spend for education and healthcare. The borrowed capital is not even touched. And there is very little to show for it. Most have been squirrelled away in secret bank accounts abroad. The standing foreign debt was \$49.1 billion by the end of 2006, although the government paid more than \$63 billion in principal and interests from 1970 to 1996.

Easterly (2006:194) speaks about the failure of foreign investment to facilitate long-term developmental impact in the Philippines. Malaria deaths and infant mortality rates are not reduced despite huge investments. Massive infrastructure investments – dams, highways, mining operation and power

generation projects – often have devastating consequences on the country's natural resources, with little benefit to the poor.

Most nations have become part of an integrated global supply chain, and politics and economics have become intertwined into a global political economy. It also has a fatal flaw: it is inherently unstable, as shown by financial crises gripping the global economy at present. Unrestricted free enterprise has produced horrible results in the past. Korten (2009:5) says that it is a failed economic system that does not take into account the social and environmental costs of monetary profits. Korten (2009:45) decries the spiritual and psychological costs of a Wall Street culture that 'celebrates greed, favors the emotionally and morally challenged with outsized compensation packages, and denies the human capacity for cooperation and sharing'. In the words of Korten (2008), this elitist economic ideology has:

[C]rippled our economy, burdened our governments with debilitating debts, divided us between the profligate and the desperate, corrupted our political institutions, and threatened destruction of the natural environment on which our very lives depend. (p. 40)

It is very difficult to reconcile conscience with commerce, business ethics with the ecosystem. Vatican Radio (2013) reported Pope Francis as saying:

It is therefore not enough to help the poor [...] but we must reform the system at the global level in a way that is consistent with the fundamental human dignity. The root causes of the current crisis are not only economic and financial, but ethical and anthropological, where the 'idols of power, of profit, of money', are valued more than 'the human person'. (n.p.)

Pope Francis (Vatican Radio 2013) said:

We must return to the centrality of man, to a more ethical view of business and human relations, without the fear of losing something. (n.p.)

This means moving away from corporate dominance of governments, economies, the media and the military, towards

finding new ways of assessing progress, not driven by consumerism, greed or unbridled growth. Progress is not a cell phone in every hand. It is when no Filipina is sold as a sex slave and there are no more street children roaming the streets of our cities.

Economics today has to connect the cry of the Earth with the cry of the poor (Boff 1995). Human beings are not above the things of the Earth, but alongside them. The market has been divinised because of greed (Cox 1999). The principle seems to be to strive for maximum profit with the least investment in the shortest possible time. In order to achieve that, the Earth is seen as an enemy to be subjugated and tamed. The Western commercial system would not work if the multinational corporations bore the full costs of production, including whatever pollution, sickness or damage to the ecosystem they caused in the countries they have colonised. Because they did not integrate the cost of these into production, they destroyed the land, ruined the health of the people, poisoned streams and rivers, polluted aquifers and wells, crippled communities and went home with huge profits. They became rich through the misfortune of others, misfortune that they often caused.

Similarly, countries like the Philippines could not find ways to redistribute wealth beyond being concentrated in a few urban areas (World Bank 2013:15). When economic and political systems fail to serve the interests of the majority of citizens, these systems need to be questioned and unmasked for what they are. On the surface, the political system in the Philippines might be democratic, but the fruits of democracy seldom reach its poorest citizens. It is a matter of degree of government, not its form. In such contexts, with huge disparities of income between sectors of Philippine society, and between nations, the poor have to become the agents of their own liberation, working for effective political institutions that will make democracy work for them.

## ■ Veritas' Alternative Imagination

The signing of the SDGs was a historical commitment by the international community to overcome poverty and injustice. If the SDGs will not again fall short of people's expectations, they have to address the complexity of global politics and economics, while affirming human dignity. An economics of creativity must come up with a new framework for development that reflects the interconnectedness of global processes and divergences of worldviews.

