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Lived Theologies of Place: Finding a Home in the City

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Abstract

This paper opens up what place contributes to our understanding of lived theology through drawing on a two year case study of diaspora churches in central London. Diaspora churches, especially African majority, have grown in urban centres across Europe and particularly intensely in London meaning that space for places of worship has become highly contested. Lived theologies of place took form through narratives about places of worship, particularly

the struggle to find and make a congregational home. In conversation with Michel de Certeau, the contestation of these narratives is understood through the interplay of strategy and tactics, indicating the significance of power(lessness) for lived theologies and how that interplay generates public theologies. Conclusions are drawn about the nature and scope of lived theologies and what they can contribute to the study of urban religion.

Keywords

lived theologies, narratives of place, theologies of place, Michel de Certeau, strategy and tactics, new black majority churches, urban planning

Biographical Note

Dr Andrew Rogers is Principal Lecturer in Practical Theology at the University of Roehampton, London, UK, where he runs an ecumenical degree programme for students engaged in Christian ministry. He was principal investigator for the *Being Built Togethe*r project (2011-13), the AHRC *Faith and Place network* (2014-16) and latterly the *Signs of Wonder* project (2017-18). Andrew is the author of *Congregational Hermeneutics: How Do We Read?* (Routledge, 2016) and, with Dr Richard Gale, *Faith Groups and the Planning System: Policy Briefing* (2015, 2016). He was vice-chair and chair of the British and Irish Association for Practical Theology (BIAPT) from 2015-19.

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Introduction

In this paper I want to open up how theologies of place emerge from narratives of everyday life, in conversation with Michel de Certeau.[1] De Certeau is an obvious conversation partner for such a task, given his work on everyday practices and the 'subtle logic of "ordinary activities"' within the particularity of their contexts.[2]

To understand the production of lived theologies of place, I draw on a case study of diaspora Pentecostal churches in London and their well-attested desire to find a home in the city for their congregations. This case study offers narratives of place that are mostly implicit in their theologising, and are embedded in congregational practices and the materiality of their places. These theologies of place could take a number of qualifiers, but 'lived theology' is the best fit for the case as it allows for their implicit and operant aspects. Recently developed by Pete Ward in practical theology, lived theology is an account of theology as it is 'lived and experienced'. It combines the contributions of ordinary theology, lived religion and the four theological voices, through respectively recognising the importance of what is spoken theologically, what is performed and practiced, and the multi-layered nature of theology and its different voices.[3] Beyond practical theology, Charles Marsh has similarly argued for a 'lived theology' that clarifies 'the interconnection of theology and lived experience' where the patterns and practice of religious communities include ways of both doing things and saying things.[4]

[1] This article is a development and extension of a paper originally delivered at the Ecclesial Practices group at the American Academy of Religion conference, November 2017.
[2] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell, vol. I (London: University of California Press, 1984 (ET)), p. ix.
[3] Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), pp. 64-65.
[4] University of Virginia, *The Project on Lived Theology*, (2014), http://www.livedtheology.org/overview/.

Michel de Certeau and the everyday

The French urban anthropologist and Jesuit, Michel de Certeau (1925-1986), assists with thinking further about the everyday in relation to place, particularly in his two volume work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, originally titled in French *L'invention du quotidien: Arts de faire* and *habiter, cuisiner*.[5] De Certeau described this work as 'sketching a *theory of everyday practices*',[6] which he described in his Preface as 'a science of singularity'. De Certeau's writing is fantastical and poetical, where you never quite know in which direction the sentence will turn next. He stirs the imagination about the modalities of ordinary actions, or 'ways of proceeding', a concept with significant Ignatian resonance.[7]

De Certeau was influenced by a Marxist analysis of culture, but developed this by arguing that in a culture of consumption the *use* of what is produced is a production as well. For example, in watching TV, the consumer also makes or does something with the images and stories being told. This making is a *poiesis*, a creativity or invention that is hidden inside the systems of production, as the expanding power of systems of production leave no place for consumers to 'indicate what they *make* or *do* with the products of these systems'.[8] The invention of the everyday, says de Certeau, is a different kind of production-consumption that is characterised by:

> …its ruses, its fragmentation (the result of the circumstances), its poaching, its clandestine nature, its tireless but quiet activity, in short by its quasi-invisibility, since it shows itself not in its own products (where would it place them?) but in an art of using those imposed on it.[9]

[5] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I; Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking*, trans. Timothy J. Tomasik, vol. II (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998 (ET)).
[6] de Certeau, Giard, and Mayol, *Living and Cooking*, II, p. xx.
[7] See Philip Sheldrake, 'Michel de Certeau: Spirituality and The Practice of Everyday Life', *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 12, no. 2, (2012), pp. 207-16, at p. 210, 10.1353/scs.2012.0024.
[8] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I, p. xii.
[9] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I, p. 31.

