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Religion and Displacement in Africa

Compassion and Sacrifice in Congolese Churches in Kampala, Uganda

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Abstract

This article is about the role of religion in contexts of displacement. The article looks at the role churches and church leaders play in the lives of refugees and more particularly the assistance that these actors provide. The analytical approach is to take into consideration both religious ideas and experiences as well as the everyday practices of people and the socio-economic structures within which they live. The empirical focus is on Congolese Christian congregations in Kampala, Uganda that for the most are founded and attended by refugees. I analyse the forms of assistance that are provided to refugees, how this is conceptualised as well as the practices in a perspective that includes the intersection between religious ideas (compassion and sacrifice) and ideas around social relationships, gift-giving and reciprocity.

Keywords

displacement – religion – Africa – assistance – sacrifice

1 Introduction

At a Sunday service in a Congolese church in Kampala, Uganda the pastor announced that a female member of the church had been blessed by God in a special way: She had been accepted for resettlement by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and was going to Canada where some of her family members were living. Many people in church expressed happiness on her behalf. Both because she had been living in Kampala for seven years and was now finally being reunited with her family, but also because resettlement was what most people in church aspired for and a fellow church

member being accepted for resettlement signified hope and the possibility that one day it could be one of them. The pastor also announced that the church would say goodbye to the sister the following Sunday and make sure she got a proper farewell. The pastor continued to speak about the reasons why the resettlement had come through, and she explained to the members that the resettlement was not because of the UNHCR, but it was the work of God. The sister who was leaving had always been a loyal and hard-working church member as opposed to others who were “church-shopping”. And in addition to that the pastor accounted for how she had prophesied the resettlement herself and that the sister had called her the following day to announce that someone from the UNHCR had contacted her to say that she would be going to Canada. Lastly, the pastor called upon the church members to place seeds with the sister who was about to leave; they were asked to make a financial contribution so she could leave with honour, but also to place a seed so that she would not forget the church once installed in Canada.¹

This article discusses the role of religion in a displacement context in Africa. It comes out of a research project that in its initial framing aimed at analysing how religious institutions provide and regulate access to social services and assistance in a situation where the state and international organisations do not.² The empirical focus is on refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) who reside in Kampala, Uganda. Refugees staying in the city and not in the designated rural settlements (refugee camps) are categorised “urban refugees”, which implies that they are not entitled to the same assistance from the UNHCR and the Ugandan state as those living in the settlements. They are, on the other hand, obligated to be self-reliant.

In this context religious institutions play a particular role; they provide shelter, food, immediate assistance, social networks, as well as spiritual services. From an empirical examination of Congolese Christian congregations in Kampala, Uganda, the article discusses the intersection between religion and displacement in particular questions of how churches and pastors assist refugees. The aim is to analyse religious experiences and explanations in relation to people's everyday lives and practices and to integrate these two analytical perspectives rather than seeing them as apart. The point is that when seeking

¹ Field notes 13 January 2013.

² This article is part of a postdoctoral research project entitled “Refugees and Religious Institutions in Kampala, Uganda – Emergent Sites of Governance and Ordering?” The project is financed by the Danish Council for Independent Research/Social Sciences. I would like to thank the editors of this special issue for inviting me to contribute.

to understand how churches navigate both in relation to other institutional actors (state and non-state) as well as in relation to their members we need to take into account both the social relations of exchange they engage in as well as the religious beliefs and experiences of people that are also part of it. For instance, when looking at how church leaders establish relations with their constituencies through providing assistance and services how do we take into account their own understanding of this assistance and in particular the religious language and experiences around giving it? Does it matter that assistance is perceived in religious terms and differently from the assistance provided by organizations like the UNHCR? What are the implications for the relationships between the pastor and the church members in the church mentioned above when resettlement for instance is perceived as a blessing from God and as dependent on being a loyal church member?

Consequently, the article analyses the intersection between religion and displacement with an approach that takes the religious ideas and experiences of people seriously. What the implications of this are (and what it might mean) will be discussed more at length later in the article. But let me just state that this is in the first place about recognising the meaning and significance of the religious lives of people, hence not dismissing it as unimportant. At the same time, I argue that religion and the everyday lives of people in displacement contexts are strongly interwoven and there is connectedness between the materiality and religiosity of people's lives.³ This means that it does not make sense to distinguish sharply between the material conditions within which people live and their religious experiences; they are understood as connected and as having direct influence on one another.

