Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora

Christianity and Social Change in Contemporary Africa

Guest Editors

Francis B. Nyamnjoh and Joel A. Carpenter

Editor-In-Chief

Afe Adogame

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African Association for the Study of Religions

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The Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora is a peer-reviewed, open-access journal for the academic study of the religions of Africa and the African Diaspora. It will serve primarily as an interdisciplinary journal in which AASR members, but also non-AASR-members, publish the outcomes of their original research on the religions of Africa and the African Diaspora.

The journal will cover the wide range of religious traditions that were founded, were or are found, and exist and operate in Africa and the African Diaspora; and topics useful to scholars involved in the academic study of religions in Africa and the Africa Diaspora, and to a wider readership of academics in the general study of religions.

The journal shall be published as electronic issues only, with up to two (2) issues per year. It will be administered on behalf of the AASR by the Editorial Management Board and the International Advisory Board.

AASR
African Association for the Study of Religions

ABOUT THE AASR

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CONTENTS

Editor's Note

It is with much enthusiasm I introduce and welcome readers to this *Special Issue 5.1 'Christianity and Social Change in Contemporary Africa,'* steered by our guest editors, Francis B. Nyamnjoh and Joel A. Carpenter. These richly diverse essays, that make up this Issue, form part of the research outputs and findings of a sub-project 'Religious Innovation and Competition: Their Impact in Contemporary Africa' conducted within a very impressive research initiative, 'Christianity and Social Change in Contemporary Africa', funded by the John Templeton Foundation in collaboration with the Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. The interdisciplinary research project, led by the guest co-editors, took place in 11 sub-Saharan African countries from January 2016 to March 2017.

This research initiative brought together African social scientists of different disciplinary orientations, but grounded in fieldwork ethnography, to interrogate the social impact of religious innovation and competition in contemporary Africa. This cohort of researchers, in conversation with theologians as collaborators, explored Christianity and social change in contemporary Africa, teasing out the complex dynamism of contemporary African religiosity through the prism of gender, health and healing, social media, entrepreneurship, and mutual religious encounter and exchange. The essays reveal inherent concerns and contradictions that are characteristic of new religious imaginaries on the one hand, but also the hallmarks of agency, creativity, innovation, and resilience that these religious mobilities engender in the face of social change. As our guest editors aptly remark: "the research and learning reflected in this volume may enhance understanding of religion's vital presence and power in contemporary Africa." I therefore enjoin readers, particularly scholars of religion and religiosity in Africa, to heed the clarion call of these authors "to invest new conceptual and methodological energy in researching the intricacies and nuances of what it means to be actively religious in a dynamic Africa." Such a move challenges us, as scholars and researchers, to look "towards a future in a transdisciplinary comparative border-crossing approach in the study of religion." It also illuminates the urgency and backbreaking task of demystifying and problematizing the ambivalent import of religious innovation and competition within contemporary African socio-religious landscapes.

My deep appreciation and admiration to our guest editors and authors for tilting our critical, scholarly gaze toward unpacking emerging discourses on religious innovation and competition in present day Africa.

Unquestionably, readers will find these essays thought-provokingly refreshing.

Afe Adogame
Editor-In-Chief
August 2019

Introduction: Christianity and Social Change in Contemporary Africa

Francis B. Nyamnjoh and Joel A. Carpenter

Abstract

This introductory essay lays out the main themes of a special issue of the *Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora*. It brings together seven empirically grounded papers by African social scientists of different disciplinary backgrounds. These works explore the social impact of religious innovation and competition in present day Africa. They represent a selection from an interdisciplinary initiative that made 23 research grants for theologians and social scientists to study Christianity and social change in contemporary Africa. These articles focus on a variety of dynamics in contemporary African religion (mostly Christianity), including gender, health and healing, social media, entrepreneurship, and inter-religious borrowing and accommodation. The editors suggest that the research and learning reflected in this volume may enhance understanding of religion's vital presence and power in contemporary Africa. The articles reveal problems as well as possibilities, notably some ethical concerns and psychological maladies that arise in some of these new movements, notably neo-Pentecostal and militant fundamentalist groups. Yet the articles do not fixate on African problems and victimization. Instead they explore sources of African creativity, resiliency and agency. Scholars of religion and religiosity in Africa, the authors argue, need to invest new conceptual and methodological energy in understanding what it means to be actively religious in Africa today.

KEY WORDS: Christianity and: Contemporary Africa, Gender, Health and Healing, Social Media, Entrepreneurship, Inter-Religious Borrowing and Accommodation

Introduction

Religions constitute some of the most dynamic forces in Africa today, and studies of African religious and spiritual practices have registered spectacular numerical growth. Indeed, the rise of the African Association for the Study Religion in Africa and this, its journal, give witness to this dynamism. Scholars are trying to catch up, in effect, with the dynamic numerical growth and changing cultural influence of African religions, and of Christianity in particular. Most of this work has been pursued within the academic discipline of religious studies, but the other social sciences are now following the trail as well. The constant ferment of religiosity in Africa has attracted significant social scientific attention in recent years and has produced a rich and growing body of social scientific publications. Historians, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists alike have

been scrambling to assess the 'religion factor' in African life (Gifford, 2004, 2009, 2015; Olupona 2004; Meyer and Moors 2006; Carpenter 2012; Adogame et al. 2013; van Wyk 2014; Echtler and Ukah 2015; Meyer 2015; Peel 2015; Hackett and Soares 2015; Janson and Meyer 2016; Vaughan 2016; van der Veer 2016; Obadare 2016; Haynes 2017).

Religious innovation and dynamism, moreover, have generated plenty of religious competition. Religious competition is anathema to religious leaders, who preach and believe in unity and accord, but social scientists might think differently. Diversity and competition are often vehicles, if not drivers, of creative change. How does religious diversity work in African contexts? Is religious competition a destructive force, or does it enable innovation and foster creativity as well? The growth of Pentecostalism in Africa, to cite one example, has brought in a high level of competition and innovation. Pentecostals have greatly influenced their competitors—including the historic churches and even Muslims and African traditionalists—to try new ways and means to attract followers and serve the public (Gifford 2004, Maxwell 2006, Kalu 2008, Meyer 2015, Haynes 2017: Kaunda, 2018).

A competitive marketplace of religions has emerged in many African nations. Governments across the continent are adopting constitutions that accommodate and protect all religions and allow varied beliefs and practices to compete without any official preference. Distinctive religious practices and identities are becoming blurred, as are the lines and paths of social status and leadership. Any upstart Pentecostal church and its newly anointed bishop have the same status under the law as leaders of long-established Anglican or Catholic hierarchies. Free enterprise now marks the religious scene every bit as much as free-wheeling commerce does the new African economies.

Inspired by these new conditions, this special issue gathers a collection of empirically grounded papers by African social scientists of different disciplinary backgrounds that touch on various aspects of the social impact of religious innovation and competition in present day Africa.

Background, Context and Research Questions

These papers, diverse as they are, have a common origin in an exciting research initiative, 'Christianity and Social Change in Contemporary Africa', funded by the John Templeton Foundation in collaboration with the Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. Even though this research grants project was funded in Philadelphia and administered from Grand Rapids, it was a thoroughly African effort. African scholars convened the project, made the grants decisions and guided the researchers. The project was diverse in disciplinary persuasions as well, including specialists in anthropology, sociology, communication studies, psychology, theology and religion studies. Equally distinctive of the project was the intent of researchers to share, discuss and dialogue about their findings with members of the communities amongst which the studies were undertaken. Every funded project team organized local workshops for practitioners as well as scholarly conferences and publications.

These papers are an outcome of a sub-project titled 'Religious Innovation and Competition: Their Impact in Contemporary Africa', which was conducted from January 2016 to March 2017 in 11 African countries. The overwhelming verdict of participants in

its 12 grantee teams is that the project engendered cooperation and collaboration at a very high level. The project has also succeeded in initiating networks of researchers and academics with common interests and pursuits. In bringing these papers together for a wider readership, it is our hope that scholarly cooperation and collaboration will be sustained and lead to individual and collective proposal writing and solicitation of research funding from other sources.[1]

New academic terrains are being charted through the development of new university courses that some researchers in the project have initiated, with the intention of encouraging young and upcoming researchers and academics with interest in the intersection of religion studies, theology and the social sciences. We hope that it will help with the dismantling of some of the rigid boundaries and gatekeeping between theology and the social sciences.

This project materialised from wide-ranging consultations with African scholars involved in and committed to engaging Africa through the prism of contemporary religion and religiosity. The planning process was launched following a 2013 consultation meeting in Accra, Ghana, initiated by African scholars from many fields of inquiry in collaboration with the Nagel Institute, to prospect for project funding in selected fields (Carpenter and Kooistra 2014). Drawing on the ideas and enthusiasm generated by such engagements with Africa, Burkinabe theologian Tite Tienou, Kenyan anthropologist Mwenda Ntarangwi, and American historian and director of the Nagel Institute at Calvin College, Joel Carpenter, worked closely together on the design of the research programme from the start. A University of Cape Town based Cameroonian social anthropologist, Francis Nyamnjoh, joined the train in motion as director of the social science subproject.

The project design and approval phase took over two and half years and culminated in the making of 23 grants – 11 in theology and 12 in social science. As evidenced by a total of 188 (88 in social science and 100 in theology) letters of interest examined and 56 (32 in social science and 24 in theology) invited full proposals, the role of religion in African societies as a critical area of intellectual contemplation and research excites the theologians and social scientists of the continent in equal measure. Had provision been made to accept applications from Africans in the diaspora as well, these figures could easily have doubled.

Applications were invited from interested African social scientists, as individuals or in teams, around six key questions, namely:

1. What are the main traits of religious innovation and competition in Africa?
2. What factors are driving religious innovation and competition in Africa?
3. What impact does religious innovation and competition have on African society?
4. What roles do religious innovation and competition play in building or hindering resilience and entrepreneurship in Africa?
5. What roles do religious innovation and competition play in the increase of youth agency and the rise of urbanized popular culture in Africa?
6. What roles do technology and media play in religious innovation and competition in Africa?

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[1] We have also published a dedicated issue of papers from this project with the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 36:3 (2018). Our thoughts expressed in that issue's introduction are quite similar to those we share here, but the articles and authors in the issue are entirely different.

The selection committees were constituted entirely of African scholars. At a joint selection committee meeting in Accra, Ghana (December 2015) and the orientation workshop in Cape Town (February 2016), expert social scientists and theologians on the selection committees as well as the project's facilitators and mentors were gratified by the programmatic seriousness, topical richness and professional quality of the various applications. With the exception of two of the selected studies – 'The faith-based segregation of interments in Senegal's Joal-Fadiouth Commune' by Ato Kwamena Onoma, and 'New imaginations of youth agency: Boko Haram and the innovative gospel of terror in Nigeria' by Edlyne Anugwom – projects focused mainly on the social impact of innovation and competition within Christianity.

These projects' initial research papers were presented in draft form at a culminating conference in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, from 6 to 11 March 2017. The conference was attended by 69 (17 female, 52 male) participants that consisted, among others, of grantees, mentors and research directors, selection committee members, and invited keynote speakers. These speakers were Harold Netland and Emmanuel Katongole for theology and Fabien Eboussi Boulaga[2] and Afe Adogame for social science. In addition to four keynote presentations, there were a total of 33 grantee presentations, of which 15 were in the social science subproject and 18 in theology. The papers benefitted from comments from and conversations with mentors that were assigned to projects from the outset, as well as from discussions with the research directors, invited facilitators and keynote speakers at the launch workshop in Cape Town and at the concluding conference in Abidjan.

The findings that have emerged out of the 12 social science research groups have contributed refreshing insights into the role of innovation and competition in religion in Africa. Religion as a dynamic force of social change has shaped the cultural, economic and political landscapes of the African continent in significant ways. The rising prevalence of hybridised and innovative 'Christianities' that sits at the centre of this research project is reflective of the resilience and transformational power within African society today. If there is one thing that these varied research projects have all converged upon, it is the centring of current African religious epistemologies within their work, contributing to a flourishing discourse that bodes optimistically for future work.

Conceptually and methodologically, a core aspect of this project has been collaborative and critical multidisciplinary research around non-zero-sum-game articulations of change and continuity in African religiosity, both from theological and social scientific perspectives. The project, most innovatively, has encouraged intellectual conversations, co-elaboration and co-production among African social scientists and theologians with shared research interests in religion, social change and African dignity and agency. Bringing theologians and social scientists together to engage fruitfully with each other's tested research methodologies and ways of knowing has resulted, we believe, not only in rich and innovative ways of understanding African realities but also in more complex and enriched research approaches, which we hope other scholars of Africa will find relevant to their own work.

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[2] As we were putting together this introduction, news reached us that Fabien Eboussi Boulaga died on 13 October 2018. May his soul rest in perfect peace. We are fortunate to have known him, and to have been enriched by his scholarship.

Basic Assumptions and Themes

A guiding assumption of the studies under the sub research project is that religions constitute some of the most dynamic forces in Africa today, and their interaction with other social forces need to be more carefully assessed. Although much work of this type has been pursued for some time now, especially within the field of religious studies, social scientific perspectives are essential, given the importance of religion as a social force, and especially in view of the social competition generated by religious innovation and dynamism.

In framing this research, we were keen to establish the extent to which diversity and competition can be vehicles of creative change in African religiosity, and not just vehicles of fragmentation and animosity, as commonly feared. Thus we were led to ask: How does religious diversity work in African contexts? Is religious competition a destructive force, or does it enable innovation and foster creativity? The growth of Pentecostalism in Africa in the past 30 years, to cite one example, has brought a high level of competition and innovation. It reopens these questions about new religious movements with fresh urgency. On the social and religious scene as well as in commerce and economics, new players and dynamics are afoot in Africa today and new questions arise about patterns and trajectories

The project also sought to be open to fresh opportunities for interdisciplinary research that might lead to new understandings of contemporary African life. We paused to ask, more than once, might these explorations and findings encourage a more positive approach to the study of Africa, where once afro-pessimism seemed the default option? We were particularly focused on evidence of African agency, resilience and creativity, as a counterpoint to the all too common tendency to focus on African problems, pathologies and victimization.

The seven papers selected for this volume bring together many themes of interest. These include:

- religious innovation and competition as well as competition-induced innovation;
- gender inequalities and gendered dynamics in religion and religiosity and their implications for the visibility of women in general, and those in or seeking leadership positions in particular;
- religion and health (somatic, psychosomatic and spiritual) and competing, conflictual and complementary constructions of legitimacy in religious health initiatives;
- creative appropriation of mainstream and new media by the leaders and congregations in Pentecostal churches and among Pentecostals in particular;
- religion and religious competition seen through the prism of rural-urban and transnational migration, urban change and vulnerability;
- extent to which the socioeconomic plight of vulnerable and marginalised groups feeds religious fundamentalism and the impact, in turn, of such fundamentalism on agency in general, and the agency of youth, women and the urban poor in particular; and
- subtle and obvious similarities and differences between present day Pentecostalism and African indigenous religions and a case for interdependence,

ecumenism and conviviality in spite of competition among the variants of Christianity in Africa.

A variety of themes emerged from our teams' studies:

1. *Leadership and Inclusiveness along Gender Lines* were the focus of several studies. These issues are central to any religion which holds equality, equity, justice and humility as core values. They are more easily articulated in principle and in abstraction than implemented and investigated in reality, especially in contexts where certain culturally informed attitudes and practices might stand in the way.

Exploring in a Kenyan context the opportunities and obstacles placed before women as both leaders and followers within these churches, the study by Parsitau sheds light on the shifting terrain of gender equality and awareness on the continent, to and from which church institutions both contribute and detract. The interesting contradictions and tensions she presents speak to the conflicted nature of gender identity and the continued struggle for legitimation, freedom of expression, and equality. A focus on gender, Parsitau makes clear, is critical for understanding the rise and proliferation of Pentecostalism in Africa. She explores some of the strategies employed by African women seeking inclusion and leadership in the dynamic field of African religiosity as they negotiate change and continuity to attract the attention for their concerns and support of colleagues. Yet they are careful not to appear to be throwing the baby of patriarchal traditions and masculinities out with the bathwater of the agentic possibilities brought their way by religious innovation and competition.

Parsitau's approach is especially significant in many an African context where stereotypes of stark gendered hierarchies are commonplace, and there is a tendency to assume that women and men cannot excel in equal measure in the business of practicing and promoting prescribed religious beliefs. The insights generated by Parsitau's Kenyan study and others in our project on the rise of female-led Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Tanzania and Ghana, provide a framework to revisit prevalent assumptions and stereotypes around gender and religiosity in Africa. How best can the divine purpose or higher vision of a religion be fulfilled in Africa by harnessing the potentialities of men and women alike, and not by assuming that either men or women are exclusively best placed to undertake that purpose, mission and vision in Africa? It is our hope that the findings presented augment what is already known of religious practices and sensibilities that prevent or allow women to take up and sustain highly visible positions of power, a phenomenon that is instructive for other social sectors in Africa. And what conversations on and around the balance of power and energy between male and female are unfolding between millennia old traditions and newer religions?

2. *The Relationship between Religion and Health* was another salient theme for our grantees. Several teams assessed the impact and relevance of religion on the physical and mental wellbeing of ordinary Africans. They highlighted how religion is interwoven and overlaid and undergirded with other belief systems, particularly relating to health, fate and wellbeing. They also reveal ways in which plurality, pragmatism and fluidity are produced and practised and how they influence belief. It is hardly enough to preach salvation as an attribute of a life hereafter, when people are often desperately seeking to make ends meet at the margins, and lives are wasting away under the burning challenges of bare existence. Who is to blame when hard work, usually prescribed as the way out of one's hardships, is not good enough to bring wealth and health? It is not satisfactory to hope to resolve the

health problems of congregants by requiring them to settle for miracles, prophesies and exorcism alone, as not every health challenge requires a miracle, prophesy or exorcism.

How then do those members of the congregation for whose attention the various approaches to health are competing relate to such competition? Are the approaches exclusionary or inclusionary in their relationship to the various ideas of health proposed by competing groups or health professionals affiliated with one form or another of Christianity? Getui's study of church-founded hospitals and clinics locates some good news on this front. These agencies, where Christian prayers and medical practice intermingle, are generally not in competition with each other, and their staff members tend not to chide their patients for seeking traditional remedies.

In her study, Yendork focuses on the impact of religions on the mental health of their practitioners, thus enriching research on the social impact of various religions in Africa. A prime characteristic of Christianity in Africa today is the increase in Pentecostalism/Charismatism based on practices such as miracles, prophecies and exorcism. These activities tend to influence the beliefs and behaviours of people who adhere to them in their quest for cosmological balance. Yendork's study reinforces the reality of religion as a complex phenomenon with both spiritual and material dimensions, requiring multidisciplinary research to understand beliefs in the interconnections and interdependencies between the mind, spirit and the body. She reveals both the positive and negative effects on mental health of certain religious practices in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Despite conventional wisdom, claims of piety, holiness, honesty, moral uprightness and humility in religion and religiosity are always in need of authentication and re-authentication. If this is the case, and if we grant the various African congregants the agency we believe they have and exercise, then this question arises: What is it about these churches and their followers that makes them oblivious of or indifferent to the negativities of practices such as miracle-making, prophesying and exorcism?

3. The resilience of indigenous African health systems and practices along with indigenous African religions demonstrates the need to factor *Interconnections, Intersections and Interdependences between Christianity and Indigenous Belief Systems and Cultural Values in Africa* into how we conceptualise and undertake research on religion and social change in Africa and among Africans. Recognising such religious entanglements should make social scientists wary of any research or discourse that privileges conversion over conversation in African religiosity (Ela 1986[1980]; Boulaga 1984[1981]; Devisch 1996; Olupona 2004; Bongmba 2012; Adogame et al. 2013; Echtler and Ukah 2015). Such resilience and entanglements invite students of religion as a social phenomenon to de-emphasise radical shifts and stark dichotomies that suggest a determination to settle for nothing less than total victory and the annihilation of competing religions or competing tendencies within the same religion. African religiosity gives priority to inclusivity and humility. It is both resilient and entangling, featuring constant negotiation and navigation amidst neighbouring religious traditions and cultures. It reflects a cultural disposition towards inclusivity or what is popularly known as *Ubuntu*. It serves as evidence that embracing innovation and competition does not always have to entail giving up something.

The incompatibility between the religious inclusiveness that pervades Africa and the religious fundamentalism that crops up sporadically on the continent is made evident by Anugwom's study of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria. Anugwom explores the impact

of economic poverty, governance failures, and limited educational and employment opportunities for youth to account for the spread of Boko Haram religious fundamentalism in north-eastern Nigeria. The need to problematize 'tradition' and the 'traditional' with reference to African religions cannot be overemphasised, given the centrality of these categories in this research. If Africans are social actors who are selectively endorsing and contesting beliefs, values and practices, old and new, how one conceptualises and researches traditions—not as inward looking, frozen in time and space realities but as open to competition and innovation—is of cardinal importance. Even fundamentalism, often defined as radical traditionalism, is a movement driven by contemporary aspirations, tools and concepts.

In the study by Mapuranga of how Pentecostalism continues to draw extensively from rites and rituals traditional to African indigenous religions, we see strong patterns of religious sharing. The study provides evidence on how Pentecostalism has inspired innovations informed by African indigenous religions in Harare, as experienced through symbols, practices and rituals used to interact with the sacred and the divine and to activate consciousness of God's presence and guidance. In terms of rituals, practices and symbols, Pentecostalism in Africa is much more like old wine in new bottles in how, among other things, it draws and builds on age-old cultural traditions of seeing and relating to bodies as permeable containers or envelops of spirituality, and as mediators of conversations between the visible and the invisible. The challenge is thus one of how best to capitalise on such continuity in change, and not to stubbornly insist on absolute winners and losers among different religions and faiths on the continent.

In many a situation, as the findings in several of the studies in this volume evidence, faith-seeking or religion-seeking Africans confronted with radically different options resort to compromises. Such conciliatory nimble-footedness characteristic of many an African, big and small, and many an African society, far from being a weakness, is in many regards a virtue informed by a willingness to reach out, take in and accommodate difference. It is the makings of humility, par excellence. This virtue could prove to be the best fortress for Africa in the face of waves of religiously motivated violence or terrorism. It is a strength – evidence of the sociality that makes one human and that provides for the resilience of humanity as a universal aspiration. Africans find room in their hearts and in their spirituality not only for Christianity in all its bloom and blossom, but also for Islam and any other religious options inspired by the continent's encounters with foreign influences.

The need to problematize "tradition" and the "traditional" with reference to African religions cannot be overemphasised, given the centrality of these categories in this research. If Africans are social actors who are selectively endorsing and contesting beliefs, values and practices, old and new, how one conceptualises and researches traditions not as inward looking, frozen in time and space realities but as open to competition and innovation is of cardinal importance.

At the heart of religion and social change in Africa is religion as a communicative act and as a form of transmission and reproduction of spirituality within a dynamic African setting. In this context, cultural and religious traditions are challenged to renegotiate themselves in conversation with innovations inspired by religious ideologies and practices from outside the continent, and more importantly, by the agency of Africans who subscribe in varying degrees and gradations to these innovations.

In their religiosity and everyday practices, Africans make little secret of the fact that it is possible to be what Charles Taylor terms 'open and porous and vulnerable' to a world of spirits, powers and cosmic forces, and still be 'disenchanted' enough to have the confidence of Taylor's 'buffered self', exploring one's own 'powers of moral ordering' (Taylor 2007: 27). Equally noteworthy is the fact that many an African does not allow their embrace of Christianity or Islam to serve as an ideological whip to flog their indigenous cultural beliefs into unmitigated compliance with an exclusive new piety (Ela 1986[1980]; Boulaga 1984[1981]; Devisch 1996; Olupona 2004; Bongmba 2012; Adogame et al. 2013; Echtler and Ukah 2015). African Christianity or African Islam simply afford Africans an opportunity to add another layer of complexity to their toolkit of personal identification (adopting Christian and Muslim names for example, without giving up their African names) and to their cultural and ethnic forms of being.

4. *Religion, Urbanity and New Social Patterns* is a theme that runs through several of our research projects. They sought insight into the new understandings, new languages and new consciousness that such intersections generate. The study we include here by Stephan de Beer and his colleagues of Pretoria and its environs provides us with a snippet view of contemporary South Africa, where South Africans are learning afresh to walk together under the guidance of Christian thinking in public life (Carpenter 2012). Over twenty years after the end of apartheid, racialized inequality and economic poverty are yet to be redressed in favour of the majority black population which continues to populate townships and informal settlements. This resiliency of apartheid creates opportunities for emerging new forms of Christianity championed by prosperity gospel and miracle-seeking Christians claiming success where the mainline churches are perceived to have failed, in creating a level playing field for all races seeking material wellbeing and salvation. However, given the vulnerabilities of the black majority in townships and informal settlements, the material and soul-saving opportunities that come their way are not without damage (van Wyk 2014). Of late, mainstream and social media have proliferated reports on problematic churches with questionable practices – with pastors in certain cases going beyond the bounds of tolerance by daring their congregants to eat forbidden, inedible, downrightly dangerous 'substances' (ants, snakes, stones, insecticides, poisons, etc.) in a show of the miracles of faith. Some pastors and prophets are accused of extravagant exploitation of their congregants, financially, sexually and otherwise, all in the name of God and the promise of salvation and material abundance.

The study by Henrietta Nyamnjoh explores the creative and accelerated appropriation of social media by Pentecostal churches to position themselves and to build and maintain networks in a highly competitive religious landscape, in which one's entrepreneurial abilities are constantly summoned and challenged. She investigates how the quest to attract new converts, extend boundaries and confirm dominance has led to Pentecostal churches appropriating new information and communication technologies and processes for 'spreading the word of God and doing God's work',[3] empowering women and youth, as well as influencing religious processes beyond Pentecostalism.

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[3] Such appropriation of new technologies for evangelisation is not confined to Africa. At a four day summit on 'Religious Violence against Christians' that was held in Washington in May 2017, and brought together 600 participants from 136 countries, 'Attendees received a swag bag with a customized iPad loaded with conference materials,' from the organisers – the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association – which reportedly spent $4 US million on the event. See Elizabeth Dias, 'Vice President Mike Pence Met Privately with Top Russian Cleric', *Time,* May 12, 2017. http://time.com/4776717/mike-pence-russian-cleric-hilarion-alfeyev/ Accessed 12 May 2017.

Social media are deployed to conjure financial, material, and spiritual loyalty straight into the breadbasket of the man or woman of God, directly or through their franchises. We see intriguing insights into the fast-paced changes underway regarding how people view and enact their connection to God, community and church.

The modernising push towards appropriating 'apps' and cellular technology to do one's spiritual work is reflective of the power of the African consumer market, as well as the innovative and fluid approaches that shape urban religious landscapes in Africa. Nyamnjoh explores and examines the role played by new media in accelerating religious discourses and innovative approaches among the emerging prophetic ministries. She also shows how the religious practices of prophetic ministries resemble and rediscover prior cultural and religious practices of indigenous African cultures and codes of conduct and decorum between leaders and their followers across genders and generations. Given the close relationship between religion and communication, and the centrality of media, information, and communication technologies to religious practices (Meyer and Moors 2006; Hay 2014; Meyer 2015; Hackett and Soares 2015), the study joins others in our group in exploring how religious innovation and competition intersect with urban change and urban vulnerability, and the extent to which processes of religious innovation and competition contribute to the healing or the fracturing of urban communities. The studies provide insight into the new understandings, new languages and new consciousness that such intersections generate.

These two studies focused on urban change and urban vulnerability give us a foretaste of the wealth of knowledge to be gained through a systematic investigation of the often taken for granted assumptions about rural-urban mobility in search of elusive greener pastures, becoming trapped in informal settlements and in poverty, and being a target for proliferating Pentecostal charismatic ministries promising gratification and salvation through miracles, prophesies and exorcism. It remains a challenge, however, to study religion and religiosity as a commodity and opportunity not always easily disentangled from opportunism, in a manner that does not trivialize or overly simplify the predicaments of those caught betwixt and between crushing poverty and the lure and allure of Charismatic Pentecostalism. Granted the popularity of these new forms of religiosity, even with academics across university campuses on the continent, future research on the phenomenon of Charismatic Pentecostalism should seek a balance in the composition of research teams between members and affiliates of these churches and those who are not.

Even so, transformation—personal and social—through religion is a critical component of the social change that has transpired in Africa for more than a century and half. The studies that we supported provide food for thought about the large-scale production and consumption of religion in an African setting – religion as a well marketed mega enterprise – as well as on the largescale resilience and revival of indigenous African spirituality. They offer lenses for understanding change and continuities in African spirituality and religiosity, and provide useful insights on the continent's capacity to reach out, take in and accommodate innovations, and provide for a healthy, enriching competitiveness that is predicated not on absolutes, but on the spirit and practice of interconnections, interdependence, and conviviality across religions (Ela 1986[1980]; Boulaga 1984[1981]; Devisch 1996; Olupona 2004; Bongmba 2012; Adogame et al. 2013; Echtler and Ukah 2015).

Towards a Future in a Transdisciplinary Comparative Border-crossing Approach in the Study of Religion

We hope that the papers presented in this volume will enhance understanding of the nexus between religion, communication and related themes of resiliency and entanglement amid an ever-evolving religious landscape. The authors are determined to go beyond doom and gloom perspectives that are overly fixated with African problems and victimization. They are keen to explore pockets of opportunities, however circumscribed, for understanding African agency and African wellsprings of hope. This approach entails focusing on sources of resilience, resourcefulness, and hope among Africans that are brought to the fore or reinforced by contemporary religious innovation and competition. It suggests, above all, that scholars of religion and religiosity in Africa, regardless of their personal religious persuasions and beliefs or lack thereof, invest conceptual and methodological energy in researching the intricacies and nuances of what it means to be actively religious in a dynamic Africa.

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Women without Limits and Limited Women: Pentecostal Women Navigating between Empowerment and Disempowerment in Kenya

Damaris Seleina Parsitau

Abstract

Neo-Pentecostalism has been characterised as offering freedoms and empowerment for women in the Global South, Africa in particular. Despite the limitations on freedom, women are able to negotiate, navigate and contest their (dis)empowerment in the context of rapidly modernized but heavily patriarchal societies, such as Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa. This article explores how women in Jubilee Christian Centre (JCC) and the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness (MRH), popular Neo-Pentecostal Churches, navigate and negotiate between empowerment and disempowerment positions in their spiritual and personal lives. I seek to point out the seemingly invisible yet critical threads associated with gender and religion and how these strands shape women's lives. These threads are associated with self- understanding, self-definition, personal and collective empowerment or disempowerment and the building of self-esteem.

KEY WORDS: Pentecostalism, Women Empowerment, Limits, Patriarchal Imaginaries, Sexed Bodies.

Introduction

Pentecostalism's phenomenal growth in the Global South has been accompanied by exponential growth both numerically and geographically. In conceptualising Pentecostalism's phenomenal growth and its impact in the Global South, a range of authors have been fascinated by exponential growth in numbers of adherents, along with its impact on women and youth (Deacon and Parsitau 2017; Parsitau 2015; 2016; Parsitau and Mwaura 2010; Mwaura 2002 and 2005). In this study I examine how Pentecostal women navigate empowerment or disempowerment (Martin 2002: 23; Sarojini Nadar 2010), in particular how these women use spiritual resources to encourage, affirm and build their spirituality. I also examine how women in these churches understand and appropriate empowerment or disempowerment and how they navigate their spirituality and lived experiences as Christian women in a heavily patriarchal society.

Scholars such as Ogbu Kalu (2008) and Marie Griffith (1997) have drawn attention to the important role of using feminine spirituality as metaphors of power, transformation and encouragement. Kalu, for example, points to the capacity of Pentecostalism to reimagine the feminine spirituality of the Pneuma. He argues that feminine spirituality is radicalised in the Bible with images of God as the mother of Israel, the awesome power of God mediated in predominantly feminine imagery. According to him, 'God's salvation was first broached and activated by Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, and Mary Magdalene. These women had the courage to say yes to the Holy Spirit, and became co-workers with God; their apparent weakness turned into a powerful, prophetic recovery of both church and community.' Griffith (1997) shows how women appropriate rich biblical metaphors and use them to reconstruct their own understanding of Christian womanhood, prayer and submission. While Griffith (1997) speaks of 'evangelical women' as engaged in 'voluntary submission to divine authority', he disagrees as to whether this engagement represents their 'true liberation' for women or not (Griffith 1997).

What is notable though is that many of the studies concerned with women and Pentecostalism appear to pay greatest attention to the manner in which Pentecostal clergy focused on personal transformation and empowerment using spiritual resources without focusing on real, tangible issues that touch on women empowerment.[1] Power, patriarchy, structural inequalities, poverty, gender based violence, racial and ethnic identities are related issues of interest.

Rekopantswe Mate (2002), for example, sees such churches as locales for 'patriarchal control' and the destructive misery of unequal rights and attendant abuses. Similarly, In Ghana, Jane Soothill (2006) has provided a challenging consideration of the means by which women negotiate power through men, especially their husbands. There is, therefore, an increasingly rich vein of work discussing women and Pentecostalism, including in Africa (Freeman 2012: Mwaura 2002; Parsitau 2012: Mwaura and Parsitau 2012; Nadar 2003).

There is also great work on changing gender norms in Africa that have undergone significant changes over the last two centuries (Nadar 2004). Women, especially in urban areas, are expected to navigate submission and patriarchy. Women are required to be, and be seen to be, under the control of and submissive to men (See, e.g., S. Nadar and Potgieter 2010). Similarly, Parsitau and Mwaura (2011, 2012, 2014; 2015) point to the role of Pentecostal churches in Kenya in granting women with voice and leadership positions as demonstrated by the number of women who are founders and adjunct heads of Neo-Pentecostal churches in Kenya.

Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity (classical, indigenous and the Neo-Pentecostals) in Kenya have ushered in a new upsurge in female religious leadership like never witnessed before since the advent of Christianity in Kenya in the 19th Century. In these churches and, as Mwaura (2002: 202) aptly points out, 'women are experiencing a measure of Christian ministerial freedom and equality hitherto denied them in mainline churches.'[2] Not only are these women visible in ecclesial leadership as founders of churches, bishops, pastors, and evangelists, but they also function as prophetesses, prayer

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[1] There are a few exceptions. See Nadar 2009, Nadar and Potgierter 2010, and Mate 2002.
[2] Mainline churches such as the Roman Catholic Churches, Anglican Churches and the Lutheran Churches are not only institutionalized but also heavily patriarchal while church leadership is largely still in the hands of men. Pentecostal churches believe in the democratization of the Spirit, which means anyone, including women, would start their own independent churches. Yet, in the older Neo-Pentecostal churches, it is still difficult for women to be ordained as ministers, so many women leave to found their own churches.

leaders, worship leaders, faith healers, counsellors, ushers, and heads of various church departments and administrative units.

A significant dimension of spiritual leadership in Kenya is its increasingly feminized face. In fact, one of the most striking features of the Kenyan Neo-Pentecostal scene is the proliferation of ordained female clergy, many of whom are founders, presidents, bishops, evangelists, healers, or prophetesses in new churches. Examples include Bishop Margaret Wanjiru of Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM), Evangelist Teresia Wairimu of Faith Evangelistic Ministry (FEM), and The Rev Lucy Muiru, head of Ladies of Excellence Ministries of Maximum Miracle Centre (MMC), Rev Elizabeth Wahome of Single Ladies Interdenominational Ministries (SLIM) and the Rev Judy Mbugua of Ladies Homecare Spiritual Fellowship (LHSF). In all these churches and ministries, women have assumed leadership positions to a degree that has not (yet) been replicated in mainstream Pentecostal churches or in public life in Kenya in general (Parsitau & Mwaura 2010), signalling women's agency in Pentecostal churches.

These women are not only assuming prominence locally, but also internationally, as overseers, as many of their churches and ministries have expanded trans-nationally, with branches in various other African countries as well (Mwaura and Parsitau 2010: Parsitau 2010a; Parsitau 2012a). Moreover, previously marginalized, 'non-typical' women, such as those who are single, divorced or widowed, have also assumed leadership roles in these new churches, ministries and fellowships as exemplified by the lives and churches of Bishop Wanjiru and Evangelist Wairimu (Parsitau 2010; Mwaura and Parsitau 2010).