These poetic ways of 'making do' or *bricolage* are not limited to the margins,[10] but are the 'cultural activity of the non-producers of culture' who now form a silent majority, where the weak make ingenious use of the strong,[11] as 'poets of their own acts' and 'silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality'. Such paths are 'neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop'.[12]

De Certeau resorted to his now famous distinction between strategy and tactics to nuance his account of production-consumption. The invention of the everyday is tactical. Whether it is walking, talking, shopping or cooking (but especially walking), tactics are used by those without power or place to evade the strategies of the powerful who have a circumscribed place from which to exercise their power. Strategies are a 'calculus of force-relationships' that isolate a subject from the environment under consideration and as such are a 'victory of space over time'.[13] Tactics, however, are not delimited by boundaries as they are the actions of those without place, who use time to act opportunistically in bricolage style with whatever is at hand. Strategies are linked to structures of power that seek to control space and tactics are utilised by ordinary individuals and communities that attempt to subvert those strategies – 'to create space for themselves in environments defined by other people's strategies'.[14]

In a poignant meditation on spatial practices inspired by standing at the top of the World Trade Center, de Certeau is highly critical of the supposed panoptic practices of the city planners of his time. In looking down on New York City, it becomes a 'wave of verticals' that is 'transformed into texturology'.[15] Such a view freezes the city in its gaze, collapsing time into space, and so totalises

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[10] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I, p. xv. *L'Art de Faire* may be translated as 'ways of making do', Mike Crang, 'Michel de Certeau', in *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, ed. Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin (London: Sage, 2011), p. 109.
[11] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I, p. xvii.
[12] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I, p. xviii.
[13] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I, p. xix.
[14] Philip Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality, and the Urban* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 106.
[15] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I, p. 91.

the narratives of the city made up of a 'maritime immensity' of practices in 'Brownian motion of resistances'.[16] This panoptic perspective is an attempt to escape narrative through the lust to be a viewpoint which is the Babel temptation to become like God. Texturology is a fiction since the 'ordinary practitioners of the city' live below the surface of the urban text, where their everyday actions have a 'certain strangeness' that is not visible or is just the 'upper limit' of the surface. Those who walk the city at street level follow the 'thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it'. It is these tactics of the everyday that make the city – the urban fact, in contrast to the concept city. The poster on the 110th floor observation deck had it right when it declared 'It's hard to be down when you're up'.[17]

Drawing on Philip Sheldrake, reading a multi-layered urban text requires an appropriate hermeneutic of place.[18] De Certeau offers an insightful lens for the case study of diaspora churches that follows, but the fantastical and imperfect nature of the lens needs acknowledging. There is a romanticising of production-consumption relations, whether it is the poetry of tactics or hyperbole about strategic power and the air brushing of its mediators.[19] The distinction between strategy and tactics is not always a sharp one and neither strategy nor tactics are *a priori* oppressive or liberative.

Such a hermeneutic of place also recognises that place is never unmediated but is interpreted through engagement with its environment and materiality, memories, persons and their practices.[20] Place-making is about narrativizing.[21] Our hermeneutic needs to interpret the multiple narratives that interweave around places whose interpretations may conflict and collide. In de Certeau's oppositional terms, 'the city is the stage for a war of narratives'.[22] Channelling Paul Ricoeur and

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[16] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I, pp. 41, 40. Converting the world into 'texturology' to be read, 'freezes urban life and thus occludes a great many urban practices', Crang, 'Michel de Certeau', p. 107.
[17] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I, pp. 92-94.
[18] Sheldrake, *Spiritual*, p. 13.
[19] Crang, 'Michel de Certeau', p. 111.
[20] Sheldrake, *Spiritual*, pp. 12-13, 122.
[21] de Certeau, Giard, and Mayol, *Living and Cooking*, II, p. 142.
[22] de Certeau, Giard, and Mayol, *Living and Cooking*, II, p. 143.

de Certeau, Sheldrake asks 'Whose narrative has been told? Who is allowed a place in the story of this city?'[23]

Finding a home in the city

Diaspora churches in recent decades have struggled to find a home in the city. Although this is an issue in many cities around the world,[24] it is particularly intense in London since it probably has the highest concentration of African diaspora congregations in the world outside of Africa.[25] Due to patterns of migration and settlement, the search for suitable premises has become a critical issue for African diaspora congregations in London during the early 21st century. Space for diaspora churches has become highly contested as they negotiate their spaces with other churches, local communities and local planning authorities in London.

