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Pentecostalism, ontological (in)security and the everyday lives of international university students in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The experience and lives of international university students studying and living in Cape Town, South Africa demonstrate the centrality of religiosity, in their case Pentecostalism in adapting to and grappling with existential perturbations wrought in a xenophobic and hostile environment. This article explores the everyday appropriation of Pentecostal religiosity and rituals by international students in navigating uncertainties and everyday anxieties and struggles of studying and living in a foreign and alienating space. Studying the mundane forms of the everyday has gained traction since Michel de Certeau's pioneering works on the practice of everyday life. This article is based on an ethnographic study conducted with international university students to understand how Pentecostalism mediates their daily life and experiences and what it means to live and study at a foreign university. I show how Pentecostal Charismatic Churhces (PCCs) not only cater for the existential material needs of migrant students on campus, but also provide space for integration and forging convivial relationships and belonging. I argue that a Pentecostal identity and being connects and creates a sense of ontological security that pervades Pentecostal students' everyday life.

Introduction

John, a first-year accounting student at the University of Cape Town (UCT), came from Zimbabwe. Having arrived in South Africa with no close relatives or any other social networks to welcome him, life for him was not easy. 'It was very difficult for me because I had never been to Cape Town and I hardly knew anyone here', John muttered in a conversation. Such a scenario meant that John was a stranger in Cape Town, but interestingly, Cape Town was also strange to John. The literature has shown us how human mobilities are punctuated with and involve material and metaphysical existential concerns (Dube, 2019; Nzayabino, 2011; Nyamnjoh, 2017b). Thus for John, moving to an alien and new environment came with serious ontological insecurities in his everyday life and experiences. When John arrived at UCT, he was told that the campus accommodation was full. Although John was offered campus accommodation, because he arrived a week late, his offer was revoked. For two weeks, John stayed at a lodge and this arrangement

was beginning to take its toll on his finances. With his small budget, he told me that he looked around online and at real estate agents but in vain. Things got better when John decided to attend a church service at the Baxter Theatre on his first Sunday in Cape Town. Toward the end of the church service, a pastor announced that one of the church members was looking for a couple of student tenants. The house was just about a 15-minute walk from the university campus. John could not believe his luck and quickly approached the church member after the service to negotiate for the apartment. That was not only how John finally got accommodation, but also how he converted to a Pentecostal church in Cape Town. Van Wyk (2015) noted that the concept of luck in Pentecostal parlance should be understood as a spiritual technology. The spiritualisation of luck relates to the ways in which one's embeddedness in a spiritual network cultivate some form of ontological security.

Although John was a Christian before coming to South Africa, he was born and grew up in a mainline church environment. His parents and all his extended family members were staunch Catholics. John told me that he never thought or imagined that one day he would convert to a Pentecostal church. Although John mentioned several things that lured him to this Pentecostal church, he was particularly impressed by the kind of reception he received from the church on his first visit. 'I have never seen that kind of hospitality, the church and everyone were so welcoming and the ushers were always smiling and willing to help,' John remarked in an informal conversation.

During orientation week, and throughout the semester, Pentecostal churches make their presence and visibility conspicuous in the public spaces on campus. They engage in aggressive proselytization, hold public payers and services and often advertise on the notice boards around the university campus. Patrick, one of the PCC student leaders, and my interlocutor noted that these are the ways through which they enter the university space and recruit new members into their group. These public religious activities on campus also signify the evangelising mission of Pentecostalism and their quest to conquer supposedly 'secular' spaces like universities before the second coming of Jesus Christ (Gukurume, 2018; Van Wyk, 2014). Patrick noted that PCC's attempts to 'Pentecostalise' the university space is a response to a biblical mandate for born again Christians 'to go and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28: 16–20). For John, ever since he joined the church, it has become his second family, and John is also now serving in the church as an usher. Indeed, familial metaphors and terms are used in everyday encounters and mediate social relatedness in the church. Interestingly, although the congregation was cosmopolitan, the members referred to each other as brother and sister. Members of this PCC considered themselves part of a big family. John, like many other students and church members, belonged to this spiritual community. Thus, they viewed each other as kin related through the shared experience of becoming born again and through the blood of Jesus (see Fesenmyer, 2017: Gukurume, 2018; Van Wyk, 2014). Earlier studies in South Africa have shown how multiculturalism and multiracialism in Pentecostal congregarions engendered and contributed to racial reconciliation (see, Czeglédy, 2008; Ganiel, 2008). Ganiel argued that multiracial congregations help tp transform antagonistic identities and make religious contributions to wider reconciliation processes.

John was one of the ushers who welcomed me to the church when I visited for the first time to do my fieldwork. In this and other PCC, I attended, in every Sunday service the pastor asks if there are any newcomers who are attending the service for the first time.