The vast majority of Neo-Pentecostal churches in Kenya include a women's ministry or wing, while some have emerged with particular prominence as well. The country also contains a more limited number of churches aimed exclusively at a female membership (Deacon and Parsitau 2017). Examples include Jubilee Christian Centre (JCC), Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM), Faith Evangelistic Ministries (FEM), Single Ladies International Ministries (SLIM) and Rev Lucy Natasha of Prophetic Latter Glory Ministries International.

Others are not necessarily founded by women but have huge women membership and activities aimed at women congregants. The Ministry of Repentance and Holiness (MRH) founded by self-proclaimed Prophet David Owour, for example, is an end-time millennial church that gives prominence to rituals on purity, holiness, sin, sex, female bodies and dress codes. This ministry is very popular with women folk who find Prophet Owour's message of repentance, holiness and moral probity attractive to them (Parsitau 2015, 2016). Particular churches have also evolved that offer assistance for women to perform this submission in an especially exaggerated manner.

Given the critical roles women play in the founding, maintaining and expanding of these churches, little attention has been devoted to how women in these churches navigate different types of (dis)empowerment, particularly in heavily patriarchal cultures such as Kenya where women are negotiating empowerment as women of both worlds, namely women struggling between modernity and tradition.

In this article, I compare the different modes of women empowerment or disempowerment visible in two radically different Neo-Pentecostal churches to find out and understand how they navigate and negotiate empowerment or the lack of it. The two churches were chosen because of (1) their radically different forms and ideas about

empowerment and disempowerment, (2) their both having popular programmes and activities that are specifically designed for women, (3) both churches representing different views about empowerment and appeal to different clienteles, (4) both churches espousing radical theologies that appear to limit and empower women in different and paradoxical ways, and 5) women in both churches experiencing and navigating these tensions in their day today lives.[3]

The article is guided by the following questions: how do these women and their clergy understand empowerment? What are the spaces in which this is contested and navigated? What are the spiritual resources that these women appropriate to contest (dis)empowerment? How do women in JCC and MRH understand and conceptualize these terms? How do they navigate Christian womanhood and submission at the same time? Here below, I present data and analysis on two such ministries, namely Jubilee Christian Centre's Daughters of Zion and its Women without Limits Programme, as well as the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness (MRH) and its King's Daughters Ministry.

This article is built on research conducted by the author throughout 2016. My concern was to gather extensive data and knowledge of varied voices of lay congregants to conceptualize their worldviews and agency in respect of empowerment or disempowerment in a complex, contemporary Kenyan society. Methodologically I therefore utilized participant observations[4] in the MRH and JCC during services (including noting sermon material, presentation, performance and spatial construction); conducted semi-structured interviews with leaders and congregants; held extensive informal discussions in churches, homes and during everyday activities with Pentecostal adherents and those from other or no faiths; and triangulated with media (including social media) and oral reporting of current events. All these engagements were placed within an understanding of the contemporary literature on African Pentecostalism.

I interviewed women about their views and conceptualization of empowerment. The nature of this research necessitated spending extensive periods of time with particular churches: months or even years. Thus, the information discussed here comes from particular congregations that I know extremely well, but my conclusions are extrapolated from additional sources as well: specific research, knowledge of the literature, and ten years of working with Kenyan Pentecostalism.

Jubilee Christian Centre's (JCC) Daughters of Zion (DoZ) and Women without Limits Programme

Jubilee Christian Centre is a Neo-Pentecostal Church founded and led by Bishop Allan and Rev Kathy Kiuna. This prosperity gospel inclined church was founded in 1999 and is situated in Parklands in Nairobi with branches in Nakuru and other parts of the country. The Kiunas are big proponents of the gospel of health and prosperity, as attested by their flashy lifestyle and sermons. The JCC is a sleek Christian organization run like a business or company using marketplace rhetoric and principles of marketing to maximize profits.

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[3] The article is based on ethnographic data gathered throughout 2016 as a result of a landmark study, 'Propelled by the Spirit: Pentecostalism, Innovation and Competition in Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe'.

[4] The nature of this study lends itself to participant observations, where I observed the conduct of members of these churches: how they lived and practiced their faith, their modes of dress, how they conducted themselves daily, and how they interacted with non- members of their churches.

Similarly, the Kiunas run monthly church magazines and they produce and sell CDS, DVDS, video and music albums. Kathy is the praise and worship team leader and is also in charge of the praise and worship wing. The Kiunas heavily appropriate billboards/posters/hand bills, websites and social media: Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Church adverts are also found in local daily newspapers as well as women's magazines. The Kiunas are portrayed by the Kenyan media as a celebrity couple who are constantly called upon to give tips on how to have a happy marriage and sustain romantic relationships.

Kathy and Bp. Allan Kiuna are authors of books, namely: *Marriage That Works, Transformed Woman That You Need to Be, Daughter of Zion Celebrate Yourself,* and *Appointed with Destiny and Anointed for the Marketplace-*. All these are found in the JCC Resource Centre and Bookshop. Kathy is also a musical artist who leads praise and worship, a fashion designer, a mother of three and a grandmother of one. The Kiunas are fabulously wealthy and have caused a lot of controversy because of their flashy lifestyles.[5]

Rev Kathy Kiuna, who co-pastors with her husband, is also an Associate Pastor of JCC and the head and founder of the Daughters of Zion (DOZ) Ministry, which is the women's wing of JCC. DOZ was founded in 2003 and runs a weekly televised programme called 'Women without Limits', which is popular with women members of the church as well as non-members. From its inception in 2003, the DOZ ministry has grown from less than a dozen members to thousands of loyal women followers. The vision and mission of DOZ, according to Rev Kathy, is derived from Isaiah 62:10-12.[6] Its mandate, according to Rev Kiuna, is to 'Raise the Standard among Women' so that they can be the best they can in their homes, workplace and in every sphere of their lives. Kathy explains that God called her to minister to women: 'God gave me a passion for women. He said to me, Kathy, go raise standards for women! As a result of this call, I want to see women change for good, to believe in themselves, to fulfil their destinies. A lot of women are so beautiful but they don't see it, they let men belittle them and tell them what to do'.[7] This programme therefore aims to empower and uplift women to rise above their current circumstances. In her own words, Kathy had this to say: 'Given that women in Africa have been criticized, ridiculed and looked down upon, women need to be supported to raise above all these. They need to understand that they are not secondary and that they matter'.

Focusing on uplifting women, the ministry's monthly and annual convention and seminars attract thousands of women. This arm of the church ministry gathers up to 4,000 women every last Saturday of the month from all walks of life to discuss issues affecting not only their spiritual life and needs but also their marital, social, economic and emotional needs. DOZ has since expanded to include daughters of Zion Cooperative Society, a savings and loans organization which aims to provide cheap loans to start and run small to medium businesses.

Kathy is also a TV host who runs the 'Women without Limits' TV talk show broadcast on Nation Television (NTV) every Sunday 4 pm, and on Trinity Broadcasting Network Family Television on Mondays at 8:30 pm; and a Daughters of Zion mentorship class on

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[5] This information was gleaned from excerpts of an interview of Rev Kiuna in a leading women's magazine, *True Love,* by Damaris Irungu: 'Incredible Journey, Kathy Kiuna on her Critics, Marriage, Divorce, Faith and Being herself,' True *Love East Africa,* November 2011, Carol Mandi Publications, pp. 42-47.

[6] See for example an advertising feature: 'The History of Jubilee Christian Church: Celebrating 11 years of God's Faithfulness: to God be the Glory,' *Saturday Nation*, January 30, 2010.

[7] Kathy Kiuna interview on Citizen TV on 20th June 2010, 9am.

the same channel. The 'Women without Limits' programme is a pseudo-motivation and talk show in which women sit down around a living room kind of set up to narrate and share their personal experiences and journeys in life and how this programme and Kathy Kiuna in particular has helped them walk this journey. The programme gives women a forum to air their views, a space for women grappling with various issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), wife beating, abuse, lack of financial security and many others such themes. In this programme women meet to share stories of resilience and hope, survival, personal reformation, entrepreneurship and business and a raft of many issues.

Besides these weekly and monthly meetings, Kathy also hosts Daughters of Zion annual conferences and symposia. The monthly meetings, as well as the annual conferences dubbed Women Without Limits International Conferences, attract local and international Pentecostal clergy who are invited to come minister and preach to these largely women-centred meetings (with men being allowed into the meetings for two days while six days are exclusively for women). These meetings are the locus for women empowerment, largely through spiritual resources and motivational language and teachings.

Heavily repeated terms used in these meetings include 'transformation,' 'excellence,' 'empowerment,' 'anointing,' 'blessed, healed,' 'raised,' 'filled with the Holy Spirit,' 'set free,' 'set apart' and 'released'.[8] Meetings, conferences and seminars feature titles such as 'Models of Destiny' 'Women of Excellence' 'Women without Limits' 'Women of Fire' 'Spirit-filled Women,' 'Daughters of Zion', Daughters of God' and 'Daughters of Faith'.[9] Women without Limits empowers women through motivation speak, affirmation through spiritual resources and scriptures, a kind of empowerment using spiritual capital and religious language. Thus, sermons may explore the means by which women can overcome challenges, but such issues are essentially family related and concerned with getting by in circumstances as they are currently structured in Kenyan society (Deacon and Parsitau 2017).

Sermons are therefore built around issues such as how to handle husbands, children, house-helps, finances, and wife inheritance. But it is also a space for confessional testimonies built around themes of spiritual transformation. Frequently women testify about how they experienced a spiritual turn around as a result of joining this ministry or participating in the church activities especially women focused activities such as the 'Women without Limits' programme and annual symposia.

It is in this manner that the Reverend Kathy Kiuna states that she has a passion for women and wants them 'to believe in themselves, to fulfil their destinies'.[10] These confessional sessions act as sort of therapeutic spaces while the talk show offers these women space to speak up, to ventilate, to cry and lean on Kathy to let go of their pain. Marie Griffith (1997) has argued that church spheres, particularly fellowships, conferences and other such meetings, provide women with space to sob and ventilate in the presence

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[8] Field notes 2016 gleaned during the Women without Limits Annual Convention, 30th Aug-6th September 2016.

[9] This information was gleaned from field notes and participant observations while attending and viewing 'Women without Limits' TV programmes as well as annual conferences throughout 2016.

[10] See, for example, an advertising feature on 'The History of Jubilee Christian Church: Celebrating 11 years of God's Faithfulness: to God be the Glory', *Saturday Nation*, January 30th, 2010. Kathy describes her passion for women as a calling from God which is so strong she never remained the same.

of a community of loving women or a shared sisterhood where there is support and group solidarity.

However, the programmes appear to focus more on Rev Kathy, who no doubt is the star of the programme, than providing women with real solutions to their problems – say, for example, bringing in psychiatrists and therapists to take these women through their pain and trauma in a professional manner. In fact, Kathy's role in the programme is to probe and ask questions to these women who can sometimes share very harrowing experiences that they have been through. But these accounts are then framed as testimonies of women who have experienced a spiritual release thanks to the prayers and encouragement of Rev Kiuna.

The testimonies appear to legitimize Kathy's place in the ministry as an anointed servant of God with women's issues at heart. It seemed to me that these women participated in the programme to speak about very sensitive issues only to validate Kathy's place as an anointed servant of God whom God has used to bring healing to hundreds of women, rather than focusing on tangible issues that these women continue to grapple with. During participant observation, I noted that although several women narrated harrowing and in some cases disturbing narratives of abuse, including gender and sexual based violence, there was no evidence that this programme provided tangible social-psycho support and therapy for these women who have heavy issues at heart. At the same time, and while the programme granted women space to ventilate, the programme did not scratch the surface to tackle real and tangible issues of empowerment, namely power and exclusion, social and structural injustice, that continue to perpetuate GBV, poverty, inequality, patriarchy, marginalization and dependency on welfare. Instead, Kathy focuses on non-issues such as beauty, class, loving and esteeming oneself, as clearly demonstrated by her concerns below: 'This is the passion and calling God has given me for women. I want to see women change for good, to believe in themselves to fulfil their destinies'.[11]

To Kathy, a lot of women are so beautiful but they don't see it, so they let men belittle them and tell them what to do. Many women are looking outside for fulfilment, but that is wrong. She says: 'As a woman you should love yourself and be a go-getter. Many women are looking outside for fulfilment, but that is wrong. Whatever you need to fulfil you is on the inside. Don't limit yourself to what you can become! Find yourself as a woman and go up!'[12]

The kind of empowerment promoted by Kathy limits women into the home and private sphere, the kind of empowerment where women understand their destinies in the family: such destinies are to be wives in second place to a husband who 'is the head of the home'. Overall, Kiuna states that her aim is to assist women in making 'a man comfortable in his place [because then] he will let you be comfortable in yours'.[13]

In this case, Kathy's empowerment is that of a woman empowered to submit, a woman who knows her place in her home. In appealing to women's notions of Christian

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[11] This information was gleaned from Kathy Interview with Lillian Muli's TV programme 'Women and Leadership' on Citizen TV 30/8/2016 Prime Time News.
[12] This information was gleaned from incepts of an interview of Rev Kiuna in a leading women magazine, *True Love,* by Damaris Irungu: 'Incredible Journey, Kathy Kiuna on her Critics, Marriage, Divorce, Faith and Being herself', *True Love East Africa,* November 2011, 42-47.
[13] Irungu, 'Incredible Journey'.

womanhood and navigating the portrayal of women by the church as defined by her position in the family as submissive to the men in their lives, 'Women without Limits' provides a safe space for women to find shelter within the church from explicitly oppressive manifestations of the kind of patriarchy that Kathy promotes. For example, women who are victims of gender-based violence find the sense of belonging or sisterhood that is generated amongst members of the church, with this sense being built on devotion to God rather than the husbands. Her teachings seem at odds with women empowerment that goes beyond the simplistic motives of helping women find themselves and loving themselves and making themselves beautiful so that they can make their men comfortable in their space, so they would let you be comfortable in yours.

At the same time, Kathy's opulent life is in contrast with the women she preaches to and aspires to empower. Kathy projects the image of an immaculate woman with an impeccable sense of style, a woman of God who lives large, has a beautiful family, a romantic spouse, plays golf, drives sleek cars, leaves in upmarket and high-end Nairobi, and holidays in South Africa and the Caribbean. She exudes class, power, grace, beauty, style, riches and images the woman who has arrived.

In this sense, she represents the 21st century modern Kenyan woman who has made a complete break with the past, a past characterized by poverty and luck and struggle. She appeals to the middle-class women aspiring to arrive like her even though many can only aspire and dream of living her life. A number of the women I spoke with were very critical of Kathy's teaching and lifestyle. Many felt that Kathy cannot relate with their present circumstances characterized by poverty, suffering, injustice, violence, abuse, lack and brokenness. Sally had this to say during an interview:

> Kathy Kiuna is fake, lacks empathy and is out of touch with ordinary women's sufferings. Her programme is not meant for women like me. Her open opulence and her story that reads like that of rags to riches is not my story. She cannot understand me or my issues. When I see her interviewing women on TV I feel sad for those women. If I can see through her fakeness, why can't they?[14]

Yet, the 'Women without Limits' programmes remain popular with women congregants who find the teachings and sermons in this programme empowering to them as individuals. Akoth, a postgraduate student and a staunch follower of Kathy Kiuna's 'Women without Limits' TV programmes and a frequent participant in the monthly seminars and conferences, credits Kathy's teachings for giving her a new lease of life. This is how she described her experience:

> Before I joined JCC churches and started attending 'Women without Limits' monthly meetings and annual conferences, I was at the verge of collapse. You see, I was sexually abused as a child by my cousin and my parents did nothing about it despite me informing them what happened. I grew up bitter and depressed and struggled with lack of self-esteem and confidence. I just got by but I have suffered depression for a long time. When I stared attending 'Women without Limits', I experienced spiritual transformation and I began to develop self-esteem. I learnt to let go of my pain and forgive my abuser. Now I am a better person and I am

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[14] Sally (not her real name) is a house girl who leaves in Nairobi and used to patronize DOZ meetings whom I interviewed in June 2016 in Nairobi Parklands.

indebted to mum [Kathy] for giving me my life back though her life transforming sermons. This is why I always plan to attend this meeting.[15]

Others explained to me how Kathy's personal story ministered to them in deep and personal ways that their lives would one day change to look like Kathy's. Others spoke about the power of the gospel of prosperity that Kathy and her husband preach and promote. Many women explained that it has given them aspirations and hope for financial independence. Pentecostal churches offer women with an alternative community and space in the midst of personal and family instability, violence and economic hardships. It seemed to me that the gospel of prosperity, which promises health and wealth to the faithful, legitimizes and supports women's economic independence. It has a message relevant to the realities of life for a section of Kenyan women and provides for their individual needs, thereby making it a promising movement for the advancement of women in Africa.

In the case of Rev. Kathy's ministry, she represents a break with the past, and a new beginning with modernity. This, it seems to me, is the reason why 'Women without Limits' programmes essentially appeal to Nairobi middle-class women who desire modernity and want a complete break with the traditional past, while women of humble backgrounds cannot relate with her teachings and sermons. Yet, and irrespective of these women's life circumstances, Kathy's teachings and sermons appear to shape women's spiritual and personal lives in ways that seem invisible but which personal narratives of women followers of this programme believe have impacted them in deep and powerful ways.

Throughout field research, dozens of women explained to me how the teachings and sermons by Rev. Kathy, particularly in the 'Women without Limits' programme, personally spoke to them or helped them understand and value themselves better, gave them an identity that changed how they defined themselves, gave them self-value, self-esteem, self-love and to understand their place in the universe. And while many respondents were divided as to the impact of this ministry on their lives, there is no doubt that DOZ and 'Women without Limits' has given Kathy Kiuna space to grow as a pastor and as a minister independent of her husband. It is strategic for Pentecostal churches to have a women's wing in the church for two reasons First, this platform has given Kathy tremendous visibility, authority, voice and power to shape not just her own theology and message but also to grow her leadership skills and acumen. Secondly, it makes sense for churches to have a women's ministry for a number of reasons; women are important to any church in terms of numbers. Numbers translate into more tithes and offerings, but also allow the pastors' wives space to spread her own influence and curve out a niche for herself away from her husband. Rev. Kathy's DOZ has indeed enabled her to carve her on space and path away from her husband.

The Ministry of Repentance and Holiness (MHH)

The Ministry of Repentance and Holiness (MRH), is a Neo-Pentecostal movement that burst into the Kenyan public sphere in 2004. This strange but controversial ministry was founded by self-proclaimed Prophet David Edward Owour, a scientist turned preacher and puritanical moralist who has made issues of sex and sexuality the central message of his theology. In this ministry, sex or 'sins of immorality' as it is normally referred to takes

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[15] Interview with Akoth, (not her real name) on June 2016 in Nakuru.

centre stage as reflected in a series of highly sexualized and highly publicized sermons and church discourses. Here, sex is also categorized as a grievous sin which attracts the wrath of a vengeful God while women are depicted as temptresses and their bodies portrayed as sites and loci for sin and sinfulness (Parsitau 2015; 2016).

Empowered Women: Female Spiritual Leadership in the MRH

The MRH is very popular with women folk who find its message of repentance, holiness and moral probity attractive. Also, the church is good to women, most of all single women: widows, divorcees, single unmarried mothers and others. In fact, women occupy a visible public role in this ministry. Many are ordained bishops, pastors, deacons, heads of altars and disciples/apostles, and evangelists. Currently, the ministry has already appointed twelve women bishops, serving as heads of regions such as counties and districts.[16]

Some counties are huge, both geographically and in terms of the number of districts they include and large concentrations of altars within them. There are perhaps thousands of female pastors who lead hundreds of altars (as churches are referred to in this movement) dotting much of the country be it in rural or urban centres. Women are also empowered to become spiritual leaders who adjudicate cases of conflict between members in various altars. Women also sing in altars, lead worship services and crusades, provide ushering services, and translate sermons into Swahili for the prophet, who preaches in English during large repentance and holiness crusades and rallies.

One such woman clergyperson, Bishop Gladys, is among the 12 women bishops heading large counties. Gladys is currently commanding a country which is made up of five districts and 80 altars. Bishop Gladys, who also doubles up as a business woman and an interior designer, described to me her responsibilities as a bishop. These include overseeing and providing leadership to over 300 pastors serving under her and coordinating the activities of all the altars under her care.

Other such roles and activities performed by Bishop Gladys and other deacons serving as heads of counties include weekly preaching, discipleship and mentorship to the youth, providing leadership, counselling couples and those planning to get married, officiating at weddings and funerals, presiding over the Lord's table or the Holy Communion, and presiding over activities and programmes for windows, orphans and the vulnerable.

Asked why the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness is popular with women, Bishop Gladys had this to say: 'The reason women love this ministry is because it embraces and accepts women irrespective of their present circumstances. Women therefore feel loved, accepted and not judged. The church also takes care of windows and orphans and the vulnerable.'[17]

Bishop Gladys further explained that the church services always have two offering baskets; one for widows, orphans and the vulnerable and for paying utility bills for the staff working in the altars. Every once a month she explained that they have contributions for the widows and vulnerable women's basket. After the collection, all the monies are banked and the altars apportion the money to those very needy women who need to pay

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[16] According to Bishop Gladys, Overseer of Nakuru County during a series of interviews held between June and September 2016 in Nakuru Town.

[17] Personal interviews with Bishop Gladys 2016 in Nakuru.

school fees for their children, pay hospital bills and buy food and other supplies. This action and undertaking makes the ministry very popular with women because it takes care of their welfare.

At the same time, the fact that this ministry does not judge single women: divorcees, those that never married but have children, widows and other such categories in a society that frowns upon single women makes this ministry attractive to women. Women are accepted and embraced just the way they are. This is how Bishop Gladys explained it to me during an interview:

> This church picked me up from the trenches, cleaned me up and gave me a new beginning. I was a divorced mother of six and a victim of gender-based violence. My ex-husband beat me senseless and nearly broke my spine. For two years, I was confined to my bed unable to do anything. I suffered horrific abuse: physically, emotionally and psychologically. I made a decision to walk out of my marriage with my six children. I had nothing to carry with me and I went into the unknown. I was hurting, raw, bitter, abused, poor and vulnerable. I hand no self-esteem or confidence or self-worth. I joined this ministry and it completely transformed my life. I was embraced and welcomed to the church just the way I was. No one judged me, I felt accepted just as I was and this comforted my heart in ways I cannot explain. This has made me love the Lord and I will serve him for ever. Today, I have a new story, a new life, a new song and I am somebody. The church picked me from the dustbin to this comfortable space I am in. Today, I am in a good place. Bless the Name of the Lord.[18]

Bishop Gladys' testimony attests to the kind of personal empowerment and transformation that this ministry accords to women. It is the kind of personal transformation that visibly changed them from the inside and gave them both spiritual and monetary resources to rebuild their shattered lives. So, this is a different kind of empowerment, one that speaks about changed lives, valuing them and rebuilding broken lives.

This ministry also grants women tremendous opportunities to serve and find meaning. For example, they sing in church, lead worship services in altars (and crusades as well as providing ushering services during large repentance and holiness crusades and rallies. Thus, national altars (gatherings such as crusades and prayer rallies) become not just sites for the formation of a sort of shared sisterhood and identity making but also and more importantly sites of holiness and gendered geographies, spaces where women find meaning, acceptance, and value as well as spaces to sharpen their leadership roles. Here they learn to speak in public, learn to lead praise and worship, and develop skills and acumen such as public speaking, preaching, counting of the monies they collect and distributing them according to the needy and deserving of cases.

Yet beneath the veneer of spiritual empowerment for female followers of the ministry are complexities and tensions and constraints manifested in a subtle control of women's bodies, sexuality and relationships.

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[18] Face to face interviews with Bishop Gladys August 2016 in Nakuru.

Limited Women: Women's Dress Code, Gender, Sexed Bodies and Patriarchal Imaginaries in the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness

An important distinguishing feature of the MRH is the distinct way in which women followers dress to embody holiness. Women's bodies and dress not only take centre stage in this ministry but are also linked to the theme of repentance and holiness. Women followers of the MRH have embraced a unique dress code characterized by long flowing and loose dresses, ostensibly to embody holiness as taught by their Prophet. Besides, women are also urged to embrace certain manners, mores and practices that are deemed appropriate and of value to religious life.

The dress code forbids the wearing of sleeveless tops, hemlines at or above the knee, slit skirts that expose the knees and thighs, open shoes, bare legs and uncovered heads. Women are taught to conceal their bodies by dressing in this particularly conservative manner. They are required to cover up not just to embody holiness but also so as not to lead men into sexual temptation. Such control over dressing and sexual needs is in clear conflict with ideas of women's empowerment.

How the Prophet's women followers dress is dictated by his teachings. For example, when he speaks about women's bodies and dressing, he often quotes Hebrews: 12:14, 'Make efforts to be holy, for without holiness, no one will see the Lord!' He teaches his female members that their bodies are 'Temples of the Holy Spirit' and must therefore be kept clean and covered at all times. Women must cover their bodies also in order that the Holy Spirit may dwell in them. This is what the Prophet told women followers in one prayer rally attended by this writer: 'When you cover your body, you are saying: I respect and honour my body which is the temple of the Lord. So make sure you do not defile the House of the Holy Spirit by dressing indecently.'[19]

In another sermon, Prophet Owour decried the manner in which 'current fashions and fads' have rendered most of today's Christian women 'virtually nude'.[20] In response to such teachings women in the MRH have evolved a unique dress style that is designed to cover their entire bodies. By covering their bodies, these women not only embody holiness but also protect themselves from men's roving eyes. They are told that in causing men to lust after them, they would sin against God, the Holy Spirit and their own bodies, which would then prevent them from entering the Kingdom of God. Thus, women must dress holy before the lord and at all times guard their purity and morals. Portions of the scriptures are often quoted to drive the message home. For instance, Romans 12:1 states: 'The Lord is beseeching you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable before the Lord.'

To further legitimize his teachings on holiness and women's dress, the Prophet likes to portray himself as one who speaks and converses directly with God at all times. This is what he says:

> The Lord also spoke to me very clearly about the abhorrent and state of immoral dressing in the church beginning with the pastors, pastor's wives, worship leaders, worship teams, and hence the congregation. The playing of *ndombolo* dance (a kind of dance from Central Africa) in the church as a form of occult worship in Kenyan

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[19] Sermon preached by Owuor on August 6, 2013 at Afraha Stadium in Nakuru.
[20] 'The Man Who Baptized Raila Odinga. Exclusive Interview with David Owuor', *Arise Africa Magazine*, special edition, 2009: 12.

churches and the dressing of worship dance troupes in T-shirts exposing their navels, playing of rap music, the perming and frying of male worship leaders' hair, including the punching and putting a shiny ring on the nose and at times earrings, these things could not go without catching the negative attention of the Lord. These things defile the altar of the lord.

The Prophet continues:

> Whoever looks at a woman and lusts at her has already fallen into adultery. Pastors have fathered children in church and there are many Sunday school kids fathered by their pastors. You just need to look at these kids' ears to see who they resemble! This is an abomination before the Lord![21]

It is such kinds of teachings that influence how women, and to some extent men, dress in the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness. Holiness is promoted as the only means through which people will enter the kingdom of God. Consequently, women's dress and bodies have become not just sites of contestation, debate and discourse about morality/immorality but also arenas of patriarchal surveillance, control and power, regulation and instrumentalisation, and signifiers of meaning and spirituality (Parsitau 2015a &b).

From the foregoing discussion, it seems apparent to me that women's bodies and dress are being used as sites of protest against perceived moral and spiritual decay. MRH women submit to the authority of the prophet and his teachings on patriarchy and submission. His teachings and sermons influence their lives in very personal ways, how they dress, personal grooming, and holy dressing that is not worldly. These women are called daughters of the King and holy sisters who are born again by grace, children of God, preparing to be ruptured soon when Jesus Christ the messiah comes.

Thus, in the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness, women are bound together by a common faith and dress code but also bound in submission to church authority, teachings and rituals. The complexities of women's material and spiritual church work and its articulation with liberating and constraining doctrines is an interesting dimension of this particular ministry. At the same time women's majority status coupled with demonstrative worship practices places women's revealed bodies at the heart of religious life. In mixed services women face the danger of accusations of inappropriate, challenging behaviour (Parsitau 2015: Deacon and Parsitau 2017).

Women in the MRH must conduct themselves like holy daughters. Holiness is understood in a twin sense: inward and outward. Moral or inward holiness consists of righteous living, thought and speech, guided and powered by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which includes abstaining from sex especially in the case of unmarried men and women. Practical or outward holiness, on the other hand, involves maintaining certain standards and dictates, among other things, modest apparel and the maintenance of gender distinctions.

Women believers are urged to dress modestly, with restraint and limitations; thus, some forms of appearance are considered off limits. Certain items of clothing are considered immoral, indecent and unacceptable, and by wearing them a woman is said to

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[21] 'The Man Who Baptized Raila Odinga,' 13.

show dishonour and disrespect to God. Miniskirts, tight pants, trousers or jeans, short dresses, sleeveless tops and so on are strictly forbidden for female followers of the church. In addition, women generally are expected not to wear makeup or jewellery; they must cut their hair short or keep it covered.

Women are urged not to dress like men or wear men's clothing because it is clearly started in Gen 22:5 that women should not wear men's clothes. Further, tight pants or trousers are strictly discouraged because they outline the female anatomy which leads men to temptation and lust. In particular while attending church service as well as Bible studies meetings, women are urged to dress holy so as not to cause the terrible sin of sexual immorality. On the other hand, men must be clean shaven at all times and must not wear tight pants, jeans or shorts. They must always dress officially in suits and always be neat and clean.

They are also expected not to watch secular movies or television programs that are not spiritual as this is thought to corrupt their bodies, minds and morals. With the current social trends all over Africa due to globalization, there have been major shifts in how young women and men dress. Yet in this Ministry certain modes and styles of dress are considered immoral. By submitting to the authority of the Prophet and his teachings, women must therefore follow the stringent dress codes established by the MRH so that they may embody holiness.

Women are also taught that they are princesses, daughters of the king, and must carry themselves as such. Many of Prophet Owour's female followers prefer to wear purple because the colour signifies royalty. The Prophet himself wears robes of fine white linen and dons a long flowing beard reminiscent of the Jewish patriarchs of the Old Testament. Jessica Meuni, a member of MHR, explains that the way the Prophet dresses is dictated to him by God, through dreams and visions. At times, it is suggested that God personally shows him a picture of the clothes he should wear to a crusade or rally. Even his long beard is a command from God and the reason for it remains a secret between him and God.

Holy Ghost anointing, prayer, testimony, song and all manner of worship and religious life all create definitive markers of what is deemed acceptable Christian holy life in this Ministry. Given that external signifiers of holiness have been codified most rigorously on women's bodies, religious practice provides significant sites for aesthetic analysis. By adopting stringent tenets of comportment and dress, this Ministry actually restricts women's sartorial choices.

On the other hand, through empowerment and preaching, the Prophet advances a remarkable theology of inclusion that places women, including those who are single or widowed, at the heart of his Ministry. The Ministry therefor offers women space for shared sisterhood bound together by a common spirituality. He promotes a sort of teaching in which women go back to the past because modernity is evil and unholy and women must dress to embody virtue and holiness. For some women, especially elderly and middle-aged women, this represents a sort of moral empowerment for saved daughters who must cover up for holiness. When I asked university students who are members of this ministry why they dressed the way they did, they explained that they have been taught by the church to cover up for their future husbands. 'I am covering up for the one' said Jessica, a student at a public university.

Church gatherings, crusades, meetings and fellowships become therefore not just sites for the formation of a sort of shared sisterhood and identity making but also, and more importantly, sites of holiness and gendered geographies. Here women are bound together by a common faith and dress code but also by submission to church authority, teachings and rituals. By submitting to the protocols of gendered spaces, women in this church show their conviction and faith in church doctrine which strengthens both their individual religious grounding as well as the Ministry's corporate identity as a holy body. Women's adherence to tenets regarding dress and gendered space strengthens individual and community spiritual identity because the counter binary or agreeable contradiction of revelation is always in play. Their bodies actualize the merging of material, temporal and spatial realms.

This church ferments women with a feeling of belonging to a shared sisterhood of holy daughters. I witnessed ways in which clothing marks and connects these church women in public crusades, prayer groups and camps, in church premises and even in the workplace. These women so to speak *wear* holiness. Looking over the sea of attendees in a huge crusade, their distinctive style (although individualized according to taste and size) is striking and their majority status provides compelling and reinforced evidence of obedience to Owour's messages and teachings. It also speaks of his influence among his thousands of followers. Owour's female followers dress in white, signifying purity and embodying holiness. Their cohesive body of shared sisterhood is bound together by an almost uniform dress code.

In this church, as in many patriarchal Kenyan cultures, women's dress is an indicator of holiness and righteousness and female bodies are seen as locales of sex, sin, immorality and pollution. Holiness and righteousness are rubrics that are markers of self-identity, and a woman's appearance serves as a key indicator of these qualities within her. According to Jessica, women must be holy at all times: they must watch out how they dress and sit even at home, because the Lord can show up anytime. Being decently dressed and covered at all times and places shows respect, honour and the fear of God. This is what one lady said to me in an interview: 'If I am a true daughter of God, then my dressing must reflect my holiness and righteousness. My clothes must be truly born again and the words that come out of my mouth must be measured'.

Despite women's majority status in the MHR movement and demonstrative worship practices, beneath the veneer of their spiritual empowerment are complexities, tensions and constraints manifested in a subtle control of women bodies, sexuality and relationships. Pentecostal performance thus represents restriction and bounding of women's behaviour within patriarchal expectations and control. Women, who perform gifts of the spirit or demonstrate initiative, are subject to significant church censure through the control of their bodies and personal freedoms and liberties in respect of dress. Thus, Pentecostalism plays an important role in women's attempts to protect themselves but does not challenge and in fact maintains gender structuration. Furthermore, whilst we can see the role of male control over females in these actions, behaviours and performances, of particular importance here is the extent to which women submit themselves to male authority, in this case that of the prophet.

Church Spaces as Loci for Empowerment or Disempowerment? Analysis and Discussions

From the above discussions, it is clear that Neo-Pentecostal churches offer women many opportunities to serve in their respective churches. It also accords them with a caring support network as well as opportunities for self-development. For example, women, who because of their poverty and personal circumstances find themselves excluded from other self-help groups, find a place in these churches like we have seen in the case of Bishop Gladys and women in the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness. This observation is validated by many studies that have shown that one of the strengths of Pentecostal Christianity is that it is a more inclusive religion that facilitates the participation of marginalized groups (Soothill 2006, Gill 1990, Martin 1991).

Not only do women who patronize these churches receive social, spiritual and psychological support, they also feel affirmed and their dignity upheld. This source of personal validation is especially important for women who are sick, widowed, childless, divorced, or accused of witchcraft. Whereas single mothers, divorced and separated women are rarely given positions of responsibility in mainline churches, the Neo-Pentecostal churches such as MRH ordain such women and give them other church responsibilities as demonstrated by the case of Bishop Gladys which serves as an encouragement to such women that even if society frowns on them, they can rise above that to become respected religious visionaries. In these churches, it is acknowledged that spiritual power is available to both men and women and that both are empowered to teach, preach and found churches as long as they have been called by God and endowed with charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, worship, prayer and fellowship also provide these women with opportunities for spiritual rejuvenation and escape from the drudgery of life. As already highlighted above, worship in these churches is participatory, refreshing and exuberant and in many cases led by women. Worship services also become loci where every persons' needs are mediated in the context of prayer, singing and dancing. This creates a sense of belonging and community.

Through prayer, women are able to have a sense of release and relief even as women freely express themselves in worship, by giving testimonies, leading praise and worship and sometimes-experiencing pneumatic and ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, trances, visions, prophesying and dancing. Here, their spirituality accords them space and the freedom to express themselves, disclose their inner feelings and tensions in a context devoid of restrictions.

Scholars have noted the therapeutic roles of prayer in the lives of women in these churches. During prayer and worship services and when gathered for their annual conferences, fellowships, cell group meetings, or Bible study groups, these women share their stories of sufferings and restoration through confessional testimonies. The meetings allow them to disclose their inner life among generally supportive women.