Given the tensions developing between these different parties, a number of ecclesial and public organisations invited the University of Roehampton to gather evidence around demographics, ecclesiology and the premises of what was termed 'new black majority churches' (nBMCs) in the central London Borough of Southwark.[26] The *Being Built Together* project ran from 2011-13 with a multi-ethnic team of researchers utilising both qualitative and quantitative research methods. We photographed, documented and visited nBMCs in the borough for pastor interviews and participant observation in services, which enabled us to generate a database of nBMCs in the borough.[27] We

[23] Sheldrake, *Spiritual*, p. 123.
[24] E.g. Marten van der Meulen, 'The Importance of Denomination for the Civic Engagement of Migrant Congregations in Amsterdam and Beyond', *Ecclesial Practices* 5, no. 1, (2018), pp. 5-21, 10.1163/22144471-00501005.
[25] Andrew P. Rogers, *Being Built Together: Final Report* (London: University of Roehampton, 2013), http:www.roehampton.ac.uk/BeingBuiltTogether/, p. 15; Andrew P. Rogers, 'Walking down the Old Kent Road: New Black Majority Churches in the London Borough of Southwark', in *The Desecularisation of the City: London's Churches, 1980 to the Present*, ed. David Goodhew and Anthony-Paul Cooper (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 95.
[26] Out of 32 London boroughs. nBMC was judged the least worst umbrella term as it captured the common experience of those churches having difficulty in finding a home. They were nearly all from outside the historic church traditions.
[27] The author was the lead researcher in this team.

contacted 186 nBMCs by email or phone and were able to engage directly with 36 nBMCs through 29 visits to premises and 25 interviews with pastors.[28] In addition, we interviewed 28 'informed observers' which included planning consultants / officers and church leaders both local and national from both within and without Southwark. All participants were guaranteed anonymity and therefore pseudonyms are used throughout this case study. Necessarily limited details of the pastors and their churches are given in **Table 1**.

[see Table 1]

It quickly became apparent that Southwark was the epicentre of nBMC growth in London, with churches located in a wide variety of adapted premises. We identified 240 nBMCs in the borough which was significantly more than all the historic churches in the borough combined.[29] Given such concentrations, the struggle to adapt or acquire a place of worship had become quite fraught, especially as English planning law requires formal 'change of use' permission for adaptation of most premises.

This case study revisits the original qualitative data generated by the *Being Built Together* project in order to draw out new perspectives on lived theologies of place and their production. This revisiting was inspired by reading de Certeau and his commentators, where de Certeau acted as a catalyst for thinking about place further. The case study focuses mainly on the narratives generated by the local planning authority (LPA)[30] and nBMCs, leading into an analysis of how this played out in terms of strategy and tactics. We asked nBMC leaders to tell us about their places (amongst other things), including the history of their places and any problems they had encountered in finding

[28] An additional 6 'interviews' were completed by questionnaire. Initial email / phone contact requested a visit to the congregation and/or an interview with the pastor. A summary of the project with consent form were supplied.
[29] The 2012 London Church Census reported 142 non-nBMCs in the borough, Peter Brierley, *UK Church Statistics 2: 2010-2020* (Tonbridge, Kent: ADBC, 2014), §12.14.
[30] A local planning authority (LPA) is part of the relevant local authority, which in London are referred to as borough councils, or 'borough' for short.

somewhere to meet. Upon assessing the multiple narratives around nBMC places, it was found that they clustered to varying degrees around the theme of 'finding a home', whether that was made explicit or not.

LPA narratives

The Southwark LPA did not use the language of 'finding a home', but their policy documents entered related territory. With eschatological echoes, their 'sustainable community strategy' set out 'what people want Southwark to be like and what needs to be done to get there' (§2.48, §2.49).[31] This 'vision for the borough' spoke of 'our shared vision for the future' that addressed a range of local government issues including community facilities and the bold aim to 'make sure everyone has access to the facilities they need' (§5.44). There were limited references to faith communities or places of worship, but a key emphasis was on encouraging 'different faiths to share facilities' (§5.44). The *Equalities Impact Assessment* was more specific and yet tentative in stating the council needed to 'consider providing locations where places of worship can go'. With some understatement, it adds 'this will have a positive impact on certain faith groups' and a 'negative impact on some other groups who may object to the noise of places of worship'.[32]

The LPA carried out their own internal research from a planning enforcement perspective during 2005-6 and made a street level identification of 104 nBMCs. The majority of these nBMCs were unauthorised and operating from industrial units. According to a 2008 report, this was 'the most significant breach of planning control involving change of use' on a 'larger scale than in any other

[31] References are all to Southwark Council, *Core Strategy* (2011), https://www.southwark.gov.uk/attach/1.0.2-DL-Core_Strategy_2011.pdf
[32] Southwark Council, *Core Strategy: Equalities Impact Assessment Appendix F* (2010).