They usually ask them to stand up to rapturous and thunderous applause from the congregants. When the pastor asked newcomers to stand up, I quickly stood up with 20 other people. The two large screens in front of the podium displayed a welcome message written in big and bold words, 'Welcome, you belong here'. Before we sat down, the smartly dressed ushers were asked to hand over a special gift bag with a branded pen, a small notebook, and a booklet with information about the church, as well as a small registration form. After the service, we were asked to remain for a cup of coffee and tea with everyone else and socialise. While queuing for coffee, I started a conversation with John, who would become one of my key informants. John told me that I had made the right decision to come to church and that it was God who directed me to the church. That said, it is important to highlight the central focus of this article.

This article examines the role of Pentecostalism in the everyday life of international students studying and living in Cape Town, South Africa. The article particularly examines how Pentecostalism mediates the lived experiences of these students in South Africa. In doing so, the article contributes to the scholarship of religion and migration and how questions of integration, mobilities, and convivialities simultaneously structure and are structured by Pentecostalism. This article is based on ethnographic qualitative fieldwork conducted with international students in Cape Town, South Africa. Data were collected from international students and PCC pastors in 2015–2016. In collecting data, I largely used semi-structured interviews with international students and pastors from selected Pentecostal churches which attracted thousands of students. I selected the participants through snowballing and purposive sampling techniques. Although some of my participants were recruited through chance encounters during church services and activities, most of them were introduced to me by my acquaintances. Eventually, data was collected from 25 (15 women and 10 male) international students and 3 church pastors. The interviews focused on a variety of issues and topics, such as student experiences in South Africa and the role of the church in mediating such experiences, everyday interactions, and practices in the church and beyond. All interviews were conducted in English and ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes.

Furthermore, I also heavily relied on participant observation. My participant observation included regular attendance of church services, social activities, evangelical activities, and cell group meetings. In these spaces, I observed people's everyday interactions and relationships. Part of my participant observation also involved engaging in multiple informal conversations with church congregants, cell leaders and pastors among other people. The information collected through mundane forms of conversations enabled me to reconcile my participants' narratives and experiences with those of other ordinary church members. Regular attendance to religious and social activities is an important part of the search for ontological security. This resonates with Giddens (1991) assertion that people construct a sense of continuity, trust the world, and feel secure in themselves through repeating and routinising actions. In a migratory context, this routinisation of behaviour and practices that are spatially and temporally organised reestablish a sense of personhood and ontological security (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Nyamnjoh, 2017b). I triangulated with two focus group discussions with international students from two different Pentecostal churches. Apart from this primary data, secondary data were also collected from church publications, photographic data, church notice boards, and religious iconography.

PCCs and post-apartheid South Africa

Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches have become an important part of the post-apartheid South African landscape. Although Pentecostalism has a long history in South Africa dating back to 1908 (Anderson 2005; Van Wyk, 2014), PCCs have become more prominent and visible in the contemporary South African public sphere. Scholars view South Africa as a predominantly religious nation with respect to public profession and display of Christianity, as well as church attendance. Studies have shown how Pentecostalism reconfigure the dynamics of everyday urban life in the post-apartheid era. For instance, Ganiel (2010) showed how Pentecostalism texture multiethnic and racial relations and interactions. For Ganiel, Pentecostalism helped to solidify and strengthen racial, ethnonational and ethnic relations in Cape Town. In the context of human mobilities, Landau (2009) revealed how religion is a space and a strategy through which migrants forge and negotiate integration and belonging. Similarly, drawing on the influence of a migrant church in South Africa, Dube (2019) particularly examined the everyday religious sociality and the identities of young people, although beyond the immediate influence of the church. Dube's study (Dube, 2019) examined the complex effect of Forward in Faith Ministries International (FIFMI) doctrine, beliefs and practices on the construction of the identity of young church members through sociality with diverse social and (non) religious groups. Similarly, other scholars have also examined the ways in which churches harness the influence and charisma of their pastors to foster ethnonational solidarities between migrants and locals (see, Ganiel, 2006). This echoes Laing's (1962) argument that ontological security should be conceived as a relational concept in the sense that its construction requires the recognition and validation of others.

Indeed, many scholars have begun to talk of a paradigm shift in the centre of gravity in the religious, and more particularly, the Christian landscape from mainline Christianity to Pentecostalism. Ganiel (2006, p. 558) noted that Pentecostal-Charismatic churches are now more influential in contributing to public discourses and the provision of new religious content in contemporary South Africa. Since its emergence, Pentecostalism has spread rapidly and gained influence in many other countries. Anderson (2005) noted that new Pentecostal churches in post-apartheid South Africa mirror what Coleman referred to as globalized Charismatic Christianity. This observation was also echoed by several scholars who frame Pentecostal Christianity as a global movement (Robbins 2004; Ukah, 2003; Van de Kamp, 2010; Van Wyk, 2014).