This opportunity has therapeutic effects on women who find time and space to ventilate in a context of sisterly support. These meetings also provide moments for entertainment and relaxation. It has been argued that since women do not have the same social outlets as men, the church and women groups become centres for socialization, welfare association and building networks of trust. The churches not only provide

fellowship and spiritual support, they also offer solidarity in times of need (Griffith 1997, Parsitau 2015).

From the foregoing, it is clear that the two churches provide a caring network of support to women and opportunities for personal development. Within these churches, women forge networks of social, financial and spiritual support that may not be available in other places. Gaining moral authority and boosting self-esteem improves women's chances of developing activities beyond the home and widen their networks of sociability, thereby encouraging female individuation. Here, women not only exchange ideas on how to run their families, but they also share access to empowering information like legal counsel, how to conduct business and even to lead a prayerful life. For these reasons, church spaces are not just spaces for worship but also act as civic spaces as well as spaces to access legal aid and advice. Nevertheless, both churches do not scratch the surface to condemn the social, economic and structural issues that continue to perpetuate gender inequality that limits women empowerment in patriarchal societies.

Conclusion

In this article I have examined how different categories of Pentecostal women struggle to navigate between empowerment and patriarchy in a complex and contested social and cultural context and milieu. We have shown how married Pentecostal women have carved space for themselves within their churches and how some, such as Rev. Kathy Kiuna, have used that space to raise up major enterprises such as 'Women without Limits'. At the same time, I have shown how limited this empowerment is, even for Kathy Kiuna, who maintains that though she is empowered, she also knows her place in her home. Hence, I point to the limitations, dilemmas and paradoxes that Pentecostal women clergy face as they try to navigate and mediate between empowerment and submission. Women such as Kathy essentially submit to their husbands despite, or perhaps in keeping with, certain rhetoric of empowerment that is found in sermons and teachings in mixed ministries and those exclusively for women alike. The latter in particular help women to survive in a heavily patriarchal society but do not challenge the structural issues that predominate in Kenyan society. In order to consider the importance of this situation, I argue that women in Kenya operate as 'sub-oppressors' and that 'the very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped' so that they act in ways demanded by males who hold positions of power within patriarchal hierarchies. In this manner Pentecostal women can also be seen as enforcing the wishes of men, and this finding would at the least represent a challenge to those who portray Pentecostalism as offering a new equality of opportunity to all its adherents.

Equally though, wider processes of cultural hegemony can be seen as Kenyan Pentecostals attempt to address contemporary urban challenges such as giving meaning to human life, while simultaneously equipping themselves to be resourceful in meeting diverse challenges. This is not to suggest that they are successful in addressing the challenges in their lives by changing their circumstances. Instead, the mechanisms employed allow some limited protection from rumour, judgment and exclusion – rather than opening up new modes of existence in which these attacks are avoided, or those who hold such attitudes have their opinions and understandings remade (Deacon and Parsitau 2017). It seems to me then that Kenyan Pentecostalism is a complex mix of empowering and disempowering standpoints. For example, women's ministries promote a sort of feel-good motivation rhetoric but fail to bolster or support challenges that women might make

in taking a stand against a heavily patriarchal culture. I wish to emphasise that the nature of this culture can be viewed in the light of a dominant Christian conception of gender roles and structuration.

Understandings of homes, families and individual gender roles have undergone significant changes in Kenya and across Africa, in part due to transformation in modes of production, but significantly, I think, in response to conceptions of Christianity. As mentioned above, a variety of authors have engaged in disputes as to whether predominant understandings of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christianity with regards to women are positive or negative. However, there is little dispute as to whether they have produced changes and are significant in terms of gender conceptualisation.

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Religious Collaboration Enhances Patient Satisfaction among Faith-Based Groups and Health Facilities in Western Kenya

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Abstract

HIV and AIDS continue to be a major challenge in Kenya, especially in the Western region where, coincidentally, public and private health facilities are sparse, but with a relatively high number of faith based health facilities. This study seeks to examine whether and how collaboration among faith-based groups and health facilities in the provision of HIV prevention and treatment services for women ages 15-49 years is associated with high patient satisfaction. Using an embedded multiple-case study design, we purposively selected seven faith-based health facilities in Kakamega County. We conducted 33 in-depth interviews with HIV-positive individuals, 14 key informant interviews with health providers; and 8 focus group discussions with members of the community in the health facility catchment area. The findings indicated that, when health facilities demonstrated collaboration, there was a positive impact on patient satisfaction. Specifically, collaborations between faith-based organisations resulted in the improvement of HIV services.

KEY WORDS: HIV, Faith Based Health Facilities, Collaboration, Patient Satisfaction

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

Introduction

After more than thirty years, HIV continues to pose a great challenge to humanity. Nowhere has suffered more than sub-Saharan Africa, where AIDS has flourished (Mombe et al., 2012). The progress achieved over the past three decades is being threatened by donor fatigue and an apparent competition for scarce resources among faith-based groups and health facilities. This problem is further compounded by the dependence of faith-based health facilities on donor funding and government subsidies for their operations, which have declined over the years.

According to the 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS), Kenya continues to grapple with the challenge of HIV and AIDS with wide disparities in HIV prevalence across the country ranging from 0.2% to 27.1% (KDHS, 2014). The highest prevalence rates are clustered around Lake Victoria; however, rates in western Kenya remain high as well (range: 3.5% to 7.1%). In addition, western Kenya is particularly vulnerable because 66% of the population lives below the poverty line (Muga et al., 2005). There has also been notable inequality in the distribution of health services in Kenya. Most health facilities are found in Central province, while the least are in Western and Nyanza provinces. To compensate for the lack of public and private health facilities, there is a relatively higher number of faith-based health facilities in Western and Nyanza provinces (Berman, 2001; Wamai, 2009).

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that faith-based organizations provide approximately 40% of all health services in sub-Saharan Africa (cite). In remote locales and in areas affected by political crisis or conflict, faith communities are often the only functioning service providers (Olivier and Wodon, 2010). In Kenya, the government and the private sector account for 60% of the health services, while the Christian health service providers account for 40% of health service provision (ACHAP, 2008; Hafner, 2009). Both Catholic and Protestant health service provision date back to the early twentieth century. Currently, the Christian Health Association of Kenya (CHAK; Protestant) and the Kenya Episcopal Conference (KEC) oversee 970 health facilities accounting for 10 million patient contacts per year (AMHF, 2015).

Furthermore, due to the diverse religious presence in the Western province of Kenya, there are divergent ethical teachings on HIV, for example, whether condom usage is a morally acceptable prevention measure for HIV infection. A study conducted by Aluku (2015) revealed that Catholics are more prone to the risk of HIV infection as compared to their Protestant and Muslim counterparts. Because the Catholic Church does not permit the use of condoms and conventional birth spacing methods, whereas the Protestant churches do, this study found that the Catholic Church is silent on the use of condoms among people living with HIV and AIDS, including discordant couples (i.e., couples where one partner is HIV-infected and the other is not). With these differing approaches, it is essential to assess whether these teachings create a competitive or collaborative atmosphere in the uptake of HIV prevention and treatment services at faith based health facilities. Lehrer (2004) notes that the extent to which religion may influence individual's behaviour may depend on the specific doctrines and beliefs of a particular religious group and the extent to which the individuals are committed to their religion and have integrated denominational teachings.

In order to account for the cultural, religious, and political environments as determinants of health service utilization, we employ the Behavioural Model of Health Service Use, which combines elements of the external environment with attributes of the health care system (Andersen, 1995). The theoretical model of health service use will allow us to embed HIV prevention and treatment services in the context of a theological framework that emphasizes liberation through collaboration and innovation. In order to test our hypothesis in this context, our study looks retrospectively at the successes and failures of faith-based groups and health facilities in delivery of HIV prevention and treatment services.

Hypothesis

This study is designed to address the impact of religious collaboration on African society, specifically among faith-based groups and health facilities in western Kenya. In the context of health service delivery, it is critical that there be religious collaboration (not competition) in order to improve patient satisfaction with health services, restore the social fabric of communities, and enable innovative strategies to strengthen HIV prevention and treatment services within faith-based groups and health facilities. In the spirit of the dialogue of action (i.e., when Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people), religious institutions that work together to serve the common good of society have the potential to have a greater impact on HIV prevention and treatment. Competition and division can arise among faith-based institutions due to doctrinal discrepancies regarding how to handle social issues, such as sexual behaviour.

Specifically, we seek to examine how collaboration among faith-based groups and health facilities in the provision of HIV prevention and treatment services for women ages 15-49 years (and their partners) is associated with high patient satisfaction. It has been shown that integrating care for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV with other maternal health services was critical to the satisfaction of HIV-positive women in Malawi (Levy, 2009). This evidence suggests that better coordinated care will improve women's satisfaction with health services. Therefore, coordinated efforts are needed to reach women most in need as well as follow up with those who are HIV-positive. Collaboration among religious institutions helps coordinate care as well as reduce the competition for funding to provide necessary services, which allows providers to be better compensated, more satisfied with their jobs, and engender a better relationship with those who are seeking their services. We posit that collaboration among religious institutions to provide HIV prevention and treatment services leads to greater patient satisfaction because the services are better coordinated, patient follow-up is more consistent, and patient-provider relationships are more fruitful.

Methodology

Study Site

To select the most appropriate county in western Kenya for the study, we conducted a health facility assessment in two counties with high rates of HIV and AIDS, namely Kakamega and Busia. Key informants from each faith-based health facility in the two counties were interviewed in order to determine the level of collaboration and/or competition in the delivery of HIV and AIDS services in the area. Based on these initial interviews, Kakamega County was selected for this study, based on the prevalence of HIV and AIDS, the relative poverty compared to other counties in Kenya, and the proportion of faith-based service providers. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (Census, 2009), Kakamega County has a diverse religious affiliation with Catholics representing 20.5% of the population, Protestants 49.2%, Muslims 5.5%, and Traditionalists 0.4%. Based on the initial assessment, seven faith-based health facilities were selected for the study based on the availability of HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment services.

Study Design

In order to compare the provision of HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment services between faith-based health facilities with religious collaboration and faith-based health facilities with religious competition, we used an embedded multiple-case study design (Yin, 2009). An embedded design allows us to examine multiple units of analysis within each case. We defined each case at the health facility level; therefore, an embedded design allowed us to assess the domains of interest at the individual, health facility, and community level.

Questionnaire Design

The research team developed three qualitative interview guides to collect information about patient satisfaction with HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment services for each case, or health facility: (1) in-depth interviews with HIV-positive individuals, (2) key informant interviews with health providers; and (3) focus group discussions with members of the community in the health facility catchment area. The in-depth interviews covered a variety of topics, including the availability and quality of health services and health providers; availability of information; ease of scheduling; and confidentiality (Tran and Nguyen, 2012). The key informant interviews focused on collaboration and conflict between health facilities when providing HIV and AIDS services. The focus group discussions covered topics related to collective action, social solidarity, trust, and conflict in the context of HIV and AIDS services (Krishna and Shrader, 2000; Story et al., 2015). The interview guides were reviewed by experts in HIV and AIDS and qualitative methods. After the interview guides were complete, the investigators facilitated a two-day training with four research assistants in Nairobi, Kenya to cover case study methodology, pilot test the questions, revise the questions, and complete the data collection protocol.

Data Collection

Within each case, or health facility, we used purposive sampling techniques to gather information from individuals living with HIV, representatives of health facilities, as well as community members who are part of organizations and associations within the health facility catchment area. Research assistants interviewed 33 HIV-positive patients from each of the selected health facilities, ranging from two to seven per health facility; two key informant interviews with health facility providers (i.e., registered nurse, clinical officer, doctor, or administrator) from each of the seven health facilities for a total of 14 interviews; and two focus group discussions within the catchment area of four health facilities (one for women and one for men) with approximately six individuals in each group for a total of eight FGDs. Before the in-depth and key informant interviews, a research assistant met with the administrator at each health facility, carrying an ethical review permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). She introduced herself and the project to the administrator at a pre-determined time. For the in-depth interviews, the administrator referred the research assistant to the respective department (e.g., HIV counselling centre or support groups at the facility) where she asked them to arrange for up to seven HIV-positive patients to be ready for interviews on a specific day. On the day of the interviews, the research assistants met with potential respondents and read to them the introduction to the project and asked them the screening questions about religion, age, and the facility that they frequently visit. If the respondent met our selection criteria (between the ages of 15 to 49 and Christian), then the research assistant proceeded to obtain informed consent.

For the key informant interviews, the research assistant asked the administrator and at least one other health provider to participate in the key informant interviews. Once the respondent agreed to participate, they were given the opportunity to sign the informed consent document. For the focus group discussions, the research assistant worked with the health facility administrators to connect to faith-based groups in the catchment area of the health facility. A community facilitator was identified within each faith-based group and the facilitator invited an equal number of men and women within the faith-based groups to participate in separate focus groups.

For each interview or focus group, the research assistant explained the purpose, methods, and the potential risks and benefits of participation and asked the respondent if they had any questions or concerns about the research project. The research assistant also reiterated that the information the respondent provided through their interview was completely confidential and reminded the respondent that they were free to refuse to be audio-recorded for any reason, but the interview would conclude at that point. If the respondent was willing to be audio-recorded, the research assistant obtained consent to conduct the interview by the signature of the respondent (or thumb print if the participant was unable to sign).

Data Analysis

All interviews and focus group discussion were transcribed and translated into English. The transcripts were used to develop a case report for each of the sampled health facilities listed in Table 1. The case reports focused on the theoretical proposition that collaboration among religious institutions to provide HIV prevention and treatment services led to greater patient satisfaction, which, in turn, led to improved compliance to treatment. After each case report was developed, a cross-case report was written, which addressed the overall trends from each of the seven case reports in response to our theoretical proposition. The results are based on the findings produced in the cross-case report.

Results

Accessibility

The study revealed that preference for accessing health services is mainly based on proximity rather than quality of services. Patients living far away from the sampled facilities seek services from the facilities mainly through referral and not by original intention. Long distances to facilities limits accessibility and adversely affects patient satisfaction. In some instances, patients travelling for long distances to the facilities can miss appointments or come late when drugs stocks are depleted which worsens their health status.

Cost

While all health facilities were accessible; most patients, accessing services from the sampled health facilities, however, complained of high cost of services (mainly service charges which are not applicable in public facilities) compared to public health facilities. Patients lamented over user-charges that shift their preferences and desires for public facilities, which have free services. User-charges have resulted in an increase in defaulters and forgoing services provided by faith-based health facilities and opting for public health facilities located far away from their residential homes. As one patient remarked: '…even

the patients that were taking medication from here left and went to other facilities run by the government. I think if we get a government facility it will be better so we are able to see changes….'

Drug Stock Outs

Patients expressed dissatisfaction with drug stock outs, though this was not a common occurrence as noted by a patient, 'No, a lot of times they cannot all be available here. When the services are not available they tell you to wait as they look for the service and then they will call you'. Stock outs demotivate patients and affect treatment efficacy. In most of the sampled health facilities, drugs supply logistics are efficient and effective. In cases of stock outs, drugs are re-stocked within a very short period of time, which encourages patients to visit the facilities. However, in some sampled health facilities, stock outs result in patients purchasing medication and/or coping with no treatment, which worsens their health status.

Patient-Provider Relationship

Patients appreciated the quality of services and improved staff relationships and friendliness with the patients resulting in improved customer-client loyalty. The findings indicated that staff were perceived to treat patients with respect and dignity irrespective of their HIV serostatus, which improves adherence and service utilization. Subsequently, patients are highly comfortable and open in disclosing their status to the staff.

The study also revealed that patients are seen privately and on an individual basis and their information is kept private. There is no movement of patients or providers in and out of consultation rooms. Sufficient privacy and information confidentiality is provided during service delivery. Patients have trust and confidence in the staff's ability to keep their information secret from the public and other people. Consultation rooms in five of the sampled health facilities had sufficient privacy. One patient remarked: 'Yes. It's a secret between me and the doctor. For the past few months I have come here I have never heard from others talking about my issues. They also give me a call in case am needed. They respect my privacy. The doctor talks to patients one on one in a closed room without distractions of others walking in and out….' Another patient noted that: 'I know it is private because for me and the others who take our ARVs we have never heard anyone talk about our status unless we decide to disclose….'

Patients also reported that staff were caring, empathetic, friendly, loving, polite and supportive to patients, which enhanced their satisfaction. Staff provided patient-based supportive guidance resulting in increased patient loyalty, openness, and treatment adherence and service satisfaction. Patients were highly comfortable in most of the health facilities under study and open in disclosing their status to the staff because there were not dismissive, judgmental or discriminative; they had a positive and caring attitude towards all patients. As seen in the comments from a number of different patients:

> '…When the staff are attending to me they are friendly, they treat you as a close person to them.…'
> '…Staff stay with me when talking. They treat me like their sister….'

'…If one is bedridden, health workers come and look after you and bring you to the facility then care for you until they can be able to nurse you to health as far as they can'.

On the other hand, a few patients expressed dissatisfaction with the patient-provider relationship. They described some providers as harsh, quarrelsome and not empathetic. Others were unfriendly and impolite to patients who missed their appointments and those not adhering to treatment or keeping to their treatment schedules. They did not exhibit a caring and understanding approach to the situation and did not provide supportive guidance to patients, especially those who lacked fare and food, which compromised their ability to take ARVs and cope with side effects of medication. As one patient noted: '…some are harsh and some are polite. I was supposed to come yesterday but I did not have transport but when I explain that to them they tell me harshly you must come pick medicine. …'

Emergency Relief Services

Availability of supplements in most of the health facilities was good. In some of the health facilities, HIV patients are at times provided with food supplements—especially flour— resulting in reduced cases of malnutrition. One patient commented: '…I get medicine, they give me flour if my children are malnourished, guiding and counselling, attend AIDs day functions…. '

However, the study revealed that HIV patients are not regularly provided with relief services such as food supplements (flour) and mosquito nets that adversely affects their health status and treatment outcomes, especially the poor and less privileged. As one patient stated: 'services they give are all accessible except the one I said if they have any relief or any other service aside from medical care as I had told you like mosquito nets, flour, or any other relief, that will be appreciated….'

Outreach Programs

Patients expressed their satisfaction because some of the health facilities had community outreach programs, such as mobile clinics and Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) programs, which have improved access to both services and information. HIV counselling services are an integral part of the management process of the illness. Counselling services enable people living with HIV and their families to adjust in line with the health situation. As a patient remarked: '…they teach us a lot such as being open and free with our partners so that if you are late, your partner can even come and collect your ARV supply on your behalf….'

HIV Counselling Services

The study further revealed that there were periodic patient counselling sessions at the health facilities and support group level which improved awareness, adherence, and increased patients motivation to live positively and refresher trainings as cues for reminders for treatment adherence. As one patient commented: '…I was 60kg but now am 73kg. I took in their advice and now am doing fine. They give me counsel, that even if I got separated with a man, people use this medicine, follow advice, exercise and eat well. Pastor advices us that he is also positive and tells everyone to accept themselves and avoid discrimination….'

At the same time, there were cases in which patients felt information provided during counselling sessions was inadequate hence expressed need for more information on HIV and AIDS, such as side effects of treatment. Some patients reported poor and ineffective appointment scheduling resulting in more than one patient appearing during service delivery. They noted that this threatens their feeling of confidence, trust and security which impacts negatively on satisfaction.

Referral Systems

Additionally, the findings indicated that there were effective and well-coordinated referral services to higher-level health facilities for critically ill patients, which, in cases where key services were unavailable, eliminates delays in medical interventions. There also exists effective referral systems from community to the health facility especially for defaulters, critically sick and those with special needs.

With regards to inter-facility relationships, across all sampled health facilities, effective referral systems between faith-based organisations (FBOs), private, and government facilities have been recorded. This may have contributed to the reduction in mortality and morbidity related to HIV and AIDS and in managing complex and advanced care for the patients and other services which are not available at the facilities. As one key informant noted in an interview: 'We link in all ways, but we really need to know if we referred a patient that they have reached those stations and whatever we have recommended is done and vice versa. They get in touch with us, we get in touch with them. We actually have a tool where we get, I know whom I can refer….'

The study revealed the presence of effective communication structures such as contact persons to follow up on referred patients, get feedback and hence assist in providing continued care to returning patients which has improved patient experiences and satisfaction. As a key informant noted in an interview: '…we usually refer patients to other facilities, including faith-based facilities, when we have a client who has tested positive and they want to go to that facility. We write a referral, that's all and then we follow-up….'

This referral pattern occurred despite there being no written and standardized guidelines for referring clients to other facilities as recorded in some facilities. As one key informant remarked: '…we don't have any guidelines. We don't have any guidelines in case you have any client you want to refer there you just refer and you just call there….'

Religious Diversity and Collaboration

Across the sampled health facilities, there was evidence of recruitment and involvement of staff and providers from diverse religious backgrounds and denominational values, which has helped demystify conflicting values and religious beliefs in HIV service delivery thereby increasing service utilization and acceptance of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA). As a key informant noted: '…in this, of course I am a Christian, I am not actually a Catholic. I belong to Salvation Army church but our staffs over here are from other denominations. We have got Catholics, we have KAG (Kenya Assemblies of God), okay, all of them. We are not biased when it comes to employing the staffs because we also need diversity….'

In many instances a diverse workforce has successfully championed the demystification of HIV and AIDS by instilling values and practices that support positive

behaviours and lifestyle changes which improve positive living and acceptance. This is an example of the team-based approach in service delivery by the staff.

There exist good coordination and collaboration between the health facility and other facilities (FBOs, private, and government) on many aspects of HIV service delivery irrespective of their religious affiliations, including provision of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) to referred patients, treatment and capacity building. They hold joint meetings to share innovative ideas for prioritized problems and share resources. This practice has improved the quality of service delivery and adoption of effective preventive approaches. As a key informant noted: '…when we get patients in transit we have to help them get medicine and if we do not have then we have to contact the nearest facility to give us or we refer the patient where they can get the medicine….'

However, there are also cases of rivalry and competition for clients, especially among other FBOs, which causes strained relationships and an inability to cooperate in service delivery. This has been a sensitive issue affecting collaboration and partnership primarily because donors support facilities based on the number of clients/patients attended. One key informant remarked: '…the major source of conflict is when facilities compete to have many clients. Some go as far as contacting clients and offering them incentives so as to change facilities. They promise clients fare and food as a result patients change facilities without getting a referral letter….'

In addition to the competition for patients, there are some denominations with conflicting beliefs and values which discourage treatment of HIV and AIDS patients, encourage stigma, and limit adoption of appropriate positive living such as proper nutrition and enrolment in support groups. This causes non-disclosure of status, which hinders prevention and control successes. Religious institutions and denominational cohesion is often affected by differences in teaching and faith values that denominations uphold, for example practice of safe sex, formal health care treatment, and inheritance of wives.

Collaboration between all religious institutions—especially churches and communities—in advocating and spearheading prevention and control of HIV and AIDS has yet to build strong mechanisms and structures which will be key in addressing the threat posed by the pandemic. This has limited VCT, encouraged stigma and reduced adoption of effective community-based prevention approaches especially those designed on principles of acceptance and community integration. As one key informant stated: '…I should talk about HIV, so that we reduce that issue of stigma and such things. So I hope that Christians will talk about HIV, even in church they should talk about HIV….'

There is perceived partiality and discrimination of FBOs in regards to trainings, grant management and drugs supply. Government, and to some extent top FBOs in the community, are prioritized in attending and/or providing trainings, implementing sponsored projects and drug stocking which creates rivalry and feeling of being sidelined to lower facilities which receive little or no support. This adversely affects coordination and cooperation which affects quality of service delivery at the expense of patients. As a key informant made clear in an interview: '…sometimes, donors give some grants to facilitate different facilities pertaining to HIV and AIDS and you find that those who are the upper hand are those who are considered first, and you get that the lower facilities….'

Stigma and Discrimination

A few respondents felt there was stigma and discrimination of PLWHA, which limited their integration with the community. PLWHA were stigmatized at the family, religion, and community levels despite the peaceful coexistence and integration within the community due to conflicting religious and community values on HIV and AIDS prevention, control and management. They were not accepted as part of the valuable assets of the community, rather they were perceived as liabilities and risks to the community health. As a result, they did not disclose their status easily. As a FGD Discussant noted: '…People are individualistic in my village, everyone minds their own business. HIV positive people are stigmatized….'

Adults and children living with HIV were stigmatized even in social places, such as schools. There are also community disputes and conflicts fuelled by land and other household issues which threaten community solidarity and integration of HIV prevention and control as they limit collective action and efforts on important health priorities such as HIV. It has also emerged that problems in managing HIV and AIDS patients who are stigmatized by society due to the conceptualization of the disease as an ailment associated with sexual deviants, such as prostitutes and the immoral, are on the increase.

HIV Awareness Creation

The patients affirmed that there was improved community awareness on HIV-related services provided by the health facilities and the church created through community awareness campaigns, sensitization trainings, and seminars. A key informant noted, '…Church leaders are allowing seminars to be held within church premises to educate people about HIV and AIDs….' Further, relevant and sufficient information was provided on treatment, adherence, prevention and control. The main source of information was the health care providers who advice and counsel patients on proper nutrition, treatment adherence, infection prevention and health issue.

Discussion

There are many attributes of faith-based health facilities and service provision that lead to patient satisfaction. Our study used a unique case study approach to identify individual, health provider, and community perspectives on the quality of care and patient satisfaction with HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment services. When health facilities demonstrated collaboration, there was a positive impact on patient satisfaction, which, in turn, has the potential to improve compliance with prevention and treatment options.

Access to good quality health services is vital for the improvement of many health outcomes, such as those targeted by the Millennium Development Goals – now the Sustainable Development Goals (Dussault and Franceschini, 2006). A study by Aluku (2015) revealed that distance to health facilities was a significant factor that prevents women of reproductive age (15-49 years) from accessing and utilizing sexual and reproductive health services in Kakamega County. Without access to appropriate HIV prevention and treatment services, patients will either seek more easily accessible medications—including counterfeit medications (Cohn et al., 2013)—or default on medication compliance.

In addition to access, it is critical to improve the affordability of HIV treatment. Some notable barriers and challenges to the improvement of women's sexual and reproductive health have focused on financial accountability and the removal of financial barriers that result in the denial of or delays in receiving necessary sexual and reproductive health services (KNCHR, 2012). There is a need to continue to advocate for affordable treatment and provide equal access to affordable treatment across both the public and private sectors. This level of coordination will also help with drug stock-outs so that patients can continue their treatment without missing doses or stopping treatment altogether (Kranzer and Ford, 2011).

Patient-provider relationships have a substantial effect on patient satisfaction with HIV and AIDs prevention and treatment services. Health workers are the element of the system that makes health care both acceptable to clients and therefore more likely to be effective, or can act as a deterrent to people seeking care (Palmer, 2008). AIDS puts heavy demands on social support systems as well. People living with HIV and AIDS not only require quality care at the health facility, but they also need practical support to manage themselves and their households, securing and preparing food (especially in food insecure settings), and caring for the dependents, particularly children in their care (Trinitapoli and Weinreb, 2012). Health facilities that are able to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of their patients are more likely to have positive patient-provider relationships, which can lead to better compliance with both prevention and treatment. In addition, health facilities that provided emergency relief services and outreach services to the community—such as VCT services and other counselling services—were also viewed more favourably by patients, which can create a culture of trust and compliance.

The study also found that there were effective and well-coordinated referral systems between lower and higher level health facilities for critically ill patients, which helped to eliminate delays in medical interventions, especially for critically ill patients. Although the referral process was informal, it seemed to be functional and useful for patients, especially when services were not available at one facility and a referral was necessary to get access to care. There is a need to continue to improve upon and streamline referrals in order to improve treatment compliance.

One of the most interesting findings was the level of religious diversity and collaboration among the health facilities in our sample. Many of the health facilities employed staff from multiple denominations and viewed diversity as a positive attribute. The patients also benefited from this religious diversity because they were offered more prevention and treatment options. However, health facilities that competed for patients or allowed doctrinal differences to stand in the way of collaboration were also the same health facilities that discouraged treatment of HIV and AIDS patients, encouraged stigma, and limited adoption of appropriate positive living practices. This competitive atmosphere prevented many HIV-positive individuals from disclosing their status, which has implications for both future prevention and treatment.

Stigma and discrimination, such as that described above, has been named as one of the major social challenges against the management of the HIV pandemic (Plummer, 1988). Furthermore, the perception among some Christian denominations that AIDS is God's retribution for man's evils when experienced on a large scale, or as a punishment to the individual for immorality (Sontag, 1989) has impacted patient satisfaction. This is evident in some Christian teachings through the doctrine of purity and holiness (Deuteronomy 28:1-24) – used by some religious leaders to teach about AIDS. This kind of teaching is

contrary to the life of Jesus Christ as portrayed in biblical teachings on love and compassion for neighbours. This thought process is however slowly being replaced by more progressive thinking as 'AIDS is not a punishment from God' as well as the statements on stigma 'stigma is sin' or 'the body of Christ has AIDS' all highlighted in the Anglican statements on HIV and AIDS in 2001 and 2003.

In order to combat stigma and discrimination, there is a need for additional HIV awareness creation, especially among church leadership. According to Judge and Schaay (2001), silence about HIV and AIDS permits inaction and is the breeding ground for stigma. Church leadership has to be bold and compassionate to prevent infection and care for all the ill and dying. By so doing, the church leadership will serve as a model for leadership in government, and all civil society. The church as a spiritual home plays a vital role in addressing the plight of African Christian women in this era of HIV and AIDS (Phiri et al, 2003:125).

Conclusion

In summary, collaborations between like-minded health facilities and faith-based organisations have resulted in the improvement of service, access, availability, quality (including reduction in waiting times and improved service timeliness), effective referrals, good patient-provider relationships and enhanced patient privacy and information confidentiality. This has been linked to improved patient quality resulting to higher patient satisfaction levels, which has the potential to significantly reduce default rates and improve treatment adherence. We acknowledge that there are other factors that play a key role with regard to provision of HIV services. Such factors include the political economy, cultural inhibitions and literacy, about which we recommend further study.

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Is Contemporary Christianity Promoting or Hindering Mental Health in Africa? An Exploration of the Impact of Charismatic Church Activities and Doctrines on the Mental Well-Being of Selected Ghanaian Congregants

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Abstract

Contemporary Christianity in Africa has seen an increase in Pentecostalism/ Charismatism, whose activities include performing miracles, prophecies and exorcism. Although it is acknowledged that the charismatic movement has its roots in Pentecostalism, clear differences can be identified between Pentecostalism and Charismatism. Given this distinction, this study focused on exploring the effects of the activities of charismatic churches on the mental health of their church members. Eighty-six respondents from six charismatic churches in Accra and Kumasi participated in the study through individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observations of church activities. Our results show that church practices such as prophecies and miracles, as well as other activities such as prayer meetings and fellowship groups, had both positive and negative impacts on mental well-being. Church doctrines and teachings similarly had both positive and negative impacts on participant well-being. Positive impacts included building of resilience, comfort and hope in difficult times, developing self-efficacy and positive self-regard, as well as positive behavioural and lifestyle changes. Negative impacts included fostering feelings of guilt, shame and fear, increased paranoia and suspicion, as well as potential exclusion and the resultant despair from flouting church rules or expectations. These impacts are discussed with emphasis on their implications for mental well-being and interventions.

KEY WORDS: Contemporary Christianity, Church Activities, Mental Well-Being, Congregants, Ghana

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Introduction

Contemporary Christianity in Africa has seen an increase in Pentecostalism/ Charismatism, whose bases include miracles, prophecies and exorcism. Larbi (2001) argues that one of the reasons for the remarkable success of such churches is the strong similarity which exists with traditional religious cosmology and concepts of salvation. He acknowledges a distinction between churches considered Pentecostal (with a focus on the work of the Holy Spirit) and those with a charismatic/spiritual emphasis (whose beliefs centre on the spiritual beliefs and activities of the leader). Although it is acknowledged that the charismatic movement has its roots in Pentecostalism (Larbi, 2001), clear differences can be identified between Pentecostalism and Charismatism. Given this distinction, together with recent media reports about some of the activities of Charismatic churches in Ghana (e.g., Ghana web, July 2015), this study focused on exploring the effects of these activities on the mental health of their church members.

The activities of Charismatic churches tend to influence the beliefs of the people who adhere to these faiths because there is identification with the tenets of achieving a cosmological balance (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013; Larbi 2001). Consequently, these beliefs influence their behaviour. Religion therefore plays a significant role in the lives of its adherents (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013). Although Christianity is expected to highlight concepts of peace, love, forgiveness and strength, the recent activities of African Charismatism have showcased a focus on blame, curses, and misfortune (Larbi 2001).

Previous research into the role that religion plays in mental health has suggested that religion has a generally positive impact on health outcomes (e.g. Williams and Sternthal 2007). Ellison (1991) and Sipsma, et al., (2013) all point to the fact that religiosity/spirituality is linked to a wide range of favourable mental health outcomes such as better psychological well-being (Ellison et al. 2001), fewer symptoms of depression (Brown, Ndubuisi, and Gary 2010), and lower risk of substance use disorders (Koenig et al. 1998). These outcomes have been found across social, demographic and cultural settings (Gartner, Larson, and Allen 1991).

The precise means through which religion influences mental health is not completely understood (Hadzic 2011); however, possible mechanisms have been proposed. The mechanisms include the reduction of stress, regulation of lifestyle and health behaviours, provision of positive coping resources, provision of positive self-perceptions, generation of positive emotions, promoting healthy beliefs, and the provision of meaning and purpose in the midst of suffering and trials (e.g., Koenig 2010; Pargament, Koenig, and Perez 2000).

On the other hand, some attention has also been given to the potential for negative outcomes of religion with regards to mental health (Chatters 2000). Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) have found that when individuals use negative religious coping such as spiritual discontentment, anger towards God, passive religious deferral, re-appraisal of God's powers and perceived punishment from God, there is the potential for negative emotional adjustment and could result in psychopathology, lack of integration of the individual's personality and lack of reflective insight (Beit-Hallahmi 2001).

Despite these studies, very little information has been documented on the unique dynamics that exist in African churches with regards to mental well-being. The African religious experience is unique in its incorporation of the physical with an interesting intrinsic interplay of the spiritual, emotional and the unseen (Pobee 1979). This multi-

layered interaction can have both positive and negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing: individuals could either become more faithful and grow spiritually, or they may have increased anxiety and paranoia which may manifest in various mental disorders including panic attacks, generalized anxiety disorder, depression, increased substance use among others. All of these may result from the proliferation of ominous prophecies and predictions.

Omenyo (2006) observed that a conscious effort is made by Pentecostal/Charismatic churches to address the perceived socio-economic needs of their adherents. These efforts are seen in the practices and activities which form the core of charismatic services in Ghana. Anderson (2004) however argued that the motivations of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of their congregants by offering insights into the sources or roots of the problems is a distinctly African practice. He noted that these practices may be rooted in a history of culture, marginalization and oppression (Anderson, 2004). Indeed, Asamoah-Gyadu (2013) observes that the Ghanaian Pentecostal/Charismatic churches incorporate the indigenous beliefs and practices of its members, including beliefs about the causes of ill-health and misfortune, some of which include hostile ancestral spirits, possession by spirits and demons, sorcery/witchcraft and hostile social relations.

Conspicuously missing from the discourse on these practices is the long-term effect of repeated prophecies and deliverances. For the Ghanaian Pentecostal/Charismatic Christian, the belief in and receipt of frequent prophecies and repeated deliverance from various ailments could have some effect on their mental, physical and spiritual well-being. These effects can be either positive or negative. There however appears to be a gap in available literature regarding such impacts, hence the relevance of the present study. Such information is valuable for mental health practitioners and leaders of these congregations and addresses two of the key questions of the grant; namely, 'What impact does religious innovation and competition have on African society'? and 'What roles do religious innovation and competition play in building or hindering resilience and entrepreneurship in Africa'?

The present article forms part of a broader study that explored the impact of activities of Charismatic churches on the mental well-being of Ghanaian congregants. In this article, we focused on how activities such as prophecies, miracles, other church activities as well as church teachings and doctrine influenced the mental well-being of congregants of selected churches. Here, we discuss first the ways in which these activities facilitated positive mental health outcomes. Secondly, we highlight the potential negative consequences that we identified. Based on these discoveries, we suggest some implications for individual wellness and potential interventions.