The relations of exchange that exist and are created among church members and pastors (e.g., when providing material and spiritual assistance), and more broadly the role of religion in displacement situations cannot be analysed in depth and in a fulfilling way when adopting a mono-disciplinary approach. On the one hand, if we look at religious institutions in the same way as any other civil society organisation that has a public role, we miss the point on the role of the spiritual realm (because of the kind of questions we address). On the other hand, if we focus solely on the religious aspects of how these institutions work in a displacement context there are aspects such as the politics of access to assistance and the issue of how pastors take on positions of authority that are

3 Karen Lauterbach, "Spiritual Gifts and Relations of Exchange among Congolese in Kampala, Uganda," in *Religion and Development – Nordic Perspectives on Involvement in Africa* (ed. Thomas S. Drønen; New York, N.Y.: Peter Lang, 2014), 75–86.

not taken into account. Therefore the premise of this article is that in order to get an in-depth understanding of the role of religion in displacement contexts we need to draw on both perspectives.

1.1 *Religion and Displacement*

Religion has both today and historically been linked to movement and mobility.⁴ Religion has been travelling with people (e.g., missionaries and migrants) and has caused people to move (persecution to due one's faith). Furthermore, religion has played a role with regard to how people manage and make sense of travelling and as providing hope and healing for people who have experienced violence and displacement. Religious institutions also offer a setting for achieving material support and guidance on how to navigate in a new setting.

Despite a general lack of attention to the significance of religion in displacement contexts in refugee studies, a number of recent articles and edited journal volumes have brought forward three aspects of the link between religion and displacement. First, religion is identified as a cause of forced migration, and we are reminded that religion in some contexts has been among the factors that has forced people to seek refuge and has been used to legitimate and organise violence and persecution. Religion has for example been part of nationalist ideology or discriminatory discourse or has been used as a way to legitimise and organise violence and persecution (e.g., the role of Christian churches in the Rwandan genocide⁵).⁶

Second, the role of religion and faith in coping with displacement experiences has been highlighted, and has focused both on the role of religious communities as social networks and as ways of dealing with traumatising experiences (e.g., spiritual healing, reconciliation and sense-making). Goździak and Shandy draw attention to the particular link between spirituality and experiences of displacement, and point out how religious communities provide a space to meet (a replacement of a lost community) and that offers both mate-

4 See among others Gertrud Hüwelmeier and Kristine Krause, *Travelling Spirits: Migrants, Markets and Mobilities* (Routledge Studies in Anthropology; New York, N.Y.; Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

5 Timothy Longman, "Church Politics and the Genocide in Rwanda," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31, vol. 2 (2001): 163–186.

6 The link between religion, violence and civil war in African contexts is not new, but has mainly been debated in a literature that deals more broadly with the social and political roles of religion in Africa.

rial, psychological and emotional support.⁷ They moreover draw attention to the dilemmas occurring when secularised humanitarian interventions do not take into account refugees' spiritual understandings of their experiences. This theme in some ways links up to more general debates on religion and migration, and the specific role of religious communities with regard to integration in the host country. There is a tendency, however, to focus more on the social and affective aspects of religion and thereby on how religion function, serve, and enable people to cope with displacement, more than how religious ideas as such intersect with the more social aspects of people's lives.

Third, the role faith-based organisations (FBOs) play in providing humanitarian assistance to refugees has been the focus of a more recent special issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies*. In this issue Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and others focus in particular on faith based humanitarian responses to displacement. They define FBOs as different from religious communities in the sense that FBOs "are guided to fulfil a particular function, such as responding to humanitarian needs arising from forced migration."⁸ The aim is to analyse how FBOs work, how they select aid beneficiaries, secure funding, et cetera. This approach is in many ways similar to how religion has been approached in development studies, which has been criticised for being instrumental and normative.⁹

In my view the FBO approach to studying the influence of religion (ideas, practices and institutions) on refugees is too narrow and technocratic. It creates an artificial boundary between the FBO and the aid receiver (or the NGO and the beneficiary) that tends to ignore how these constitute each other or are both influencing the processes of providing and receiving assistance. Moreover, this approach ignores the different ways in which religion and materiality are interwoven. It is not just a question of being member of a certain religious community to receive material assistance. As this paper shows, there are specific understandings of how for instance the use spiritual talents can be paid for / acknowledged through material goods. This calls for a deeper understanding of the link between religious categories and materiality, as well as how this is employed, invoked, and unfolded in specific contexts. The point is that I

7 Elzbieta Goździak and Dianna Shandy, "Editorial Introduction: Religion and Spirituality in Forced Migration," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15, no. 2 (2002): 129–135.