London borough'.[33] The Head of Planning at the Council summarised the ongoing situation in July 2010 as follows:

> There have been many instances of religious groups occupying what are seen by the local planning authority as unsuitable premises such as in residential areas where the noise of their activities and large numbers of people arriving by car causes harm to residential amenity or in industrial areas where their occupation of factory and warehouse buildings often contravenes the council's policies to protect these areas for appropriate employment generating uses. A number of refusals of planning permission and enforcement actions against places of worship have resulted and the council sought a dialogue with religious groups to find ways to avoid this happening wherever possible.[34]

Over the period 2000-2011, planning permission was granted to just 24% of nBMCs which is strikingly low and was a cause for concern on the part of the Council and nBMC leaders. For the Council in particular, they need to demonstrate they are fulfilling their public sector equality duty to apply planning law fairly to groups with the protected characteristics of race and religion.[35] This duty and other factors, such as 'social cohesion' as set out in their 'vision for Southwark',[36] motivated the Council to develop a strategy of engagement with faith groups and their places from the late noughties onwards.

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[33] Dennis Sangweme, *Report on Places of Worship in Southwark* (London: Southwark Council, 2006); CAG Consultants, Land Use Consultants, and Diverse Ethics, 'Responding to the Needs of Faith Communities: Places of Worship (Final Report)', *Greater London Authority* (2008), https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/places_of_worship_report_2008.pdf.

[34] Simon Bevan, *Liaison with Faith Communities over Planning Matters 2009-10* (London: Southwark Council, 2010).

[35] As given in the Equality Act 2010, public authorities in England are required to 'eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act' while advancing 'equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not', see Equality and Human Rights Commission, *Public Sector Equality Duty* (nd), https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty; see also Andrew P. Rogers and Richard Gale, *Faith Groups and the Planning System: Policy Briefing* (London: University of Roehampton, 2015), http://faithandplacenetwork.org, p. 6.

[36] Southwark Alliance, *Southwark 2016: Sustainable Community Strategy - Our shared vision for the future* (London: Southwark Council, nd).

The LPA narratives express a vision for the borough in terms of the Council's priorities, such as employment, education, health and community facilities. Such a vision requires making judgements about the relative importance of these different priorities. Leonie Sandercock and Maged Senbel characterise planning as 'an ethical enquiry' about 'how to live with each other in the shared spaces of multicultural cities'.[37] These ethical judgements are shaped by values that no doubt the Council hopes are part of a 'shared vision' within the borough. For example, it chose to make minimal reference to faith communities and places of worship in its documents, dealing with them largely as an instance of community facilities. It may be said then that the LPA offers its own ideology or secular 'theology' of place for the borough. As will be seen, this is a lived 'theology' that has only limited overlap with nBMC theologies of place shaped by a different vision of the borough, city and world.

nBMC narratives

nBMC pastors made frequent reference to the experience of obtaining a place of worship, whether it was in the past or a continuing struggle. These experiences were described using words such as 'difficult', 'problem', 'fight', and even 'nightmare'.[38] The target for these terms was often the Council – in Pastor Solomon's words 'it was a three year fight in which everything was no, no, no, NO, no, no, no [laughs]'. This struggle was given stark expression at a heated early engagement meeting held by the Council, where an unnamed female pastor pleaded with the Council representatives:

> …here we are suffering, we don't have nowhere to worship. And our children, most of them have been displaced, we too have been displaced... we bought our own property, for the last four or five months we've

[37] Leonie Sandercock and Maged Senbel, 'Spirituality, Urban Life and the Urban Professions', in *Postsecular Cities: Space, Theory and Practice*, ed. Justin Beaumont and Christopher Baker (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 87.
[38] Rogers, *Being Built Together*, p. 87.

> been running about all over the place, we haven't got anywhere to worship as far as today's concerned, we are still roaming, all of us and most of our congregation anyway they've gone, and we've lost the money we paid on that property, the property is still locked up there, we're still away.