Methodology

Research design

Qualitative research methods were used for the project. Specifically, the phenomenological qualitative design was used to guide the study due to the focus on individuals' shared experiences of charismatism as a phenomenon (Creswell 1998). In-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and observations of church activities were the primary tools used for data gathering.

Research settings

Six churches, three in Kumasi and three in Accra, were recruited using snowball, convenient and purposive sampling techniques. Accra and Kumasi were of interest because they are highly cosmopolitan areas and the most populated with Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana. Only churches whose base of operation included miracles, healing, deliverance, prophecies and revelation activities were considered for the present study. The final samples of participating churches have been given the following pseudonyms to provide anonymity and confidentiality: Favour, Charity, Godliness, Holiness, Endurance and Purity.

Sample

In total, 86 individuals participated in the study. Of the 86 participants, 13 (15.12%) were recruited from Favour, 15 (17.44%) from Charity, 28 (32.56%) from Godliness, 6 (6.98%) from Holiness, 14 (16.28%) from Endurance and 10 (11.62%) were from Purity. Fourteen were church leaders, made up of pastors, prophetess, deaconesses and deacons with the remaining 72 being church members. 38 were males and 48 were females, aged between 13 and 64 years.

Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Ghana Ethics Committee for the Humanities. Further permission was obtained from the leadership of each participating church. A week-long observation and participation in church activities was conducted at all the research settings, during which participant recruitment for the study began. Individual informed consent was obtained from each participant. Following consent, in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions aimed at exploring participants' experience of Neo-prophetic church activities were conducted. All interviews took place at the church premises after or before church activities. Interviews lasted between 9 and 96 minutes and observations lasted between 1 hour 30 minutes and 6 hours.

Data Analyses

All interviews and observations were audio-taped and transcribed and coded manually. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to identify the patterns of lived experiences of participants with regards to their encounter with the activities of Neo-Prophetic churches, and the meaningful interpretations they ascribed to these experiences (Smith 1996). The use of IPA aided in the exploration of participants' perception of the activities and their impacts on their well-being based on their subjective interpretations of these experiences. IPA also aided the researchers in the explanation and interpreting of the meaning of participants' accounts of their experiences (Smith and Osborn 2003).

Results: How Religious Activities Promote Mental Well-Being

This section focuses on ways in which religious activities fostered mental well-being of congregants.

Prophecy

One of the activities that facilitated mental well-being in participants was the receipt of positive or favourable prophecies. Many of our participants reported that they felt more optimistic about the future when they received a positive prophecy. This experience was particularly the case for participants who were facing challenges or anticipated some desired goal. Hence, when prophecies were given that predicted good tidings for the future, many participants were optimistic about its fulfilment: '…I was excited and I was expectant...as in, I was always looking around to see where that [prophecy] will manifest in my life...yes. And then, I was confident because I knew that God is at work for me…' (P.21, female, 20 years). These participants all looked forward to receiving the positive outcome that had been predicted. As such, they lived in anticipation, and could cope with life's situations because of the expectation of good things to come. Such optimism tended to engender a positive outlook and relative mental wellbeing.

A further factor that came up was an increased sense of purpose and faith in God after receiving prophecy. For many of our participants, the prophecies they had received related to future careers/prospects. As a result, many reported a reorganizing or shifting of their focus to fulfil the prophecy: '…it made me feel good and also made me feel [like] a necessity was laid upon me because I understood that prophesies [are] not just mere sayings…but then you have to work towards it cause if you don't work towards it, it won't come into fruition…' (P.24, male, 19 years).

When prophecies were fulfilled, participants' faith in God and His plan for their lives was increased, making them more spiritually conscious and instilling a desire for greater religious involvement. As a result of such increased faith and sense of purpose, recipients reported a closer relationship with God, which facilitated peace of mind: '…it made us to realize that we have a God that we are serving. And when it gets to times like that, He will come into our lives to turn things around, for us…' (P.80, male).

Our findings also suggest that prophecies can result in individuals changing their behaviours for the better. This is particularly so when prophecies about impending danger are received. For example: '…I was engaging in a lot of sinful and unworthy acts…it was based on the prophecy given to me that I will become a pastor someday, that encouraged me to sit down and think that I have to give my life to God…and stop behaving that way' (P.73, male, 23 years).

However, many participants did acknowledge that although prophecies pointed the way to a future event, the recipients needed to work at making them come true. This presented a further change in behaviour towards achieving that prophecy: '…But when they prophesy into your life that doesn't mean it will happen at once. You have to work…you have to work to get it... when a man of God tells you I prophesy in your life that you will start mining gold or you will be a rich man you just don't go and fold your arms and sit down… you have to work at it [to make it come true]…' (P.22, female, 20 years).

Therefore, receipt of prophecies, particularly regarding future endeavours or impending danger, served as a catalyst for conversion or repentance and subsequent modification of behaviours that were considered inappropriate or detrimental. New behaviours included lifestyle changes such as reducing or eliminating risky behaviours,

increased religious involvement, increased drive and focus, among others. Further, such behaviours tended to build resilience, improve spirituality and renew faith.

Miracles

Another church activity that fostered mental well-being among our participants was witnessing or receiving miracles. The general perception was that miracles had the potential to change lives and improve well-being. Participants recounted instances when they had seen church leaders perform miracles that had led to healing or had facilitated changes in people's circumstances. For some, such miracles were evidence of God's power at work: 'It has made me realize that God has the power to fix anything that has gone wrong. So it has made me believe strongly that God can rectify any situation in my life' (P.58, female, 49 years).

Others were awed by the perceived power of the 'man of God' when they saw miracles being performed and this made them thankful: '…I more often watch [the pastor] on TV … So when I heard that [he] was coming to Ghana… I believe this man of God carries an anointing that when he gets to places you see there is a release and there is a kind of transformation …' (P.23, male, 23years). Such acts served to strengthen their faith and provided comfort in troubling times, thus serving as a coping mechanism. This is because there was the expectation that God and/or the prophets would be able to solve their problems for them, and as a result, they worried less about those problems.

In addition, miracles sometimes led people to change their behaviours either in awe or in appreciation of what they had witnessed or experienced. For instance, one woman stated: '…I was doing all the worldly things with the worldly people…So the miracle in my life was that I came to Christ and stopped all the bad things I used to do… Even those who knew me before are surprised at my change of behaviour …' (P.61, female, 64 years). Thus, miracles had diverse impacts on our participants' well-being. Witnessing or experiencing miracles served as a source of hope and relief from distress. Miracles also served as a catalyst for people to change faulty or maladaptive behaviours. Overall, seeing a miracle occur made them happy and fostered a positive outlook on life.

Other Church Activities

Information on other activities practiced in the participating churches and their potential impact on congregants' well-being was gathered. Other church activities included preaching of sermons, praises and worship services, testimony times, evangelism, deliverance/exorcism, Bible studies and quizzes, fasting and prayers, counselling, spiritual directions, healing and singing. They also have certain specialized groups such as the Youth Fellowship, Women Fellowship, 'Prayer Towers' among others in the church that meet to engage in activities such as personal and intercessory prayers, teaching and training to enhance their Christian and social life. All of these form part of the church's core activities and are usually held during the week: '…on Tuesdays we do counselling over here. On Wednesday evenings, members of the tower, gather here to pray. On Thursday the women fellowship meet here, and on Friday there is normal church service, and on Saturday evenings, women fellowship meet here... Early morning when we come, we first of all do Bible studies …' (P.70, female, 29 years).

Other participants also mentioned that their churches periodically organise programmes such as revivals, music and drama festivals, sports activities, distribution of

religious books, conventions, training programs, 'harvest', excursions, giving social support and camping. Most participants reported engaging in these activities because they are required of every Christian: 'I think it's very good and very helpful because… as believers we have to share God's word, we have to spread the Gospel and we have to get people to be born again [in order to get] to heaven…' (P.14, female, 22 years).

The order of service and other activities of the church may be planned or directed by the Holy Spirit through revelations to the church leader:

> No, since I came here, we don't have specific days for specific things… we do what the Holy Spirit leads us to do... At times, the day that we'll go for communion, the communion will be after the service, but at times, when we come, right in the morning, when people have not come, the prophetess says the Holy Spirit says that we should have communion, also, sometimes after the service, there can be an anointing service, per the direction of the Holy Spirit … (P.2, male, 28 years).

When asked about the impact of these church activities, most participants mentioned the positive impacts they have on different aspects of their lives. According to the participants, these activities (e.g. intercessory prayers) provided social and emotional support especially when they are faced with difficulties. They also provided spiritual support, spiritual fortitude and a sense of relief from their difficulties:

> …we in the women's fellowship, do intercede for each other, such that when we come together, and there is something disturbing a fellow member, she speaks about the issue and we pray together... Also, when we come for prayers, I raise up my difficulties, and my fellow friends help by praying together with me. But through prayer, God moves on his Grace, and takes everything away from my life … (P.71, female, 35 years).

Aside from the above, some of the churches organize training sessions where congregants are trained on how to build Christian virtues, and how to develop good social relations: 'besides prophecies and miracles… they train us to be somebody to be able to stand on our own… they tell us how to behave and how to relate to other people; it's not just about being a Christian … I know that I am where I am today because of what I have learnt from my ministry' (P.16, 19 years).

Youth fellowships also provide a means to educate the youth on issues of life and to help groom them to be better citizens in the future: '... teachings also help the youths to know how to go about issues. The Bible says that, teach a child the way he should go, so that when he grows he would not depart from it. So if you don't teach them how they should go, then they would surely depart from it. So that is why we focus on the youths' (P.79, female).

Other activities such as prayers were believed to build one's faith and facilitate spiritual growth which in turn can lead to success and blessings in one's life: '…Spiritual work is also done in the church. Some people don't pray at home, but when they find themselves in church they try to pray. That also helps in spiritual growth. … When you involve yourself in the work of God, your life moves forward …' (P.64, female, 22 years).

Counselling provides guidance on how to overcome life difficulties: '… the counselling is good for anyone who has problems. So during the counselling, the pastor will guide you

and pray with you. You must take active part; the pastor will not do everything for you' (P.58, female, 28 years).

Some participants believed that giving testimonies can lead to further blessings because of the public declaration of what God had done for the person. They also believed that interceding for someone could result in God Himself interceding for you. Finally, some participants believed that paying tithes provided divine cover and escape from misfortune: '… to me I think when God does something for you and I say it He'll do more, that's what I believe. I do believe that when you intercede for a friend, God will intercede for you. That's what I believe, and the paying of tithe, it will just make God take away wrong things that will come to your path' (P.40, female, 13 years).

These church activities help to gain social recognition, prevent misuse of time, and equip congregants for greater encounter with miracles and prophecies: '… well with these activities it has helped me in such a way that like, … I don't use my time on unnecessary things' (P.17, male, 25 years).

Teachings that speak to the negative lifestyle of congregants lead to an awareness of bad deeds and potential change in lifestyle: 'I think that it's [sermons] very good because it changes the bad people and then sometimes it goes to the extent of people repenting from their bad deeds to good deeds' (P.31, female, 14 years)

Church Teachings and Doctrines

Information on the doctrines and teachings of the churches and the impact of such doctrines on congregants' well-being was gathered. Results revealed a focus on means of attaining salvation and eternal life; building faith; prescription of dress codes aimed to promote decency; instilling virtues (e.g., love, forgiveness, obedience to God, morality, honesty, endurance, humility, responsibility, academically oriented, leadership skills); identifying signs and preparations for the end time/ second coming of Jesus; building fortitude against the work of the devil; giving and its benefits; and soul winning into God's Kingdom. A focus on the pleasures but not the suffering of Christianity, teaching identity and true purpose of Christianity aimed to build enduring outlook also emerged. These teachings were thought to lead to behaviour change and instilled virtues as well as build stronger faith in God.

Church Teachings Promote Virtues

Virtue-related teachings were given in diverse forms. Some of the teachings were reported to focus on promoting upright living by encouraging participants to desist from negative life styles and focus on living a life that pleases the Supreme Being:

> … when we read 1Corinthians 3:16, it says, 'do we not know that our bodies are the temple of God, and that whoever destroys the temple of God, He will also destroy'. So in view of that, we are taught not to destroy our bodies and to keep it holy. The main thing being taught here is to live a life that pleases Christ; we must obey what God says and stay away from the things that don't please God (P.11, female, 30 years).

Some doctrines focused on instilling forgiveness and tolerance among congregants. To some participants, the content of the teaching is the driving force for their conversion into

the current church. Such teachings promote favourable relationship among congregants and have the potential to promote positive community bonds:

> … In my church, honestly, it was the preaching that drew us into the church. Because when you listen to the preaching… there are a lot of things you can learn from the preaching. For example, if someone steps on your foot, just remove your leg and tell that person sorry. If someone slaps you, turn the other cheek… they teach us a lot of things that help to change us … (P.49, female, 35 years)

Additionally, some teachings focus on promoting love for one another: '… they teach us how … to love your neighbour and go according to the word of God and the commandments' (P.34, female, 14years). Other teachings also focus on the need to be benevolent towards the needy: '… we learnt last year that if we think we have the means to, we should help our brothers in need …' (P.66, female, 23 years).

The qualities have benefits to both the individual and the community. For the individual, practicing these virtues could promote inner peace which in turn could promote physical, spiritual and mental well-being. On the societal level, they could promote strong community bonds and harmonious living among people.

Church Teachings Instil Life Skills

Besides promoting virtues, accounts of participants also revealed that some teachings focus on coaching congregants on qualities needed for successful leadership:

> Yes, how to become an overseer, a leader in your church. To become an overseer, you're to go through certain stages, you're to be humble, to be able to take care or your family because if you're not able to take care of your family, how will you be able to take care of other people, and if also, you're not well educated in how to help people, how will you go and help people when you've not helped yourself? (P.30, male, 16years).

Some teachings focus on equipping congregants with skills that are needed for positive interpersonal relationship with one's spouse as well as qualities needed for thriving marriages. Such teachings have the potential to promote successful marriages and reduce marital distress which in turn can promote mental health in couples. In a society like Ghana where psychological services are scarce, the church appears to be filling the gap by providing counselling services to congregants in need:

> … I have learnt a lot from them … we learnt about how to handle your husband in marriage or things you shouldn't do when you get married, and things you are to do to your husband to make him be pleased with you… and that about dating, if you are married … he [the pastor] said married people should not have extramarital affairs (P.66, female, 23 years).

Teachings Build Personal Resilience in Challenging Times

Another significant teaching pertains to doctrine of the love of God and the associated benefits of identifying with Christianity. Such teaching provided some reprieve during trying times. During challenges, the knowledge of God's love and His availability to help the individual through the tribulations provided comfort and promoted resilience in the mist of the challenges:

… I'll love to share … the love of God. The Bible has said in the book of John 3:16 that ' For God so loved the world that He gave us His only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish', and then that word has assured us that anytime we believe in Christ, we would not perish no matter what happens to us, we may pass through tribulations and a lot of things but we should stand firm because the Lord is always at our side because He loves us and He's not going to allow us to pass through things that we'll not be able to pass through… (P.37, male, 15 years).

The provision of biblical evidence of other Christians who have been helped by God during challenging times further solidify the individual's beliefs in their capacity as Christians to sail through the challenges when they identify with Christianity. In this sense, resilience is built through fostering self-efficacy beliefs in the individual: 'Teachings on Christianity, like … the story of Joseph for example, we were taught that Joseph went through a whole lot but in the end God raised Him up because it was depending on his work towards the word of God and how God loved him …' (P.40, female, 13 years).

Teachings on faith further engender endurance and resilience during challenges. Congregants are taught to have faith and persevere through challenges as the trials are testing periods in Christianity. Additionally, congregants are equipped with means through which they could resist the source of and effects of their problems. This reduces worry and uneasiness: 'They preach Christianity and about faith… Satan can come and test your faith … if you don't have faith, Satan can [take you away] from Christianity [but] If you have faith Satan cannot do anything to you. [they also teach you what] you can do to help yourself, if you're going to sleep, you pray … angels can come and protect you …' (P.44, female, 15 years).

Results: How Religious Activities May Hinder Mental Well-Being

This section focuses on ways in which religious activities hindered mental well-being of congregants.

Prophecy

Despite the recounted positive impacts of receiving prophecies, our participants did acknowledge that there was the potential for negative consequences of such practices. One of the foremost factors that came up repeatedly was the ability of negative or threatening prophecies to induce sadness and/or despair. Some participants recounted instances when they had become despondent upon receiving an ominous prophecy: '…they told me that my little child would die, and at once, I became tensed up. As I was going home, I was very sad…' (P.76, female, 22 years).

In addition to feelings of sadness, there were also instances when dire prophecies induced fear, worry and anxiety in recipients. The participant below had received a prophecy that she was 'going to become mad', and therefore found herself worried about occurrences that may trigger the prophecy's fulfilment: '…there are days that, immediately something happens it clicks to me [and I wonder], is this what is going to happen that I am going to go mad? …It really worried me. For a whole week, I wasn't myself and even till now I'm not myself… I feel what if it didn't come yesterday, it didn't come today and it might come tomorrow? So it worries me…' (P.28, female, 23 years).

Such anxiety or fear can have further psychological consequences for the individual including feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, associated depression and even suicidal tendencies. Apart from these, this fear and anxiety may also result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, which a few of our respondents also reported: '… [If] it's not a prophecy that would bring happiness to your soul, you can be thinking about it… [And] the thinking can lead to its fulfilment…' (P.78, female, 27 years).

Some respondents also recounted becoming paranoid and/or hyper-vigilant when they received negative prophecies. This was particularly the case when the prophecies regarded someone being the cause of some bad experience or problem, or when a prophecy remains unfulfilled. The respondent below had received a prophecy about a neighbour being the cause of some hardship in her life through some spiritual machinations, and as a result, she had become suspicious of the woman's activities: '…it made me to be vigilant in my behaviour [around her]...there are some things that I have seen about her that, I have realized that, I have to take caution about…' (P.72, female, 35 years). Such suspicions resulted in avoiding people, places and activities that were related to the prophecy in some way, denial of the predictions' existence or efficacy, as well as some behaviours targeted at refuting the prediction.

In addition to feelings of paranoia, unfulfilled prophecies also resulted in frustration and despair for some recipients: '…if I say it I'll cry… As for the prophecy, if I say it I'll cry. Hmm, as for me, I don't know. I feel that, I believe that I'm yet to experience the true thing. But how to get there, that's the issue' (P.5, female, 42 years).

Receiving prophecies also potentially resulted in some compulsion on the part of the recipients as a show of blind faith. In response to receiving some positive prophecy, or seeing a prediction come true, some recipients believed that the prophet needed to be 'obeyed' in order to keep receiving such good will or in order to prevent some dire occurrence: '…if he prophesies that you are about to die…you should also follow him, and whatever he would tell you, you have to do. If he says sleep here, you have to sleep there, and if he says you should sit, you should sit. If you follow him with your heart, everything would go on well for you' (P.74, female, 28 years).

The last respondent describes a situation that was cited by a number of participants. Due to the faith the recipients had in their prophet, their word was taken as fact and resulted in broken relationships/families. Many of them believed serving the prophet and obeying his instructions would avert misfortune and/or produce blessings. This affects their agency as individuals and may be the precursor to disillusion and potentially a crisis of faith when the prophet is unable to meet all their perceived needs.

Finally, some respondents talked about the method of disclosing prophecies as potentially causing negative outcomes. Many of them believed that prophecies needed to be disclosed with tact, and in private:

> …it's not every prophecy that you must [disclose]...they have to be very careful. They should not just get up and give out any prophecy, they must look at the appearance of the person…if you tell a person who looks like he has a hot temper that his mother is a witch, it can make him go home and even stab his mother (P.69, female, 27 years).

Such public disclosure has the potential of inducing fear, shame and guilt in people, all of which are potential triggers for anxiety disorders, depression, helplessness and even suicidal ideation. When the content of the prophecy is worrying, it may produce panic because of the public awareness.

These potential negative outcomes of receiving ominous prophecies, can result in loss of faith or faith crises, and subsequent de-conversion. The individual may also lose the associated social and emotional support that they have from belonging to the church or group. Again, these are trigger points for psychological disorders.

Miracles

Although there were many described positive benefits of witnessing or experiencing miracles, few of our participants had specific negative impacts to relate. What did come up was an acknowledgement of the potential 'god complex' that may result between the prophet and the members of the congregation. Some participants were aware of the fact that focus and adulation may shift from God to the prophet when miracles were performed. The consequence of such adulation is the possibility of being taken advantage of: '…Now, there are a lot of pastors who are taking advantage of [people] and they are asking people to bring all sorts of things in order to give them their miracles, I've been a victim to that, that's why I no longer believe in those things. So many pastors have said a lot of different things…' (P.11, female, 29 years). This participant has clearly become disillusioned with this practice. The potential for faith crisis or apostasy is high in such cases. These kinds of examples dominated the participants' perceived negative impacts of miracles.

Other Church Activities

Again, despite the many positive factors arising from various church activities, there are also some negative consequences such as preventing medication adherence. In some instances, when prayers/desires of the individual were not fulfilled within a specific time, frustrations set in and attenuate one's faith and possibly cause the cessation of prayers. Too many church activities that span through the week may cause stress, loss of jobs and family problems. This is particularly so if one doesn't take a break from some of these activities, and especially for those individuals who are unable to assess the benefit and detriments of the activities on their well-being: '…one thing I know is that, in our church everybody is supposed to be very active, whether you are in the choir department, ushering department, [sometimes] the pastor would call you, [and] wherever you are you have to find yourself at [the main church] …' (P.19, Male, 23 years).

The demands from the church to engage in these week-long activities may cause stress which may lead to other psychological conditions:

> …Monday we have to go for church service and other rehearsals and then Tuesday teaching service and Wednesday also teaching service. Thursday we have rehearsals, Friday youth prayer service and sometimes all-night, Saturday rehearsals, so you see, sometimes maybe if you are not strong psychologically it can affect you especially when you are working and you need some rest. Stress might come in… sometimes you have to miss (P.48, Male, 27 years).

Church Teachings and Doctrines

Besides the positive role of church teachings, participants' accounts also revealed ways in which some of the teachings could potentially hinder mental health. Some churches prescribe dress codes and restrict women from wearing 'men's clothing' (trousers). These restrictions could prevent church attendance and the associated benefits, especially for congregants who are unable to afford acceptable attire:

> A teaching like a male shouldn't wear a female's clothing and vice versa, we don't have any teaching like that. God doesn't look at your dressing, He looks at the heart… some people are children spiritually, so if the person wears a dress and the pastor shouts you don't have to wear this to the church… Maybe that is what the person is used to wearing… The person wouldn't come again, you have sacked the person (P.65, male, 17 years).

Teachings on the second coming of Christ and the possibility of people not making it to Heaven also induced fear in some congregants. The problem is with the uncertainty about whether an individual will make it to heaven and spend eternity in delight or to hell in eternal damnation:

> They always teach that Jesus is coming. Those who are doing evil, those who wear skinny [a type of trousers], and those who wear trousers. I had a lot of fear running through me. Those who don't respect their husbands. All these made me to fear a lot. So I sat down to think about it … the Man is coming, and when He comes what would I tell him. So when I imagined that, when Jesus asks me of what work I have done in his church, what would I say… (P.73, female, 28 years).

A similar thought was shared by another participant who was concerned about whether or not she will make it to Heaven. Besides inducing fear, it also induced sadness: 'when the preaching comes, I become sad, because if God should come now, I don't know where I would stand' (P.76, female, 26 years).

While teachings on faith have the potential to instil resilience, the caveat is that, it could also promote blind faith and faith crisis. For example, congregants are encouraged to have strong faith that could make the impossible possible. However, in situations where such faith does not yield the desired results, the individual could experience faith crisis: 'They teach us that everything that you do … you should have faith … because when you have faith, you can tell this machine to move without electricity' (P.42, female, 13 years).

Another way in which church teachings could hinder mental well-being is through the church's emphasis on the content of the Bible. Many participants reported that the doctrine of the church is the content of the Bible. Some of the churches professed to follow all the content of the Bible and congregants are made to believe that what is taught in the church comes directly from the Bible. The problem with this method is that although the quotations may support the intended message the leaders are trying to convey to the congregants, the interpretation of the quotations may be misleading and some quotations may be taken out of context. Congregants may blindly follow the leaders due to their perceived authority and their trust in them, without discerning the quotations for themselves. Congregants may also become dependent on the leaders and may not learn to problem-solve for themselves: 'It is the word of God. That is first, we use bible, everything that we say is based on the word of God. We give them the assurance that what we are

telling them and teaching is from God, not from us but from God. So we have to do it … for their own good. … We believe if you obey [and] if you believe you will be great, not only on this earth but even after' (P.54, male, 38 years).

Discussion and Implications for Well-Being

The results of the study revealed significant findings that have implications for the mental well-being of the congregants. These are discussed below in line with the three broad thematic areas, namely, prophecies and miracles, other church activities and church doctrines.

Prophecies and Miracles

Our results suggest that prophecies and miracles as practiced in charismatic/neo-prophetic churches in Ghana can have both positive and negative consequences. This is similar to what has been reported in the literature (e.g. Koenig 2009; Smith, McCullough, and Poll 2003). The general perception of our participants is that prophecies and miracles in themselves are beneficial. However, the content, the mode of disclosure, and the motive behind the practice can negatively affect the mental well-being of recipients or participants.

Although prophecies and miracles may foster optimism, hope and growth, it can also lead to an unhealthy dependence on prophets for solutions to life's struggles. This is also similar to what other studies have reported (e.g. Shreve-Neiger and Edelstein 2004). As such, the individual as an agent is lost in the mix, and he/she develops a blind faith in the prophet's abilities. The dependency may also result in complacency and unrealistic expectations of success.

Further, although belonging to church groups can provide social, emotional or financial support, when members receive ominous prophecies about family members, or have unmet expectations of miracles, such bonds and familial support may break or may become burdensome. Unmet expectations for miracles may also result in cognitive dissonance in the individual when it appears that the expectation is unfulfilled due to some personal failing.

The end result of these processes is not only eventual apostasy and/or faith crises, but also potential psychological disorders such as anxiety disorders, mood disorders, intense feelings of shame and guilt (similar to what was reported by Koenig, King, and Carson 2012), and even suicide (Dein and Littlewood, 2005).

Other Church Activities

The results above also indicate that most participants found that engaging in religious activities improved their spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing. Other studies have found that regular participation in religious activities improve life satisfaction, happiness, emotional health and psychological well-being of their participants (e.g. Connor 2010; Levin, Markides, and Ray 1996). Most participants alluded to the fact that their involvement in religious activities was beneficial as they received social and emotional support which helped them when they encountered misfortune and difficulties. This in turn increased their emotional and psychological health given the enhancing effects of social support on psychological well-being (Petersen and Govender 2010).

The findings also indicated a change in behaviour of some participants due to the teachings and sermons they received when they attended some of the religious activities. This finding is consistent with other studies that were conducted to ascertain the influence of engaging in religious activities on behaviour change among adolescents (Jessor, Turbin, and Costa 1998; Wallace and Forman 1998). In addition, Agbiji and Swart (2015) also reported that being affiliated to religious group fosters the development of good personal values as described by participants in this study.

Although engaging in religious activities seemed beneficial, other participants also reported feeling stressed due to the demands of the churches' activities. This finding is consistent with previous studies (e.g. Strawbridge et al. 1998; Ellison et al. 2001) that highlight the association between demands of religious activities and exacerbation of stress in congregants. These negative experiences could lead to psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety.

Church Doctrines

The results further shed light on the association between church doctrine and the psychological well-being of the congregants. On the positive side, church teachings promoted mental well-being through four main pathways. First, church doctrines promoted virtues including humility, love, forgiveness, tolerance and benevolence. Additionally, church doctrines taught life skills, promoted personal resilience and focused congregants' attention on the rewards for salvation and eternity. These findings are consistent with previous studies that found religious teachings to reduce deviant behaviours (Johnson, DeLi, Larson, and McCullough 2000) and encourage the practice of virtues (Hill and Pargament 2003).

Another previous study found that spirituality promoted positive worldviews that gave meaning to personal experiences (Salifu Yendork and Somhlaba 2017). This in turn enhances a sense of purpose, direction, and hopeful beliefs (Koenig and Larson 2001). Furthermore, comfort and hope in the midst of troubling times has been shown to improve health outcomes among others (Koenig et al. 2012). Increased faith and religious involvement can also result in a generally positive outlook in life, fostering better resilience, self-efficacy and overall mental well-being (Dein 2013; Koenig et al. 2012). The teaching of empowerment skills could also improve mental well-being through fostering self-efficacy beliefs and self-esteem (Hajizadehanari et al. 2013).

Despite the positive impacts, church doctrines could hinder mental health through unrealistic restrictions of congregants' dress code, inducing fear and sadness through teachings that focused on damnation, promoting blind faith and faith crisis, and indirectly encouraging dependency on church leaders. Restrictions on dress code could prevent congregants from attending church services which in turn could prevent them from benefiting from being a part of a church community. Research has shown that during trying times, religion (especially membership in a church) and spirituality present a wide range of social and emotional ties and an opportunity for a shared experience of grieving (Somhlaba and Wait 2008). Thus, preventing individuals from attending church because of strict dress code could prevent the benefits associated with being a part of a church. Additionally, the association between church teachings and fear that we found also aligns with previous research (Jong 2013). Furthermore, the potential for faith crisis has also been confirmed by previous research (Mwakabana 2002).

Limitations and Directions for Future Study

In spite of the many findings reported above, there were some limitations that are important to note. One such limitation was the number of churches. With the time constraints and the difficulties in obtaining consent to participate from many of the churches that were approached, sampling participants from more churches would have provided greater context and perspectives.

A further task which would have enhanced analysis of narratives is comparisons with congregants from non-charismatic churches. This would have allowed an exploration of deeper cultural meanings and understanding of the discussed practices and concepts.

Conclusions

In conclusion, church activities and doctrines were found to have both positive and negative effects on the mental well-being of the congregants. It is therefore important that church members and leaders are engaged in continued dialogue to identify potential risks and benefits associated with religious membership. Further, the need for psycho-education cannot be overstated. When both members and leaders are aware of these impacts, the risk can be reduced and the benefits can be increased. Their understanding of mental health and spirituality will also provide avenues for mitigating harm. Periodic workshops, seminars and/or talks will be beneficial. These could be done for members and leaders separately to provide a means of learning from the experiences of others. There is also the need for stricter regulation around religious practices. This is a tall order considering the varying methods, needs and beliefs that exist. However, periodic spot checks by governing bodies may help to reduce the instances of abuse. Stricter requirements for registering as a religious entity may be needed to enhance monitoring of their activities.

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New Imaginations of Youth Agency: Boko Haram and the Innovative Gospel of Terror in Nigeria

Edlyne E. Anugwom

Abstract

The study is an empirical examination of the credentials of the Boko Haram as an innovative religious expression driven by socio-economic marginalization in the Northeast of Nigeria. It discovered that the Boko Haram is a youth driven sect which, even though embodying the rich history of Islamic fundamentalism in the North of Nigeria, has manifested innovative strategies for confronting the decadent Nigerian state and its political class. Prominent in this case is the ideology of *takfir* which has led the sect to kill fellow Muslims. The group has also pioneered the 'gendering' of Islamic fundamentalism through the use of women as active collaborators and suicide bombers in its later history. Strangely enough, the study discovered an ambivalence regarding the perception of the legitimacy of the sect with a good number of respondents seeing the group as Islamic both in its messages and methods. In conclusion, the study discovered that the Boko Haram has raised salient questions about the political economy of Nigeria that need addressing if resurgence of such conflicts is to be averted. Also, while de-radicalization came up as a means of tackling Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria, there is need for a nuanced approach that builds on credibility and acceptance of those driving the programme.

KEY WORDS: Boko Haram, Insurgence, Northeastern Nigeria, Islam, Terrorism

Introduction

The study examined the extent to which the Boko Haram insurgence represents an innovative religious imagination of redressing perceived social exclusion and marginalization from mainstream socio-economic and political processes in Nigeria. Thus, in spite of a noted history of religious violence in Nigeria, the Boko Haram, which is highly populated by young people, may represent a new religious strategy for addressing perceived socio-economic privation in the larger Nigerian society.

While there is no doubt that events since late 2015 - especially in terms of a better coordinated military response - have undermined the capacity of the Boko Haram to inflict terror and greatly diminished its presence in the Northeast of Nigeria, it is still too early to categorically state that the Boko Haram has been totally vanquished. Perhaps nothing

underlines the above more than the spate of bomb attacks in such places as Madagali (Adamawa state) and the University of Maiduguri in January 2017[1]. In fact, the ability of the Boko Haram to successfully strike and inflict carnage on a hitherto safe haven like the university calls attention to the proven capacity of the group to still cause mayhem in Nigeria. The insurgence has presented daunting challenges of nationhood and raised critical questions regarding both the political economy of Nigeria and the ambivalence of religion as a source of solidarity.

In spite of the constitutional provision which defines Nigeria as a secular state, religious diversity has often threatened this secularity. Thus, vertical religious differences have continually questioned the continued existence of Nigeria as a secular state. While there is no contesting the fact that Islam remains a slightly dominant religion in Nigeria, more than 40% of the citizens of contemporary Nigeria subscribe to Christianity and other forms of religion.

Although the Boko Haram episode in Nigeria has been rightly labelled an act of terrorism, there has been a tendency to gloss over the underlying or driving force of the insurgence. Therefore, while Boko Haram represents an affront to the corporate existence of Nigeria, there is no denying the fact that some of the issues that the group has adduced for its actions may be related to popular imaginations of justice and reprisals against a perceived unjust state.

Apart from the above, the wanton killing of known Islamic clerics and scholars by the Boko Haram in the last six years brings a new dimension to the need to understand the dynamics of the group especially as a prototype of Islamic fundamentalist groups in the North of Nigeria. It has been shown that a great gap in socio-economic status sponsors the belief that even rich Muslims are unbelievers as exemplified in the philosophy of the *Maitatsine* movement of the 1980s, responsible for perhaps the greatest number of Islamic religious conflicts in the history of Nigeria (see, Udoidem, 1997). In this case, religious conflict may become a metaphor for economic competition and the urge to violently establish an economic level playing field (see, Odey 2000; Anugwom, 2008).

The study tried to provide an evidence-based understanding of the extent to which the persistence and popularity of the Boko Haram are related to its perception as a tool for addressing both marginalization and social exclusion from the Nigerian state. Typically, the main members of the sect are youthful *'talakawas'* or commoners in the Northeast who may feel marginalized and totally deprived of socio-economic provisioning by both the state and central governments.

Given seeming resilience of the Boko Haram there is need for continuous interrogation of the nature and dynamics of the group both as an innovative religious sect and the embodiment of the imagination of improved socio-economic conditions. Beyond the euphoria of the likelihood of the vanquishing of the Boko Haram is the fact that it represents only a peculiar form of fundamentalism in the Northeast, hence the likelihood of other forms of even more fundamental violent groups emerging from the region remains very imminent.

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[1] Unconfirmed estimates would show that there were more than ten successful and aborted bomb attacks by the Boko Haram in January 2017 alone in the Northeast. This number is really amazing given the narratives of the military on having totally emasculated the group.

It is imperative to state here that apart from mainly journalistic forays into the understanding of the Boko Haram (e.g. Walker, 2016), diplomatic overviews and what may be termed casual field interaction in the course of some other research assignments in the North of Nigeria (e.g. Last, 2009; Harnischfeger, 2015) there has not been any thorough-going empirical survey of the Boko Haram in the scale done in this study. Thus, this study may be seen as one of the earliest attempts to examine the Boko Haram from the perspective of a well-grounded field study.