Through its convergence economics, Veritas wants to build on the reality of a highly connected marketplace by enabling poor communities to participate in a networked economy, but from below and on their own terms. Veritas emphasises ways in which economic processes can and should be transformed in order to promote integral human development, social justice and sustainability. Through retrieving new technologies and combining them with ideas and innovation, Veritas aims at creating a convergence economics that could transform economic processes, in ways that can subvert monopolising of resources by a few on top who shape political and economic processes according to their vested interests.

The purpose of Veritas as a social enterprise is to stand alongside urban and rural poor communities in order for them to take collective responsibility for their own destiny. Veritas was inspired by the *bayanihan* system of farming in the Philippines, where neighbours would converge on one farm to plough it, and then move on to the next the day after. This system is also used for planting, harvesting and even moving houses from one place to another. Other sources of inspiration included the Mondragon Corporación Cooperativa in the Basque region in Spain, the Economy of Communion of the Focolare and, of course, Catholic social teaching, all offering a critical hermeneutic of economic activity.<sup>23</sup> I have also been invited to attend conferences on

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23. Examples include the work edited by Cortright and Naughton (2002) or Alford and Naughton (2006).

business as mission where I absorbed many ideas that are incorporated in the Veritas business philosophy. Businesses should be rooted in the community, if not actually owned by the members of the community themselves, an idea expanded on by Korten (2001) and (2000). The network between the urban and the rural poor aims to restore the relationships of communities, which are essential to their well-being and happiness.

Veritas seeks to help build relationships for justice and the common good through its triple bottom line of people, planet and profit. We put purpose and passion above profit and define business success in terms of a more personally fulfilling and socially responsible life for the members of our network. Financial profit is easy to measure. Veritas is also looking to measure the impact on people and planet in order to calculate its triple bottom line performance. We use the Oxford Multidimensional Index of Poverty to measure the progress being made.

Veritas strengthens the building blocks of local communities and promotes sustainable agriculture so that economic activity can contribute to the well-being of people, communities and the ecosystem. Veritas envisions an economic system whose priority is to create better lives for everyone. Pope Francis (2013:n.p.) expressed it like this in a letter he wrote to British Prime Minister David Cameron ahead of a meeting of G8 Global Leaders, stating that, ‘the goal of economics and politics is to serve all of humanity, beginning with the poorest and most vulnerable wherever they may be, even in their mothers’ womb’. All political and economic efforts and policies must be seen as the means, not the end, with the true goal being the protection of the human person and well-being of all humanity (Pope Francis 2013):

Every economic and political theory or action must set about providing each inhabitant of the planet with the minimum wherewithal to live in dignity and freedom, with the possibility of supporting a family, educating children, praising God and developing one’s own human potential. (n.p.)

Veritas aims to become a social disruptor, transforming the whole market equilibrium in its areas of operations nationwide.

Strategic decisions coming from the right vision must support business planning and innovation with constant attention to the fundamentals to achieve this. In encouraging creativity, Veritas has learned not to try to do too much too soon, with too few resources. It has also learned not to overestimate the ease with which the e-Trading network's objectives can be achieved or to underestimate the resources (time, people and money) required to achieve the goal of social, economic and environmental transformation.

The Veritas vision requires systemic change in the institutions that shape markets. Helping farmers produce more food without providing serious support (such as tools for measuring maturity before harvest, tools and containers for post-harvest activities, sorting and grading, cost-effective methods for storage or processing of surplus, access to distant markets, market information regarding prices and consumer demand, and other critical factors) will most likely lead to even more post-harvest losses. Veritas aims to figure out how to assist farmers, traders and marketers with these kinds of value chain supports so that producing more organic food will lead to increased incomes and there will be more incentive for farmers to produce more organic food, which will lower prices, which in turn will enable more people to eat healthy food.

Veritas imagines systemic change that can shape markets in ways that favour the poor. This requires ongoing innovations. Veritas' Climate Change and Food Security programme is promoting a number of such innovations for sustainability. These include agroforestry, 'soil management, increasing crop diversity, improving food production from existing livestock, diversifying livestock breeds', 'meatless Fridays', rain catchments and smarter irrigation systems, 'integrated [farming] systems, agro-ecological and organic farming, [and supporting] small-scale farmers' (Segrè:46).