This emotional appeal was indicative of many stories told by pastors that included sharp practice by agents and landlords, queues of churches waiting for vacant premises to become available, the cost incurred by planning applications and concomitant loss of money when permission was withheld.[39] Pastors perceived premises owners to not want churches because:

> 'they fear neighbours will be disturbed' (Pastor Wale);
> 'it's a community thing and they don't just want to give it to a church… they want to give it people to use it for community basis' (Pastor Ezekiel);
> 'a lot of defaulting on rents' (Pastor Solomon);
> 'the landlord say they don't want us anymore when they see the crowd… even more than their own congregation… thinking we want to take over their place' (Rev Jeremiah)

Being homeless, in rented and adapted places of worship, prompted pastors to speak of the constraints this brings. Pastor Yomi wanted more space to 'make the church of God more convenient for people, because we are limiting our growth'. Pastor Yaya missed 'having a stable place where we can easily interact with the community' so they can 'have impact on the community, on the youth' with a view to 'most especially, bringing them to Christ'. According to Pastor Solomon, the nomadic existence of many nBMCs can lead to being 'trapped in a dangerous dynamic', since 'the more you move the more ethnic you remain'. When a congregation finally 'settles down' and seeks to 'be more relevant to the local population' it is difficult to overcome that history.

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[39] Rogers, *Being Built Together*, p. 87. Not all nBMCs were or had been in this situation, but at least half had in our sample, which was skewed towards ownership.

Pastor Michael told of how his congregation started in 1985 in Lewisham, and 'then moved over to above the High Street and then from there we spent four months in the Canon Cinema, Shaftesbury Avenue, and Piccadilly Circus'. He spoke of the difficulty of 'moving from place to place', but commented 'we were renting those places, but this is where we call our home'. Pastor Victoria also described how her church had 'moved from place to place within south London':

> We started actually in Peckham and then we met in different places in Peckham... just in the community hall, and then the primary school in Peckham… and then we met at the East Dulwich baths for quite a few years and then eventually we even had a building in Bermondsey and then it didn't work out because the guy who was our agent was false and so we actually lost a lot of money…

Speaking of this loss, Victoria commented:

> …it was such a big hit to the congregation and so you don't even want to say much about "Let's find another building" because we haven't recovered from this one... eventually, when the time is right, when the people are recovered and feel they can cope with it, yeah, because they also realise that, that we've always felt that you need a home and because we are that kind of congregation, we enjoy fellowship, we cook and we eat together, we're like a family, so to have a space where we come together and "this is ours" is always the final goal…

Pastor Victoria highlights not just the search for a congregational home amongst nBMCs, but also how their places of worship were *understood* as home. The majority of nBMC leaders and a substantial proportion of their congregants were first generation migrants, and this had particular significance for understandings of home. Pastors often spoke of 'back home', which defaulted to Africa, suggesting that nBMC places functioned as a 'home away from home',[40] as Bishop Eaaron explained:

[40] Afe Adogame, 'The Quest for Space in the Global Spiritual Marketplace: African Religions in Europe', *International Review of Mission* 89, no. 354, (2000), pp. 400-09, at p. 407, 10.1111/j.1758-6631.2000.tb00221.x.

> People understand themselves, so somebody from Ghana sees the church as, oh, this is from my home. So she or he feels comfortable… And also language plays a role. After the service is over you can get somebody to talk to, somebody to relate to, especially those who are not elite or who have not been to school, you know, they have trouble and they can speak to [someone]…

The congregational home had resonance with the family home (where many of the churches had started), in that it was a place where you were understood and comfortable. Congregants 'just feel at home' partly due to its similarity to 'back home', particularly the style of worship that is 'part of us' (Pastors Leonard, Yomi and Bernard). nBMC places may also offer rudimentary health checks for those without 'immigration papers' (and so no GP) and a support network for those seeking jobs, facing bereavement or those simply struggling to get by financially (Pastors Luke and Kwabena). These 'safe haven' features of home added to its importance for these predominantly first generation migrant churches, some of whom described themselves as having been in 'survival mode' (e.g. Pastor Solomon).

The most explicitly theological aspect of the nBMC narratives was the widespread conviction that God had provided their home in a miraculous way. Given the complexities of the struggle to obtain premises told above, this is perhaps not a surprising theme. Some pastors were more definitive about this, such as Bishop Matthew who said:

> …it's relatively easy because the grace of God was there, like this place we have I believe is divine, the divine providence of God. I didn't even know about this place, I was in prayer with the church one day and the Lord spoke to me that he has given me a place…

For Pastor Benjamin, he saw the building in a dream (not an uncommon form of guidance in nBMCs) and recalls telling the congregation 'let's go to the appeal, I believe God has given us this place'. Reflecting on the premises problem, Pastor Luke observed of nBMCs:

> …they must make sure that number one you are called by God, because some of these churches haven't been called… if you're called by God, somehow God will make a way

Solomon slightly more tentatively observed that, given the competition for space, 'when you find a building you have to find God quickly and act quick'. His church 'had to pray like crazy… but I think God led our footsteps in ways'. Pastor Ezekiel commented 'it's been a miracle because… we tried many times, we couldn't find a place… it was very hard', but 'it was an answer to our prayers' since 'God came in at the right time'.