The study was conducted between March and August 2016 in Borno State, Northeast Nigeria where incidentally the activities of the Boko Haram have been largely concentrated. However, the study purposively selected two Local Government Areas (LGAs) viz. Maiduguri and Gwoza as the study locations. The choice was premised on the concentration of Boko Haram activities in the LGAs and the relative security in these LGAs. The study depended on information gathered from a total of ninety-two (92) respondents (i.e. 48 from Gwoza and 44 from Maiduguri including 12 focus group discussion (FGD) participants in each of the two LGAs). The respondents, which included men and women (about a third of the sample) and youth and older members of the communities (early 20s to over 60 years), were selected using a combination of the snowballing and purposive methods. In addition, the study utilized three methods in gathering data: from documentary sources, the Key Persons Interviews (KPIs), and the FGD. Interestingly, the information from these three sources proved adequate and generated good information for the study.

State of the Knowledge: Islamic Fundamentalism, Sharia and the Boko Haram

Quite a good volume of literature has emerged in the last decade focusing on the Boko Haram (see, Adesoji, 2010; Onuoha, 2010; Cook, 2011; Loimeier, 2012; Aghedo, 2014; Perry, 2014; Campbell, 2015; Comolli, 2015; Walker, 2016 etc.). Interestingly, these materials discuss the insurgence of the Boko Haram largely through information pieced together from the media, documents and insights gained through journalistic endeavours in the North of Nigeria. As good as some of these accounts have been, they have not benefitted from a thorough-going empirical investigation of the Boko Haram.

It is often the case that religious insurgence like the 'Boko Haram' is interpreted as the reflection of a Nigerian state battling with the challenges of nationhood and where socio-economic privation make citizens easy prey to the antics of religious fundamentalists (see, Danjibo, nd; Loimeier, 2012; Adesoji, 2010; Aghedo, 2014; Asuelime and Ojochenemi, 2015). However, the Boko Haram has, in spite of later metamorphosis, anchored its unique proselytization on the acute need to return to what it sees as pure Islam and unadulterated *Sharia*. It rejects both mainstream Islam in Nigeria and disavows the Sharia in practice in about twelve states in Nigeria.

Be that as it may, the extant literature has been inundated with the view of the dynamic and conflict-prone nature of religion, even in the present era of modernity where the influence of religion is expected to have waned. As Ellis and ter Haar (2004:17) argue, 'western-trained thinkers largely failed to foresee the resurgence of religion because they had made a series of wrong assumptions about the place of religion in regimes of modernization'. Therefore, religion, especially in the form of fundamentalism, has become a phenomenon with which some modern nations, including Nigeria, must contend even as new forms of individualism and anti-religious orientations take root globally. One

critical issue in religion in Nigeria is the Sharia question. As Kukah (1993) contends, the Sharia project, which can be traced back to the pre-colonial jihad of Usman dan Fodio, aims at ultimately building a state in which politics and governance would be determined by the rules of Islamic religion in Nigeria.

The Sharia law's transformation from a peculiarly customary law for Northerners to a criminal law applicable to all people was driven by the example of Zamfara state, which adopted the Sharia first in 2000 (Anugwom, 2008). After Zamfara, other states of the North quickly followed suit in adopting Sharia, which became a watershed in the history of Nigeria's secularity (Anugwom, 2008). Apart from the multiple effects of the Sharia adoption on the socio-political system and inter-ethnic and religious relationship in the country, its negative impact on collective life was very instructive (Anugwom, 2008; Odey, 2000).

Historically the Sharia was created as a response to the need to generate a set of laws that could be uniformly and strictly applied to all Muslims, especially in the context of the emergent Islamic empires that brought together large numbers of people from diverse backgrounds under one religious and political umbrella (Kukah, 1993; Khuri, 1990; Komonchak, Collins and Lane, 1993). Incidentally the brouhaha about the Sharia was further exacerbated in the context of Nigeria's political system, in which ethnic politics and ethno-regional rivalries seem rife (Anugwom, 2008; Obasi and Anugwom, 2002; Ejobowah, 2000).

The quest for Sharia is anchored in the belief that it represents the pure and correct Mohammadan order. Therefore, in spite of the struggle for political power after Mohammad's death, which led to the first split in Islam between the Sunni (those loyal to the Umayyad Dynasty founded by Mu'awiyah) and Shia (followers of the fourth Caliph, Ali) and complicated the practice of inseparability of religion and politics, orthodox Muslims want to establish the ideal Muhammadian order (Ayoob, 2008; Choueiri, 1990; Khuri, 1990). Ostensibly the elites, who are the drivers of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria, are basically motivated by the desire to emulate Usman dan Fodio (Ali, 2003; Kukah, 1993; Anugwom, 2008). Perhaps like him, these elites see the control of socio-political structures and leadership of Islamic faithful within a Sharia context as critical pre-requisites to the unadulterated practice of Islam (Kukah, 1993; Williams, 1997; Anugwom, 2008).

The overriding goal of the Boko Haram was to replace the Western-style state, its governance and its values with those derived from pure or unadulterated Islamic tenets. In the views of a popular Nigerian news magazine: 'The mission of the sect was to establish an Islamic state where "orthodox Islam" is practiced. Orthodox Islam according to Muhammed Yusuf, leader of the sect, frowns at western education and working in the civil service because it is sinful' (Tell, August 10, 2009:34).

However, the extent to which this orientation is still explicitly the goal of the Boko Haram and its leaders remain questionable. Given the level of atrocity committed by the Boko Haram even against fellow Muslims, the big question is the extent to which the group can still be seen as strictly a religious movement aimed at any edification of Islam. Galadima (2011) argues that the group has transformed from a seeming ideological sect into a group of murderers and political gangsters.

The Boko Haram, in spite of whatever appeal to the aspirations of the common people, is first and foremost an Islamic fundamentalist group. Although Islamic fundamentalist groups are characterized by vast differences in ideology, beliefs, organization and behaviour (van Bruinessen, 1995; Choueiri, 1990; Dessouki, 1982), they share commonality in rejection of secularism and an avowed commitment to enthronement of Sharia. Islamic fundamentalism has thrived in Nigeria against the background of fears and suspicion which have marked inter-group relations in the country (Anugwom, 2008; Sanusi, 2007; Udoidem, 1997). In effect, Islamic fundamentalism has become more or less a recurrent decimal in national socio-political life (see Udoidem, 1997; Williams, 1997).

The Boko Haram is not the first incidence of Islamic religious uprising in Northern Nigeria. In fact, it could be argued that the Boko Haram is largely a new addition to the long history of Islamic fundamentalist conflicts in the area. It might have been this fact that led Aghedo (2014) to view the Boko Haram as 'old wine in a new wine bottle'. Aghedo traced in broad detail the relationship between the Boko Haram and the Maitatsine uprising, although he focused mainly on similarities between the two groups outlined in the rejection of secularism, condemnation of ostentatious lifestyle, rejection of western democracy and education. But the above traits of similarity between the two groups can be fairly generalized for all Islamic fundamentalist groups in the world. Thus, the challenge would really lie in generating a nuanced understanding of the innovative strategies of insurgence imbued in the Boko Haram.

Prominent in the discourse on the Boko Haram is the role of socio-economic deprivation. In this sense, most writers on the subject subscribe to what can be termed the economic narrative of the insurgence (Loimeier, 2012; Adesoji, 2010; Aghedo, 2014; Perry, 2014; Comolli, 2015) and in most of these cases, the economic situation is seen as the main driver of the insurgence. Smith (2016: 59) summarily captured this fact thus:

> As Nigeria's oil economy led to the neglect of other industries and corruption flourished, the North-east struggled. The region, for so long a crossroads of ideas and trade in the scrubby savannah near Lake Chad and the Sahara desert, trailed much of the rest of the country in education and wealth by the time Yusuf began building his movement.

However, a thorough-going study of the Boko Haram as done in this study and familiarity with the history of both Islam and its relationship with the state in Nigeria may indicate a tendency to over-emphasize the socio-economic drivers of the insurgence. In other words, apart from interrogating some of the generalizations in the extant knowledge on the Boko Haram, this study was called forth by the need to investigate the innovative credentials of the Boko Haram and its assumed niche as a youth agency responding to socio-economic and political challenges of the ordinary citizens in the Northeast of Nigeria.

The Boko Haram and the Innovative Gospel of Terror: Evidence from the Field

Origin of the Boko Haram

While there are contending and even contradictory viewpoints on the origin of the Boko Haram (Onuoha, 2010; Cook, 2011; Danjibo, 2009; Cline, 2011; Comolli, 2015) especially

in relationship to the exact date it took off and its relationship with the group called the Nigerian Taliban which sprang up in Yobe state and launched attacks in 2003/2004 in that state; there is an emerging consensus among my respondents which shows no ambivalence regarding the origin of the group. The majority of the gatekeepers interviewed linked the Boko Haram to a group initially called the *Yusuffiyya* which was a crystallization of those who were drawn to the fiery preaching of Mohammed Yusuf in early 2000s.

Yusuf's antecedents can rightly be traced as far back as the 1990s when he was a key member of the Muslim Youth Organization called the *Ahlulsunna wal'jama'ah hijra* in Maiduguri (Adisa, 2012). This group was largely seen as an offshoot of the Izala, a Salafist movement for removing impure additions to Islamic practice (e.g. Sufism), and engaged mainly in intellectual discourse and debates over the Qur'an and Hadith. The group was initially led by Abubakar Lawan. Yusuf, who was a member of this group and even assumed the mantle of leadership briefly when Lawan left for further studies in Saudi Arabia, soon enough carved an entirely different niche for himself. He believed that the Izala, in spite of portending Salafist tendencies, was too soft and often in cahoots with the decadent modern state (Harnischfeger, 2015). The group later imploded over the style and obvious confrontational orientation of Yusuf.

The remnants of the group that agreed with the stance of Yusuf, especially on the immediacy of jihad and the total negation of the state, and others--especially young unemployed males; artisans; commercial motor cycles riders and even young men in tertiary institutions in the state (a group obviously staring down the barrel in terms of socio-economic future) were drawn to the powerful preaching of the young Yusuf and transformed into the Yusuffiya sect. Thus, the respondents saw the Yobe group (the so-called Nigerian Taliban) as an independent group of those who were originally with Yusuf but rebelled against him. Hence:

> The group was founded by Muhammed Alih and Muhammed Yusuf of blessed memories in Maiduguri and had branches across the Northeast zone of the country. It was based on the authentic interpretation of the Glorious Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet as well as the philosophies of Ibn Taymiyya (of blessed memories) after whom our headquarters "Ibn Taymiyya Masjid," which was bombed in 2009 by the Nigeria government, was named. The group was peaceful and structured around Yusuf until his death in 2009 after which Imam Abubakar Shekau took over the leadership.[2]

This is slightly different from the dominant narratives in the literature which argue that the group led by one Ali broke away when it became tired of Yusuf's slow build-up to the desired Islamic state (Walker, 2016). A more telling, but not evidence-borne, perspective is that privileged in Comolli (2015) - that the Boko Haram sprang up from this group and probably moved to Maiduguri after the altercation with security agencies in 2004. Those interviewed were of the predominant view that the group originated from Maiduguri with the antics of Yusuf in the Indimi mosque in that town. Thus:

> Jama'atu Allis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal Jihad now referred to as Boko Haram was a group of Muslims who came together under the leadership of late Sheik Muhammad Yusuf here in Maiduguri for the practice and propagation of Islam in its original form. The sect was peaceful before it was attacked by the Nigerian

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[2] Personal interview with Ademu Alih, Boko Haram sympathiser in Gwoza (21 April 2016).

authorities and hijacked by the criminals. The intention of the founders was clearly to propagate Islam based on original interpretation of the doctrines of Islam and that was why the sect attracted large numbers of people to her processions and lectures in those good days.[3]

The sentiments above also found overwhelming support among the FGD participants. Apart from a lone dissenting voice in the FGD for men in Gwoza, there was agreement on the Maiduguri origin of the Boko Haram. The lone voice was of the view that the Boko Haram took roots first from Yobe state before moving to Maiduguri. On further probe, the dissenter conceded and stated that he got the view from discussions with a neighbour who lived in Yobe in the early 2000s.

Boko Haram as Reflective of Novel Youth Agency

One thing that is generally agreed upon regarding the Boko Haram is the demographic categorization of its members. In this regard, the movement is perceived generally in the Northeast as a movement by young people. This perception was common among all the respondents and even among the FGD participants. As a matter of fact, some opinion leaders in the communities investigated saw the young age of the members of the group as the main reason why they are easily misled by their leaders. According to one such respondent, an Imam in a mosque in Maiduguri: 'the Boko Haram are misdirected and misinformed young people who think that they can transform their situations overnight. It is both the exuberance of young people and some foolishness gone too far".[4] 'This view is further reinforced by the contention, 'Yes of course! They are young people. And that is perhaps a major reason why they choose violence instead of seeking justice peacefully'.[5] Another respondent easily concurs, 'Boko Haram is an organization of young people, most of whom have no education, and that is why their approach is very poor and bad'.

In general, the Boko Haram is a movement in the demographic category that can be referred to as young people or those who are far short of 40 years. Even though the exact age of both Yusuf and Shekau remain unknown, there is little doubt that Yusuf died before he was 40 years and Shekau is presumably short of forty years in age. The high number of young people drawn to the movement has been seen in the literature as a direct consequence of the increasing privation among this demographic group and the obvious incapacity or unwillingness of the state (easily represented in the public imagination by the political elites) to do something about the situation of these young people. An obvious fact from the study is that despite the role of politics in the movement, there is no gainsaying the fact that its foot soldiers are drawn from the commoners who are typically young, poor, uneducated and either unemployed or severely underemployed.

Even those people in the Northeast who condemn the actions of the group relate all the same to the dire socio-economic situation of young people there. In this sense: 'The situation [of the young people there] is nothing to write home about. They are mostly illiterates and have no opportunities to advance themselves compared to youths in other parts of the country and the governments have not done much to arrest the situation and if nothing is done, other sects might emerge and do the same thing'.[6]

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[3] Personal interview with Aliyu Gambo, Maiduguri (25 July 2016).
[4] Personal interview with Imam Abubakar in Maiduguri (17 August 2016).
[5] Personal Interview with Abubakar, 38 year old politician in Gwoza (18 April, 2016).
[6] Personal interview with Alhaji Maitokobi a local politician in his early fifties in Gwoza, 19th April 2016.

Despite the above sentiments, some of the respondents could not see how the engagement in violence would in any sense ameliorate the situation of the young people. According to one of those with this opinion, an Imam of a mosque in Gubio, Maiduguri, 'Boko Haram is a terror group and the major drive behind its violence is the ideology. Yes, the people are poor and mostly illiterate but can Boko Haram violence solve these problems[7]'.

Equally reinforcing image of the Boko Haram as a group made up predominantly of young people is that it is associated with not only the rejection of the *status quo* by the young but equally as an attempt to use the vehicle of radical religion to remake their socio-political situation. The menace of the Boko Haram and the large following it enjoys are equally often related to another group of young people fostered by Islam in the form of the *almajarai* system very popular in the North. It is often the contention that Islamic fundamentalist groups like the Boko Haram have exploited this system in attracting members and willing soldiers to fight their cause (Isichei, 1987; Danjibo, 2009). Despite the predominant culpability of the *almajarai* one finds in the extant literature, Hoechner (2015) has called attention to the fact that the *almajarai* might not be guilty as charged. There is however, no contesting the fact that often there is only a thin veneer between pursuit of religious edification and fundamentalism. This separation can easily be lost in the case of the very young and impressionable youth that one finds in the ranks of the *almajarai.*

From Infidels to Takfirs: Boko and the Redefinition of Fidelity to Islam

A critical difference between the Boko Haram and the other Islamic fundamentalist groups before it in Nigeria is in the redefinition of those who are faithful to the religion. In this case, while other Islamic fundamentalist groups before the Boko Haram conceptualized opposition and enmity to Islam broadly in terms of unbelievers (Christians) and heathens, the Boko Haram operate from the perspective that Muslims who do not subscribe to the jihad and return to pure Islam are equally as guilty as the former and deserve death. This orientation is largely captured in its unpopular notion of 'Takfir'.

The ideology of the Boko Haram derives not only from an extreme form of salafism but equally a non-negotiable belief in the principle of 'Takfir'. In line with this principle, all non-practicing Muslims (defined by the Boko Haram as the so-called mainstream or moderate Muslims in Nigeria) should be seen as 'kafirs' i.e. the equivalent of infidels. This principle goes on to hold that it is the primary obligation of the faithful to abandon polluted or impure Muslim societies, seek new abodes and more crucially wage a war against these Muslim infidels who deserve death in line with the overriding goals of the jihad.

The idea of Takfirism as promoted by the Boko Haram makes a critical but broad sweeping distinction between apostates and infidels. Even though this distinction is not in any sense novel in Islam, what is new is that the Boko Haram believes that both categories deserve the ultimate punishment i.e. death and that it is the required obligation of all Muslims to carry out this punishment.

The only close resemblance to the above can be discerned in the activities of the 1980s Maitatsine Movement. The leader of the group, the late Mohammed Marwa also held

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[7] Personal interview with Imam Ishaq, July 23, 2016 in Maiduguri.

strong strictures about members of the Islamic faith who were not members of the Maitatsine and unreceptive of the millennial doctrine of the group. Marwa only took this loathing of other Muslims to the extent of verbal cursing and unending vituperations. This was actually the source of the name 'Maitatsine' bestowed on him since it refers to 'the one who curses in Hausa language'. Thus, while Marwa would not have cared whether this group of Muslims lived or died he never raised his hands knowingly against them, thereby keeping to the injunction of the Holy Prophet that Muslims should not kill fellow Muslims.

Boko Haram's idea of the role of true Islam in present Nigeria differed radically from the *status quo* and thus set it far apart from other Islamic sects and mainstream Islam in the Northeast. Therefore:

> Boko Haram was not relating with other religious groups that existed before it because they believed that other Muslims were not practicing Islam the way it ought to be. They took a radical view of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims as well as the government. Their beliefs that the government is corrupt and meant to serve the elite and wants to replace it with an Islamic state that will be strictly guided by the Sharia. This position is similar to that of the Maitatsine sect that existed a long time ago.[8]

Incidentally, the unpopularity of the group beginning from 2013 can be related to the inability of other Muslims to understand the rationale, even from an Islamic point of view, behind the slaughter of other Muslims by the Boko Haram. This has led to recent attempts at questioning or doubting the religious credentials of the group and its intentions. Thus:

> I am not sure that these people are really Muslims. At the beginning one felt it was a religious thing but now nobody is sure again. How can they be bombing mosques, killing both Muslims and Christians? They are more like people who are not well [mad], I mean they cannot be Muslims. This is not Islam at all. In fact, it is either that they are ordinary blood thirsty people using religion as cover or they read the Qur'an upside down. This is not the behaviour of Muslims at all, we are not monsters, never.[9]

Familiarity with the history of the group's activities would show that the popularity of the group began to wane only when it became deeply involved in the killing of fellow Muslims from 2011 onwards. In other words, before this time, a lot of people supported the group and even its metamorphosis into a terrorist group was seen in many quarters as the consequence of the unnecessary highhanded response by the government:

> The group that was led by Yusuf was lawful and was minding its own business, preaching and even helping poor people here in Maiduguri until the military came and killed the leaders and most of them including even those who were not with the group. I think what we are now seeing is the retaliation of the young men in the group to government's brutal action.[10]

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[8] Personal interview with Alhaji Maitokobi, a local politician in his 50s in Gwoza (19th April, 2016).
[9] Personal Interview with Ahmed (taxi driver) - July 18th 2016 - Maiduguri, Nigeria.
[10] Personal Interview with Ishaya Adama, a long distance lorry driver – July 21, Maiduguri Nigeria

Legitimacy of Boko Haram's Methods

A critical concern of this study was to ascertain the extent to which the methods of the Boko Haram can be defined as novel and, critically, as truly reflective of the canons of Islam. The study was not as concerned with establishing the authenticity of jihad, which might be said to be emblematic of the religion in general, but rather attempted to examine the impact of Boko Haram's belief that other Muslims who do not subscribe to the immediacy of jihad and imperative of action are not truly Muslims.

As would be expected, the findings indicate a division between the members of the community who are neither members of the group nor sympathetic to it and those who are sympathetic or are aligned in some way to the group. However, this distinction is complicated by the voices of some people who are not members of the group and are ordinary members of the society see the methods of the Boko Haram as lying squarely within Islam. Given the fact that this was a consensus of an FGD session where participants were drawn from ordinary members of the community, one can only conclude that there is a certain ambivalence about the legitimacy of the Boko Haram. The consensus as expressed by one of the participants is, 'Boko Haram is Islamic. Shekau and his people are Muslims and they have repeatedly justified their jihad with provisions of the Quran and Hadiths. Whoever says that the sect is not Islamic is living in denial'.[11]

This should not be all too strange since a good knowledge of the dynamics of the sect would show that until the later stages of its existence, say from 2013 when it began to enforce the 'takfir', the group had enjoyed the support or sympathy of the larger Northeast population mainly based on their dissatisfaction with the way and manner the government and its agencies handled the 2009 face-off with the group. A classic example of the above can be seen in the assertion that:

> The Boko Haram group started here in Maiduguri in the early 2000. The sect was a religious group with a focus on the propagation of Islam through lectures and processions. It was founded by Sheikh Muhammad Yusuf who was killed by the police after he was arrested in 2009. It is important to differentiate between the sect Yusuf led and the Boko Haram group we have today. During the life time of Muhammad Yusuf, the Yusufiyya as they were then known were not armed. It was after his death that his student, Abubakar Shekau who took over the mantle of leadership successfully transformed the sect into an armed group and moved the sect to Sambissa forest.[12]

The legitimacy of the Boko Haram is influenced by status or social divide in the society. Therefore, while there is a certain ambivalence on this issue among members of the public, religious clerics and scholars who have borne the full brunt of both the humiliation (Boko Haram repeatedly referring to them as the supporters of the corrupt state and its political class) and violence (including assassinations) out rightly condemn the group and see no rationale for its activities. The same goes for the military engaged with the group. In one such instance, 'those guys [Boko Haram] do not even know why they are fighting. We have arrested and interrogated so many of them and I can authoritatively tell you that illiteracy

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[11] FGD Consensus with adult males. FGD conducted on 7th August 2016 at the LGEA Primary School, Madimagari, Maiduguri.

[12] Personal interview with Hon. Rabiu, a 45 year old politician originally from Biu (Maiduguri, 11 July 2016).

and poverty are the major reasons why Boko Haram flourished here in the North east'[13]. But the remonstrations of the above people on the illegitimacy of the group flies in the face of the opinions of the sympathizers of the Boko Haram who are in total agreement that the group is justified in its methods (actions) and hold the right interpretations of the Qur'an and the Hadith. Therefore:

> They are very legitimate [in methods]. As a Muslim, the Sharia is the most important law as far as I am concerned. There are clear provisions of the Quran about when to start a holy war and the rewards as well as punishments for Muslims who participate or refuse to participate, as the case may be. Whatever tactics adopted in the course of a holy war against the enemies is legitimate provided the Sharia is not against it.[14]

What the above sentiments underline is the observed incapacity of even mainstream Islam to denounce the Boko Haram on the basis of scripture. What one encounters is the usual denunciation of the group as young men ill-motivated or in pursuit of wrong interpretations of the scripture. The fact that Yusuf Mohammed while alive could hold his own admirably well in debates with recognized Islamic scholars and clerics says much about the doctrinal foundations of the group. Perhaps, what is at issue is the methodology of the Boko Haram rather than its version or interpretations of the scripture *per se*.

Boko Haram and the (En) Gendering of Violent Fundamentalism

Without doubt, the Boko Haram is the first Islamic fundamentalist group in the history of Nigeria to have found a meaningful role for women. While women were undoubtedly, victims of the insurgence (for instance the much-cited Chibok abduction and the numerous widows created by the group), there is strong indication that the women were not only victims of the Boko Haram. There have been reports of the active involvement of women in the activities of the group, not only in terms of providing backroom support like keeping the camp, cooking and fetching for the men, but also as active in the field by helping spread the message and even recruiting new members for the group.

According to a report by the Sahara Reporters (2014), the Nigerian military captured some of these women who confessed to acting as recruiters for the Boko Haram. This was seen as totally unrelated to the Chibok abduction and the women seemed to be working as undercover recruitment agents for the Boko Haram out of their own volition. In spite of the above, the dominant view is still that of the women as victims. Thus: 'women are being used by both parties even the government has been detaining and harassing women suspected of being wives and close family members of suspected Boko Haram people. They seem to forget that these women have neither influence nor power over the men. The men just do what they want to do'.[15]

Therefore, for an overwhelming majority of the respondents both in the interviews and the FGDs, women have been more or less pawns in the hands of the Boko Haram. Their opinions are agreed on the fact that the insurgence has visited untold hardship on both the women and the girl-child. Thus, 'As a women leader, I can tell you with all assurance that women are the big victims of Boko Haram crisis. Many have lost their

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[13] Captain Sotonye, field commander, Operation Lafia Dole (Gwoza, April 23, 2016).
[14] Personal interview with Shamsudeen Adams, 37 year old Boko Haram sympathizer (Maiduguri, 11 August 2016).
[15] Personal interview with 48 year old Hajia Hadiza Aminu (Gwoza; 19 April 2016).

husbands and children, even houses, and are displaced and might never return to this L.G.A again'[16].

However, an interesting dimension came from the sentiments of an Islamic scholar in Gwoza who contends, 'there is no doubt that women because they are weak physically have been abused in the conflict. However, a good number of women have served willingly as the wives and cooks of these boys. Some of them are in the camps of the sect because they want and not really because they were forced'[17]. Perhaps lending some credence to the above views is the position of a youth respondent in Maiduguri, 'women are sometimes drawn to men of action. They may think that going to the members of the sect makes them special or something like that'.[18]

Be that as it may, while the notion that women were pawns in the hands of the Boko Haram might be strong there is no denying the case that over 85% of the bombings of the group since 2013 have been carried out by women. These female suicide bombers are usually young girls in their teens. While, there is some controversy about whether these girls are willing suicide bombers or are rather being led or coerced into it by the group (like in the idea that some of the abducted Chibok girls are being used in this manner); the fact remains that these girls are the ones bearing the torch of Boko Haram's suicide bombing nowadays. Interestingly, even with the diminishing capacity of the Boko Haram in the last two years, these women suicide bombers have remained active. The first two suicide bombing recorded in 2017 in Madagali and the University of Maiduguri were the handiwork of these teenage female bombers.

Towards a Theoretical Explanation of the Boko Haram

In spite of the existence of a good number of theories (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Sinai, 2012; Borum, 2003; Schmid, 2013) I find the staircase model of Moghadam (2009) very insightful in understanding the Boko Haram in Nigeria especially in view of the revelations from my study. The model in significant ways addresses the peculiar needs of a study of jihadist terrorism or the Salafist-jihadism of the type of the Boko Haram. In the views of Moghadam, radicalization in Islam can be seen in the form of narrowing staircase which leads step by step to the very top represented by acts of terrorism.

He conceives the staircase model like a building which has, in his unique metaphor five main floors, viz. the ground floor, occupied literally by the over 1 billion Muslims in the world, who have some sort of the cognitive apprehension of the structural circumstances of the individual. The first floor is occupied by individuals who are seeking to remedy or set right the conditions seen as unjust. Ultimately some of those on the first floor eventually move up to the second floor, which involves being directed towards external targets. This stage equally involves the process of radicalization in a number of places including mosques. The third floor is the next stage and involves both a disengagement from the society and a moral engagement with the terrorist organization. It is here that values are constructed which are geared towards rationalizing violence and debunking the moral authority of the state. Also, some of those on the third floor soon move upward again to the fourth floor where there is the strong acceptance of the legitimacy of the terrorist organization.

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[16] Personal interview with Hajia Mairo, 55 year old women leader in Gwoza (20 April 2016).
[17] Personal interview with 62 year old Malam, Gwoza, 21 April 2016.
[18] Personal interview with a youth in his 20s, Maiduguri, July 14, 2016.

According to Moghadam (2009) at this stage the predominant attitude is you are either with us or you are against us. At this stage, the individual is also incorporated into the organization and its values and structures. Like the other stages, some individuals here are recruited into the fifth or final steps on the staircase which involves the committing of terrorist acts. Despite the fact that the above model arose largely in response to global terrorism and worries with radicalization, it can be used in explaining the Boko Haram. Thus, the members of the Boko Haram sect can be seen as neither reflective of Islam in Nigeria nor in the Northeast. Thus, radicalization and engagement in violence are choices made by few individuals who strongly feel the need to take matters into their hands in order to address perceived injustice or seek redress.

Crucially, the model recognizes the same fact as my findings do - that terrorism and insurgence do not simply arise because one is a Muslim or aware of his situation viz.-a-viz. significant others in the society. Therefore, becoming a committed member of the Boko Haram or other insurgent sects and being ready to embark on violent jihadism goes beyond being a Muslim. It involves a systematic process of radicalization and/or indoctrination, which leads the individual to the point of violent action.

Concluding Remarks

The major outcome of the investigation of the Boko Haram carried out in this study is the revelation that the Boko Haram is a product of myriad socio-political and historical factors. To this end any monolithic explanation of the insurgence and its nature misses the mark. For starters, the insurgence is built on a robust history of Islamic fundamentalism in the North of Nigeria.

As the contemporary political history of Nigeria shows, the quest for pure Sharia and the place of Sharia in national life have played controversial roles in the nation's body politic and in informing intergroup relationships since independence in 1960 (Kukah, 1993). The Boko Haram has benefitted from the above history and the politicization of Sharia by politicians eager for cheap electoral votes in early 2000s. The failure of the political class in the North to live-out the prescriptions of Sharia and give the people the Sharia system promised after election has been a prominent plank of the Boko Haram insurgence.

Widespread poverty and deepening privatisation in the Northeast have unwittingly produced a teeming army of frustrated and hopeless young people, amenable to the devices of the Boko Haram. The socio-economic situation is craftily construed as a response to the political class and the large-scale corruption in the state which has created a situation in which the poverty and misery of ordinary citizens deepen, while the political elites swim in dumbfounding opulence. However, as I have argued, despite the prominence of the socio-economic privation in the Northeast it cannot be taken as an adequate explanation of the Boko Haram. In this sense, the economic condition was important largely in terms of making it easier for the message of the group to strike the right chords and for the group to easily recruit young people to its cause.

The Boko Haram can also be validly explained within the context of the politicization of Islam in modern Nigeria. While the political elites have found it expedient to manipulate religion to their benefits; the religious class has also played politics by hobnobbing with these politicians and even slanting religious doctrines to suit decadent politics and

obedience to a failed state. In the consensual views of participants in one of the FGD sessions: 'Most politicians always want to take advantage of everything including Boko Haram. Before it was outlawed, there were allegations of even government financial supports and patronage which played vital roles in the survival and capacity of the sect. Politics is a dirty game and politicians are devils. They supported Boko Haram.'[19]

The angst of the Boko Haram against prominent Islamic clerics in the North and even the falling out between Yusuf and the Izala Movement is traced to the belief of the Boko Haram that these people were wrongly using religion to prop-up a decadent political system to the neglect of the citizens and the dictates of pure Islam.

One of the solutions to the insurgence that came up equally in the views of the respondents is the use of de-radicalization which aims at weaning the young people in the Northeast from the poisonous doctrines of the Boko Haram and similar groups. In the views of one of the respondents:

> There is need to get right information regarding the religion to the young ones in order to avoid groups like Boko Haram confusing them. Islam is a religion which preaches love and submission to Almighty Allah. A religion which talks about love cannot also support massive killing of innocent people as the Boko Haram has done. The young ones need to know the truth about Islam.[20]

Without doubt the government in Nigeria has seen de-radicalization as a viable solution to the recurrent menace of Islamic fundamentalist groups in the North of the country and has instituted programmes on de-radicalization. However, the efforts of the government, apart from not being massive or widespread in the North, are undermined by the fact that it uses the same set of clerics that the Boko Haram has stigmatised as the leaders of de-radicalization. This has meant massive pessimism amongst the youth and general distrust with the programme.

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'Battling for Souls: Contesting for Space'? African Traditional Religions and Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe

Tapiwa Praise Mapuranga

Abstract

There is no doubt of the existence of religious competition and conversion in Africa. Pentecostalism has become one of the fastest growing forms of Christianity that has created a major competition for African traditional religions. This study concurs with the idea that diversity and competition are often vehicles, if not drivers, of creative change, and such innovation creates more competition. It is the thrust of this study to analyse how contemporary Pentecostalism in Harare has been forced to create innovations from African Traditional Religion as experienced through 'rituals, symbols and practices that are usually forms of communication with the divine as well as through more contemplative practices that enhance one's awareness of the presence of God' (Mwaura 2008:2).

KEY WORDS: Innovation, Competition, African Traditional Religion, Pentecostalism, Continuity and Change

Introduction

Religious competition exists amongst various religious traditions that exist in the Zimbabwean religious market. This article explores the competition that exists between Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religions (ATRs). It is the aim of this study to analyse how contemporary Pentecostalism in Harare has been forced to compete against ATRs. The study examines how Pentecostalism has created innovations drawn from ATRs so as to maintain the relevance of spirituality in a world characterized by religious competition. As players in the same religious market, Pentecostalism and ATRs are likely to be involved in a competitive quest to attract clients. As Michael Bourdillon (1990) avers, this can create tension between the religions. However, this study approaches the theme from a more positive perspective; we seek to explore the extent to which practitioners of ATRs and Pentecostalism have been forced to be innovative and creative as they seek to create boundaries and present themselves as offering a more competitive product.

Rationale of This Study

The significance of this study lies in its quest to unveil the significance of the African belief system in the African, even in the context of conversion to other religions. Scholars such as J.S Mbiti (1969, 1975), J.A Awolalu (1976), amongst others, generally concur that ATRs are indigenous beliefs and practices that have been passed on from one generation to the other. This is generally a lived way of life that is complex and multifaceted. This study seeks to analyse how far this indigenous beliefs and practices have been passed on over generations, no matter the arrival of newer traditions such as Pentecostalism.

As shall be expanded in this article, ATRs have faced a lot of competition from other religious traditions on the religious market. There have been ways (through innovation) in which this traditional religion has adapted to some competition to remain relevant. One of the forms of religions that have been in competition with ATR is Pentecostalism. In this study, I argue that ATR has continued to survive within Pentecostalism. This implies that, though a competitor, Pentecostalism has embraced ATR, by innovating ideas borrowed from ATR. Thus, some scholars have stated that, 'through modern changes, the traditional religion cannot remain intact but it is by no means extinct (Awolalu 1976:1).

Scholars are increasingly recognising the emergence of these newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the African ecclesial experience (e.g., Bateye 2008:116, Ukah 2007). Pentecostalism represents the fastest growing brand of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa (Kalu 2008). Of the three types of Pentecostalism identified by Ukah (2007: 11), this article focuses on the newer Pentecostal churches. In Zimbabwe, these newer Pentecostal churches have mushroomed after the year 2000. Some of the more prominent include The Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries, (PHD), United Family International Church (UFIC), Spirit Embassy, and the Divine Yard Church of His Presence (DCOHP). They sprang up alongside a few older Pentecostal bodies, such as Family of God Church (FOG), and Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Church (ZAOGA), that were in existence earlier.

This study argues that Pentecostalism is surviving in an era where there were already existent forms of worship. To survive, Pentecostalism must compete with and (if possible), outdo the existing traditional practices (amongst other religions). Consequently, Pentecostalism has to invent new ideas from African religions that appeal to the believers of ATR so as to be relevant within the same setup which has always appealed to African believers. Thus, the two religions have to face intense competition and be innovative enough to thrive in the religious market.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative methodology, using an ethnographic case study approach. The study lies in the sociological assumption that when two or more religious systems share the same space, they are likely to compete for followers. Close examination of these spaces was best suited to the methodology selected. The research site, Harare, was selected and isolated carefully. It constitutes the hub of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, with its cosmopolitan outlook. It thus hosts the Head Offices of numerous Pentecostal ministries, as well as various practitioners of African traditional religion.

Fieldwork was conducted over eight months. This included interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. A total of twenty interviews were held with

various categories of research participants who include religious leaders and members of the congregation (men and women) from each of the participating religious organisations.

Apart from interviews, Pentecostal and interdenominational conventions were attended (such events are always under way in Harare). This enabled participant observation to be a critical tool of the research methodology. Furthermore, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews availed qualitative data that clarified the phenomenon under investigation. Participant observation was also done by attending and witnessing selected traditional ceremonies. Processing and analysis of data included translation of some material from Shona and Ndebele and synthesizing data according to themes.