Van Wyk (2014) noted that the phenomenal success of Pentecostalism in churches in South Africa is in part due to their capacity to provide 'all answers' to people's existential anxieties. At the heart of PCC preaching is the gospel of prosperity, exorcism, and spiritual warfare against the devil and his demonic forces (Anderson 2005; Gukurume, 2017; Van Wyk, 2014). For many scholars, prosperity is one of the reasons why the poor and marginalised are attracted to Pentecostalism. For instance, the Comaroffs and Comaroffs (2000) argued that Pentecostalism embodies the logic of occult economies of neoliberal capitalism. The prosperity gospel is anchored by the belief that God wants his children and all born again Christians to be successful in health and wealth here and now (Coleman, 2000; Gukurume, 2017; Van Wyk, 2014). Further, what makes Pentecostalism compelling for many people is its close affinities with modernity and its capacity to transform people into modern subjects (Maxwell, 2000; Van Dijk, 2003).

Indeed, the remaking of individual subjectivities is central to the rapture or 'breaking with the past' project in the Pentecostal movement. The idea of breaking with the past in PCCs is related to the ways in which converts leave their past lives, deeds, and relations. For Engelke (2010), breaking with the past means renouncing one's ancestral spirits, one's extended family, and sometimes one's close-knit kinsmen after converting to Pentecostalism. This symbolic and material process of breaking with the past requires elaborate spiritual rituals. As Robbins (2003) noted, for one to break with the past, Pentecostals turn to a ritual of deliverance designed to lay the past to rest. This is done through exorcising the evil spirits with which ties with the past are maintained and reproduced. Indeed, Robbins (2009) asserts that everyday life, rituals and practices in PCCs, are epitomised by ruptures and rejection of life before conversion. By promoting rapture with the past and offering spiritual technchologies to do so, Pentecostalism makes itself relevant and fulfils a felt need which makes PCCs attractive in the religious marketplace.

That said, there is also a growing body of work on the role of religion and more specifically Pentecostal religiosity on the life of migrants in Africa (Biri, 2014; Bukasa, 2018; Dube, 2019; Nzayabino 2011) and beyond (Garbin, 2013; Village et al., 2017). However, this work does not specifically focus on university students studying and living in foreign spaces and the ways in which they enact and navigate existential precarity.

Apart from the burgeoning influence of PCCs in the South Africa public sphere, particularly university campuses, the post-apartheid era has also seen increasing mobility of international students into its universities. To this end, South African universities have become increasingly cosmopolitan spaces of encounter. South Africa is home to thousands of students from different African countries and beyond. With many of its universities ranked in the top ten in Africa, South Africa has become a hub for international students. Since the attainment of democracy in 1994, South Africa has continued to attract university students from all walks of life. Although actual statistics are elusive, it is widely accepted that in the past few years South African universities have absorbed the highest number of students from other countries in Africa and beyond in comparison to other African universities. Student mobility in post-apartheid South Africa has already attracted considerable scholarly attention. In post-apartheid era, there has been a growing South-South student migration and South Africa is playing an important role as a host to international students. This increase is attributed to the internationalisation drive of the South African higher education system. In the same vein, South African universities have also worked hard to attract and increase the number of international students. According to DHET (2013) for the 72,464 international students in South Africa, 74% are from the Southern Africa region. Zimbabwe contributes the largest group of (37%), followed by Namibia (7%) and Lesotho (7%). Since then research on international students has grown and shows that for international students who enter new environments they may be faced with a complex web of challenges, including foreign languages, homesickness, cultural differences, and lack of financial support.

There is a growing body of literature on international immigrant students in South Africa (Catalano et al., 2016; Hiralal, 2015; Lee, 2017; Muthuki, 2013). Some of this literature examines the adjustment challenges faced by international students (Mudhovozi, 2011; Muthuki, 2013), the discrimination faced by the students (Lee, 2010), lack of a sense of belonging and integration to the local community (Dang & Tran, 2017) as well as the culture shock and the psychological stress it engenders (Dawson & Conti-Bekkers, 2002). In her study on the experiences of black foreign African students in South Africa, Muthuki (2013) examined the everyday challenges faced by foreign black African students in immersing and negotiating the new sociocultural environment in South Africa. Muthuki (2013) asserted that black foreign African students encountered a myriad of challenges and experienced varying shades of subtle, symbolic, linguistic, and violent xenophobia. This included exclusion from campus accommodation, university bursaries, name-calling and discrimination by university service staff. Similarly, Singh (2013) also examined intrastudent xenophobic practices in the Limpopo province of South Africa. Catalano et al. (2016) asserted that black African immigrant students in South Africa face hostilities from the local community who feel that they are taking their jobs. However, many of them show remarkable resilience in the use of adaptation strategies. These adapations are often mediated by and through new social networks forged by the students in their host destination (Herman & Kombe, 2019). In fact, Nyamnjoh (2017b) argued that being a migrant is informed less by one's individuality than by conviviality, interconnections, and interdependencies of relationships that are woven into their ontological security personhood and daily lives to reduce vulnerability (see also, Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001).