8 Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "Introduction: Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 3 (2011): 430.

9 Jean-François Mayer, "Introduction. 'In God I Have Put My Trust': Refugees and Religion," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2007): 6–10; Ben Jones and Marie Juul Petersen, "Instrumental, Narrow, Normative? Reviewing Recent Work on Religion and Development," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 7 (2011): 1291–1306.

do not approach the encounter between church and members (receivers) as a development encounter (or relief encounter), but rather as a social relation between church leaders and church members as well as a spiritual encounter that involves the person, the pastor and God. The aim of going to church might be to receive assistance, but there are other elements of that relation too that are also important to capture (e.g., how church members legitimises and recognises the position of a pastor as well as religious experiences and faith).

1.2 *“Taking Religion Seriously” – Anthropology and Theology in Dialogue*

In an article from 2006 Joel Robbins outlined a number of ways in which anthropology and theology as two distinct disciplines could enter into dialogue. This was sparked out of an ambition to frame an ‘anthropology of Christianity’ and in this endeavour also to reflect upon the relation between theology and anthropology. Robbins proposes three ways in which this can unfold. The first way is as a “project of tracing theology’s role in the formation of anthropological thought”. A second way in which this dialogue can take place is to “read any given piece of theology as data that can inform us about the particular Christian culture that produced it.”¹⁰ Robbins deplores that this second approach has received little attention in recent anthropological scholarship. However, there has been a tendency in studies of Pentecostalism, and particularly of Pentecostalism in Africa, to focus on the religious discourse of Pentecostal churches and their leaders.¹¹ This attention to Pentecostal theology (e.g., ideas around the prosperity gospel and rapture) has nevertheless been tightly linked to the more sociological and anthropological aspects of these studies and has therefore fitted what Englund and Leach termed meta-narratives of modernity.¹² So although attention has been given to the religious messages, this has by and large been done within a social science analytical frame that fitted analytical tropes of modernisation, individualisation, fragmentation and rupture, rather than opening up for alternative interpretations. The point is that local Christian theologies and culture have been given some attention, albeit more from the

10 Joel Robbins, “Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship?,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2006): 285–294.

11 See for instance Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity. Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004) and Birgit Meyer, “‘Make a Complete Break with the Past’: Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 316–349.

12 Harri Englund and James Leach, “Ethnography and the Meta-Narratives of Modernity,” *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 2 (2000): 225–248.

perspective of analysing how these theological ideas reflect a certain moment in time and through this people's lives and practices, and not so much with the aim of challenging the theoretical standpoint of the analysis.

Thirdly, and following on from the above discussion, Robbins raises the point about the inherent differences between anthropology and theology from an ontological perspective. Robbins' point is that in order to challenge the ontologies we build the creation of knowledge within "we should take on the challenge to find real otherness at the fundamental level of social ontology ... we need ... to ground the other ontologies we bring to discussion in the way we always have – by finding people who live in their terms and describing how they do so."¹³ So how for instance can we think about the assistance that Congolese diaspora churches in Uganda provide to its members and people in need? Is this to be understood and analysed as a new space of urban governance, as a non-state actor that provides assistance where no other humanitarian assistance is available? Or as a case of fellow Christians providing help to those in dire need according to Christian principles of charity, love and compassion? What happens to our analysis if we integrate for instance the idea that resettlement to Canada is a gift from God? There are certain religious ideas that are challenging to tackle from a social science perspective, e.g., the role and meaning of love and compassion when assisting other people. From a social science (anthropology) perspective, relations of exchange between people could be analysed as a form of reciprocity or as patrimonial relations. The challenge then is how to analytically deal with aspects such as compassion, love, and unity and at the same time provide an analysis that fulfils the criteria for valid social science.