These narratives clustered around the theme of finding a congregational home as espoused by the nBMC leaders interviewed. They reflect what pastors felt was important to say about their places. It is notable that they are theologically quite implicit, in that they make little reference to Christian beliefs and sources, with the main exception being God's guidance and action in securing a home (viewed retrospectively). This exception suggests the difficulty of hearing lived theology, in its Esther-like absence of Christian language about place, yet with the apparent assumption of God permeating it all. There was implicit theological expression through nBMCs taking the premises that were available and so necessarily being highly gathered congregations; through constraints on community engagement and the nature of community; and through concerns about congregational diversity beyond African ethnicity. I am not evaluating the truth claims of these narratives here, but rather interested in how lived theologies emerge from the interaction of these narratives, analysed through de Certeau in the next section.

Strategies and tactics for finding a home

The interplay of strategy and tactics in this section particularly brings out the significance of nBMC practices and materiality or the operant voice for their lived theologies. Lily Kong has also used de Certeau to understand religious practices in Singapore, understood as tactics of adaptation, negotiation and resistance, a framework that I utilise here.[41]

As the first tier legal authority for urban planning in the borough, the LPA operates with strategic power over borough places and their uses. Such strategy is backed up by legislation and captured in policy documents cascading from national to regional to local level. The exercise of this power was sometimes portrayed by its LPA representatives as an objective 'application' of policy, but research over the past few decades has demonstrated that urban planning is a significantly interpretative exercise in relation to changing religious demographics and landscapes in urban centres.[42]

As discussed, de Certeau conceives of tactics as quasi-invisible, below the surface of the urban text, fragmentary and resistant in the sense of a consumption that repurposes rather than overthrows strategic production of space. Such a description resonates with nBMC discourses, practices and places as indicated in the narratives above, and developed further here, as nBMCs struggled to find narrative and physical space in Southwark. Tactics were their making do with the situation they were in.

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[41] Lily Kong, 'Religious Processions: Urban Politics and Poetics', *Temenos* 41, no. 2, (2005), pp. 225-49, 10.1355/9789812307552-022

[42] E.g. Richard Gale, 'Locating religion in urban planning: beyond "race" and ethnicity?', *Planning Practice and Research* 23, no. 1, (2008), pp. 19-39, at p. 36, 10.1080/02697450802076415.

The most visible evidence of nBMC tactics was in their adaptation of spaces to become places of worship. As has been heard, such tactics were necessary due to the scarcity of suitable premises, the constraints of planning regulations, and the associated costs of compliance. Consequently, nBMCs were located in a wide range of premises with varying degrees of suitability, including shop fronts, factories, warehouses, railway arches, businesses, industrial units, community centres and shared / reused church buildings. English planning policy and practice has been slow to adjust to the needs of diaspora faith groups,[43] hence nBMCs have responded tactically by repurposing the space that is available, often making creative use of the 'unsuitable' (see **Figures 1 and 2**).[44] Such a bricolage of the built environment is not well captured by the LPA Local Plan – a point well melodramatized by de Certeau's meditation from the tower.

[**Figure 1 – Signboard listing nBMCs in an industrial park**]

[**Figure 2 – Restoration Chapel International in a railway arch**]

[**Figure 3 – Near invisible nBMC**]

nBMC quasi-invisibility was evident in its contradictions.[45] At the street level, some nBMCs were nearly invisible in their repurposed premises, with few if any signs to mark their presence as a church (see **Figure 3**). There were also particular concentrations of nBMCs in out of the way industrial estate units. For some nBMCs, these were tactics to avoid attention from the planning authorities and others,[46] given nBMC concerns about the legality of their adapted premises. At the same time, there is evidence that local planning authorities are sometimes complicit in the

[43] See Rogers and Gale, *Faith Groups and the Planning System*.

[44] See Tate Modern, 'Tate Modern and You: Sunday Service', (2014), http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/tate-modern-and-you-sunday-service.

[45] cf. David Garbin, 'The Visibility and Invisibility of Migrant Faith in the City: Diaspora Religion and the Politics of Emplacement of Afro-Christian churches', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39, no. 5, (2013), pp. 677-96, 10.1080/1369183X.2013.756658.