In his study of neonational[1] experiences of international students in South Africa, Lee (2017) noted that black African students perceived more discrimination than those from outside the continent and students from Zimbabwe, the largest immigrant student group, felt the most mistreated due to their nationality. Similarly, Mudau and Khanare (2021) asserted that universities and other institutions of higher learning have not been spared of xenophobia and xenophobic attacks on international students. Indeed, a number of scholars have asserted that cultural discrimination, verbal, and physical assaults experienced by international students both on and off the university campus are key problems faced by international students in South Africa (Dominguez-Whitehead & Sing, 2015; Lee & Rice, 2007). This exposure to xenophobic violence and the absence of personal safety articulates with Laing's concept of implosion: a scenario where even in spaces that are regarded as inclusive and safe from xenophobic attacks, the threat of violence both material and symbolic become so severe that many international students feel compelled to leave. For example, university campuses are often viewed as a safer haven, but many of my inter-locutors felt that it can also be as xenophobic as off-campus spaces. As such, for international students, ontologies of personal (in)security permeate everyday geographies of the campus.

Some scholars have noted that international students in South Africa, particularly from other African countries, tend to struggle with seemingly stringent and discriminatory immigration policy controls (Kasese-Hara & Mugambi, 2021; Ramphele et al., 1999). This closely invokes Laing's (1962) notion of 'ontological insecurity'. For Laing, 'ontological insecurity' is 'the feeling of a precarious and threatened sense of existence' (McGeachan, 2014). It is important to note that by its very nature migration is inherently disruptive, and thus ontological (in)security becomes an important issue as the routines of normal life and sociality are disrupted.

Ontological (in)security: theoretical lens

In this article, I deploy the theoretical concept of ontological security as my analytical lens to understand the everyday lives of foreign students in South Africa. The concept of ontological security was coined by Ronald David Laing (1962, p. 53) who defined it as the need for a person to have a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and in a temporal sense of a continuous person. In his conceptualisation of ontological security, Laing (1962) foregrounded the existential need to maintain a sense of a continuous self that exists over time. Ontological security also relates to a person's fundamental sense of safety in the world and includes a basic trust in other people (Giddens, 1991). Ontological security is used as a conceptual lens for understanding subjectivity that focuses on the management of anxiety in self-constitution (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). While aware of the theoretical limits and Eurocentric nature of Giddens Laingian 'ontological security, I contend that the theoretical concept of ontological security is analytically productive and useful because it attends to complexities and experiences of the everyday. The use of the concept of ontological security and insecurity in understanding everyday lives has gained traction in social science scholarship. Although the usage of ontological security is growing, the concept is not in any way new. The concept was coined by Laing (1960/ 2010), who used it to refer to 'a continuous personhood' where a person enjoys a stable and whole existence in reality, rather than anxiety and loss of meaning that can threaten daily experiences and self-integrity. Laing (1962) asserts that ontological security signifies existentially self-assured experiences of relatedness to other persons and the world. As such, Laing's framing of ontological (in) security dovetails with the compositeness and incompleteness of beings (Nyamnjoh, 2017a). As such, ontological security is attained through reaching out, forging convivial socialities and dialogical engagement. For Giddens (1991), ontological security denotes a sense of order and biographical continuity pertaining to an individual's life experiences-a security of 'being' and 'becoming' (see, Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). It is subjective vigilance that allows one to guard against every-day anxieties and go on with life. Mitzen (2006) argues that ontological security is attained by and through tactical and consistent routinising of socialities and relationships with significant others, and individual actors forge affective attachments to such relationships for continuity. Croft (2012) asserts that ontological security should be understood within the context of complex entanglements between identity, narrative, and security. Similarly, Karp (2018) asserted that the goal of maintaining ontological security is to reduce existential anxieties to a level at which they do not threaten the individual's ability to keep the self-narrative going. Overall, ontological security seeks above all to protect who we are and our identities.