Brief Overview of Literature

Several scholars have examined the relationship between Christianity in general and ATRs. Examples include Mosala (1983), who examines the relationship between African traditional religious beliefs and Christianity. This same relationship has been noted by Maxwell (2002), who argues that in some way Christians tend to borrow from traditional religion and culture. More related to this study is the argument by Biri (2012) that ATR remains a 'silent, but echoing voice' in Pentecostalism. She argues that 'Pentecostalism does not offer anything completely new but that what it offers either resonates well with, or is sourced from the historical religious and cultural background of believers' (2012: 37). It is from such arguments that the following chapters seek to examine the validity and applicability of this argument.

This study particularly interrogates the popular notion that conversion to Pentecostalism represents a clean break with the past (Meyer 1998; Togarasei 2006). It seeks to understand how values, beliefs and practices from ATRs might be continuing in Pentecostal churches in Harare, despite the rhetoric and official dismissal of them. Preliminary studies by Biri (2012), albeit in a rural setting, appear to indicate that Pentecostal churches have carried over key aspects of the traditional worldview. This study confirms Ogbu Kalu's contention that 'the African map of the universe' is at the heart of African Pentecostalism (2008: ch. 9).

Innovation and Competition: Unpacking the Concepts

Religious innovation may be defined as a departure from orthodox, and can be deemed as a threat to the original praxis. (Iyer et al 2011). For Iyer,

> …'innovation' in the religion sector … [is] any alteration to beliefs and/or to religious practice either by individuals or by the religious clergy that has an impact on then subsequent actual observance of the religion. Consequently, taking a cue from the literature from the economics of innovation, we can think of `innovation' in the religion sector if there are alterations to religious practice, which makes previous practice less likely to be adopted (2011: 5-6).

Expanding out from this definition, this article therefore analyses the ways in which Pentecostalism has altered the beliefs in ATR, illustrating how these traditional religions have managed to survive the threat and competition posed by these newer religions. But just what is this religious competition?

One of the varied definitions of religious competition has been given by Lu, Johnson and Stark (2008:140: 'Competition lies at the heart of the religious economy model. The model assumes that there is a religious market in which religious firms compete with each other to attract or maintain adherents by means of providing religious products and services'.

In simpler terms therefore, religious competition may be defined as the art of trying to get to the hearts and minds of the believers in the religious marketplace of any given society. From these definitions, this article argues that religious innovation and competition can be manifested in various dimensions which include rituals, doctrinal, spiritual, experiential, and moral amongst many others. For this article, there is an implication that although African traditional religion seems to be under threat from modern day Pentecostalism in Harare today, its tremors are still being experienced within Pentecostalism. On the one hand, one can argue that ATR has been innovative enough such that it remains existent amidst religious competition. On the other hand, it could be argued that Pentecostalism has developed a strategy to adopt new ideas that are acceptable in the religious market by transforming what had always existed within ATRs.

The next section examines results from the study which show some of the aspects from both African Traditional religion and Pentecostalism that illustrate the vibrancy of this innovation and competition between the selected religions.

Findings

Fieldwork from a number of Pentecostal ministries that include PHD ministries, UFIC and DCOHP amongst others has illustrated a lot of mutual borrowing, competition and innovation with ATRs. This pattern seems inevitable as these religions seek the same attention within same spaces. Some of the findings are identified below.

The belief in Spirits and Exorcism

The belief in spirits is one of the major aspects of African traditional religions. Spirits are critical in the religious life of any human being in African traditional religion. These spirits can be labelled as either good or bad depending on their role and effect in the life of the believer. As such, good spirits (such as those which might invoke a talent to heal, sing, or hunt, amongst other roles) can be invoked and celebrated in the life of the believer, whilst bad spirits (which can cause all sorts of immorality, for example, to steal, kill and be promiscuous), are usually exorcised out of the believer. A study around the city of Harare has shown that Pentecostals in Harare strongly believe in spirits. Likewise, they can either be good or bad. For example, the power of the Holy Spirit is critical to Pentecostalism. There are evil spirits as well that affect a person negatively, resulting in undesired conditions such as failing to get married, poverty, death, amongst others.

However, there seems to be a major difference in that what African traditional religion calls 'good spirits' *(mashave)* which have all been labelled under 'heathen' spirits which need to be cleansed out in Pentecostal Christianity. According to Pastor Todd (interview), 'these spirits are why many believers in our churches flock here for deliverance'. What is critical in both these religions is the pivotal role that the belief in spirits plays. However, having realised that the arrival of Christianity denounced this aspect in African traditional religion, Pentecostalism thus sought a way to incorporate it to suit Christianity. There was thus

some innovation on the part of Pentecostalism, as it borrowed from African Traditional Religion.

Exorcism and Deliverance

Another area of innovation and competition between ATR and Pentecostalism is in exorcism and deliverance. What has been identified as deliverance in Pentecostalism is more or less similar to the practice of exorcism in ATRs. Thus, the concept of exorcism in African traditional religion has been adopted and adapted to suit Pentecostal Christianity in Harare. According to Kehinde (2016: 2):

> The background to deliverance ministry in African Christianity could be associated or traced to the understanding of beliefs of the African people that an individual or community could be bewitched or attacked spiritually with the unseen forces. They believed that there are spiritual forces that could act against one's progress in life. When anxieties and stresses arise in social and domestic life, when things do not go according to plan, when there is barrenness or sterility, depression or failure in business, in academic or other pursuits.

Through participant observation, we noted that there is a similar aspect of the belief in spirits and the way they are exorcised. A striking similarity was the way in which the believer who is being exorcised of the spirit rolls and screams. A Pentecostal identified as Mai Sithole (interview) clearly pointed out, 'I am happier when demons are commanded out of us and they scream out and roll away, just as our forefathers did with their religion, though the way they did it was heathen'. Deliverance is as crucial to Pentecostalism as it was to ATR. Some Pentecostals have even embraced it into their identities, for e.g., the Prophetic, Healing and Deliverance ministries. This illustrates the extent to which deliverance is one of the crucial aspects of these ministries. Consequently, due to the observation that African traditional religious ways of exorcisms were no longer commonly accepted in the spiritual and religious market, Pentecostalism sought new ways of dealing with such spirits by introducing the aspect of 'deliverance'.

The Belief in the Spiritual Person

Not only does Pentecostalism show some innovation on the spiritual belief and exorcism, but also the role of a spiritual person. This is the one who usually is the medium between the deity and the believers. This practitioner in Shona Traditional Religion is called a *n'anga* (Chavunduka 1978, Gelfand 1985, and Shoko 2011). This study revealed that the role of a *n'anga* in African traditional religion is like that of a prophet in Pentecostalism. There emerged a notion of innovation in the context of religious completion. Due to the central role that the Christian religion seemed to be overtaking the space of African traditional religions, there had to be some innovation on the roles such as those of the *n'anga,* so that he/she can be transformed to be called a prophet in Pentecostalism (Chiwara and Shoko in Chitando et. al. 2013). As such, the title 'prophet' is more of just an innovation from the role of a traditional healer/*n'anga.* It is from this aspect that one can identify the traditional healer with the likes of Pentecostal prophets in Harare such as Emmanuel Makandiwa of United Family International Church (UFIC), Walter Magaya of Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries (PHD), Tavonga Wutabwashe of Heartfelt International Ministries (HIM), amongst a whole lot of others.

One could wonder how the prophet becomes different from the *n'anga*. Are these people not performing the same roles, albeit in different identities? Innovation on the part of Pentecostalism illustrates that the identity of the young Pentecostal prophet becomes a more acceptable and appealing title than that of the *n'anga*. An interviewee (James), explained that there are various reasons why, at the end of the day, he feels more comfortable to be identified with the prophet rather than the *n'anga*. These include:

a. Their immaculate dressing as opposed to the dirty, smelly traditional animal skins.
b. The English language that is easier to understand as opposed to some unidentified language that needs the interpretation of an aid.
c. The use of modern technology such as televisions, public address systems as opposed to some tools used by *n'angas* such as horns.
d. The level of prosperity spoken about is relevant to contemporary society. Prophets speak of money, cars, houses, unlike the traditional healer that talks of prosperity in hunting, farming and other such traditional tasks.
e. The types of spiritual battles being fought are also quite relevant to the young believer, unlike *n'angas* who usually focus on battles emanating from long departed ancestors who the believer knows nothing about.

Spiritual Mentorship

Emerging from the identity of the prophet is an interesting aspect in Pentecostalism regarding how one is groomed to b*e a prophet*. There seems to be a growing aspect of spiritual parenting that is emerging in Pentecostalism. A survey in most Pentecostal churches has revealed that most of the prominent prophets have their 'spiritual fathers' who in the real sense are their mentors. It is from these spiritual fathers that these 'men of God' got their impartation from; they get their powers through their fathers. This is similar to what happens in ATR where one does not just become a traditional healer; but must undergo some coaching, training or some transitional stage where one is mentored.
The research from this study has linked most of the prophets in Pentecostalism to some spiritual mentees. Examples include T.B Joshua of Nigeria as a 'father' to Walter Magaya (PHD) and Sham Hungwe (House of Grace International Church), and Victor Boateng as a 'father' to Emmanuel Makandiwa (UFIC), Uebert Angel as a 'father' to Paul Sanyangore (Victory World International Ministries Church), amongst others. In some cases, such as two of those mentioned, these fathers stay in countries different from those of their sons. Therefore, their sons must travel long distances for mentorship. This study has seen this aspect as a form of innovation due to competition between ATRs and Pentecostalism. Whereas, in African religions, a practitioner goes to some distant place to get powers in what is known as *kuromba* or *kuenda kumaroro* (spiritual enhancement). Christianity regards this practice in a negative way. However, because it is a practice that has been deemed a necessity by these African Christians, they have innovated new ways of seeking power and guidance through the notion of having spiritual fathers.

It is interesting to note that these mentors are always spiritual 'fathers' and never 'mothers'. This illustrates the extent to which masculinities are at play in religion. In Zimbabwe, patriarchy endorses heroic masculinities to the extent that one would not choose to be mentored by a woman but a man. This study concurs with Chitando, Manyonganise and Mlambo (2012: 167) in their analysis of the role of fatherhood in Pentecostalism. They argue thus: 'It is our submission that most men in Zimbabwe would find it extremely difficult to say they are children of a particular woman prophet/ess. Socialisation allows them to submit to other men on the basis that these men are endowed

with spiritual power.' Apart from the discussed points of innovation and competition, this article turns on to another way in which Pentecostalism has shown some innovation based on ATRs – through adopting and adapting the names of God.

Names of God

Names continue to play a significant role in the African setting. Amongst a variety of studies done on naming, A.J.C Pongweni (1983) provides a classic analysis of the significance of naming among the Shona of Zimbabwe. This is reiterated by Chitando (1998:109) who argues that 'names encapsulated the people's socio-religious concerns and were meaningful in their given context'. Names of God illustrate the importance of the Supreme Being in African Religions. According to van der Merwe, the concept of a Supreme Being had always been present in African Religion (1957: 2). This is illustrated on the various names of God which are loaded with deep meaning. These include such names as Nyadenga, Wokumusoro, Runji, Musikavanhu, Chirazvamauya, Chirazamauya, amongst a lot more others (1957: 6-12). According to Mapuranga (2013:173) the significance of names did not end with the arrival of new religions such as Christianity. Though some of these names can be acceptable in Pentecostal Christianity today, the concept of using such names has been largely innovated to meet the religious marketplace of the Christians. Pentecostals have coined new names for God such as the following:

- Jehovah Chikopokopo (Eubert Angel's Spiritual Embassy Church). This name likens God to a military helicopter which does not need a specially designated space to land, such as an airplane needs. According to a follower of Angel's church, 'God can thus land in your life anytime for whatever challenges you may have, and He is able to solve them'.
- Jehovah Jaw Breaker (JJB) (Paul Sanyangore's World Victory International). Paul Sanyangore in one of his sermons (May 2016: Harare), explained that this name means that people's jaws will be broken as they open their mouths with great awe and astonishment to the miracles God does. *(Mwari vanoita minana inotyora majaws vanhu vachishama miromo)*. This followed a testimony by Sanyangore's sister who had a letter from the doctor indicating that her ailing heart condition had been reversed.
- In one of his sermons, Walter Magaya of PHD Ministries referred God as the following: *Nyamatsatse nyeredzi inoyedzerwa* (Nyamatsatse, the star that shines all night). *Chamangurangura, Bhobhojani, Spanera, simbi inodya dzimwe simbi* (An iron that sharpens another iron).

These praise names for God basically refer to the amazing power of God, who, like, a star which shines all night long, is always watchful over His believers (Interview: 2016).

This study has noted that names of God did not end with African Religions. Due to the significant role that names have in African Religion, Pentecostal Christianity realised that it had to innovate new names that are in sync with Christianity in order to compete for religious space with African Religion. This study thus concurs with Mashiri (1999: 93) who argues that naming and addressing practices are dynamic and they reflect linguistic, political and cultural changes. These changes and continuities in the way human relationships and identities are perceived and the factors that determine them. The flourishing of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has this seen many dynamic names of God that are meant to appeal to the power and authority of the Supreme Being.

Anointing Objects

Sacred objects are a crucial aspect of religious practice. There are quite a number objects that have been sanctified in both African traditional religions and Christianity, particularly in Pentecostalism. These include oils, water, stones, cloths, bangles and bracelets, amongst a variety of others. According to Eliade (1957:32), such features are not merely themselves but represent some religious implications or significance. For the believers, these objects often act as the doorway or bridge between the sacred and the profane (Eliade 1957:15), that is, the believer and God. This section briefly examines selected objects that have encountered innovation amidst the competition existing between the two religions under study.

a. Oil

Oil has always been a major religious object used for healing, good luck, and chasing away of bad omens in ATR. In most instances, this oil is extracted from animals such as snakes, lions, sheep or pigs. Contemporary Pentecostalism uses olive oil which is believed to be anointed through the man/woman of God. For example, field research has revealed the following inscriptions on oils from two Pentecostal ministries:

- PHD Ministries: 'Overflow and Abundance… Anointing that breaks the Yoke of the Devil….Your past dark life is over; the anointing is opening a new prosperous life in Jesus Christ's name'.
- House of Grace International Church: 'Sets you free from sin, sickness, poverty, as you minister it in Jesus' name'.

These oils are given some names that enhance/appeal to the believer in terms of its healing powers. These inscriptions are meant to lure or increase the faith of the believer. Thus, these oils help Pentecostalism to appeal to more followers as compared to traditional animal fat used by *n'angas*. This illustrates some innovation on the part of Pentecostalism as some oils used in ATRs were not given any particular names.

b. Bangles and Bracelets

In ATR, it was common to wear a bangle or bracelet which was, in most instances, made from animal skin such as lions and snakes. These were/are usually believed to have powers to protect the one who wears it. In most instances, babies, the pregnant, and the sick usually tied these to their wrists, ankles or waists as protective amulets from the evil spirits. Pentecostalism has embraced this practice through its initiatives. Pentecostal ministries in Harare such as PHD and UFIC encourage their members to wear their bracelets which are known to be a medium of the Holy Spirit.

c. Water

Water is a significant element in African values and culture. Water is life. Water is sacred. This is illustrated in a variety of ways, some which include the names of God. He is referred to as *Dzivaguru* (The perennial pool /the pool that never dries up). This is similar to the belief in Christianity, where Jesus is referred to as the water of life (cf John 4:14, 7: 38-39, Isaiah 12: 3). As a result, ATRs have always used water as part of the healing processes for some ailments and conditions. In some instances, the source of water is an issue of concern. According to Sekuru Sigauke (interview), he prefers to use water from a particular

mountain which he could not disclose. Others use water from caves, or tree hollows, amongst other sources. This is supported by a research done by Rinne (2001:52) who states that: '…flowing water is regarded as the most pure water, and thus, flowing water is considered suitable for holy practices. Stagnant water is never used for medical purposes or divination practices. There are other aspects related to flowing water, such as the origin of the water, which are very important.'

For Pentecostalism to attract the same believers from ATR, indeed the value of water has to be embraced. Pentecostal ministries such as House of Grace Ministries, UFIC and PHD, amongst others have adopted the concept of anointed water. This works well with its adherents as they believe in it as the manifestation of the Almighty to heal them and provide miracles in their life. Most Pentecostals interviewed confirmed that they always move around with a bottle of anointed water in their cars, bags and homes. They spray this water to address any challenges that may include illness, applications, and pregnancies. This 'holy' water is also sprayed in their homes for protection. According to Shoko (2007:139), 'The sprinkling of holy water around the homestead has parallels in traditional religion where the home is 'fenced' against witchcraft through protective items….'

The above objects (amulets, water and oil) used in Pentecostalism can greatly be related to ATRs. One Pentecostal leader who shall be identified as Pastor D reiterated that his congregants are highly influenced by ATRs, so for him to lure them, he has to use familiar strategies. This concurs with Shoko (2007: 139), who states that: 'The use of holy water, smearing of oil and burning of sacred paper as a defense mechanism in the Afrocentric church maybe parallel by the use of charms and amulets in the traditional practice…. Even though such protection assumes new meaning because of the changed setting, the underlying concern still persist.'

Apart from the discussed, we turn to the innovation of musical instruments emerging through competition between ATRs and Pentecostalism.

d. Musical Instruments

Music has always been a crucial aspect of the traditional life of the Africans (Chitando 2002). This concept has been adapted in Pentecostalism where it continues to take a centre stage in influencing the lives of the believers. There are musical instruments that were used in traditional religion such as *hosho* and *mbira,* and drums made from wood and animal skin, amongst others. Pentecostalism has sought to adopt the effect of such musical instruments by bringing in new types of instruments such as trumpets, keyboards and modern-day drums, amongst others. According to Chitando (2002: 26):

> …the changes in Shona traditional music should not only be thought of in terms of external influences, though these often instigate the most profound changes. Encounters with new experiences and challenges have always had an impact on music production. …Amidst the ideology which musical practices that have been handed down from the ancestors are cast in stone, there is always a constant negotiation and creation of new artistic modes. This observation helps to explain why musicians from a Shona cultural background were not traumatised by the experience of colonialism....

As such, there is evidence of innovation and competition in terms of musical instruments between ATRs and Pentecostalism. Apart from these objects, we continue to examine

other phenomena where there appears to be competition which brings in innovation in Pentecostalism.

The Gospel of Prosperity

The concept of success has been another area in which Pentecostalism sought to innovate a new way of the understanding of prosperity from ATRs. Scholars generally agree that the gospel of prosperity has always been existent in African Traditional Religions (Shoko 2008, Anim 2010). The concepts of *Kuromba* (acquiring supernatural powers to get rich) and acquiring a *divisi* (charm to get plenty)*, chikwambo* (goblin used to supernaturally collect riches from others) *or gona* (horn use to keep charms and medicines in some instances for wealth), amongst others, have always been used in Zimbabwean Traditional Religions to acquire wealth and prosperity. Some have possessed a *gona* to acquire wealth in the form of hunting, farming and dancing (Vengeyi 2011: 98).

The role of using charms to acquire wealth in traditional medicine can be compared to what Pentecostalism practices. This is embraced in Pentecostalism through the teaching of the prosperity gospel. One of the key tenets of Pentecostal theology is the gospel of prosperity. According to Asamoah (2013: 198): 'Prosperity theology, sometimes referred to as the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth gospel, or the gospel of success is a Christian religious doctrine that financial blessing is the will of God for Christians, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to Christian ministries will always increase one's material wealth.'

Pentecostalism has thus illustrated innovation on the very concept of prosperity in newer ways that have become more lucrative and acceptable in the contemporary religious market in Harare today. Rather than going to the traditional healer to acquire a *gona, chikwambo, divisi* or *kuromba*, Pentecostals have resorted to the use of anointed water, oil, bangles, and towels amongst other items as discussed above. According to Anim (2010: 66):

> The thriving prosperity teaching in the charismatic ministries is largely due to the fact that the charismatics have tapped into fertile ground already nurtured by the traditional concept of prosperity, which is to be understood in terms of wealth, longevity, and fertility or procreativity. In African cosmology, the belief in and pursuit of prosperity is paramount. Africans do not 'honour' or accept suffering or poverty. It is a battle they have always sought to fight. The belief in the gods is primarily to ensure prosperity and well-being.

In all Pentecostal services attended to attain participant observation, the gospel of prosperity was reiterated. It emerges as a specifically Pentecostal doctrine that places emphasis on the attainment of wealth and health in the life before death, Gifford (1998), Ayegboyin (2011) and Garrard-Burnett (2012). For Gifford for example, its origins were from the biblical text of Matthew 11:23ff. The basic teaching is that God wants the Christian to be wealthy and that poverty is an indication of personal sin. A further tenet, based on a tendentious reading of 2 Corinthians 9 is that in order to reap, one must sow. This means that the Christian must contribute abundantly to the work of evangelism and to the upkeep of his/her Pastors, if he/she wishes health and material wealth themselves. Apart from the identified verses, Walter Magaya, Emmanuel Makandiwa, Paul Sanyangore and Sham Hungwe, uniquely address the gospel of prosperity, quoting from biblical verses such as Psalms 37:4, Matt 16: 27. This is comparable to ATR's use of charms to acquire

wealth. For example, this study has observed the innovation on the part of Pentecostalism to address the concern of the believers in terms of acquiring health and wealth. For instance, research findings concur with the argument by Vengeyi (2011: 113) that: 'In as much as the *gona* guided everyday life of the Shona, Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches believe that the Bible should guide every step of their feet. This forms the rationale for arguing that the prominence given to the Bible in Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches is a substitute for the *gona*'.

The Roles of Women

Women in African traditional religions played a significant role in the religious realm of society. They held a number of important roles that had to do with the spiritual life of their families, communities and other social units. The overarching perception was that women were considered as having a big role to play in the recreation of humanity (Mukonyora, 2007: 17ff; 1999: 276–84). This is also portrayed in myths (Bucher; 1980; Mapuranga, 2011: 38–40; and Parrinder, 1967: 15–16). The significance of women as life-givers is also illustrated in names. Writing in the context of the Ndau in Chipinge, Zimbabwe, Mapuranga (2011: 40–41), highlights some names that were accorded to women because of their special function as life-givers. Consequently, because women were being associated with that which gives life, they had a special place as religious functionaries. Women had special roles as healers (Shoko, 2008: 22), rainmakers, diviners, priestesses and other forms of participation in religious rites. A good example of a woman who held a very significant role in the religio-political lives of the society on traditional religion was Nehanda Nyakasikana. She remains the most celebrated traditional heroine who doubles as a spiritual and political figure in the struggle for national independence.

With the given scenario, one would argue that, 'the Christian message as introduced by the missionaries has affected the lives of many African women in various ways' (Lagerwerf, 1990: 17). This is one major reason why Africans sought to break away from the 'white' gospel and re-create Christianity that met their own needs through what have become known as African Indigenous Churches (AICs) and African Pentecostalism. Women are visible on Pentecostalism, much more than they even were in ATRs. According to Ukah (2007: 16): 'Knowing the power of women to attract men into religious organisations, some churches deliberately exploit this in giving women pastoral duties so that men would be drawn into the fold. There are now churches with "Department of family affairs" which cater to the needs of family members particularly women'.

Mapuranga (2013) gives detail on the various female personalities that have gained leadership personalities through Pentecostalism. These include Eunor Guti, Rutendo Wutawunashe, Tendai Magaya, Ruth Makandiwa and Beverly Angel amongst many others. Most female adherents who were interviewed expressed satisfaction over this aspect of Pentecostalism. According to Mrs Wenzira (interview), 'after all, our tradition has always told us that *musha mukadzi* (the woman is the pillar of the home), so we are there to give direction to our churches'. Resultantly, this concept of accepting the leadership of women in religion illustrates innovation from African Traditional Religion. It has become one of the ways through which Pentecostalism seeks to thrive in the highly competitive religious marketplace in Harare.

Bira/Overnight Crusades

All night crusades are a common event in most Pentecostal ministries in Harare today. Of particular significance is the night into the first of January every year (usually termed as the crossover). Adherents gather in their thousands overnight as they sing and praise to the Almighty. In the UFIC, there is another event dubbed the 'Judgement night', and in the PHD ministries there exists a service known as the 'night of turnaround'.

These, among other nights, are dedicated to serious praise and worship where one is expected to have new dawn in their lives. With particular reference to PHD's crossover night, an interviewee (James) believes it is a service that totally changes his life for a new beginning. For him, this insight is particularly brought about by the practice of candle lighting that is done in the last minutes of the previous year, into the first hour of the coming year.

The concept of singing and dancing all night long in worship that is recurrent in Pentecostal churches in Harare today did not just occur in a vacuum. This concept reflects some similarity with the traditional *Bira*. This is an all-night ritual, celebrated by Shona people from Zimbabwe in which members of an extended family call on ancestral spirits for guidance and intercession. The attendees at a ceremony participate in singing, dancing and hand clapping (Berliner 1981). In this ceremony, music that was favoured by the ancestors when they were alive is used to summon the spirits to possess living mediums; thus, the religious belief system helps to preserve older musical practices.

The selected objects and practices have sought to give examples on how Pentecostalism has demonstrated innovation, grabbing ideas from ATR in order to survive the religious market in Zimbabwe. The respondents' views were, however, not homogenous with regards to the assumed relationship between ATRs and Pentecostalism. The following emerged:

a. Pentecostal Religious Leaders often denied any link with ATRs, quoting the Bible. The most common verses were:

    - 2 Corinthians 5:17: 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The Old has passed away, and the new has come'.
    - Isaiah 43:18, 'Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old, behold, 1 am doing a new thing'.

b. Reactions from the congregants were mixed. Whilst some claimed a total break with the past, there were others who agreed that they were practicing an African form of Pentecostalism where there was bound to be mutual borrowing between the two.

c. Most Traditional healers and believers in ATRs saw an inevitable resemblance (some claiming borrowing) of Pentecostal practices with ATRS. Of particular interest were the claims made by one traditional healer Sekuru Friday Chisanyu, a registered traditional medicine practitioner and the founding president of the Zimbabwe National Practitioners Association (ZINPA). He argued that Pentecostalism in so many ways embraced ATRs. For him, a prophet, for example, is a *n'anga* merely in a suit, otherwise they practice similar roles in the spirit.

As such, though not homogenous, these ideas reflect in some way a relationship between Pentecostalism and ATRs. The next section elaborates on this communion of borrowing, innovation and competition between ATRs and Pentecostalism.

A Further Interpretation: Innovation and Competition

From the discussion, this study appreciates the existence of religious innovation and competition between ATRs and Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism, which can be attributed to be part of the agenda of colonialism, sought to take the place of ATR. According to Omeje and Kwaja (2008:83), 'part of the necessity for maximizing the colonial agenda was the tendency towards a systematic obliteration of the entire African social structures and the imposition of their western equivalents or alternatives where such existed'. Thus, as argued by Omeje and Kwaja (2008: 84):

> This continuing encounter raises serious concerns about the extent to which Africa is prepared to protect its identity in an emerging civilization based world order that is accelerated by forces of globalization, to the extent that the revival of cultural, ethnic and religious identities are increasingly gaining ground… All of these variables have continued to uphold and define the relations of power and subordination between Africa and the West.

These two religions, amongst others, are clearly contesting for space in order to survive in the religious market. In order to survive in this space of competition, there is an apparent innovation that exists within each of these religions. What is very clear is how Pentecostalism strives to adopt beliefs and practices from African Traditional Religion, and changes them to suit the Christian lifestyle. It tallies with the idea that diversity and competition are often vehicles, if not drivers, of creative change, and such innovation creates more competition. This study concurs with the notion that religious competition stimulates innovation. As such, the presence and seeming threat that Pentecostalism seems to throw at ATR has not succeeded in wiping it away. This is reiterated by Biri (2012: 38) who argues in her study on Zimbabwean Pentecostalism that:

> …ATR is a significant 'silent voice' that continues to echo the quest for spiritual power in the hearts and ears of Pentecostals as involuntarily they continue to be informed by the realities of their African traditional religious and cultural background…The study argues that some aspects of ATRs seem to have been in decline, yet have remained dynamic in these Pentecostal denominations. These features are expressed in various ways in these churches. ATR is a silent voice and, as such, it is not easy to notice its presence among Pentecostals. Yet ATR is also an echoing voice because Pentecostals have refashioned and resacralised Shona traditional features in dynamic ways.

Thus, it can be argued that religious competition in Harare has created a space for change in terms of how religions are practiced. Competition has become a force and a drive for change. Pentecostalism has shown great creativity in terms of contextualizing borrowed beliefs and practices from African Traditional Religions.

Conclusion

This study thus examines how African forms of religion have resisted dying away through some form of adaptation through innovation. This study has argued that even though Africa is a 'victim of domination from powerful hegemony, the continent has witnessed counter hegemonies of resistance' (Reader 1999, Skalnik 2002). This paper on ATR and Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe confirms this statement as it examines some particular traits of ATRS that have remained vibrant in Pentecostalism. This illustrates how ATRs have managed to survive, albeit in altered forms, even in the new religions coming from other parts of the world such as Pentecostalism. In other ways, instead of wiping out certain beliefs and practices of ATR, it has actually brought in new life. According to Hackett (1991), such processes have actually brought about the 'revitalisation' of African religions. Pentecostalism, like Zionists and Apostolic prophet churches have been quite successful partly a result of that they have modelled their practices on traditional pattern (Daneel, 1970: 25).

This study has examined some selected traits and manifestations of religious innovation and competition in Harare by exploring how ATRs and Pentecostalism express and market themselves in the face of intense competition and potential rivalry on the spiritual market. This study investigates the similarities between Pentecostalism and African religion in terms of rituals and symbols, stemming from the reality of religious competition out of which the former creates new innovations from the latter, thus creating new ways of being religious that fit into the contemporary spiritual market. This study has examined the extent to which African religions and Pentecostalism in Harare are enduring competition, thereby leading to religious innovation to survive the religious competition in Harare, Zimbabwe. This article confirms the observation made by Martin that Pentecostalism usually 'appeals to young men and women disembodied from traditional contexts and anxious to embrace modernity (2002: xviii)'. From this, one can argue of the existence of competition between the two religions.

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Religious Innovation and Competition amidst Urban Social Change: Pretoria Case Study

Stephan de Beer and R. Drew Smith

Abstract

We are a group of 9 researchers curious to explore how local churches in two specific regions of Pretoria – Pretoria Central and Mamelodi East – respond to urban change and vulnerability, whether there are signs of religious innovation and competition, and whether there is evidence of churches in these regions contributing to the healing, or perpetuation, of urban fractures. In the article we engage critically the concepts of innovation, competition, vulnerability and urban change, recognizing that these are by no means neutral terms. We approach the research in a trans-disciplinary manner, outlining our specific research methods – mapping, surveys, focus groups, and the World Café – in a self-critical manner. We then describe the face of the locality, as well as the face of the broader context, identifying emerging themes surfacing from our research engagements. These include the different faces of migration; church members as distant consumers or vested contributors; ecclesiologies under construction; informality, innovation and the church; and youth agency. We reflect critically on both innovation and competition as we encountered it in these communities, appreciating the dynamism and fluidity of many of the churches but concluding that these churches held largely unfulfilled potential as agents of urban social change.

KEY WORDS: Urban (Social) Change, Urban Vulnerability, Religious Innovation, Religious Competition, Trans-disciplinary Research

Background

The fast-moving process of African urbanization is changing urban landscapes across the continent considerably. Migratory patterns as well as urban population growth leads to sub-Saharan Africa being one of the fastest growing urban regions of the world (UN-DESA 2012:12; Pieterse and Parnell 2014; Naudé 2015). South African cities are not unaffected; overwhelming migration coupled with the apartheid legacy of socio-spatial fragmentation, and the accompanying deep vulnerabilities, present unique challenges.

The primary interest of our research was to explore how local churches[1] in two specific regions of Pretoria - Pretoria Central and Mamelodi East – respond to urban change and vulnerability. We are concerned with whether religious innovation and competition are evident and whether such innovation or competition contributed to the healing or perpetuation of urban fractures.

In this article we will provide brief insight into the research context, the specific research questions, some of our conceptual and methodological considerations, some of the emerging themes, and map out what we see as the way ahead for our collaborative research journey.

Research Context

Pretoria is the administrative capital of South Africa and today forms the centre of the broader City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. This project focused on two regions within the city that have both experienced rapid, yet very different, changes and challenges over the past two decades.

Pretoria Central, or downtown Pretoria, was the centre of apartheid power and bureaucracy for many decades. Since 1994 it witnessed complete demographic and socio-culture change, and residential neighbourhoods in Pretoria Central changed from being 100% white in 1993 to virtually 90% black by the year 2000. Since then Pretoria Central became a catch-basin for thousands of migrants from many other African countries (De Beer 2009; De Beer 2012:252-259; Smith 2015a).

The second region that made for interesting comparative data was the Mamelodi East region of the Mamelodi Township, the largest black township in the old city of Pretoria. Since the 1960s Mamelodi expanded fast, mostly due to forced removals of black residents from other places to complete the implementation of the apartheid city. Mamelodi East is characterized by the more established neighbourhood of Mamelodi Gardens towards the west, and the sprawling informal settlements towards the east. The co-existence of established neighbourhoods and informality, very different housing typologies, and relative proximity to some of the wealthiest eastern suburbs of Pretoria, still predominantly white, accentuates the socio-spatial disparities and inequalities of the city (Steyn 2009; Gapp Architects 2010).

Both Pretoria Central and Mamelodi East are deeply shaped by on-going migratory patterns, both rural-urban and cross-border, accompanied by different forms of vulnerability, and limited capital investment (capital flight from Pretoria Central post-1994). Both regions experienced serious xenophobic events in recent years. As recently as March 2017 in Pretoria Central, the houses of foreign migrants were torched with tangible tension between migrants and locals.

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[1] In this project 'church' was defined in a rather commonsense definition, subverting any church-sect-cult distinction. A church was any local expression identifying itself as such. This was a conscious choice also in the light of academic theology's bias toward so-called mainline churches (cf. De Gruchy 2013), often paying too little attention to the growing presence and impact of independent, non-denominational or African initiated churches. See also the article by Naudé (2015) focusing on 'the church in the church as institution being present at local urban level'.

The churches in these two regions are rather different. Churches in Mamelodi are mostly poor, particularly in the informal settlement areas, and membership is predominantly South African. Churches in Pretoria Central vary between start-up shop front churches, small but growing independent Pentecostal churches, and the "old mother churches" or cathedrals that often host some of the new middle class, the new political elite, and important decision-makers within society. Inner city churches tend to be much more diverse in terms of ethnicity and nationality, hosting dynamic migrant churches in almost every corner.

Research Questions

Our research project was grounded and guided by a number of key research questions:

- Where and how has religious innovation and competition taken place within these two distinct contexts – Pretoria Central and Mamelodi East?
- How does religious innovation and competition, respond to urban change and vulnerability? Does it contribute to the healing or perpetuation of urban fractures?
- What role do religious innovation and competition play in these contexts in the increase of youth agency and the rise of urbanized popular culture?

Conceptual Considerations

We explored possible understandings of innovation as it relates to religious communities. Distinctions were made between innovation which aims to ensure the survival of the religious community (internal), and innovation which responds to the challenges of the broader community (external). We interrogated innovation and competition critically, considering the theoretical paradigms from within which these terms emerge and whether appropriation of these terms really have liberating potential for individual and societal well-being, or whether they perpetuate fragmentation mediated by increased individualism and concepts of success that are inherently exclusivist, fed by neoliberal capitalist paradigms[2].

The use of concepts such as urban vulnerability, urban fractures and urban change are also critically considered. Is the language of vulnerability and fracture in itself not perpetuating certain discourses about communities? How can we understand urban fractures through intersecting power relations in urban communities?

Are ethnic religious communities which assist in developing social capital for their members who are immigrants only contributing to urban fractures or to communal healing by assisting people towards self-reliance and social inclusion?

We recognized the diverse definitions or interpretations of human vulnerability described by scholars (Moser 2009; Egdhami and Singh 2014:71-82), never being disconnected from the living environments in which people find themselves. Our own use of the term fracture implies a prior moral or political position acknowledging the unequal distribution of power and resources, resulting in life-denying exclusions and oppressions (De Beer 2015).