In the same vein Robbins asks if we can dismiss the ideas and beliefs that guide people's actions and their morality and consequently advocates for "critically studying the theologies we find in the field"¹⁴ and hence recognising "the intellectual engagements of the religious practitioners ... and assume that sophisticated ideas underlie their religious ways of living."¹⁵

The debate outlined above is not limited to a missing dialogue between anthropology and theology, but reflects a broader discomfort with dealing with religious language and experiences within the social sciences. As Orsi, among many others, argues:

13 Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology," 292.

14 Joel Robbins, "Afterword: Let's Keep it Awkward: Anthropology, Theology, and Otherness," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 24, no. 3 (2013): 329–337.

15 Robbins, "Afterword," 330.

But the transposition so characteristic of modern analysis – religious practices are distorted refractions of the real circumstances of life (which are social, political, and economic) – eviscerates the reality of religious imaginings and experiences, and of religious presence, as it denies the accounts religious people give of their own lives.¹⁶

Orsi therefore calls for a “radical empiricism of the visible *and* invisible real”¹⁷ which implies going further than acknowledging that ““this was real in her experience” to describe how the real ... finds presence, existence, and power in space and time ... and then how the real in turn acts as an agent for itself in history.”¹⁸

Building on the above reflections, this article takes religion seriously in the sense of bringing into the analysis the ways in which people make sense of their lives through religious language and categories. Rather than interpreting religion as a response to a specific socio-economic situation (such as displacement or modernity at a larger scale), I intend to analyse the interactions and intertwinements of people’s religious ideas (theologies?), their daily lives and the socio-economic structures in which they live.

2 Congolese Churches in Kampala, Uganda – Context

Due to the protracted crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Congolese have sought refuge in the neighbouring countries such as Uganda. Most recently, post-election violence (December 2011) and the continuing conflicts in the Kivus have resulted in a growing number of Congolese crossing the border to Uganda. In its 2013 country operations profile for Uganda, the UNHCR estimated that approximately 190,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers are in Uganda, of which 120,000 are from the DRC. Forty-eight thousand of the 190,000 refugees are considered to live in urban areas mainly in Kampala (UNHCR, 2013).¹⁹

16 Robert A. Orsi, “When $2 + 2 = 5$: Can We Begin to Think about Unexplained Religious Experiences in Ways that Acknowledge Their Existence?,” *The American Scholar* 76, no. 2 (2007): 34–43.

17 Orsi, “When $2 + 2 = 5$,” 42.

18 Orsi, “When $2 + 2 = 5$,” 43.

19 UNHCR. 2013. “2013 UNHCR country operations profile – Uganda,” n.p. (accessed 13 February 2013). Online: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e483c06.html>.

As the above figures indicate, many have come directly to Kampala without passing through the rural settlements (refugee camps) that refugees are designated to live in according to the policy of the Government of Uganda. These refugees are labelled “urban refugees” and are obliged to be self-reliant. People come to Kampala rather than the camps for the better livelihood opportunities and better access to health and educational services. In addition, the refugee settlements are located close to the border with the DRC, which poses a security risk.

When people come to Kampala they look for the Congolese community or a Congolese church; many are referred to the Congolese churches that are known for helping refugees. Most refugees rent small rooms in the slum areas of Kampala (e.g., Katwe, Kisenyi, and Nsambya) if they can afford it. Some live in the streets or sleep outside at the premises of Old Kampala Police Station, where refugees register. Many refugees also find shelter in churches or in pastors’ homes.²⁰

According to the Congolese Christian Community in Kampala there are around 50 Congolese churches in the city.²¹ The number is growing both due to the continuing influx of Congolese refugees and due to the splitting up of some of the churches. These churches are mainly of a charismatic orientation and describe themselves as “revival churches” or “evangelical churches”. Some of the churches have existed ten years and others are established more recently. They also varied a great deal in terms of membership, stability and size ranging from being merely “refugee churches” to being churches with a membership consisting of refugees, but also students, business people and Congolese people who are in Kampala for other reasons.

Being a diaspora church had several implications. First, the churches had unstable memberships, both in terms of numbers, but also in the sense that people were living mobile lives and thereby also changed churches relatively often. Some pastors mentioned being a “refugee church” as a problem with regard to functioning as a church because the churches could only collect small amounts of money in terms of tithing and offerings and thereby had little economic means for paying rent, electricity bills, and assisting needy church members. Second, members came from a number of different congregations and Christian denominations in Congo, which meant that church members

20 Ellen Lammers, “War, Refugee and Self. Soldier, Students and Artists in Kampala, Uganda” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2006).