For Laing (1962), being ontologically insecure refers to being in a perpetual state of anxiety; the ordinary everyday existence of an individual constitutes a daily threat from the environment and fear of engulfment, implosion, and petrification and depersonali-zation. Intological (in)security is intricately linked to experiences of precarity. The process of migration often makes migrants ontologically insecure, experience of anxiety, terror, and a sense of depersonalization (Laing, 1960/2010, p. 45). However, the affective space provided by PCCs facilitate the socialities of migrant students which help them navigate the precariousness of everyday life in a volatile and alienating environment. Expanding on the theoretical concept of precarity, Susan Banki (2013) argued that non-

citizen migrants experience 'precarity of place'. Unlike precarity, which has been largely applied in labour studies, precarity of place adopts an existential approach to everyday living. For Banki (2013) 'precarity' and 'precarity of place' are intricately related and complementary concepts, but they offer fundamentally distinct experiences to their victims.

Adapting to a new environment

One of the roles that PCCs play in the lives of international students is to help them settle and adapt to the new environment. In a context of limited social support structures which often mediate the adaptation of international students to cross-cultural transition challenges (Contreras-Aguirre & Gonzalez, 2017), PCCs have become an alaternative space for the provision of social support. Indeed, PCCs enable international students to build social relationships with both fellow international students and locals, and such relationships tend to produce a connection between adjustment and social support, which mediates the ways in which international students adapt and settle into the new university terrain (see Leong, 2015). Most of my interlocutors explained that the churches they joined in South Africa helped them settle in South Africa. For instance, John explained;

> I think without the church my life would have been very difficult because it was my first time in South Africa and I hardly knew anyone here, but when I joined my church I made a lot of new friends and that helped me a lot and made my life easier.

John's experience was also echoed by Judith who noted that the church helped to orient her to Cape Town and to forge friendships with church members. Judith explained to me that she struggled to adjust to life in a new country until she became a member of the Christ Embassy church. Judith noted;

> The first month and a half I was always indoors, I was so lonely because I had no one to talk to and show me around. It was hard for me to adjust to a new environment. There was a time when I felt like I made a wrong decision to come to study here in South Africa.

Scholars have shown how churches enabled migrants to adjust to new environments as they moved into the city (Jules-Rosette, 1975) from their rural communities. They did so by providing the everyday needs of migrants. For scholars like Gifford (1998), PCCs that meet people's needs and address their social anxieties have great potential to contribute to socioeconomic and political transformation in Africa. This resonates with Giddens (1991) idea of ontological security, where international students affirm a belief and sense of 'being' and belonging to a Pentecostal community and therefore become part of the sociospiritual fabric of life on which they rely for biographical stability and predictability. As such, for them, membership of this spiritual community helps to establish their sense of ontological security (see, Croft, 2012). This sense of security pervades the everyday life of born-again students. This finding echoes observations made by Mudhovozi (2011), who noted that amid stressful life changes brought by mobility, social relationships offer social support, which is critical to the psychological and academic adaptation of international students. For Mudhovozi, religious groups promote fellowship with other students, which facilitates socio-spiritual adjustments to a new environment. This

research indicates that membership to PCCs for international students is a rational ontological security-seeking behaviour. For Laing (1960/2010) ontological security-seeking is the quest for existential certainty and, while anxiety cannot be eliminated altogether, it can be reduced to levels that allow a continuous self-narrative and purposeful agency (see, also Karp, 2018). This ontological security-seeking behaviour allows international students to impose a cognitive order on the alien environment (Mitzen, 2006).

Religious/ spiritual enclaves and belonging

In this section, I show how membership of PCCs helps international students in Cape Town to navigate and negotiate the insecurities and uncertainties that come with transnational relocation. Signing up for Pentecostal churches should be viewed as a conscious, rational, and strategic decision by international students to adapt to the new environment and destination. Therefore, joining a church becomes one of the many strategies students use to cope with uncertainties wrought by the process of relocating to a new and volatile country like South Africa. Furthermore, in a country where foreign nationals are vulnerable to open violence, 'Othered' and labelled as 'Makwerekwere[2]', I contend that the PCCs that students join on arrival in South Africa provide alternative spaces where these students forge convivial relationships with locals and other foreign students and nationals. These networks cement their security and sense of belonging while simultaneously diffusing their sense of insecurity. For instance, one of my interlocutors noted during a conversation; 'When you belong to a church or a religious group, you are better off because you can easily relate to others and get many networks and opportunities that help in times of need.'