Agroforestry involves massive planting of bamboo seedlings in line with government's plan to plant 2 million hectares of

bamboo, as well as trees, which contributes to reducing soil erosion. In partnership with Mga Anak ni Inang Daigdig, plans are being drawn to put up a bamboo tissue culture laboratory and an incubator hub where innovators can experiment and discuss bamboo-based businesses. Soil management is taking its cue from the Department of Agriculture, teaching organic farmers that alternating different crops allows soil periods of recovery. The use of drones and sensors will help greatly in helping the stakeholders of Veritas engaged in food production to manage the soil they are tilling. 'Meatless Fridays' implies not eating meat for at least one day a week, reducing environmental impact while increasing food availability in the market. Each of these innovations contributes uniquely to shaping the market in a manner that benefits the poor.

Our humanity thrives when we choose higher goals and long-term objectives, thinking beyond our lifetimes, even thinking of coming generations. Veritas takes a long-range view and risks short-term revenue to ensure long-term success, and it will continue to experiment and learn from mistakes. This kind of vision requires self-discipline and creativity to bring into being new things that did not exist before. It also does not punish failure because transformational initiatives are almost always the result of trial and error. Filipino culture should be transformed to become less averse and more creative and entrepreneurial so that Filipinos can achieve their full potential. Their dreams should lead them to believe that a better nation is possible, a better world is possible.

Once a product has been chosen to be marketed or produced, Veritas through its e-Commerce platform gets it to market fast, allocates more resources, rallies everyone behind the marketing strategy, eliminates all potential speed bumps and gets everyone on the required timeline. This vision helps create processes that deepen meaning, a spirit that makes people really care about making the vision of Veritas a reality. The vision is reinforced constantly and creatively – the stakeholders must continually



look for compelling metaphors and images to describe the vision in an active way. Every leader must know the importance of speaking in such a way that people can see and feel the future and see and feel themselves thriving in it.

Financial technology is needed to help market-based entrepreneurial solutions achieve their social and market potential and meet the needs of millions of Filipinos effectively, equitably and sustainably. Vast new markets will need to be created, financed and regulated nationwide. This requires intense creativity and innovation; therefore, Veritas values and promotes innovation, trust and happiness among the members more than traditional economic measures like efficiency, technology or return of investment. We value social capital over financial capital but find convergence in innovative ways.

Veritas provides economic incentives that favour recovery and recycling rather than extraction and exploitation of resources through creative economic enterprises that will spring from the people's imagination, innovation, discipline and hard work, collaboration and intelligence. Veritas also incorporates ecological costs on things produced and reminds stakeholders constantly to be mindful of the needs of future generations. Veritas asks the poor directly about what they consider 'impact' and 'progress' instead of coming up with top-down indicators and measurements.

Poverty is caused by trampling of human rights and lack of access to social, political and economic power and resources, together with the inability to make choices in relation to food, health and education. Sustainable product innovations must safeguard sustainable development as a right and a guarantee for fairness. An economics of creativity understands and implements strategies of development that are low on carbon emissions in light of an eco-justice that favours the poor. We have to leave behind paradigms of unsustainable development based on fossil fuels and the belief that the human being is the centre of the universe.

An economics of creativity fosters production and marketing of goods resilient to climate change, favours the poor with reduced carbon emissions, in an integral, ecological economics that is not fragmented and isolated from natural processes. Veritas is helping do this by introducing climate-smart, technology-driven agri-ecological methods and streamlining the marketing system to cut carbon emissions among the urban and rural poor and indigenous peoples, moving towards a vision of development that is inclusive, just and sustainable. In accordance with the UN's SDGs, Veritas sees sustainability according to the social, economic and ecological dimensions. The economy of convergence must become an economy of living systems.