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[2] See Naudé (2015) describing the way in which cities are often co-opted into a kind of globalism in which the empire deals economic marginalization and a suppression of indigenous knowledge at the expense of the dominant socio-economic-political paradigm.

Methodological Considerations

As the project unfolded and we engaged diverse churches and religious leaders we were confronted with the limitations of theological and sociological language and categories, frameworks and methodologies, probably too often imported from the global North, and realized that we too needed to be "objects" of scrutiny and on-going critical self-evaluation.

A Trans-disciplinary Approach Using Different Methods

Collectively our research team brought insights from urban, black and liberation theologies, social and political sciences, narrative theology, and studies on community transformation. As the project developed we became increasingly aware of the importance to suspend judgment based on our own theoretical constructs in order for the emerging narratives to unfold authentically.

In this project we opted for a trans-disciplinary research approach, in the definition of Klein (2012; cf. also De Beer 2015), having people from different disciplines as well as church leaders from the two researched regions, work together in order to help refine research questions and generate insight and knowledge in response to these questions. We would like to continue locating our own research in a trans-disciplinary way but also within an epistemological understanding of what Edgar Pieterse (2014) and others speak of as 'southern urbanisms', seeking to find epistemological constructs that can do justice to urban innovations coming from the global South.

Insights from the social sciences and theology were merged into a qualitative research methodology and the research was structured around the contextual praxis cycle of Holland and Henriot (1983). We placed much emphasis on benefits for the communities in which the research will take place and therefore also made a specific effort to engage research methods that could facilitate participatory spaces for generating and sharing knowledge. We combined literature study and conceptual analysis, with mapping, surveys, focus groups and a number of World Cafés.

Mapping

We mapped 57 churches in a defined area of Pretoria Central and 40 churches in a defined area of Mamelodi East, within a 1km radius around the Mamelodi Campus of the University of Pretoria.

We started the mapping process merely as an administrative technique to identify churches before 'real' research could occur. In the process we realized that we undervalued the huge potential that mapping holds as a participatory method in urban neighbourhoods. In the next phase of this project we would like to explore this more.

We are especially curious about socio-spatial mapping (Takahashi 1997; Walks 2001; Smith 2010; Natarajan 2015), participatory action mapping (Chambers 2006; Literat 2013; Boll 2015), and participatory action mapping as critical mapping methodology (Boll 2015). It holds potential not only in terms of generating knowledge collaboratively and from below, but also as a local resource for information sharing, community organizing and collaborative action.

Surveys and Focus Groups

We set out to get a representative sample of churches, covering the broad spectrum of Christian traditions, in order to establish base-line information. To date 36 churches participated in the survey – 21 from Pretoria Central and 15 from Mamelodi East – which is 37% of the churches mapped. From the mapping and surveys, we selected 6 groups per region (12 in total) for more in-depth engagement through focus groups and unstructured interviews. Especially in Mamelodi East it was complicated to arrange focus groups, often due to the informal nature of the largest percentage of churches, as well as the fact that most of the ministers have other employment and are largely absent during the week. We were mostly able to access them on Saturdays or Sundays and then the programmes of the churches and their ministers are extremely full.

World Café

We decided to include a method used in open space technology, known as the World Café, as one of the methods in our research process, particularly emphasizing our desire to construct understanding and insight on local contexts together. The World Café is a process whereby participants engage in discussing a set of questions while transiting from one conversation table to another at each turn. It is 'a simple yet powerful conversational process that helps groups of all sizes to engage in constructive dialogue, to build personal relationships, and to foster collaborative learning' (Tan and Brown, 2005).

It is a participative method that invites members to take ownership in the meaning-making process, relying heavily on 'an appreciation of local knowledge' (Steier, Brown and Da Silva 2015:212). It is a dynamic rather than a rigid space with the ongoing movement around tables allowing for depth of interaction and knowledge sharing. Early in the process, preceding the surveys and focus groups, we hosted a World Café for participating churches in both Pretoria Central and in Mamelodi East. Two more World Cafés are still planned to discuss emerging themes with participants from both Pretoria Central and Mamelodi East.

The Face of the Local Church in Pretoria Central and Mamelodi East

Pretoria Central

In Pretoria Central the size of churches differed from 20 members in Grace Exploration Ministry to 1200 members in the Melodi ya Tshwane Uniting Reformed Church and 1500 members in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) Word of Life.

The majority of members in most of the churches surveyed are women. In 4 of the churches 70% of members are women, 1 church (New Life for All Ministry) indicated that 80% of members are women, and 1 church (Grace Exploration Ministry) indicated that 90% of members are women.

Twelve of the 19 churches indicated use of English only, even though most of their members are diverse language speakers. The AFM Word of Life has 60% Shona speakers, the Grace of God Ministries has 90% French and English-speaking members and 10% speak Lingala. All the churches, with the exception of four, indicated that they are black only churches. In terms of nationality the Pretoria Central churches demonstrated

interesting characteristics. Four of the churches indicated that membership was mainly South African; Grace Exploration Ministry and Christ Populate Ministries indicated that membership was 50% South African and 50% other African. Deeper Christian Life Ministries is 90% Nigerian. Similarly the Redeemed Christian Church of God is 98% Nigerian and 2% South African. The Grace of God Ministries is 98% Congolese and 2% other nationalities. In addition, people from Malawi, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya and other African countries worship in local churches.

In terms of age composition the churches differed. 100% of membership of Grace of God Ministries is below 45 years of age. In AFM Word of Life 80% of its members is below 45 years of age. Christ Populate Ministries is 80% youth, New Life for All 60% is youth. Other churches had a more balanced composition with young people either 50% or 40% of the membership.

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. All the churches indicated traditional means of supporting their ministry: offerings, tithing and fund-raising. Grace Exploration Ministries indicated that they had no income or source of income.

Mamelodi East

The 15 completed survey forms represented a good balance of evangelical (2), Pentecostal /Charismatic (6), mainstream (5) and apostolic churches (2). Churches tended to be smaller – between 50 and 170 members with exceptions being denominational churches such as St Paul's Lutheran Churches with 1000 members and the Presbyterian Church with 640 members on their books.

With regard to gender it is clear that women are in the majority in almost all the churches. In a church like Golden Gate 86% of members are women and in the Lutheran, Bapedi, Forward in Faith and Wilderness of Faith churches 70-75% of members are women. Only in Leratong Faith Mission and All Saints Ministries did they indicate a 50/50 male/female membership.

Sepedi was a rather prominent language in 7 of the 13 churches, with a strong presence of Setswana, Zulu and Tsonga also found in at least 6 of the churches. The Golden Gate Ministries has a 60% Tsonga-speaking membership and in Forward and Faith they combined English with local languages. St Paul's Lutheran indicated that all South African language groups were present in their church.

All the churches surveyed in Mamelodi were black-only churches and 8 of the 13 churches only had South African members. Golden Gate was South African and Zimbabwean, and Omnipresent indicated being 90% South African and 10% Zimbabwean. The Lutheran Bapedi Church was 75% South African and the other 25% of their membership came from other African countries (unspecified).

Golden Gate and Omnipresent both demonstrated a strong youth presence with 50% of Golden Gate's membership being between 11 and 35 years of age and 80% of Omnipresent being between 17 and 35 years of age. In denominational churches, youth

membership was less. An example is the St Paul's Lutheran where an average member was 53 years old.

The majority of churches indicated activity in the areas of preaching, worship, prayer, hospitality and Christian education. Only 2 churches indicated involvement in advocacy issues without elaborating and 3 churches indicated a specific ministry with elderly people. Only one church indicated an alternative approach to sustaining themselves to the traditional methods of offerings, tithing and fund-raising.

The Face of the Context

Spatial challenges refer both to overcrowding in local neighbourhoods, whether informal settlements, apartment buildings or back yard shacks; the lack of access to ample parking (in the case of largely commuter churches), the allocation of spaces for churches in new settlements.

Socio-economic challenges that were repeatedly identified included crime and violence, poverty, unemployment, substance abuse and HIV and AIDS. The prevalence of violence was pointed out by many churches as one of the greatest challenges of their communities. They referred mostly to domestic violence occurring within households, but also to violence emanating from crime and a lack of safety. We found no evidence of any of the churches specifically engaging issues of violence, even though they identified it as a major concern in their vicinity, both in Mamelodi East and in Pretoria Central.

In addition a long list of other socio-economic challenges, vulnerabilities or fractures were identified, including political unrest, overcrowded apartments, commercial sex work, and children living on the streets. In Pretoria Central one church mentioned the challenges of homelessness, and another church the issue of refugees and asylum seekers. Two churches in Mamelodi East mentioned the challenge of morals and values and one church mentioned "unbelievers" as a challenge in the community.

Churches in the city centre focused more on issues of crime and safety in their narratives, but unemployment and substance abuse were also mentioned as local challenges. HIV and AIDS hardly came up in the churches of Pretoria Central. Churches in Mamelodi East also spoke of crime and safety but HIV and AIDS was mentioned much more frequently. It obviously still has devastating effects in their local neighbourhoods.

Emerging Themes

Different Faces of Migration

Migration in these churches took different forms but the transient and dynamic nature of most of these churches is evident. The reality of rural-urban migration is a strong theme in city centre congregations, particularly those with membership that is predominantly South African.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Pretoria Central lamented the out-migration of German members either to the suburban congregation of the same denomination or even back to Germany because of better economic opportunities. On the other side of the spectrum are churches in which the majority of members are foreign migrants from other

countries on the African continent, ironically often being economic migrants, and such churches not only being home to migrants but being migrant churches.

Churches in Mamelodi East did not describe migration in a similar way to city centre churches. The more established township churches experienced migration to a lesser extent. And yet, churches located in the informal settlements of Mamelodi East, at least initially, were all started in response to rural-urban migration and new settlement development. What was evident to us was the absence of churches from more traditional mainstream denominations in the informal settlements, something echoed in the research of Colin Smith about Pentecostal churches in the informal settlements of Nairobi, Kenya (2007: 206-225).

Distant Consumers or Vested Contributors

Marked differences appeared between city centre and township churches in terms of how churches were rooted in their local contexts or not.

In focus group meetings in Pretoria Central participants felt that members were *mostly consumers instead of contributors* to the church's mission. This was mainly explained as a result of members not having vested interests in the city centre, only 'consuming' religion here on Sundays. For the rest of the week the vulnerability or changes of the city centre are not really affecting members' lives directly. Such churches often struggled to mediate a sense of home, and many members saw these as transitional faith communities with the home church remaining the church of origin (mostly rural). Having said that though, in the case of those city centre churches being made up primarily of members who are foreign migrants, churches tend to offer stability and roots, even though members do not necessarily reside in the proximity of the church. In these churches members tend to stay longer and experience something of 'home' (RD Smith 2015).

In Mamelodi East dynamics differed. Members were mostly South African and not foreign migrants. The township church in most cases seems to be experienced as home church, thereby mediating rootedness for its members, whether they are residents of Mamelodi or commuters. The pastors of these churches are mostly themselves residents of Mamelodi East, often with deep roots. The majority of members in the churches come from within the vicinity of the church. At the same time however we found that churches are often not very actively involved in the life of the local community, perhaps because of a lack of resources, the minister mostly working outside of the township during the week, or theological persuasions that are not necessarily emphasizing engagement with the community.

Ecclesiologies under Construction

Our point of departure sought to be free from fixed or rigid constructs of what constituted church, engaging the reality as we found it and considering all those who considered themselves to be church in whatever definition. We encountered a group of 20 women calling itself a local church. We also encountered a local church in Pretoria Central who preferred for us to engage their top leadership located in the suburbs, arguing that they as a local church did not deal with local societal issues as those functions were outsourced to a specialist non-profit agency. It became clear that there were probably as many ecclesiologies as there were churches in these two regions.

We have found a range of ways in which churches chose to define themselves: in terms of denominational tradition, as Pentecostal, Charismatic, African, evangelical, apostolic, Protestant, or Christian. None of the churches self-identified as African initiated or independent or informal and clearly markers from the north, which happen to be the dominant ecclesial differentiations, do not necessarily hold in these contexts.

Distinguishing between formal or informal churches became increasingly contentious during the enquiry, as we recognized this distinction as a product of a Western construct of materiality that fails to recognize the validity of forms of religious expression or church different to the dominant constructs. Decolonizing church and theology would have to include a reconstruction of our understanding of church, to be informed by the vast and often innovative grass-root faith expressions and experiences.

Churches located in informal settlements are shaped by the informality, mobility and vulnerability of their surrounding environments, but this does not make them any less legitimate than other churches in their response to their local contexts. In fact, in some ways they give expression to what Boff (1986) speaks of in *Ecclesiogenesis,* as the (re)birth of the church.

Informality, Innovation and the Church

A large part of Mamelodi East is characterized by informal settlements, whilst pockets of informal trade and informal housing exist in Pretoria Central. Smith (2007: 40-41), with reference to informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya, wrote:

> Just as the informal economy is the economy of the urban population which largely does not share in the benefits of urban citizenship, so informal churches need to be understood in terms of their marginalization both socio-economically and within the structures of organized religion in the city.

Although we argue against defining such churches as informal, we agree with his analysis of the socio-economic, and frequently even theological, marginalization of such churches. So-called informal religious activity or new or different expressions of religion often operate in ways that are more elusive to the untrained eye.

The pop-up nature of some churches only on days of worship, and the way in which existing structures – informal dwellings, school halls, and so on – are used for church purposes without it being identified so in an overt way, not only makes research more difficult but also makes one underestimate the actual presence of the church in a locality.

Many challenges exist in the informal settlements of Mamelodi East, ranging from city planning and policies guiding settlement upgrading, the lack of infrastructure, the ways in which parts of Mamelodi East were traditionally used as dumping sites for people being displaced from other parts of the city. In Pretoria Central lack of access to space is a constant reality, for churches seeking venues, informal traders in precarious situations, homeless people lacking access to shelter, and pressure on already limited housing stock.

A question emerging during the research had to do with how churches relate to, or live with, informality. Do churches resist, embrace, or engage informality? If engaging it, are they pursuing socio-economic transformation of existing circumstances, merely

succumbing to the status quo, or seeking creative ways to sustain life and mediate freedom within challenging contexts?

The very spontaneity of informal settlement growth and the eruption of a multiplicity of small faith communities could be viewed as innovative urbanization from below. Spontaneously, people shape their own communities and futures. What we could not find in this research endeavour were signs of more deliberate, reflective and organized actions by churches in these areas to effect local change and to imagine possible alternative futures.

Youth Agency

In a number of churches membership was made up of predominantly young people between the ages of 16 and 35. Belonging to and participating in the life of a local faith community in itself contributes to building agency, capacity and confidence.

In one church, young people take the lead to organize events and dialogue between churches in order to foster unity. In another church young people lead the home visitation programme. In two city centre churches, we found that it was young people who led cell groups or facilitated liturgical elements during the worship service. Young people expressed a sense of having ownership of the congregation, compared to many other congregations of the same denomination. When specifically enquiring about the agency of young people, young people themselves spoke up in positive terms in the focus groups about some of their activities.

Some of our research team, though, felt that even where it seemed as if the youth were invited to take leadership, it was done so in rather patronising ways by the church leadership. Young people were often allowed to take responsibility but only on the terms of older leadership, without leadership being given away authentically.

Innovation and Competition of Churches in Relation to Contextual Challenges of Their Communities

We found significant, from our perspective, the large presence of diverse churches that spontaneously respond to changing urban environments, demographic changes and migration patterns. This correlates with literature suggesting that actors of faith in urban areas cannot be ignored. They are important for several reasons, such as the broad-based membership of faith communities in urban areas (Rakodi 2014: 82), the ways in which faith communities provide spaces for meaning-making, identity, refuge and hope (Bernstein and Rule 2010; Kuljian 2013; Rakodi 2014; Winkler 2008a; 2008b), and the 'entrepreneurial energy' found particularly amongst emerging (neo-)Pentecostal movements (Bernstein and Rule 2010: 123). A mere presence, however sizeable, is no guarantee, for mediating deep systemic change.

Contexts characterized by large numbers of churches in a relatively small area raise questions as to whether such dynamics represent innovation and a healthy form of competition or an expression of unhealthy striving and disunity in the church community. In research on similar lower social status communities with an abundance of small churches, scholars have argued that this represents an institutional redundancy that stretches scarce social resources within these communities too thinly (Mays and Nicholson 1933). What is encouraged instead in these instances is greater consolidation and

cooperation across ministry initiatives. Such arguments are countered, however, by growing inclinations (theoretically and practically) toward decentralization, non-hierarchical structures, and democratization of power and authority—which these diverse, individuated church ecologies within metro-Tshwane and across urban South Africa reflect in several respects.

Our research shed light on ways religious innovation and community are assessed at community levels.

Community Perspectives on Competition

Competition between churches is viewed as both negative and positive by different church communities. The more traditional and established churches viewed competition between churches as more negative whilst new churches regard competition as healthy, a given, and even an incentive for their own excellence.

Some churches spoke of what they perceived as negative competition: members are 'stolen' by churches of their own denomination in adjacent neighbourhoods, mostly because of music or liturgical styles being more attractive elsewhere. Streams of Living Water in Mamelodi East, coming from a very different tradition, stated that they were 'rejecting the notion of competition' and rather worked hard to build relationships with other churches.

The AFM church in Pretoria Central, however, regarded competition as positive, encouraging one 'to up your own game'. They felt that the proximity of other churches spurred them on to take their own music and preaching to higher heights. The church in Salvokop felt that there were so many people in their area, they only had a certain number of people, therefore, the other churches were not in competition as there were 'more than enough people to reach for all of us'.

One church in Pretoria Central adopted a deliberate strategy for recruiting new members, similar to the ethos of franchising: they 'set up shop' very close to a vibrant existing church. People think they go to the existing church, which has become known for its vibe, whilst they are actually attending the new church, still unknown, without knowing that it is not the church they intended to visit. And before they realize it, they are hooked.

Community Perspectives on Innovation

A central question of this research project is to understand whether there are innovations we can learn from. In response to that question one of our team members expressed a sense of feeling depressed and disappointed about the lack of articulation of churches with regard to vulnerable communities and the healing of urban fractures. He said: "It was painful to accept that reality". He felt that further research had to be done to unearth whether churches did not actually contribute to address urban vulnerability and fractures in more visible ways than we could detect. Another team member found the research 'depressing', as he encountered the 'same old thing; different people doing the same thing'.

Upon reflection we concluded that our own biases might prevent us from seeing innovations. The tension between the utopian ideas of liberation theologians and the actual local communities of faith responding to felt needs and experiential challenges might blind us from seeing.

The fluidity and flexibility of particularly independent churches in the informal settlements of Mamelodi East or in Pretoria Central, distinguished them from more rigid and therefore inflexible structures of many of the more established congregations we have engaged with. Spatial innovation, in the face of little infrastructure, has been clear.

And yet, up to this point our research has found it difficult to trace many examples of innovation in response to the most pressing challenges identified by the churches themselves: violence, poverty, unemployment, HIV and AIDS and substance abuse. Responses were rather limited in terms of being sporadic, uncoordinated and mostly restricted to 'welfare'-type responses without engaging in more transformational programmes mediating longer-term systemic change.

The description of one church sums it up. This church suggests that they were getting along well inside the church. All the problems were outside, and that was not where they were present. Another church indicated that they had no response to their context. The focus group actually helped them to surface ideas or visions for children living in a small informal settlement in their area.

Why are churches able to respond innovatively to urban migration patterns, starting churches with little resources in challenging urban neighbourhoods, yet seem unable to respond innovatively to some of the greatest challenges they themselves have identified repeatedly in these neighbourhoods? Is it a theological or ecclesiological problem, having a narrow self-understanding of the church's mandate in response to socio-economic-political challenges of its context? Is it an institutional problem, lacking capacity? Or is it a problem of identity, shaped by a paralysing vulnerability or a lack of confidence to make change?

Three of the more traditional denominational churches in Pretoria Central reflected worship style and multilingual approaches as innovations, at least within their own denominations. A question that surfaced for us was whether that which is innovative today might reach a time when the context requires new adaptations and the very innovation might lose its power.

The broad spectrum of churches engaged in ministries ranging from teaching, Biblical education, forgiveness and healing, to evangelism and prayer. A number of churches – Omnipresent, Lutheran Bapedi, Forward in Faith and Wilderness of Faith indicated assisting the poor in addressing their basic needs through financial or in-kind donations. The Jubilee Baptist Church specifically identified families that needed support and Omnipresent had an outreach ministry in the local community.

Only a few churches seem to have developed more comprehensive responses. The Evangelical Lutheran Church taught people to plant vegetable gardens and had a specific emphasis on health issues such as diabetes, blood pressure, and so forth. Jubilee Baptist Church organized soccer for young people and various children's activities.

Two churches made us curious enough to want to continue journeying in conversation with them. At Streams of Living Waters, a very small church in Mamelodi East, the Bishop/minister provides arts training to children as a way to fight poverty. The bishop is also an artist who sells his paintings as a way to generate support for the congregation. Although a small church in an informal backyard structure, we sensed the seeds of social innovation in the way in which this church tried to sustain itself, using the little they had.

This particular community was owned by members and they intentionally broke down leadership that is hierarchical or exclusivist.

One of the most innovative expressions of church we discovered was the Golden Gate church in Mamelodi East. 90% of the members are poor women, the church leader / founder is a woman and she is assisted by her 3 'spiritual daughters'. They have created their own community from below in a way that is self-organized and self-managed. This is particularly significant in a patriarchal church and community context with predominantly male leadership. In this church they are trying to address their own issues through collective organizing and have developed a rather well articulated vision to eradicate poverty. Their vision to transform the church into a social business reflects language that is innovative anywhere. Instead of church leaders promoting materialism or being greedy, or waiting for God to act, in their words, they want to stand in the gap to address the lack of resources and vision. In order to do so they started, among other things, an education desk, a sports desk, business seminars and empowerment seminars for people in their community.

What we would like to explore more is whether the way in which this community is organizing itself differs from, or is an expression of, how grass-root organizations in Mamelodi East commonly organize themselves.

Tentative Conclusions: Making Sense

Signs of Innovation and Competition

Our initial sense would be that there are signs of religious innovation and competition in both regions investigated. The existence and proliferation of so many churches in the two regions that can rightly be viewed as tough places to work in, speaks of agency, resilience and creativity.

The presence of the church, particularly migrant churches, seems to contribute both to home-coming and rootedness, and in the process also to the agency of individuals and families, enabling them to break certain negative cycles.

Neighbourhood or Systemic Impact

However, the same could not necessarily be said of such churches' impact on a community, neighbourhood or systemic level. Whereas individual agency seems to be mediated quite significantly, the proliferation of churches in relatively small areas, and the competition between them, sometimes seems to perpetuate disunity and reinforce the existing status quo of a fractured church and fractured communities instead of mediating drastic local transformations.

In relation to socio-spatial fractures our initial conclusion is that the churches we were investigating exhibited little in terms of overcoming socio-spatial fractures in any meaningful way.

Naudé (2015) describes this challenge for the oneness of the church in urban (South) Africa in a poignant way:

In the city, the disunity of the church is amplified in the ambiguous synergy between two forces: Urban divisions and insular closed identities find a spiritual home in ethnically defined churches; and (second) the fast spreading of African Independent and Pentecostal type churches – specifically in poor areas – show a lack of ecumenical sensibility and fractious leader-centred-ness which leads to a proliferation of the institutional church itself. If one adds urban apartheid, the legally enforced race-based suburbs and townships still lingering today in South Africa, the challenge for the visible, institutional unity of the church becomes even more pronounced.

Commuter and Resident Churches

We wondered whether the direct impact on the neighbourhood differed between 'commuter churches' and 'resident churches'. The narratives from two focus groups were telling: one church was predominantly comprised of members within walking distance of the church; the other church predominantly a commuter church. Someone from the church in Salvokop was on the local Community Forum. Another person was concerned with the people living in Baghdad, a small but growing informal settlement in Salvokop, and wanted to start a pre-school for the children from this community. Members of the Salvokop church spoke about play parks for children and the conditions of walking across the foot bridge from Salvokop to the Central Railway Station and city centre. In contrast, in the focus group with a nearby commuter church one of the greatest concerns mentioned was not play areas for children, or the safety of the streets – in other words, issues affecting the local neighbourhood – but, rather, the lack of parking spaces around the church for those driving in and out.

At least two denominational churches in Pretoria Central, with the largest memberships ironically, felt overwhelmed by their surroundings. One member said: 'We can't help everyone' and another: 'We are vulnerable because of all these people wanting help'. Their identity in relation to their context became one of internalized vulnerability, paralyzed for action.

Youth Agency

With regard to youth agency, we contrasted our experience of a resurgence of socio-political youth agency nationally, on university campuses, and also in local vulnerable communities, such as Mamelodi East, with the agency of young people found at the churches. Although we saw that churches contribute significantly to the personal and spiritual agency of young people who are members, and young people taking leadership and ownership at different levels in the church, we did not get a sense that churches are necessarily the institutions activating the kind of socio-political agency or change-making capabilities evident in the student movements, or that churches even seek to be in solidarity with emerging youth agency or popular social movements as they unfold in their own communities.

Churches as Agents of Urban Social Change: Unfulfilled Potential?

On the one hand we were struck by the dynamism and fluidity with which churches in both regions are able to respond to very dynamic and fluid urban contexts. On the other hand, however, we sensed that these same churches have largely unfulfilled, and probably

undiscovered, potential as social agents in contexts where people are often marginalized and striving towards greater inclusion.

In this regard we would consider placing greater emphasis on *social science research as emancipation* (Schwartz 2011; Nkoane 2012) or *theology as conscientization* (Freire 1970; Allen 2008; Glassman and Erdem 2014) in the next phase of our research: both allowing our research to be shaped more directly by the questions, concerns and aspirations coming from local churches themselves; and desirous of seeing our research contributing more directly to churches articulating a more concrete role for themselves as agents of local urban social change.

Concluding Thoughts

In researching urban religion in Africa, one encounters contexts characterized by a pronounced fluidity and change. What partly accounts for this dynamism has been the momentum of African population mobilities and migrations, resulting in rapidly changing neighbourhood and institutional landscapes and new conceptions of social and religious identity, interaction, and practice. Confronted with such fluidity, urban researchers are contending increasingly with the limitations of previously established research paradigms and methodologies in their explorations of these contexts. The contextual analysis and research methodologies outlined in the present study hopefully assist in navigating key aspects of these current frontiers of urban religion research.

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"When Are You Going to Change Those Stones to Phones?" Social Media Appropriation by Pentecostal Churches in Cape Town

Henrietta M. Nyamnjoh

Abstract

On May 15th 2016, the Southern Africa Zone 5 Pastor of Christ Embassy (CE), Pastor Rita, appeared on a live stream service that was broadcast to all the churches in the region to talk about the visit to the Holy Land in Jerusalem by Pastor Chris and his delegation. She later announced that the entire visit can be viewed on Love WorldSat Super User and King's Chat and encouraged the use of the app to encourage viewership. Following the concept of mediatisation and looking at Pastor Rita's communiques, this paper explores the appropriation of Social Media (SM) by Pentecostal churches (PCs) in Cape Town, South Africa. It seeks to understand how and to what extent innovation and competition propels PCs' appropriation of SM to disseminate information, position themselves to attract the desired audience and maintain relevance in the face of mounting competition. Acknowledging the premise that the church is fast eroding and peoples' lives are increasingly on the move, PC understand that the success of church depends on how they stay connected with Christians and evolve with the times. SM thus becomes the tool on-the-get-go, a way for accessing the church, and for PCs to stay connected with Christians, given their accessibility on mobile phones.

KEY WORDS: Social Media, Appropriation, Mediatisation, Pentecostal Churches, Platforms/Apps

Introduction

This paper is part of a larger study that explores religious competition and innovation within Pentecostal churches (PCs). The main objective of this project was to map out religious competition and innovative trends among PCs in Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The study explores the creative appropriation of Social Media (SM, henceforth) in comparison with face to face modes of communication and interaction in PCs. Of interest is the extent to which SM appropriation by PCs influence how it is represented as well as how the church and followers interact with one another. The paper discusses the extent to which SM represent the authority of religious institutions, and offer

Christians a degree of self-selection and self-determination. While the focus here is contemporary media as SM, henceforth, it is important to acknowledge that religious competition is not new, and started as far back as the fifteenth century when Gutenberg invented the printing press (Morgan, 2011; Einstein, 2008), which gave a different perspective to religion –namely, introduction of marketing following the printing of pamphlets/tracts and subsequently the proliferation of tracts to counter the profane literature that was circulated at the time (Morgan, 2011). Competition was further heightened after the First Amendment right to freedom of religion in America, which meant that religions had to compete for parishioners, oftentimes using marketing techniques, from simple print advertising to door-to-door salesmen (Einstein, 2008: 4). However, these simple forms of competition have evolved with the advent of new communication technologies to reach out to Christians. What is more, SM has taken this competition further by targeting Christians on-the-move, no longer limited to televisual outreach (Pradip and Lee, 2012). These advances, Einstein intimates, 'have meant not necessarily more competition, but bigger competition and not only bigger competition, but competition with considerable marketing expertise in multiple media outlets' (2008: 8). That various platforms have been created to speak to different consumers' taste illustrates what Cheryl Russell refers to as 'customized products for individualistic consumers' (Russell, 1993: 56). This drive for customised taste is what propels the competitive environment, engendering religious firms such as CE and mega Pentecostal churches to 'flourish owing to the provision of products at least as attractive as its competitors' (Finke and Iannaccone, 1993; Hamberg and Pettersson, 1994).

Through the communiqués of Pastor Rita[1] of CE, I examine how PCs appropriate SM in the context of evolving internet-mediated technologies to appeal to Christians. The first communiqué comes in the aftermath of a visit to Jerusalem by Pastor Chris, some Pastors and selected members of the church in April 2016:

> I am sure that you have seen it on King's chat, Love WorldSat, Super user and Yookos, and even on Christ Embassy Southern Africa and Zone 1. Have you been following on all those platforms? Praise God! Make sure that you follow! How many of you are following on Love WorldSat Super User? How many of you? Can I see your hand? This is very serious! Ok why are you not following Love WorldSat super user? You don't know how to follow? It is very easy.... Only these ones are following and we've been talking about it! So everybody sitting down is not following! Can you go there now if you have your phone with you ... Are you connected? Or there is no data? ... Do it all over the region! You have to follow, this is one app you must follow. Praise God! I can see that some of you have just started following it, because I can see the number of people who are following rising.… Tell somebody you must follow Love WorldSat super users. If this is the only reason that you need to get a phone, instead of a stone[2] it is worth the investment! Alleluia![3]

After this exercise, Pastor Rita cautions against unfollowing and told the church that as Christians following these apps was expected. 'How can Christians win souls when they do not have apps installed on their phones, what then will they use to win souls'? she interjected. Seen from the pastor's remarks above, some Christians downloaded the app

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[1] All names used are pseudonyms.
[2] Referring to a phone as a stone insinuates that it is not sophisticated enough.
[3] Live stream communiqué of Pastor Rita of Christ Embassy Southern Africa Zone 4, Cape Town: 15/05/2016.

and were advised not to delete for want of memory space. Rather, other unimportant apps should be deleted to make space for church apps. And for those without smartphones, they were asked to 'change their stones to phones'. While not all members have downloaded the various apps, from my observations, it would appear most Christians have the Bible app on their phones and navigate the different versions of the Bible on Sunday service.

The call by Pastor Rita was reiterated at the cell group prayer meeting by a junior pastor. On May 29th 2016, through a similar live stream broadcast, Pastor Rita made a follow-up to find out how many Christians of CE have downloaded all the other apps of the church. Those who downloaded the apps in church were given a gift voucher of Pastor Chris' digital library and were asked to download a sermon or motivational talk for free. Conversely, those who do not yet have an Android phone were asked to; 'save your money for food this week and buy a phone; stop using a stone'![4]

By contrast, Ark of the Glory of the Lord (AGLC), limits its followers' appropriation to the existing apps (WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube), and to what is convenient to them. Sunday services are still held following the mainline tradition of face-to-face encounters.

Against this backdrop, this paper uses the communiqués of Pastor Rita to explore the appropriation of SM by Pentecostal churches (PCs) – Christ Embassy (CE) and Ark of the Glory of the Lord (AGLC), in Cape Town, South Africa. It examines and compares the uses of SM by both Pentecostal churches, and how each of them understands the power of social media and its role in proselytization in an increasingly competitive and fast-moving world. While the role and appropriation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) within PCs has been well articulated (Hackett and Soares, 2015; Campbell, 2013, 2010; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2007), the appropriation of SM however, is yet to be fully captured in all its multiplicities and complexities and its fluid and dynamic nature (Villi and Matikainen, 2016). This paper fills that gap. It argues that as a way of staying relevant and connected with Christians on-the-go and appeal to would-be Christians, especially youth, mega-PCs have inculcated SM into forms of worship while rising PCs have adopted a minimalist approach towards appropriation and maintained the traditional forms of face-to-face worship by increasing the number of Christian activities in church.

Firstly, it is helpful to get some perspective on social media. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 60), 'Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content' (UGC). This layer of platforms form a new online layer through which people organise their lives, and which increasingly influences human interaction on an individual and community level, as well as on a larger societal level, while the worlds of online and off line are increasingly interpenetrating (Van Dijck, 2013: 4). Acknowledging a proliferation of SM platforms, this study will be limited to two social media platforms – social network sites (SNSs) and user-generated content (UGC). The former are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 63; Van Dijck, 2013). UGC involves explicit and implicit participation. Explicit participation involves

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'producing media texts and artefacts. It also encompasses co-creation – when consumers are no longer satisfied with their traditional end-user roles and get involved in creating and developing digital products and services' (Villi and Matikainen, 2016: 110; see also Ramaswamy and Gouillart, 2010: 3-6). Implicit participation involves users sustaining connections and togetherness rather than producing content; it serves to maintain communality and community (Villi and Matikainen, 2016: 110). Although studies have shown how PCs are more successful with appropriations of the mass media with regard to SNSs and UGC than their historic mainline churches (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2007: 235). It is also worth noting that while mega churches are at the forefront of appropriation, some PCs (Ark of the Glory of the Lord church, AGLC) are content with basic forms of SM – WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook. What does such appropriation entail and how does it fit patterns of media ownership and control? Following the deregulation of the media in the aftermath of neoliberalism, media ownership ceases to be a prerogative of nation-states and corporates. It opened up the airwaves for PCs to purchase their own airwaves and determine the content to be broadcast. The new form of ownership and control practiced by PCs, while appearing to have moved away from that practiced by corporates, still operates on the same principle – it 'controls every means by which the population learns of its society' (Bagdikian, 2014: 4; Pradip & Nain, 2004) Wanting to be the first in technology development of different SM platforms engenders significant controls, allowing churches to defend their interests and disseminate content that maintains the statuesque and their privileged role within the church (Pradip and Nain, 2004: 3). For instance, Pastor Rita may not own somebody's smartphone yet she exerts control over the contents by asking that certain apps be downloaded and others deleted to make space for these apps. In this respect, the pastors are not different from the state/corporates that seek to control content and determine desire.

This paper will focus on the question of how and to what extent Pentecostal churches have appropriated social media to disseminate information, maintain relevance and position themselves in the face of mounting competition to attract the desired audience? What drives the need for Pentecostal churches to appropriate social media? How have new players in the arena successfully gained or worked towards achieving visibility in the face of such stiff competition?

Following Stig Hjarvard's concept of mediatisation (2011, 2016), the paper uses the communiqués of Pastor Rita and empirical findings from this study to discuss religious mediatisation and the appropriation of SM to take spirituality closer to the Christians, with relation to innovation and competition. Such innovative and competitive traits hinge on the supply-side concept of religion that states that religious change usually occurs in response to the shifting desires and needs of religious consumers (Finke and Iannaccone, 1993). At its base, one religion is not very different from another. The differences, intimates Einstein, (2008: 20), 'lie in the packaging – the music, the type of texts used, and what additional services are available beyond the prayer services – *such as internet-mediated services*' (my addition, in italics for emphasis).

Given that people's lives are increasingly on the move, the coming of SM thus becomes the tool on-the-get-go and a way for PCs to stay connected with Christians following its accessibility on mobile phones. Hence appropriating and embedding SM into the workings of the church keeps the church connected with the Christians.