21 Interview with chairman of the Congolese Christian Council, Kampala, Uganda, 10 January 2013.

were not necessarily sharing the same religious practices or specific theologies. Some had been members of the Catholic Church in DRC, some had been members of other evangelical or charismatic churches. There was, however, a general feeling of belonging to the same community in Kampala, which enabled people to also share their faith and many were saying that they were all worshipping the same God despite their differences.

One pastor was explaining the particularity of being a “refugee church” in terms of the difficulties he encountered when trying to get people involved in church related activities as for instance prayer retreats and other activities that are time consuming. He explained this with people being busy and thus he found it more difficult to get people to spend time praying than when he was working in Kisangani in DRC. His understanding was that people in Kampala were busier because they have to do petty trading to make enough money for their daily living. He also explains that many refugees aspire to be resettled in Europe or the US and therefore are less occupied with spending time in church and in prayers and concludes that the spiritual lives of people were less strong as compared to where he was working before in DRC.

The main activities of the churches were Sunday services as well as other prayer sessions, choirs, English lessons and sessions in the men’s and women’s departments respectively.

3 Giving Assistance – Compassion and Sacrifice

In the following I will analyse the ways in which Congolese congregations provide assistance to church members, both in terms of the forms of assistance they provide and in terms of how they perceive the act of helping and providing assistance. This leads into a discussion of how religious categories such as compassion, unity and sacrifice are used to render the actions meaningful and moreover how these categories make sense in relation to the particularities of the local context of displacement and mobility. The aim of the analysis is, as mentioned above, to approach the act of giving assistance in a way that integrates both the religious ideas and experiences as well as the more social aspects hereof. This implies for instance that when looking at the help pastors give to church members it is both a form of gift-giving in which pastors create social relationships to their constituencies, but it is also understood as an act of compassion, as a divine blessing, and as being a fulfilment of God’s will. Let me briefly recall the double focus of the article, firstly that in order to understand the role of churches and religious leaders in providing assistance to refugees it is necessary to bring the religious understanding and experiences related to

this into the analysis. And secondly, that there is a connectedness between the religious and the material lives of people in the sense that a spiritual gift for instance can be exchanged for a material commodity, or in other words that the material and the spiritual worlds are constitutive of each other. Said differently, the first theoretical point reflects the second empirical argument.

3.1 *Forms of Assistance*

When Congolese come to Kampala as refugees they often look for a Congolese pastor or a Congolese church. The churches serve as a way to enter the Congolese community in the city and get access to social networks. When they arrive people present themselves to the pastors and explain their background, their personal histories as well as their situation in Kampala. Some seek shelter, some are in need of food, some need guidance on how to navigate the official system when seeking asylum, and others again seek pastors' assistance with spiritual and/or psychological matters due to their experiences of displacement.

The churches themselves distinguish between assistance that is of an emergency character and help that is more long-term and related to the well-being of the person. The first category of assistance consists of food, medicine and shelter and is seen as for people "in dire need". This form of assistance is not always reserved for church members, but could also be given to people coming to church for the first time and asking for help. The second category comprises for instance help to start small businesses, education and paying rent. This assistance is given to church members and in particular to church members who have certain positions in church (e.g., leader of the women's department) and who shows to be spiritually mature.

One pastor explains how he has invited a Congolese refugee to come to his home and eat every day, and refers to his Christian obligation:

He is not even member of the church, but as he has come, we had to help him, we are obliged to help. Because first of all that is the word of God. We have to help those who are in need of help. As his problem was also to get him to travel, to get him back to Bunia, because he lives in Bunia. We have to make him return.²²

In addition to material assistance, the churches and pastors also provide spiritual assistance. At the spiritual level pastors assist people by offering prayers, by

²² Interview with pastor, 7 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

deliverance sessions and by anointing (with oil). This type of assistance can furthermore take the form of listening to displacement experiences, counselling on how to overcome rape, and finding hope for their future lives. One pastor noticed the particular needs of refugee church members in terms of deliverance and prayers: “maybe life is not going well and they have serious problems.”²³

