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Editorial:

Christianity and Multiple Identities

Multiple identities are a standard feature of human culture and society. Everyone possesses what French sociologist Bernard Lahire has called an internal plurality (2011). As Lahire sees it, individuals are '… the bearer[s] of heterogeneous habits, schemes, or dispositions which may be contrary or even contradictory to one another' (2003: 344). Relatedly, in their comprehensive work on identity theory, Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets have argued that, 'We take on many identities over the course of a lifetime, and at any point in time we have many identities that could be activated' (2009: 131). In other words, everyone's internal plurality includes multiple identities that can be activated for diverse purposes.

Within studies of World Christianity, an approach to identity construction and negotiation that foregrounds multiple identities has been gaining momentum in recent years. Some of this research has focused primarily on Christians with multiple religious identities. The most insightful work in this regard has combined a social scientific approach with theological reflection, as seen in work from Catherine Cornille (2002), Peter C. Phan (2004), Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and Joseph Prabhakar Dayam (2016), and André van der Braak and Manuela Kalsky (2017). In other research, the attention has been on how Christians construct and negotiate non-religious identities. For instance, in work on the Middle East, scholars such as Andrea Pacini (1998), Sidney H. Griffith (2008), and Kail C. Ellis (2018) vividly illustrate how Christians in the Middle East have negotiated a range of competing ethnic, national, and cultural identities. Similarly, research on religion in Africa from J.D.Y. Peel (2015), Marloes Janson and Birgit Meyer (2016), and Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (2018), among others, has advanced our understanding of the interdependence and fluidity of various cultural and social identities in multireligious settings. In line with this forward momentum, this special issue of *Studies in World Christianity* examines the topic of Christianity and multiple identities from diverse methodological approaches, conceptual lenses, and geographic locations.

In the first essay, 'Chrislam, Accommodation, and the Politics of Religious *Bricolage* in Nigeria', Corey Williams provides an ethnographic exploration of a new religious movement in Nigeria that often goes by the name 'Chrislam'. With a particular focus on the Ogbomoso Society of Chrislam, the article documents the group's origins and practices, as well as its public reception. Core to their understanding is what they call 'a spirit of accommodation', which provides a divine directive to exceed mere tolerance or coexistence and combine multiple religions under one roof. Despite the group's intention to promote peace and unity, and act as a counterpoint to violent movements such as Boko Haram, the Ogbomoso Society of Chrislam finds itself at the centre of an on-going debate about the politics of religious *bricolage* and the resulting cultural limits of acceptable forms of religious entanglements.

Deanna Womack, in her essay 'Syrian Christians and Arab-Islamic Identity: Expressions of Belonging in the Ottoman Empire and America', examines how late nineteenth century Arab Christians from Ottoman Syria (present day Syria and Lebanon) navigated and understood religious, cultural, and national belonging as immigrants in the US. Womack utilises publications from the Arab renaissance in Beirut and early American newspapers in New York to explore the Syrian Colony in New York City where the first significant Syrian-American community settled. She examines their sense of belonging to the Islamic world and uses Edward Said's notion of *contrapuntal* to nuance how Syrian Christian expressions of Arab-Islamic identity emerged and offered a new way to bridge religious, cultural, and national boundaries.

In the third essay of this special issue, 'Buddhist-Christians in Cambodian America', Briana Wong examines the blurry lines of 'Cambodian' and 'American' identities among Cambodian refugees and their American-born children in the contemporary US. Wong contends that affiliation with multiple religious traditions is typical in Cambodia, where Buddhism, Hinduism, Chinese religions, and indigenous Cambodian religions fuse together in daily religious practice. She demonstrates how some Cambodian-Americans who have become Christian also simultaneously maintain their identity as Buddhists. Wong contextualises this phenomenon by documenting how these Cambodian-American Christians long to keep their Khmer cultural identity, which inevitably involves engaging in religious activity at Buddhist temples.

Raimundo C. Barreto, Jr., in his essay 'Brazil's Black Christianity and the Counterhegemonic Production of Knowledge in World Christianity', examines how since the 1990s Brazil's Africanness has emerged as an important reservoir for personal and public belonging and identity. Barreto highlights the often-overlooked agency of Afro-Brazilians who have not only provided resistance to colonialism and neo-colonialism, but who have also contributed positively to Brazilian culture, knowledge, identity, and public policy. Of particular importance for this article, is the syncretistic influence of Afro-Brazilian religions and spirituality on Brazilian

Christianity, and how this influence has contributed to the production of counter-hegemonic forms of knowledge and knowing. Ultimately, Barreto argues that by taking such Afro-Brazilian contributions seriously and drawing upon frameworks of understanding such as decolonial theology and epistemic disobedience, there are many possibilities for healing interfaith and intercultural relations in the region.

In the final essay of this special issue, '"The River Between": Negotiating Dual Identities in the Anglican Churches of Kenya', Kenneth Ofula examines the ongoing negotiation and contestation between being an *African Christian* or a *Christian African*. By combining historical and empirical research, Ofula focuses on the relationship between *Irua* (an indigenous puberty rite of passage) and the confirmation practices of three Metropolitan Anglican Cathedrals in Nairobi, Kenya. Alluding to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's notion of 'The River Between', he concludes that a Christianisation of *Irua* acts as a conciliatory agent for negotiating dual identities.

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