I will begin by exploring earlier studies on SM and Pentecostalism that speak to the theoretical underpinnings of mediatisation and the extent to which churches are reliant on

SM. Next, I will give a methodological overview of the study. This will be followed by looking at the power of having a smartphone, and how it can help the church achieve its objectives of spreading the word and winning souls. The last sections explore comparisons of CE and AGLC with regard to SM appropriation – creation of software and apps – listing the different apps in use and the functions. The paper concludes that while megachurches are on a global mission to attract followers and reach out to the would-be 'born-again' through the massive creation and deployment of social media, rising Pentecostal churches adapt to the social media platforms that are feasible to their Christians to enhance evangelism – domesticating the new and the old.

Pentecostalism, Social Media and Mediatisation

This study follows in the path of earlier studies (Hackett and Soares, 2015; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2007, 2005; Hackett, 2006, 1998) that shed light on the social uses and appropriation of information and communication technologies (ICTs). While TV was the major medium used in reaching a wider audience in the past, increasingly people's lives are on the move and thus churches require other strategies to reach these populations. SM, given its accessibility on mobile phones, has thus become the tool on-the-get-go. PCs see the heuristic benefits of transforming communication, and minimising the threat of competition from the secular world and profane literature. The need to add SM to its previously appropriated internet-mediated communication technologies is to connect and reach out to as many members as possible or risk losing members and would-be converts (De Witte, 2003: 185; see also Asamoah-Gyadu, 2007: 228).

Appropriation of SM therefore invokes the way Pentecostal churches (PCs) are recalibrating the appropriation of ICTs in general and SM in particular. Out of this technique has emerged a mediatisation theory that shows how societies are intertwined and influence each other in various institutions including religion, stressing the interaction and transaction between actors and structures (Hjarvard, 2011: 120-21; Hjarvard, 2016). SM goes beyond the 'virtual/visual arena of spiritual warfare' (TV) to a virtual space for competing for mass recruitment of new members, interaction and disseminating Christian messages. The use of SM becomes an extension of print media and physical church and creates the desired impact of 'moving with the ministry in their pockets' - similar to the idea of 'having your life in your pocket' as the late Steve Jobs noted with the creation of the iPhone (Campbell, 2007). In other words, the media has become integrated into the social fabric/workings of society and its institutions. While SM offers very convenient means through which PCs can put their activities into public space, it is also a form of social organization, which helps PCs to maintain social relations, control and determine contents/desire, as well as gain surveillance over their members (Bagdikian, 2014).

This approach enables the churches to become physically and virtually present in the lives of their members, following the notion of 'moving with the church in their pockets' (Allmer 2015; Campbell, 2007). In keeping with this mission, the creation of different apps is meant to keep Christians continuously connected to the church and to be out-of-sync with the general secular apps (Christensen, 2012), 'in order to project a version of religion that is less influenced by secular media' (Hjarvard, 2016: 10). Consequently, creating the church apps is indicative of the competition from culture wars – the apps are meant to shield Christians from secularity. Albeit, the apps serve as a medium that facilitates interactive religious activity, follows the activities of Pastor Chris, other pastors and connects with CE Christians worldwide as well as enabling users to see activities of other

sister churches. Conversely, the platforms are not only about providing the actual service that the app is designed for, but also about generating data/information on the users of the app, for various uses related to and beyond the app itself.[5]

This study draws on Stig Hjarvard's concept of mediation as a point of departure. Whereas Hjarvard's (2016, 2011, 2008) understanding of mediatisation relates to contemporary media, he fails to incorporate historical underpinnings such as the evolution of print media and TV to its current digital form. Acknowledging Morgan's (2011) concept of mediation, I adopt mediatisation of religion, given its specific contemporary development of high modernity (Hjarvard 2011:127). Several scholars have also indicated that 'mediatisation involves a complex dynamic between how religious organisations incorporate the affordances of various media in order to be able to communicate with the external world, but also use and appropriate media for their own purposes' (Lövheim, 2011: 161). SM, which is the focus of this paper, falls within that category. Hjarvard posits that 'mediatisation entails a dual process by which the media have developed into a semi-independent societal institution at the same time as they have integrated into the workings of other institutions and become an indispensable part of "doing religion"' (2016: 9; 2011). The media therefore becomes a social tool that focuses on transformations in society and a conduit that helps co-construct the routines and social relationships of ordinary life – integrated into the social fabric and workings of social institutions (Hjarvard, 2011: 121, 2008; Lövheim and Lundby, 2013). As conduits, media have become an important source of information about religion in society (Gelfgren, 2015; Hjarvard, 2016, 2011; Lundby, 2009). Specifically relating to religion, Hjarvard intimates that mediatisation entails the transformation of three aspects of religion:

> media become an important source of information about religious issues; religious information and experiences become moulded according to the demands of popular media genres and media have taken over many of the cultural, and social functions of the institutionalised religions and provide spiritual guidance, moral orientation, ritual passages and a sense of community and belonging (2011: 124).

However, with regard to the last point, I will re-echo Clark's argument that in the contemporary period, the processes of mediatisation are contributing to a personalisation of what it means to be religious. It would appear, albeit, that Pastor Rita is inspired by the above tenets and engages her Christians to have Smartphones in order to be active users of the various SM platforms.

Religious app development therefore invokes a consensus-based authority within CE. In this respect, Schulz (2004: 88-90; see also Hjarvard, 2011: 122), considers four points that elucidates mediatisation. First, a process in which mass media extend human communication, second, subsume social activities and institutions, third, join with non-media activities and lastly, engage people and organisations in their media logic. With regard to SM substituting face-to-face communication, while it may be the case to an extent, evidence from this study shows that SM, especially WhatsApp, is used to plan face-to-face meetings. For instance, the cell WhatsApp group postings speak to this:

> Good evening mighty precious team of XXX! We have another glorious cell meeting tomorrow, and we have an amazing word we have been instructed to listen to from Pastor, and we will discuss it. Next week Thursday we will have a-bring-

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[5] Hence Pastor Rita can see all those joining the platform after her intervention.

and-share to celebrate birthdays we have had so far in the month of January. We can't do that tomorrow because of time... see you soon![6]

1 hour to go to our cell meeting! Come ready to receive from the Spirit! Our lives will never be the same again.[7]

SM appropriation by PCs influences how it is represented as well as how the church and followers interact with one another. However, the level of interaction is limited to church members or a drive towards proselytization. Campbell (2007) and Hjarvard (2011) adduce that the media challenges the authority of religious institution. Acknowledging their views, I posit that it also enhances the authority of the religious institution, such as the encounter between Pastor Rita and the Christians. Through live stream broadcast, Pastors can encourage or challenge Christians to use the platforms. SM thus offers Christians a degree of self-selection and self-determination as well as ways in which subjection works and governs people's lives.

 Similarly, social media allows the users to retrieve information based on individual needs and interests (Schulz, 2004: 94). Relatedly, rather than substitute existing face-to-face communication as Schulz (2004) indicates, the new media supplements and complements old media. While certain platforms privilege virtual interaction, the underlying fact is to use the apps to occasion face-to-face interaction. Encouraging Christians to download the various apps (see Pastor Rita's excerpt), SM platforms becomes 'intermediaries through which Christians can experience the divine; providing for greater interreligious conviviality', as opined by Nyamnjoh (2015: vii). Similar findings show how SM becomes synonymous to a support mechanism that provides moral orientation and emotional consolation in times of crisis for individuals (Cerulo, Roane, and Chayko 1992; Hjarvard, 2009).

Methodology

Data collected for the paper is informed by qualitative research. Participant observation proved quite useful as the author participate in church services at CE and AGLC and cell group meetings of CE and other related events.

Participation at services was facilitated by the fact that the Sunday services preceded each other; hence I would navigate between both congregations. Participant observation involved sustained engagement and attentiveness – observing how Christians, in the course of the service, navigate the various digital platforms was quite educative. Listening to the pastor on both occasions via live stream gave a sense of the importance attached to the platforms as well as brought the stark reality of how much the church had invested in social media.

Interviews and informal conversations, such as the one with Naomi (a hairdresser) were very useful. Interviews complemented participant observation; they provided opportunity for follow-up conversations on events/happenings in church. At C E 16 persons were interviewed – 5 women/10men and one assistant pastor, while at AGLC 10 persons – 4 women/6 men and the Bishop. I also had six follow-up interviews with some

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[6] Message posted on 01/02, 21:12 by Blessing, Cell group leader, Cape Town.
[7] See footnote 4.

members of both churches. Comparative methods provide a general explanation on the levels of SM appropriation by CE and AGLC to discover specific characteristics that are similar or different between cases. Relatedly, downloading the apps to view its contents and using the apps provided a sense of what it entails and an opportunity to closely follow the activities of the Pastors and the church. The same applies to reading the chapter on 'Technology and our Gospel' in the Foundation School manual. These give a sense of direction as to how the church engages in the use of ICTs in general and SM in particular. Listing all the platforms and their usage invites the Christians to interact with it.

Annette Markham (2013) highlights the looming concerns about the appropriateness of using traditional ethnographic research methods when doing research in a digital context. She maintains many of these underlying conditions 'prevent us from using our creative, interpretive authority to "See. Things. Differently"'(Ibid, 436). One way of overcoming these challenges was to take seriously entries into my research diary that permits detailed recordings of happenings besides formal interviews as seen below:

> My first day at Christ Embassy, I was struck by how much Christians interacted with their phones in church. More so, I was taken aback by the pastor's use of her phone on the pulpit. Lots of questions came to mind; what are they doing with phones turned on in church? Including the pastor? Each time a bible chapter/verse is displayed in the screen people turn to their phones. I quickly noticed from my neighbours that they use it to access the Bible app…

In a conversation with Naomi later she explained to me that Christians navigate between the Bible app and King's chat.[8]

The Smartphone Era: "Stones" or Phones?

> You cannot be a leader and have a 'stone'.Be on the go! Reach people! Those who have downloaded King's chat should stand up. … Those who have all the apps stand up. I am sure those of you with smart phones have been alerted that the apps are draining your battery or are occupying too much space. Don't uninstall them, instead delete other apps in order to make space for church apps. Those of you who are yet to download the apps, why do you still go around with those 'stones' in the name of phones? What are you waiting for to change your stone into a phone? You should pray and change your phone today. Save up and buy real phones and not stones! Share for those who are downloading. We have got a gift for you but you have to prove. I am watching you all over the region.[9]

As noted in the introduction, Pastor Rita calls on church group leaders and the entire church to have smartphones and be connected to all the church apps, have data to reach out to other members of the church, and win souls. Using the live streamed broadcast to Southern African Zone 5 churches (South Africa & Zimbabwe) to ensure that she reaches out to those under her zone, emphasises the seriousness with which Pentecostal churches, especially CE, consider social media. Recalling that this is the second time in a fortnight that the pastor has come up on live stream to talk about the apps and the need for Christians to download them denotes the importance the church attaches to social media

[8] Research notes: 03/04/2016.
[9] Live stream communiqué of Pastor Rita of Christ Embassy Southern Africa Zone 4, Cape Town: 29/05/2016.

and the notion that social media can only work with Christians switching to smart phones instead of having "stones" that do not facilitate the work of the church. CE has recognised the importance of these platforms to facilitate communal activities where participation is key (Van Dijck, 2013: 11). Again, vouchers were distributed to all who had downloaded the apps. The vouchers become a bait to lure Christians to the platforms and keep them hooked onto it, consequently resulting in 'data generating audience traffic' (Villi and Matkanein, 2016). By using the vouchers it is hoped they will appreciate other activities and interesting literature that will keep them continuously on the apps. By the same token, addressing the church leaders directly is cognizance of the 'alpha distributor' role that they are expected to play. This refers to 'users who act as key nodes in social media and whose recommendation/communication has an extensive reach and influence' (Villi & Matkanein, 2016: 112). These leaders would include; mentors, cell group leaders and their assistants, ushers, and choir members and foundation school teachers.

Although relatively new in the scene compared to mainline churches (Catholic and Protestant), PCs have been quick to understand the importance of ICTs for evangelism, dissemination of information and reaching out to many more Christians. This trend has steadily grown and the coming of SM has increased the demand for ICTs for proselytization, as evident in Pastor Rita's call as well as the phenomenal resources CE has invested in developing different apps tailored for specific groups and purposes in the church. Pastor Rita's ability to see the increasing number of members downloading the app confirms the church's ownership and control. The platforms do not simply provide services that they are designed for, but equally they generate data/information on the users of the app for various purposes beyond the superficial uses. Her remarks, 'I am watching you all over the region', confirm this. As Nyamnjoh (2004: 58) intimates, it is therefore a philosophy of ownership and control that seeks to marry individual and group or community property rights, rather than seeking to impose the illusion of the autonomous individual.

Given the importance of social media in the workings of the church a month of sensitization has been dedicated to it. According to Pastor Rita:

> We will focus on the digital platforms for the month of June because we want to avoid those platforms where one is not allowed to talk about Jesus Christ/God. Platforms like these are because the future of our God can be harnessed on these platforms. We can't be complacent about it. There is a world of tech in preaching the gospel.[10]

The focus and emphasis for Christians to migrate to the church platform is acknowledgement that the development of tailored specific social network sites (SNSs) does not equate to social presence, participation and connectivity. As such, social presence, participation and connectivity are intertwined, as they are influenced by intimacy and immediacy. Relatedly, innovation and competition can be achieved when members change from having 'stones' to having 'real phones' to give the church a physical presence from a virtual world.

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[10] Statement by Pastor Rita to congregants of Christ Embassy Southern African Zone 5, Cape Town: 29/05/2016.

Being Relevant in Modern Life: Christ Embassy's Quest for Visibility

> Technology actually constitutes 90% of the modern life. It is about speed, about efficiency, and reaching out faster to everyone. It's about easy communication, and faster communication. People don't want things that take long to happen. People want things to happen immediately and we took advantage of that. Technology has to be incorporated into our day to day life. This is the modern. So the church has got to move with the speed of how the world is also advancing so that we will be able to reach out to the generation that makes the future. They are the church; they will make the church, so we focus on them. That's why we say, technology into the church is the modern life and they believe in technology. So if you don't give them technology, if you don't give ministry Apps they will not be part of it, they don't want to read books any more, they don't want to read pamphlets, but we give them books in form of pdf, in different formats, which can actually be uploaded into their phones or downloaded into their gadgets.[11]

Like previous ICTs to have been appropriated by PCs, SM is no different and has been created and programmed with similar objectives – evangelisation, connectivity and interaction. However, SM appropriation is further underpinned by the need to be relevant and keep up with modern pace as underscored by Moses. Hence, CE's investment in the creation of software aimed at providing management software and religious-themed apps for the church. It is prompted by the need to attract young Christians; often referred to as the 'android generation' and 'inefficient attendance monitoring and financial tracking, poor communication and engagement with church members and difficulties in promoting events' (Kleinman, 2016). For the church, the platforms are important components, hence: 'It is strategic for the platforms to be popular. The popularity of the apps is you; I mean the number of people who are there. Like, share and talk within the platforms. Start your groups and migrate it to King's chat; …. Pastor Chris should have you communicate his orders'.[12]

The importance of the apps is attested by Christians who navigate the various platforms. Joan details its importance:

> It is important because they want to help us not to be distracted. Take for example Facebook, it's not specifically for Christians. Facebook is for everyone. Now the ministry has given you – Yookos – where there is the word of God, where we get to pray with pastor …, there are specific times in the day when we pray with pastor, he gives us petitions and we pray. I say that they've made Christianity so simple. It's not enough to go church. So if you want to play around with your phone, go to Yookos. Then you see testimonies there, you see teachings, you see prayers, petitions and answered prayers. If you want to listen to music you go to CeFlix, there you'll be listening to gospel music. So it's way of helping us to grow and not to be distracted at all because sometimes what can happen can be disastrous.[13]

Similarly, the frequency and interval between the communiqués by Pastor Rita, is an indication of how seriously CE takes the use of the various social media platforms. The insistence of sharing communication is underpinned by the fact that 'consumption of media content has gone from being an individual activity to one in which the consumer

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[11] Interview with Moses of the IT department at Christ Embassy, Cape Town: 14/02/2017.
[12] See footnote 7.
[13] Interview with Joan, Cape Town: 20/05/2016.

has the opportunity to interact with others' (Villi and Matikainen, 2016: 112). Consequently, interaction on the platforms becomes central to the way Christians experience the media's contents, and conversely the way the contents/platform get visibility. Perhaps Pastor's Rita's call for members to migrate their groups to the platforms is informed by thinking that a higher social presence and larger social influence that the communication partners have on each other's behaviour, will better enable joint and simultaneous creation of content by many end-users. This inevitably leads to a better outcome than any actor could achieve individually (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 61-62).

To stay relevant and encourage a higher social presence, SM platforms are dynamic as they are continuously tweaked in response to their users' needs and their owners' objectives by way of aping current SM platforms, as well as in response to competing platforms (Van Dijck, 2013). In this connection, CE's platforms mirror that of other platforms; for instance, Yookos is a hybrid of Facebook and WhatsApp. Informed by their needs, CE has become one of the leaders in the appropriation of SM and software development to enhance proselytization, interaction and control. This is confirmed by a chapter dedicated to 'technology and our gospel' in Christ Embassy's Foundation School manual. It states that 'technology provides a platform for us Christians to "hold forth the word of life" and even better with SM as 'we can evangelize and make disciples in another country without the need of physical appearance'. Further, as Christians what differentiates their use of SM from the rest of the population is 'their conduct, practices, and decent language.' Unlike people who are not 'born-again' they are reminded of the powerful tool that they have at their disposal to win souls, to change the course of someone's life for better. Relatedly, Christians are reminded that their presence on the platform should be meaningful – create and share contents; one's communication should be impactful on the community. CE has twenty-one apps that are tailored for various needs, but this study focuses on seven apps. Describing the how the apps function, Daniel notes that:

> These apps are free if you have got an Android gadget. Whether it's a mobile phone or tablet… these apps will give you access to ministry material. Some of the ministry material can be downloaded for free and others are for sale. Books can be bought directly from your gadget onto your gadget using the apps; making life easier. You just have to link your debit or credit card to the app that you are using and your phone then you can purchase directly and download. People don't want things that take much time, so the convenience of apps attracts so many people to the church.[14]

The demand for apps and software development in Africa is perhaps an acknowledgement that many Pentecostal Christians in Africa are on mobile devices, hence the need for reachability, accessibility and interaction. Daniel of CE confirms the dependency on one's mobile phone as he pulls out his phone to show this researcher the various apps he has on his phone:

> Okay, let me take my phone out so that I will be able to check some of the apps that I have. …. I will start with the Bible, which is the most important. I've got the Bible and other versions, and the Bible toolbox as well. The Bible toolbox helps me to study the Bible properly without repetition. I have our app; the CE app, which I can download messages for free by Pastor Karen, and I can also watch services live every Sunday if I'm not in church, then I can log on to the app, boom!

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[14] Interview with Daniel, Cape Town: 22/07/2016.

I'm already in church. I have The Rhapsody which I usually download from the rhapsody app every day and that's one of the apps that I love most. Then Pastor Chris online, this is where you find most of the material by Pastor Chris. I have got quite a lot of apps on my gadget.[15]

After showing the researcher the various apps on his phone, Daniel goes on to list the rest.

Social Media and Proselytization: Christ Embassy's Apps

The addition of SM to its impressive mass media outlets (television, radio and print media), exemplifies CE's products and services that are part of a 'comprehensive, cohesive marketing and outreach plan to create a product that resonates with today's consumer-conscious religious shopper' (Einstein, 2008:14), and also a product that reflects the changing times – on-the-go.

Pastor Chris Online

This is a one-stop and highly interactive app packaged with inspiring interfaces and aptly designed to keep Christians connected on-the-go, to the ever-expanding world of global impact, peculiar to the multi-faceted ministry of Rev. Chris Oyakhilome. Through this app, users are able to connect into the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ as preached by Pastor Chris. *Pastor Chris Online* is designed to serve as a highly interactive, entertaining, inspiring and spiritually uplifting app which brings to millions God's eternal word on the go. *Pastor Chris Online* gives you the opportunity to share your testimonies, join a social community, participate in live blogs, upload comments, and participate in prayer sessions. The app aims to make authentic Christian broadcast available 24 hours on the internet.

As a cell group leader, Blessing uses this app to conduct meetings especially when it comes to prayer points, affirmation and confessions that are found on this platform. For the benefit of those who do not have data, she reads aloud for members to repeat after her, those who have data read along from their phones. Daniel summarizes this platform as follows:

> This is where you find most of the material by Pastor Chris. I can download for free and I can buy. Besides, Pastor Chris Online is also connected to Yookos. You can find the prayers/confessions for the day. You don't have to lag behind when you've got these apps. With Pastor Chris Online, it means whatever is happening in the ministry, you are connected to that. So that is one way we are connected to Pastor Chris anointing because he will give, he will ask the church to pray together at 12 midnight/noon, for example. So if you are connected to Pastor Chris Online, it means you will have access to that information. You … will know there is a conference in China. In short, we follow pastor's activities. It's a way to connect the ministry with us and that is very important for me.[16]

A similar sentiment is shared by Pastor Rita who tells Christians 'how much they are missing by not joining King's chat to follow his activities, especially the Holy Land tour, and urge members to download this app'. For Naomi, although all the platforms are

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[15] Interview with Daniel, Cape Town; 22/07/2016
[16] See footnote 13.

important, *Pastor Chris Online* is very important as it invites Christians all over the world into the life of the Man of God, and follows his movements and activities.[17]

Pastor Chris Digital Library

This is a mobile platform that lets users access hundreds of audio and video messages by pastor Chris, spanning various life issues, such as healing and health, faith, Christian living, fellowship with the holy spirit, prayer, prosperity and finance, from anywhere at any time. Its main objectives are for users to get instant access to life changing videos and audio messages directly from Pastor Chris straight to your mobile device, and to share and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ by sharing this app with your friends/loved ones. Through this platform, some subscribers have experienced life changing miracles and testimonies through the messages from Pastor Chris inspired by the Holy Spirit. Users are able to choose to be a free user, silver member or gold member all with various benefits as you go higher. While this platform has been designed to enhance connection with the entire CE church and constant connectivity with Pastor Chris, it has also built in communication to monetize the platform whereby E-books, DVDs, and sermons are for sale, while few messages can be downloaded for free. The library contains hundreds of impactful messages in both audio and video formats. One can also send gift vouchers to friends and family and also invite friends to join.

King's Chat

This app is a fast, simple and effective way for users to send and receive messages, pictures, audios, location and video messages – all for free. The app has been upgraded to allow users' blog and broadcast messages on the platform with the possibility to see other users' activities. This app is a hybrid of WhatsApp and Facebook. It is orientated towards the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ and sharing the word the world over. It also offers interaction with Pastor Chris, group conversation and makes provision to add or remove group participants, change group subject and set a group icon. And *King's Chat* is compatible with multiple languages.

Rhapsody of Realities App (ROR)

This is the best-selling daily devotional and Bible study guide distributed to over 242 countries in 608 languages. The ROR app provides a new world of inspiration following its redesigning. It comprises of a ROR combo book – audio book and E-book, exclusive to Rhapsody app users only at no additional cost. The newly designed reader is complete with improved bookmark, highlight, search and comments features. Through this platform, users can send their prayer request, share testimonies, read that of others around the world as well as become partners to sponsor contributions of Rhapsody to others. Features of the app can be shared on Yookos and other social networks.

Yookos

This device is a Christian social networking app developed by Christ Embassy International and available to users worldwide, with the mandate to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Besides worldwide interaction with other users, members can have a one-on-one access with the Pastor. Other than its Christian mandate, members can create blogs

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[17] Conversation with Naomi, Cape Town: 11/05/2016.

within the platform, connect with friends online, have free chats, and create groups and have discussions. Rating this platform Daniel notes that:

> As far as I can say, Yookos is like a link between WhatsApp and Facebook because you can do a lot of stuff that you do on WhatsApp with Yookos. At the same time, some functions of Facebook are on Yookos as well. So it's like a combination of both, which makes it even much better. It's actually developing but they've already come to that point where you can make a call on Yookos.[18]

Healing School App

The vision of the Healing School is 'taking divine healing to the nations and people of the world'. The Healing School mobile app gives you access to a multi-lingual experience with translations in French, German, Russian and Spanish. With this app you can watch inspiring videos, listen to faith stirring audio podcasts, register for upcoming sessions, and connect with the healing school on Yookos. The app offers users the opportunity to watch videos of Testifiers at the Healing School, inspiring documentaries from the minister's visitation program and exciting testimonies of visitors to the international Easter youth camp with Pastor Chris. It also offers a Healing School monthly magazine available in English, Dutch, Spanish and French which can be downloaded for free, as well as archives of the healing school magazine within the app. Having participated at the Healing School, Faith maintains that:

> I was inspired to attend the Healing from watching LoveworldSat before I joined CE and later listening to testimonies from the app on my phone when I became a member. What I like about the healing ministry is they teach you the word of God about healing so that you understand it's not magic, it's a process and it's what the word of God says.[19]

Through this app, Christians evangelise to others who are sick and in need of help. Testimonies from the app are shown to friends in one's circle. Jess' excerpt echoes this:

> I have a colleague who is very sick and needs help. I showed her testimonies from the healing app on my phone and implored her to seek help. A week later the friend told me she has been thinking about what I said. Having encouraged her, I am now praying for her that she takes up the offer.[20]

LoveworldSat App

This is a mobile application developed to deliver TV experience of LoveWorld Satellite station for Christians on-the-go. It is a premium television station that provides rich, quality content that is meaningful and life changing. It also offers a wide variety of TV programs ranging from faith-based inspirational programs to world news and current affairs, lifestyle, entertainment, kiddies' show, education, movies and music. Besides this TV station, there are other broadcasting channels that apps have been created to enable Christians to access news and information on-the-go. These include; Loveworld TV, Loveworld Plus, Loveworld Radio, and Loveworld news. The design and programmes on these platforms are informed by the stiff competition that the church faces with the secular

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[18] Interview with Daniel, Cape Town: 22/07/2016.
[19] Interview with Faith, Cape Town: 21/05/2016.
[20] Conversation with Jess, Cape Town: 09/02/2017.

world. In order to attract Christians to the church, while privileging church contents, they must be able to provide them with similar worldly entertainment contents but couched in the work. Blessing elucidates:

> Competition between the church and the secular world is real! This is even so because of the fast world in which we live today whereby young people, especially, want to enjoy the world, but unfortunately what is being thrown at them are all the things that could destroy their lives forever. As a church we thought, what are the things that these youth like to do so we can provide to them for free but couched in the word? This is the only way we can fight this competition; by providing similar things that they would normally pay for out there, but for free and there will be abundant fun. This is the bait to bring them into the word.[21]

The above statement encapsulates the culture war and fears of the churches through the eyes of this young pastor and cell group leader. Competition is not so much with other Pentecostal churches than with the secular (modern) world. The sentiments shared by Blessing and Moses concur with Einstein's, that faiths of all kinds must compete not only with each other, but with a myriad of more entertaining and more convenient leisure activities (2008).

Commending all the apps, Daniel concludes that:

> Yes, you can also receive calls through our apps, of which it is similar to what people in the world are doing. However, we have taken technology into the church so that instead of young people thinking there is nothing in the church, they will realize the church has got even better stuff than in the world. It's also a way to lure the young men and women into the church so that if they think Facebook is the best, wait until they download Yookos. They will find the Word of God on Yookos. You can post pics, connect with friends and with Pastor Chris, which is much better. But when they go to other worldly social apps, there are a lot of things that can destroy their lives. But when they get connected to our apps, they are actually connected to the anointing. They are connected to the Word of God. They are connected to true life; to Jesus Christ.[22]

CE's appropriation of SM suggests that in order to compete effectively and for reachability to be impactful, mega PCs have had to become brands – easily recognizable symbols with which Christians can make immediate connections (Einstein, 2008). However, despite the perception that Pastor Chris is just a click away, accessibility and reachability is often virtual, hence their present-absent nature. How does Ark of the Glory of the Lord church fare in this regard?

Ark of the Glory of the Lord Church (AGLC)

AGLC is not as resourceful and equipped with the internet mediated communication and Social Media as Christ Embassy (CE). Most Christians here are economically marginalised and from the townships, and many are attracted by healing, miracles and prosperity gospel. They are less enthused about SM and rely on announcements made in church and

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[21] Conversation with Blessing, Cell group leader, Cape Town: 27/11/16.
[22] Interview with Daniel, Cape Town: 22/07/2016.

WhatsApp messaging for those who belong to a particular group in the church. The daily lives of most Ark Christians are enmeshed in navigating work, social/family crises or requesting prayer intercessions for job offers consequently impacting on the finances of the church, resulting in the church's inability to invest in SM as it would like to. Jonah, a Minister of the church explicates further:

> But then we just looked at it and said no it's expensive, very expensive. We can't afford that for now because now we are focusing on like making sure we pay the rent of the place and do everything that we need to do: pay electricity, pay water, bills and everything so it was too much money to think.[23]

This notwithstanding, WhatsApp has become the main form of SM communication. According to Jonah, it is a good and inexpensive medium for communicating and organising church's activities/meetings. Because the church is made up of different subgroups that are entrusted with different activities/functions, the activities of various groups are coordinated via WhatsApp. These groups include: Ministers of the church, Partners, Elders, Mighty men, Women of value, Intercessors, Evangelists, Ushers, and Youth group – new Generation and Social team. The tendency is to get every member of the church involved in at least one group of the church. WhatsApp, to these groups, becomes a convenient tool to plan meetings, share information/announcements that pertain to the specific groups and to liaise with the Bishop and spouse. According to Simon, 'every cell group have a WhatsApp group. In every department they have their own team on WhatsApp to communicate so that if there is information about the church or something happens, the same minute, most will know'.[24] However, a significant number of Christians without smartphones means that members still rely on SMS and even voice calls. There is little interest to engage in developing SM software like Christ Embassy for lack of finances.

Unlike CE Cape Town that has an up-to-date website, AGLC has no official website other than a Facebook page and postings on YouTube. The link to their website carries the information 'This Account has been suspended. Contact your hosting provider for more information'. Unlike most PCs and Mega PCs, AGLC is not as dependent on ICTs/social media to carry out evangelism or to encourage actual religious experiences such as praying for people or getting them to confess their faith as noted by Asamoah-Gyadu (2007) regarding the church of Pentecost in Ghana. Rather, there is intense focus on evangelism that privileges face-to-face encounters – operate a four-day-a-week program; Tuesdays – prayer session, Thursdays – healing session, Saturdays – meetings of various church groups and Sunday service. Acknowledging this trend Jonah notes that:

> We depend on prayers in the church, like on Sunday we come here. People come to pray, and on Tuesday people come to pray, on Thursday people come to pray. So what we are doing is to make sure there is that closeness, that people should have that closeness to the church. They need also to know God more. They must come to church.[25]

It is this face-to-face contact that lured Paul from CE to AGLC. According to Paul:

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[23] Interview with Jonah, Cape Town: 12/07/2016.
[24] Interview with Simon, Cape Town: 12/07/2016.
[25] Interview with Jonah, Cape Town: 12/07/2016.

> The services at CE were amazing, but I didn't like the constant live streaming services. I felt it did not have an impact on my spiritual life. I wanted to see and hear from the Pastor and not a virtual preacher. I was not getting enough of face-to-face contact at CE and moved to Ark.[26]

Paul expected an experiential practice, one that gives him a more personal connection to God wherein he experiences His presence (Einstein, 2008). Contrary to others who are happy with a mix of virtual and corporeal preaching, he prefers sermons from the pulpit. The lack thereof sends him searching in the spirit of competition. The lack of enthusiasm to appropriate SM underscores the co-existence between the old and the new forms SM. Despite its far-reaching qualities, the old forms of worship are still sought after.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to provide new insights into the phenomenal success and growth of Pentecostalism in the case of Christ Embassy following the appropriation of Social Media. Through this lens of SM appropriation, this study has been able to show how, propelled by competition, the quest for innovation becomes a continuous work in progress for Pentecostal churches (PCs), especially megachurches such as Christ Embassy. Their goal is to repackage religion for proselytization in order to retain existing Christians, appeal to would-be converts, and stay permanently connected with Christians on-the-go. By contrast, rising PCs – such as Ark of the Glory of the Lord Church (AGLC), privilege face-to-face evangelisation and as such, appropriation of SM is limited to WhatsApp. Compared to the virtual arena of spiritual warfare in the past, today's warfare is a virtual competition, (re)branding for mass recruitment of new members, interaction and disseminating Christian messages. This trait of appropriation is a manifestation of competition among mega PCs in particular. It places them at the forefront of religious innovation, competing with the secular world to appeal to the generation of the future (youthful).

Compelled by competition due to cultural wars, appropriation and creation of SM software/platforms, in addition to the multitude of existing Internet-mediated platforms contribute to the strengthening and expansion of their congregations. These apps are seen as an attraction to the youth given their interactive features. Accordingly, this allure is quite instrumental, given that most youth have been taken off from one form of internet – browsing 'unwanted websites' to the apps of the church. In the context of South Africa, these apps are credited for mitigating engagement in illicit activities. The conscious decision to educate Christians about the role of technology in evangelism raises awareness on the role of users as active empowered users of new media. They can make distinctive choices about their relationship/participation with technology, rather than assuming that technology usurps their choices (Campbell, 2010).

The coming of the Internet was much celebrated for having established a significant electronic medium towards development of religious communities that complemented earlier appropriations of writing, printing and moving images (Beckerlegge, 2001). The arrival of SM has proven much more significant as it has equipped Christians to seek Christ on-the-go; offering possibilities to move with the ministry in their pockets or seek the 'divine' in the comforts of their homes. These SM platforms thus become intermediaries

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[26] Conversation with Paul, Cape Town: 16/07/2016.

through which people can experience the 'divine' and provide for a greater sense of conviviality following the spread of religious contents inter-denominationally (Nyamnjoh, 2015). Investments in media technologies as Hackett and Soares (2015) adduce play a role in Christian conversions and reconversion as much as they lure others to be born-again; what Meyer (2004) has termed 'Pentecostalite'.

That religious products would turn to 'branding' (Einstein, 2008) indicates the current cultural environment. To maintain relevance in the commercialisation and consumerist culture means at a minimum being heard among the multitude of competing messages. SM becomes the linchpin for reaching the old, new, and would-be religious consumer.

Although the platforms/apps are designed to be interactive, they are equally lucrative resources for popular entertainment such as DVDs and downloads from the digital library following the monetisation of most of the materials on this platform. While each app/platform has a specific purpose, the generic position is to give followers a sense that their leaders are reachable – they are a click away from them. In so doing, members are enthused, especially, by the simplicity of the Man of God – Pastor Chris – and become glued to the church and apps. Ownership and control become by-products of accessing the divine on-the go.

The fact that AGLC has timidly appropriated WhatsApp while still privileging face-to-face contacts does not exonerate them from exerting control. Engaging with members through various groups introduces another form of control. Nevertheless, while social media innovations are appropriated by mega PCs, others are selective in their appropriation. The preference for old and new forms of social media technologies, as Nyamnjoh explicates, 'bring the old and the new into conversation in a process of creative domestication and innovation' (2015: viii).

Pastor Rita's call for Christians to switch to smartphones that would give them access to the different platforms illustrates that appropriating ICTs and SM is insufficient to enhance the workings of the church, but what gives the platforms credence and visibility is getting Christians on board – 'giving up their stones for phones'. As users, they have to actively engage with the SNSs – 'like it, share and create groups and migrate to the platforms' as insisted by Pastor Rita.

By contrast, Paul's move from CE to AGLC confirms Nyamnjoh's call for domestication of the old and the new. CE has appropriated SM, but many Christians are unwilling to migrate to the different platforms or upgrade to Android phones. Meanwhile, AGLC privileges face-to-face forms of worship. Paul's move may be out of sheer frustration at the number of platforms CE pelted at him or the failure by the church to connect with what people's values/preferences are. While new technologies may be celebrated as 'Jesus technology', old methods of face-to-face encounter still appeal to others. In this regard, this paper has shown that social media has differing impacts on the reception of religious authority and thus is appropriated differently by PCs.

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