However, providing spiritual assistance in the form of for instance prayers is also seen as a way to handle not having any material assistance to offer. A number of pastors explained that when they had nothing else to offer they could always pray for people, but also that people would often get disappointed and move on to a new church. So although people are seeking spiritual services and also recognise a pastor for delivering these services, there is at the same time an idea that prayers alone do not suffice when people are in emergency situations. Moreover, if pastors are not delivering material services they are not seen as providing in the same way as those who do. This echoes a norm of non-refusal, which means that pastors rarely decline a demand for assistance. They can either postpone the demand or offer something else (like prayers). One pastor says: “If I don’t have I can tell them ‘please let us pray’, I want God to bless me so if he blesses me you will get.”²⁴ This quote moreover alludes to a connectedness between prayers and material assistance, as a blessing from God can manifest itself in the form of money or other material goods.

In this way there is an overlap between and tension around the understandings and values of material and spiritual services. On the one hand the two forms of assistance are seen as complementary and as both being necessary for living a good life. On the other hand though, material assistance, such as food and shelter, is viewed differently in a displacement context marked by scarcity and this implies that the legitimacy of pastors is related not only to how they perform spiritually, but also to how they are able to deliver material assistance and in providing in relationships that are of a more reciprocal character.

Although the churches in principle see it as their obligation to help needy people, they employ a certain number of criteria in this work. One criterion is the nature and gravity of the problem. If it is a small issue (such as assisting with food) it can be handled directly by the pastors. In other and more serious cases and when it concerns a church member it is more likely that the elders of the church are involved and also that the pastors initiate collective collection in church. In the last case it is then the entire church community that assists

²³ Interview with pastor, 7 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

²⁴ Interview with pastor, 15 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

and this could take place if it is a loyal church member who also has a position of responsibility in church. The assistance also depends on the resources of the church: "Sometimes the church has nothing. We can only do what we can. If it is little it is little. If it is a lot we give what we can."²⁵

At the same time, pastors and church leaders invoke the Holy Spirit when making decisions in church. Before electing new members to church departments the pastors and elders pray and ask God for guidance. God reveals his advices and they accept: "As we work with the Spirit of God we accept what the Holy Spirit communicates."²⁶ A woman, who worked as treasurer in a Congolese church, in a similar way, explained how they took decisions in church when they had some money and had demands for assistance. She explains that they were discussing the various requests with the pastors and then prayed to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit. The guidance was manifested through visions and dreams that some pastors or leading church members would receive. There could be particular cases where the pastors were uncertain about the sincerity of those asking for help.²⁷

In sum, pastors and church leaders employ *grosso modo* three sets of criteria when delivering assistance. First, they assess the degree of the need in questions and distinguish between emergency assistance pertaining to the survival of people. Second, they consider the spiritual maturity of people as well as their commitment and loyalty to church and third, they invoke the Holy Spirit and follow the guidance they receive from God.

3.2 *Compassion*

When explaining the values around giving assistance pastors often refer to their pastoral calling as well as to their Christian obligation of helping people in need.

One pastor recounted his pastoral trajectory and his type of calling as a calling to preach, to heal and to help homeless people. He talked about the last part of his calling as compassion and explained:

I am happy to have refugees in front of me and taking care of them, preaching to them, counselling them. So it is part of my call. It is a compassion of mine. God told me that I would support homeless people, the orphans, so I will help ... So when I see this is one of the accomplishments

²⁵ Interview with pastor, 7 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

²⁶ Interview with pastor, 7 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

²⁷ Interview with female church treasurer, 20 January 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

of the promise of God. What he told me whether I have money or not to have these people like this.²⁸

The pastor continues to explain how he has given accommodation to several Congolese families who came to Kampala as refugees. Twice he has handed over a rented house to refugees who did not have accommodation. He says:

It is a sacrifice, you went there to my place, I left there, that was not my first home I have left, but I left it to those refugees ... It means compassion. I can tell you I used to sleep on this carpet here. Here. You can't believe. You will see a man walking during the day and say this is the man and he is blessed. Yeah, but if I tell you this is my bed you can't believe.²⁹

He explains his compassion as both stemming from his mother and as being a gift from God. He moreover relates getting the gift of compassion to being responsible in the sense that God would not give you a wife and children if you are not capable of being responsible and taking care of them. If one does not have the spirit of responsibility you will not be given a task that demands responsibility. This logic is transferred to the task of assisting refugees. The pastor says:

When the Lord foresees that you will assist refugees, and moreover, the refugees are people who suffer, who have nothing, now they are in need of help and you would not be able to help the refugees who suffer if you do not have a heart of compassion.³⁰

This is also connected to the willingness to share money although one does not have much. Here he makes reference to the Bible: "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much" (Luke 16:10, English Standard Version). He explains that even if he only has 1,000 Ugandan shilling³¹ he still gives a little as a gesture. But also recognises that giving away his house twice is not a small thing, but he did it because of the suffering of people. He accepts to suffer himself because of his calling. This related to the idea of sacrifice that I discuss in the following section.

28 Interview with pastor, 15 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

29 Interview with pastor, 15 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

30 Interview with pastor, 15 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

31 1,000 UGX is the equivalent of 0.4 USD.

However, being a pastor and a refugee himself poses a challenge, both in terms of lack of financial means and in terms of how to uphold his legitimacy if he cannot assist and help church members. He explains that after church service people come and see him and asks for money to buy food and pay for transport expenses and says “but yourself you ask questions, I am also hungry, but you cannot tell them that you are hungry. But you tell God ‘I am hungry so what am I going to do’”.³² He complains that he has a lot of people to support, but no one who supports him, as he is alone.

Another pastor who was representing a Congolese church at meetings concerning urban refugees at the UNHCR also raised the issue of failing to provide and risking losing one’s trustworthiness vis-à-vis church members. This is a particular concern in a displacement context because there is large need for material assistance. When pastors involve themselves in the humanitarian sector, as in this case, the expectations for providing assistance increases and thereby also the possibility of failing to provide. There is, in other words, a dilemma between fulfilling the will of God or one’s pastoral calling and involvement in the social networks that would enable one to do so. One pastor expresses the dilemma in this way: “So when people are suffering they are just waiting ... That is why I said this year I am not going to work with them. Just let me focus on God’s work and God will make a way. He is God. He knows how. But dealing again with those people, I will not.”³³

3.3 *Sacrifice and Voluntariness*

Several pastors refer to their actions of assisting refugees as giving sacrifice and to the work they were doing as based on voluntariness. As most pastors are refugees themselves, they often possess little financial means and receive no stable income other than their share of the tithes given in church. When possible the churches assist refugees with food, accommodation and small funds to start petty trading. However, oftentimes the churches lack money and the pastors assist with their own personal means. Related to this, some pastors talk about their work as a personal sacrifice. The pastor mentioned above who gave his accommodation to refugees explained the situation in church:

Now we can give maybe some maize, but we are limited ... because me I don’t have a job, where will I find money? Someone can bless me with

³² Interview with pastor, 15 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

³³ Interview with pastor, 15 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

money, with 100,000, with 50,000. And I look at this woman, *maman* you can buy and go to town, if you work for two months I think you can have even 300,000.³⁴

The pastor refers to the small amount of money they give to newly arrived refugees. They buy jewellery, lotion or fabric and go to central Kampala and sell the goods in the streets. When the church collects offerings and tithes some of the money is divided among the pastors as their salary. According to one pastor this amounts to somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 Ugandan shilling per month. Often they use this money to assist refugees and this is both seen as part of their pastoral obligations and as a personal sacrifice. One pastor asks:

What are we going to do with the offerings? Share the money? It's a problem, we sacrifice. Buy a bag of cassava. We sacrifice ourselves, we sacrifice ourselves. We give. Me, I am single, and I can find something to eat at someone's place. Maybe I pass [and they say] 'Oh pastor, don't go like that. Take'. So I can eat. But for those who are [live] at the church, we buy.³⁵

This pastor talks about sacrificing in the sense of giving; that the pastors give to the refugees, even though they are suffering themselves and do not have much. Similarly, pastors talk about their work as volunteering in the sense that they do not get a payment. Volunteering again is thought about as a sacrifice, as something they give freely. One female pastor talks about the activities she does with the women in church and explains: "They are refugees and don't have money. There is no payment, we just sacrifice. There are women like me who volunteer help without pay."³⁶

But sacrificing is not only linked to pastors as persons (in the sense of them giving a personal sacrifice), it is also related to ideas around unity and understanding the church as a community. A pastor explained:

As you see S. church, it is a community. We welcome everyone. Why I am saying we are volunteers, sometimes I can have 10,000 of my own and buy food, but you find there is a visitor – a refugee, who has just come from Congo or Burundi, but he doesn't know where to begin [...] and the man

34 Interview with pastor, 15 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

35 Interview with pastor, 15 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

36 Interview with pastor, 20 January 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

doesn't have money so I am the one to use my money. Why? Just to help the person ... So if he doesn't have where to stay, I used to give them this place, free.³⁷

In this context sacrifice is understood in the sense of giving something up for the benefit of someone else, but not in the sense of self-sacrifice in an ascetic form a life.³⁸ The literature on Pentecostalism in Africa has highlighted a strong focus on the "prosperity gospel" that is about success and wealth in this life rather than in the afterlife. Therefore I argue that in this particular context it is possible to link the ideas and practices around sacrifice to gift-giving and general reciprocity as suggested by Lambek.³⁹ Pastors sacrifice their time, money and well-being with the aim of helping other people in need, but helping and sacrificing oneself is also thought of as the will of God and as linked to pastors' obligations to look after their members (some referred to the idea of the shepherd protecting his flock). At the same time, sacrificing is a form of gift-giving in the sense that what pastors sacrifice is thought of as a gift they give and they then might expect to get something back (either from the individual that has received assistance or from God).

Sacrificing at the same time enhances a pastor's status. He is perceived as someone who cares about and loves his members, and this adds to a pastor's position and authority. Both giving and sacrificing add to the legitimacy of a pastor; giving implies being a provider and sacrificing in the sense of putting oneself aside for the sake of others. There are overlaps between the two sets of norms in the sense that both have attached to them the expectation of some form of return (or a generalised form of reciprocity).

4 Concluding Remarks

Approaching the provision of assistance to refugees in diaspora churches in a way that encompasses the intersection between religion and more secular aspects of people's lives has been central in this article. Through an analysis of Congolese congregation in Kampala, Uganda I have argued that pastors and churches provide and conceptualise assistance both in relation to religious ideas of compassion and sacrifice and in relation to expectations of reciprocity

37 Interview with pastor, 15 February 2012, Kampala, Uganda.

38 Michael Lambek, "Afterthought on Sacrifice," *Ethnos* ahead-of-print (2013): 1–8.

39 Michael Lambek, "Afterthought on Sacrifice".

when they engage on social relationships of exchange. These different, yet overlapping, frames of conceptualising the act of giving assistance and providing help reflect the multiple norms that pastors and church members relate to. As the opening story about the Congolese woman leaving for Canada and this being narrated as the will of God rather than as the work of the UNHCR indicates there is not necessarily a sharp distinction (if any) between these two spheres. The work of God is seen as manifesting itself directly in the everyday lives of people and the pastors are important figures in the mediation of this. If we intend to get a deep and nuanced understanding of the role of religion in displacement contexts there is a need to take “religion seriously” as also argued above. There are different ways in which to interpret what this implies in analytical terms ranging from taking religious experiences and religious language as ethnographic data and to engaging in more ontological discussion about what aspects of the world we include in the analysis.

At the same time, there is an important contribution to make to the more general literature on Pentecostalism in Africa and in particular discussions of prosperity. The sacrificial pastor discussed above is in many ways an unusual figure in an African Pentecostal and charismatic setting. In the literature there has been a strong emphasis on prosperity and wealth amongst which one argument is that being a strong and powerful pastor entails being wealthy and displaying this in public. In a displacement context this is, according to the above analysis, not the most prominent aspect of sermons and other religious messages. Rather as indicated in this article the focus is (among other things) on sacrifice and on fulfilling God’s will by being able to assist people in need. This points to the argument that the material lives of people are closely interweaved with the religious lives of people and also calls to attention to these forms of everyday theology as opposed to more formalised ones.

Lastly, taking the criticism of the lack of attention to religious realities in social science oriented studies into account might draw our attention to another analytical challenge, namely the risk of compartmentalising the aspects of the world we are looking at, e.g., the religious sphere and the material world. With this follows also the risk of reproducing a concept of religion that stems from a Western understanding of the term or exoticising religion and portraying religious experience as something inherently distinct from other aspects of life.

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