Veritas joins the call for rich nations to reduce their carbon emissions drastically to maintain global warming below 2°C and reduce emissions significantly by 2020. This calls for greater innovation and creativity. The adoption of low-carbon emission strategies by developed countries should also provide the necessary transfer of technology and financial aid to developing countries moving towards ecological economics. These global efforts should include the full participation of the poor in a clear, participatory and transparent manner. The poor are, after all, left most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. International development goals will be successful only if every human being has rights and the power to live in dignity.

## ■ The Spirituality of Economics and Ecology

Sachs (2011) states:

We have created a nation of remarkable wealth and productivity, yet one that leaves its impoverished citizens in degrading life conditions

and almost completely ignores the suffering of the world's poorest people.

We have created a kind of mass addiction to consumerism, relentless advertising, insidious lobbying, and national politics gutted of serious public deliberation. (p. 183)

What, or who, is the economy for? The global economy has been shaped by economic forces, not social or ecological ones. The economy, however, should be at the service of human beings and the natural world, at the service of life. Creating a future in which all people can prosper will require a fundamental rethinking of how the economy should be structured. In light of these principles, Veritas seeks to implement an economic system based on solidarity and respect for natural processes while serving the community of life. It supports an economic system where self-organising communities have control over essential natural resources. Veritas forges economic and social development from the bottom of the social pyramid, among the urban and the rural poor.

Easterly (2006), in *The White Man's Burden*, wrote that poverty continues not only because of indifference but also because those who care often adopt ineffective methods. The Veritas e-Trading Network aims to put agency back into the hands of urban and rural poor people themselves, to empower the poor to create their own future, shape their own destiny and take control of their own lives. That is the only way in which they would stand a chance to thrive in the current dominant global political economy. Our economic aspiration is to implement a digital marketing and 'green' distribution strategy based on a network of organised communities in the context of a spirituality of liberation and ecology, a spirit of democratic governance and efficient economic management. This is in direct contrast to the way in which McKibben (2007:100-111) describes the dominant economic discourses. He suggests that economics thinks of human beings in individualised ways and not as part of a human community. Furthermore, they base their economic thinking on the idea of 'a human being as a self-contained want-machine bent on maximizing utility' (McKibben 2007:111). Through our convergence economics we are countering that, building an economics of community in which people are highly connected, breaking cycles of poverty through organising from below.

Korten (2009:43) critiques the ways in which dominant economic systems value economic growth above anything else; cultural values are shaped by consumerism and governance fails to curb the excesses of corporate wealth. We have to face the reality of 'an out-of-control and out-of-touch financial system devoted to speculation, inflating financial bubbles, stripping corporate assets, and predatory lending' (Korten 2009:43).

It is within such a global context that Veritas advocates for the redistribution of financial and natural capital, cutting back on the consumption of material things and living with green technologies to build a sustainable future. The planet cannot sustain the global political economy as it is being run today where environment and economy are always on a collision course. We have to discover new economic models based on the idea of limited natural resources. We have to promote eco-efficiency and produce more with less. Filipino inventors have to design new products that generate social and natural value for the poor. In other words, Veritas calls for the reorganisation and transformation of the global political economy.

According to Korten (2006), development and prosperity should be measured by:

[T]he quality and the realization by each person of the creative potential of their humanity. A high-performing economic system supports the development of this potential, provides every person with an adequate and dignified means of livelihood, maintains the healthy vitality of the planetary ecosystem that is the source of real wealth, and contributes to building community through strengthening the bonds of affection, trust and mutual accountability. (p. 418)

Thus, Veritas has to keep on innovating – reducing its prices, seeking to please its customers and monitoring its impact in terms of transformed lives. It must work to build up enduring coalitions among the urban and rural poor, propose concrete policies for effective modes of governance and imbue its stakeholders with a sense of solidarity, common purpose and a renewed sense of confidence in the future to create a path towards a world glowing with harmony and prosperity.