This was echoed by other scholars like Nyamnjoh (2017b) who showed how foreign nationals join various sociocommunities, which help them establish convivial spaces and forge a meaningful sense of personhood. Through collective worship and relationships forged thereof, mobile international students gain some degree of social acceptance and negotiate their marginality while simultaneously collapsing the symbolic boundaries between the local and the international students. As such, the church becomes an important socio-spiritual enclave through which international students integrate and adjust to the new and alienating environment. Alien spaces of the diaspora often present challenges for forging meaningful forms of being and personhood. Such an experience destabilises everyday routinised practices as migrants struggle to navigate new landscapes. In response, PCCs do not only create, but also become spaces of social bonding, where students forge fictive kinship ties. For students, these fictive familial networks become crucial social safety nets in times of crisis such as xenophobia or uncertainty. Such familial networks play a key role in constructing ontological security for international students. Indeed, scholars like McGeachan (2014) assert that family is a key terrain of meaning, with family relationships, both real and perceived, being central to people's feeling real or unreal, threatened, or safe.

Interestingly, some of my interlocutors noted that they navigate cityscapes in Cape Town based on stories and knowledge acquired from church colleagues about which parts of the city are safe, risky, or dangerous. This resonates with Cazarin and Cossa (2017) who noted that migrant churches provide migrants with a bridge for the 'here' and 'there'

and the interconnection between the past and the present. During church services, rituals are done communally where members are equal participants. Congregants are urged to sing along to the songs in the church whose lyrics are always displayed on the big screen in the auditorium in front. Services always started with a praise and worship session that often lasted 30 minutes. Although English is the *lingua franca* in most church activities, songs are sung in an eclectic mixture of languages, local and foreign. Interestingly, the church choir was made up of people from seven different countries. These lead singers taught other members songs in their native languages and then perform these songs during church services. This helped to accommodate the cosmopolitan nature of the congregation, but also helped to cement solidarity and cohesion. Indeed, the multilingual nature of church rituals reveals the church's quest for inclusivity (Ganiel, 2006). John explained in an interview;

> When I attended the church, in my first service, I was impressed to hear people singing in my mother native tongue (Shona). I felt at home, even though I didn't know anyone from Zimbabwe in the church. I just told myself that I will come back again next time. I realised that it was their policy to sing in different languages to accommodate everyone.

John's sentiments were also echoed by Mirriam, who explained;

> What I like about this church is that you find everyone from everywhere in African and some from European countries. You feel like being part of a bigger family because the people are so supportive in everything.

Interestingly, in some cases, the church organised prayer sessions that addressed the existential perturbations of students and other foreign nationals. For instance, prayer vigils covered issues like access to permits (papers), protection from xenophobia, and other forms of violent crimes commonplace in South African townships. The bonds established at and through the church allow students to negotiate both their socio-economic and metaphysical anxieties. This corroborates Maguire and Murphy (2016)'s observation that Pentecostalism makes available spiritual and other forms of support, social connectivity, and even status in a nation state that is seen to deny worshipers as people. Maguire and Murphy (2016, p. 845) further assert that; 'Pentecostal churches often act in state-like ways, engaging in mundane but totalising world-making practices that are composed of the bodily, affective, and spiritual stuff of everyday life. During services, for example, pastors try to elevate congregations and attune them to the presence of the Holy Spirit while mentioning a vacant apartment or visa requirements in another breath (Maguire & Murphy, 2016, pp. 844–845).

For many international students, religion becomes a source of meaning in a meaningless space. Indeed scholars have noted how religion has become a space of forging a sense of community and belonging in hostile social landscapes (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Watson, 2009). Watson (2009) further noted that in multicultural spaces, the church plays a fundamental role as a space of convergence and encounter for people from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. This mixing and encounter engendered the formation of convivial networks and communities, which in turn cement the social embeddedness of students in the new environment and community. Indeed, it restored their sense of being and ontological security in uncertain and xenophobic spaces. For Dube (2019) these everyday practices allow migrants in this case international

students to perform belonging 'from below' (Alexander et al., 2007). Dube (2019) conceptualises belonging from below as everyday forms of routinised practices, which are sometimes contingent, fractured, and haphazard personal ties that traverse and transcend imagined understandings of religious spaces.

Furthermore, during fieldwork, it was not uncommon for some PCCs to organise prayer vigils for students seeking scholarships and bursaries at their respective universities. Given that some international students came to South Africa as asylum-seekers and refugees, not all of them were financially stable. As such, some rely on scholarships and financial support from various organisations. These scholarships are not only scarce for a foreign student but also competitive. Thus, prayers become central in one's quest to secure financial support. In the words of Johnson one of my interlocutors;

> I came to South Africa with my family on asylum, so no one was formally working. My mother started a small hair salon and this helped to fund my first year at university, but things have not been well because now she spends time trying to regularise our stay. So I desperately need financial assistance. At church, I always ask the pastor to pray for this during prayer requests.