[46] John Eade, 'Order and Change in the City', *Material Religion* 9, no. 1, (2013), pp. 118-19, 10.2752/175183413X13535214684456.

invisibility of diaspora faith groups through a hide and displace strategy.[47] Alongside this tactical and strategic invisibility was a more confident visibility on the part of longer established nBMCs with striking signs, banners and names that countered narratives of exclusion (see **Figures 4 and 5**).[48]

[**Figure 4 – Highly visible nBMC on the Old Kent Road]**

[Figure 5 – nBMC signboard]

nBMCs engaged in many other tactic-like practices in order to secure a home. Due to lack of time, finance or familiarity with the English planning system, nBMCs often took on premises that were 'unauthorised' for religious use. This would then eventually lead to an LPA enforcement notice to cease using the building, or instead to negotiating retrospective planning permission through multiple applications and appeals, which caused some friction with local communities. Corresponding strategic actions from the LPA included placing conditions on nBMC places, such as hours of use, type of instruments and amplification, sound-proofing, green transport plans, access to facilities for the local community and sometimes granting planning permission for a temporary period of time only. Breaching of these conditions was not uncommon, particularly around noise, and was an example of outright resistance tactics to LPA strategies.

Community engagement was a further tactic-like practice of nBMCs in some instances. Many nBMCs constituted themselves as charities and in England this requires demonstration of public benefit. Community engagement was also advantageous for planning applications, not least because neighbourhood consultation responses are sought as part of the process.[49] The LPA and

[47] If extrapolated to nBMCs, so Ceri Peach and Richard Gale, 'Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs in the New Religious Landscape of England', *Geographical Review* 93, no. 4, (2003), pp. 469-90, 10.1111/j.1931-0846.2003.tb00043.x.
[48] Due to limitations of space, I will consider nBMC iconography elsewhere.
[49] Community engagement activities were also sometimes mentioned in planning permission documents as conditions or justifications for permission.

nBMC notions of community were at odds with one another, however, since planning authorities favour a geographical notion of community whereas nBMCs, often from necessity, operate with a highly networked and dispersed understanding. As a result, a number of nBMCs developed or emphasised their local community engagement activities, despite the constraints they noted.

Employing the necessary fantastical hermeneutic described earlier, the narratives and analysis demonstrate that both strategy and tactics can be oppressive to other parties, whether the LPA, nBMCs, historic churches or local communities. As Ward points out, not all lived theologies are good.[50] Furthermore, strategy and tactics were not straightforwardly associated with the LPA and nBMCs respectively, albeit this was true more often than not. Nevertheless, nBMCs were not without agency and sometimes were able to be strategic about their places, particularly when they owned their own premises. A number of pastors referenced strategies around being a 'good neighbour' and wanting to 'live in peace', often involving restricting noise levels, although these did not explicitly reference the Christian tradition. A few nBMCs invited senior political figures to their services, possibly with a view to establishing soft political influence. Curiously, there were also quasi-tactical actions within the LPA by sympathetic planning officers seeking to improve the LPA offer to faith groups. For example, some officers engaged in an 'under the radar' mini-brokerage operation by letting nBMC leaders know of suitable premises that had become available.

Viewing these narratives through the lens of strategy and tactics shows how their interplay shaped nBMC theologies of place. Strategic conditions and incentives and their corresponding tactics influenced nBMC discourse, practices and materiality on a range of matters. As a tactical response to limited premises availability and low change of use permission rates, nBMC visibility was low in many cases, lacking material presence or location in a local community. This impacts nBMC lived ecclesiology, but this visibility was contradictory as well, so signboards may also be read as

[50] Ward, *Introducing*, p. 66.

a tactical expression of nBMC theological priorities (e.g. transnational ecclesiology, success / prosperity),[51] often in contrast to their built environment (see **Figures 3 and 5**). Invisibility combines with the pastor narratives around the difficulty of community engagement, but is in tension with the strategic incentives to engage with local communities, thus shaping a lived missiology. In addition, conditions restricted Pentecostal style amplified sung worship in terms of volume and duration and the requirement for transport plans nudges towards a lived environmental theology. Although the influence on lived theology was mostly one-way from the LPA, nBMCs' tactics (and sometimes strategies) *en masse* led to greater sensitivity within the LPA in their implementation of planning policy for diaspora faith groups[52] – a check on the secular 'theologies' of place expressed in the LPA vision for Southwark. The interplay of strategy and tactics then was a production-consumption that created partially shared public theologies of place touching on at least ecclesiology and missiology. This sharing has been understood as 'crossover narratives' in the language of post-secular discourse,[53] while Kong names it as the 'politics of hybridisation and in-betweenness',[54] but I suggest neither exhausts the lived theology dynamic in understanding urban religion.