Our forefathers believed that the Earth did not belong to them; they belonged to the Earth. They did not have the concept of absolute ownership of the things of the Earth. They realised that human beings are social beings, also economic, political and spiritual beings. Economic concerns are only one among other values and needs that make us human. Is there any way at all that this joy, this deep religiosity, this indomitable energy and gritty determination of the Filipinos can be harnessed so that they can organise themselves, mobilise on a massive scale, engage the economic and political system, take risks and decide communally which risks they have to take so that they can attain what they consider of value in the light of their history and culture?

*Oikonomia* means 'stewardship'. We have failed to be compassionate stewards of the planet. The global political economy that causes garbage dumps all over the world, the slums, the spirals of violence, the terrorist bombings and the pollution of the environment are glaring proofs that we have not been very good stewards of the planet. We did not comply with our duty to steward the capacity of the Earth to sustain all life and nourish everyone in it. Modern civilisation is inspired by a vision that equates human progress with unbridled economic growth. Humans and creation have been made subordinates of the market as God. The market ideology assumes that Mother Earth's resources are inexhaustible and that the environment has a virtually infinite ability to absorb the waste generated by the consumer society. Today, we urgently have to move away from the ideology of infinite material progress towards genuinely sustainable economies. Different scholars provide possible alternative imaginaries for sustainable economies that would nurture humanity and the planet alike (cf. Greer 2011; Heinberg 2011; Jackson 2011).

Western economics made incorrect assumptions about human nature, thinking of the human being as *Homo economicus*, a being who makes decisions based on rational self-interest. Western economics considers extreme mathematicisation, as

well as distance from normative concerns, to be signs of objectivity and rigour, much like the hard sciences. It is assumed that the pursuit of self-interest will automatically produce the best outcomes for everyone. However, to the contrary, in the process of maximising value for shareholders, who care only about their own wealth and return on their investments, the poor are often marginalised and exploited. The only goal of business firms is to maximise profit, and the measure of success in national policy is the growth of GDP per capita. In other words, the ideology behind the global political economy maintains that the self-interest of a rational, autonomous individual utility-maximiser automatically leads to collective well-being.

The purely rational, greed-motivated person is a functional psychopath – ethically unmoored with no moral compass to guide decisions, caring nothing for the welfare of others. The economic doctrine based on self-interest has often led to the overexploitation of natural resources and social problems that make life worse for everyone, not better. The global financial crises that have happened and are bound to happen again and again have caused many companies to go bankrupt and some nations to declare bankruptcy. The personal costs in terms of unemployment, poverty and health have been immense.

The understanding of human beings by free market economists has not looked closely at how human beings evolved – the best survival strategy for *Homo sapiens* was to cooperate with each other and to suppress the greed and selfishness that was good for the individual but harmful to the tribe – driving animals towards teammates yielded more meat than hunting alone. The human species survived because our ancestors held the belief that everyone must make personal sacrifices to follow ethical rules and avoid harming others. Veritas believes it is high time for a paradigm shift in economics based on the survival strategies of our ancestors and not relegate our interdependent futures to mindless, values-neutral ‘market forces’. The purpose of the economy is to provide for the sustaining and flourishing of life.

It cannot do this if economists continue to imagine it as an ethics-free and compassion-free sphere.

Catholic social doctrine is based on solidarity between human beings. It strongly promotes and defends democracy and freedom and fosters universal human rights, based on an affirmation of the inherent dignity of every human being. Economics therefore should foster pro-social behaviour. It should result in a world where 'producers' and 'consumers' see each other as people and together work towards creating a sustainable global economy and a global society. Veritas would like to measure the standard of living by the well-being of the citizens, the flourishing of the community and of the ecosystem, and not by the gross national product. Growth will need to rely to a much greater extent on sustained improvements in human capital, institutions and governance. The global economy has to be built on a just and sustainable foundation. Without social justice, there will be no world peace.

Pope John Paul II (1991 in Melé & Schlag 2015) wrote in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*:

[T]he purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but is to be found in its very existence as a community of persons who in various ways are endeavoring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society. Profit is a regulator of the life of a business, but it is not the only one; other human and moral factors must also be considered which, in the long term, are at least equally important for the life of a business. (n.p.)