During prayer vigils, students are urged to demand these scholarships and bursaries from God. At church services I attended, the congregants were often asked to write on a piece of paper what they wanted and bring the papers to the pulpit, and the pastor prayed for God to grant these wishes. Sometimes, people were asked to make sacrifices to the church as a strategy to speed up God's response to their requests. In the event of delays, people were urged to make more sacrifices and to strengthen their faith. Indeed many of them believed that through faith and prayers such scholarships could be miraculously acquired. For many of my interlocutors, prayer was constructed and imagined as an important weapon in the spiritual warfare against Satan and his demons which blocked the flow of material blessings, in this case, financial support and jobs in their lives. Johnson told me that at some point his pastor urged him to apply for scholarships that he was not qualified to get, and to his surprise, he was awarded the scholarship. Johnson attributed this 'miraculous scholarship' to the grace of God. For Johnson, with God and strong faith, nothing is impossible. Although Johnson often embellished his testimonies and stories on the efficacy of miracles and other spiritual technologies in church, during major services, it was not uncommon for other congregants to tell spectacular stories and testimonies of how they became miraculously rich and accessed things they felt they did not deserve or qualify for, how they were promoted, and how they conceived when doctors had pronounced them infertile and their miraculous healing of cancer and HIV. These spectacular stories and testimonies were often repeated on the big screens during church services and pastors often referred to them in their sermons as lived examples of how God transforms the lives of born again Christians.

My interlocutors believed that all the misfortunes they encountered on the way to and in South Africa were demonic and caused by evil spirits. As such, many of their problems were spiritualised and required spiritual remedies such as prayer vigils and the use of church paraphernalia and other consecrated objects which protected them from demonic attacks and bad luck (Van Wyk, 2015). In South African PCCs, Van Wyk (2015) highlighted

how churches advertise their capacity to provide remedies for bad luck, which is an everyday reality in the lives of many people. Of note is the important role of Pentecostal rituals in laying claim to particular social spaces.

Cell and connect group socialities and convivialities

At church, students were encouraged to join cell groups and connect groups. On-campus connect groups were particularly crucial and mediated the everyday sociality of students on campus. Connect groups were normally formed based on one's discipline and profession. As such, connect groups could be imagined as professional networks. Cell groups, on the other hand, were determined by the spatial location of members. For example, on-campus students staying in the same hostel normally formed a small cell group. Officially, cell group members met twice a week for bible study, prayer meetings and sometimes for social activities. Many students forged convivial relationships through the cell and connect group encounters on and around campus. For instance, Mirriam explained;

> Before I went to church, I never had a friend on campus. I would keep my problems to myself, and I had no one to confide in. When I became a member of this church, God blessed me with many very good and caring friends. It's like I have a new family. My life will never be the same.

Contact in these groups is not only physical in venues, it is also virtual and maintained through social media platforms such as Whatsapp, Facebook, and church-based social applications. Interestingly, many new PCCs mediate religiosities through the creative use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs; Nyamnjoh, 2019). Through social media and ICTs, Bible study is conducted online by people from spatially disparate terrains, and students connected and interacted directly with their pastors. As such, the private and public lives of the congregants have been closely connected through the use of social media platforms with pastors and other congregants. Indeed, for Giddens (1991) and Croft (2012), these everyday practices structured the associational life of the students enabling them to attain some sense of security. Scholars remind us that ontological security is achieved through the enactment and establishment of a web of relationships performed through everyday religious and spiritual routines like attending cell and connect groups, social events, and prayer group vigils among others. Consequently, participating in such activities allows students to negotiate the affective and cognitive dissonance wrought by the mobility process and the alienation and anxieties it engenders. Interestingly, hostilities broiled in the rhetoric of 'outsiderness' are negotiated and diffused through membership in a Pentecostal network. This often engendered a stable sense of self-hood for the student member of such networks.

Notably, connect and cell groups become important social spaces where congregants interact, connect, and cohere. In fact, scholars have revealed how the church creates social bonds and promotes a sense of togetherness and belonging (Czeglédy, 2008; Gukurume, 2018; Nzayabino 2011). As noted by Atsu, one of my interlocutors;

> When I attend the social gatherings and cell group meetings, I feel like I belong to a big family and even if you are not from South Africa everyone accepts you because we are all children of God.