Reflections on Lived Theologies of Place

Lived theologies of place have been understood through narratives about nBMC places and the interaction of strategies and tactics embedded in those narratives. The focus of the narratives was about nBMCs finding a home, which included making a home, what nBMCs considered such a

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[51] For example, out of 252 nBMC names in the database, 47 used the term 'international', so Rogers, *Being Built Together*, p. 43.

[52] In addition to examples already given, Southwark's *Guide for Faith Premises* was produced at the time of this case study and offered a designated planning officer contact for faith groups for answering questions about planning applications. Special project officers at the time also developed a particularly good knowledge of nBMC ecclesiology and premises needs.

[53] Paul Cloke, 'Crossover: Working Across Religious and Secular Boundaries', in *Mission in Marginal Places: The Theory*, ed. Paul Cloke and Mike Pears (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2016), p. 149f.

[54] Lily Kong, 'In Search of Permanent Homes: Singapore's House Churches and the Politics of Space', *Urban Studies* 39, no. 9, (2002), pp. 1573-86, at p. 1584, 10.1080/00420980220151664.

home to be, and how the nBMC search for homes was contested by others. Finding a home expresses a theology of place, whether (largely implicitly) in the narratives themselves or in their contestation as seen in the interplay of strategy and tactics, interpreted here as producing public theologies of place. This is not theology as expressed in the academic forms of conference paper, journal article or research monograph, but rather it is an everyday form of theological expression about place.[55] Theologies of place characterised in this way usefully stretch categories such as ordinary theology[56] to lived theology, since the theologies of place encountered do not emerge by hearing alone, but are mediated through narratives that include mostly implicit God-talk, accounts of practice and the materiality of place. In particular the material has its own voice that needs to be recognised and interpreted with an appropriate hermeneutics of place.

The temptation for those studying lived theology is to distil academic theological expression from the lived.[57] This, however, would not be taking lived theology seriously enough. De Certeau's focus on walking, understood more metaphorically, emphasises that the lived is difficult to map out in conceptual space from above, since the panoptic view freezes time and so collapses narratives. 'Walking' captures the experiential and narrative nature of the lived, where theology is expressed through the connections and constraints of context experienced through time. It also has its own modes of expression through everyday 'modalities' where walking 'affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc. the trajectories it speaks',[58] as has been seen in the case study. It is this 'certain strangeness' of lived theology to academic forms of theology that problematizes attempts at distillation. Having said that, I do not see the two as incommensurate as a reading of de Certeau might imply.[59] Ecclesiological and missiological themes have been identified as both embedded in

[55] cf. Peter Ward and Sarah Dunlop, 'Practical Theology and the Ordinary: Visual Research among Migrant Polish Catholic Young People', *Practical Theology*, 4, no. 3, (2011), pp. 311-13, 10.1558/prth.v4i3.295.
[56] The reflective God-talk of Christians who have received little or no formal theological education, see Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 56.
[57] cf. Ward and Dunlop, 'Ordinary', pp. 308-9.
[58] de Certeau, *Everyday*, I, p. 99.
[59] And might cast doubt on the enterprise of theological education.

and emerging from narratives of finding a home. 'Home' itself can also easily be God-talk,[60] albeit here it was limited to God's provision of a home. It is not my intention here to elaborate these themes further, but rather to contend that the academic study of lived theology needs to recognise this (mutual) strangeness, through a hermeneutic that appreciates the particular form and modalities of lived theological expression. Part of this mutually critical conversation is understanding how lived theology enfolds other forms of theology into itself. In de Certeau's terms, this is the making do with or bricolage of fragments from the broader tradition and academic forms of theology.

De Certeau, understood more literally, offers additional insight into lived theologies of place through considering their modalities. The analysis of strategy and tactics in relation to nBMC places opens up the significance of power relations for understanding place in lived theology, particularly the bricolage modality of tactics and how these shaped theologies of place. This case study indicates that lived theology is indeed sometimes oppositional and shaped by steep power gradients between actors. Strategy and tactics were not always straightforwardly oppositional, however, given the varied examples of adaptation, negotiation and resistance in the lived theologies of place considered. De Certeau is indeed a fantastic(al) conversation partner, aiding our understanding of how place draws out the power dynamic in lived theology, as well as highlighting the importance of place for the ongoing study of lived theologies.

[60] Jaisy A. Joseph, 'The Decentered Vision of Diaspora Space: Theological Ethnography, Migration, and the Pilgrim Church', *Practical Matters* 11, (2018), pp. 88-102, at p. 98.