Slow Money founder Woody Tasch (quoted by Chaudhar 2013) says it in language even more resembling of a spirituality:

In the 21st century, investing is not only about markets and sectors and asset allocation. In a world that is speeding up and heating up, losing its soil and losing its sense of common purpose, investing is also about reconnecting and healing broken relationships. What could make more sense than taking a small amount of our money, turning in a new direction, and putting it to work near where we live, in things that we understand, starting with food? (n.p.)

## ■ Conclusion

Veritas is looking to network with local entrepreneurs who can demonstrate that their projects, in addition to financial viability, promote larger social and environmental goals. Veritas believes that sustainable development and true progress will be characterised by socio-economic justice, paving the way for harmony and freedom among all people. Veritas does not call for an end to economic growth nor for economic stagnation but for a convergent economy and a sustainable society where everyone can become all that they can be.

The e-Trading networks, technologies and innovations created between urban and rural poor communities, described here, seek to demonstrate the viability of such an alternative imaginary, against the backdrop of a global political economy that has largely sidelined the poor. Not only is it viable, but it is also internally sustainable, because in economic processes based on solidarity the despair of the poor and the avarice of the rich both get replaced with an economics of sharing.

True prosperity, in our minds, is when the way people make a living is true to who they are and convergent with an evolving cosmos.





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This collected work is an important contribution to developing an urban theology that takes seriously the epistemological and ontological questions related to the 'urban condition' in light of planetary urbanisation. The essays provide much fodder for discussion irrespective whether the discussants approach the topics from a social science or from a theological perspective. It has become an imperative for theologians to take the city seriously. Cities, from their initial establishment, always have exerted sway over their surrounding hinterlands and beyond. This scholarly book is timely. For example, reflection on immigration in the Central and Southeast US is hope-filled. Likewise the grappling to understand violence particularly as manifested in Guatemala provides insight to the current state of affairs in Central America (and in the world). Never before has the urban process been so bound up with finance capital and with the caprices of the world's financial markets. The book helps the reader make the link between globalisation and urbanisation, the interconnected urban and 'non-urban' economies, as well as the paradoxical relationship between the gross domestic product by means of which as the health of a country's economy is gauged and its sustainable development with a different bottom line. What I appreciated about the discourse is that it did not spend time making the case vis-a-vis demographic data of becoming an 'urban world' — those can be easily found. The authors wrestled with the assumptions upon which the data are based or what they reveal, providing in-depth reflection about everyday phenomena.

**Rev. Prof. Michael Mata, Assistant Professor and Director, Transformational Urban Leadership Program, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California, United States of America**

This book is a composite and competent work which demonstrates significant unity of theme in the manner in which the authors interact with the leitmotif 'glocal responses to planetary urbanisation'. The contributions are the result of serious and sustained research and stand up to rigorous examination.

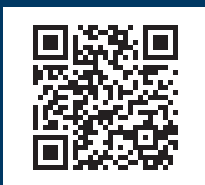
**Dr Graham Duncan, Professor Emeritus, Department of Systematic and Historical Theology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, South Africa**

The challenge of an entire planet being urbanised has not been adequately considered theologically. When theological consideration is given to urban challenges, it has often been done almost exclusively from the global north, from within a specific Christian faith tradition, or in relation to urban evangelism or proclamation. The unique contribution of this scholarly collected work is twofold. The contributions span all continents and various faith traditions. Voices from the global South, as well as critical voices from those in the global north in critical solidarity with the global South, are coming forth very clearly. The book explores the concept 'decolonial faith', expressed in various forms of justice and embodied as emerging responses to planetary urbanisation. Narrow disciplinary boundaries are transcended. The book's academic discourse demonstrates an interface between scholarly reflection and an activist faith, as well as between local rootedness and global connectedness.

**Prof. Andries G. van Aarde, Chief Editor, AOSIS Scholarly Books, South Africa; and, Emeritus Professor, University of Pretoria, South Africa**



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