Many of my interlocutors told me that it was only in church that they could express themselves without fear of being labeled or discriminated. Such an environment permits the randomisation of individual and collective identity while simultaneously guaranteeing its continuous affirmation. Karp (2018) reminds us that ontological security is not attained by exclusion, but through the existence of routines that can master the anxieties that change entails. Interestingly, the interactions engendered in these religious groups tended to also transcend ethnonational and racial divisions. The congregants imagined themselves as equal before God. This was always emphasised during church activities and social events. For instance, in one of the social events I attended, people were exhorted to interact with people from a different country, culture and race. The pastors urged them to fellowship with and get to know each other better. During cell base evangelism, cell group leaders and pastors paired people from different countries. This pairing of members from different countries created space for conviviality. Indeed, conviviality emerged out of shared understandings of being born again and being children of God. Interestingly, personal connections to a single God cemented social solidarity, yet it was also a key source of ontological security. In conversations with church pastors and cell group leaders, it emerged that most of them thought of their church as multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multinational. For instance, Jacob, one PCC cell group leader explained;

> Our church is opening its door to everyone regardless of where they are from or what colour they are. We are creating a cosmopolitan kingdom of God where everyone is free to worship God. We are all children of God and that is our motto here. We are Christians first, before we are anything else.

Jacob told me that for born again Christians, the Christian identity usurps any other identity. The multiethnic and multiracial nature of some PCCs manifested itself in very interesting ways in the socialities forged by campus-based cell group meetings that I attended. As such, the cell and the connect group become an important space of interface and encounter between local and international students (Ganiel, 2006; Heer, 2015). This face to face interface in cell and connect groups creates and solidifies social intimacy between congregants and strong bonds are forged. Such interpersonal relationships between congregants often develop into social capital (Granovetter, 1983; Gukurume, 2018; Putnam, 2000). Indeed, the churches under study played a fundamental role in the generation of social capital for international students (Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital was particularly salient and played an important role among the migrant students themselves, as they interacted and shared experiences in the various religious communities to which they belonged. For Putnam (2000) bonding was imagined as a social cement that bound people together, generating strong rapport among migrant students. As migrant students bonded with each other at church relationships of reciprocity and social support emerged. This resonates strongly with De Souza and de Souza Briggs (1997), who asserts that people can make do and get by through relying on bonding social capital. Furthermore, PCCs also promoted bridging social capital. Bridging occurred between migrant students and their local counterparts.

Of note is that in Putnamian conceptualisation bonding occurs among homogeneous social groups (migrant students and migrant students) while bridging occurs in heterogeneous social groups (migrant students and local/native students). Interestingly, while the ties and networks between migrant students and South African students can be

viewed as 'weak ties' characterised by thin trust, Granovetter (1983) asserts that weak ties can offer more opportunities for the people involved. Many scholars emphasise that through participation in social networks and other ties, opportunities for economic and social advancement are generated in the new homeland (Cederberg, 2012; Granberry, 2014). Indeed, scholars such as Ganiel argue that the Pentecostal space provides a propitious environment for understanding people's everyday lives, interactions, and relationships.

Indeed, some of the PCCs I attended adopted Desmond Tutu's mantra in their self-making as a 'Rainbow church of God' (Czeglédy, 2008; Ganiel, 2006). The metaphor of a rainbow was borrowed from the belief that the nation of South Africa is a 'Rainbow Nation' given its racial and ethnic diversity. In fact, one of the small churches operating on campus had the term multi-racial in its name. Formed by a Cameroonian migrant pastor and his wife, the church attracted students from West Africa, Southern Africa, and other parts of the world.

Conclusion

This article explored the ways in which migrant students used Pentecostal religion and religious networks as a strategy to navigate and negotiate the anxieties and uncertainties of studying and living in a foreign space. The article argued that Pentecostalism textured student daily life and lived experiences on campus. Through attending PCC services, students were able to forge conviviality relationships and build social capital, which enabled them to adjust to the new and often hostile environment. Cell and connect groups, as well as other social activities organised by the church, became important spaces where different forms of socialities emerged. These socialities helped migrant students integrate into the host community and in the production of various forms of being and belonging. PCCs devised creative and performative ways of transcending ethnonational and racial differences in the congregation. Further, the article also revealed how PCCs enabled the formation of bonding networks between migrant students themselves and bridging networks between migrant and local students. These bonding, bridging, and linking networks play out in everyday interactions in church rituals and activities. I argued that PCCs provide affective enclaves of sociality that make routines and habitual conviviality and interdependence possible. These affective spaces allow international migrant students to maintain convivial relationships that provide some form of ontological security while simultaneously protecting them from the stress of everyday uncertainty and insecurities. Such spaces engender order and predictability in the everyday lives of the migrant student in a terrain that is disorderly and unpredictable. Importantly, PCCs establish affective spaces through which a meaningful sense of personhood can be (re)established.

Notes

1. For Lee (2017) neonationalism refers to a new nationalism based national order in the new global economy.

2. Makwerekwere is a derogatory term or label given to black Africans of foreign/immigrant origin living and working in South Africa and lacking the linguistic capital of any local language.

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