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De-centring pilgrimage studies: understanding neo-Pentecostal journeys and pilgrimage in Africa

Dominic Pasura ⓘD

ABSTRACT

This article aims to de-centre the taken-for-granted categories and empirical tendencies in the field of pilgrimage studies by discussing how the phenomenon of neo-Pentecostal journeys and pilgrimage emerges in Africa. Pentecostal Christianity's rapid growth and development in Africa are now well-known and researched; however, some distinctive patterns of transnational religious circulation and mobilities have so far escaped academic attention. Over the last decade, West Africa has emerged as a Pentecostal spiritual centre for religious pilgrimage, a space where 'godfathers' mentor young, mainly male, aspiring prophets from across Africa to perform 'extraordinary miracles'. It is also a space where politicians, diasporas, and ordinary believers flock for spiritual rebirth and release from the burden of poverty and the quest for healing and prophecy. This article highlights that the neo-Pentecostal journeys and pilgrimage are grounded in indigenous religious worldviews, Pan-African connections, and Africans' agency, on a continent shaped by violent and exploitative structures and experiences of enslavement, colonialism, and neoliberal capitalism.

Introduction

On 12 September 2014, the multi-storey guesthouse of Temitope Balogun Joshua's (known as T. B. Joshua) "Synagogue Church of All Nations" (SCOAN) collapsed in Lagos, Nigeria, killing 115 pilgrims, of whom 84 were from South Africa, 7 from Nigeria, 3 from Zimbabwe, and 1 from the Democratic Republic of Congo (BBC 2014a, 2014b). Sixteen people were critically wounded, but over 130 people survived, including 10 pilgrims from Botswana (Mmegi 2014). Media reports suggested that some 350 South Africans were visiting the church at the time of the tragedy. Many conspiracy theories emerged explaining what caused the guesthouse to collapse, with T. B. Joshua claiming that a small plane had circled over the building before

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it collapsed, which showed that it was an attempt on his life (BBC 2014a). However, a coroner's inquest into what caused the collapse concluded that "the church was culpable because of criminal negligence resulting in the death of the victims" (Mail & Guardian Online Reporter 2015).

The story of human tragedy, which was reported in international media because of its geopolitical significance, provides a window to explore the phenomenon of neo-Pentecostal journeys and pilgrimage from Southern Africa to West Africa, particularly Nigeria and Ghana. Established in the 1990s, SCOAN runs a global Christian television station, Emmanuel TV, from Johannesburg, South Africa. Its leader T. B. Joshua, referred to by his followers as "The Prophet" or "The Man of God", is one of Nigeria's best-known evangelists (BBC 2014a); his popularity for performing miracles, healing, and predicting the future has spread across Africa and its diaspora. SCOAN claims that six out of every ten visitors to Nigeria come to T. B. Joshua's church for miracles, prophecies, and miracle water and oils, which attract 50,000 worshippers weekly (Vanguard 2014). For this article, the critical issue is not whether the miracles performed by T. B. Joshua and other 'prophets' are true or false but the meanings attached to them by believers and the question why neo-Pentecostal journeys have occupied such a place in many Africans' lives.

Pentecostal Christianity's rapid growth and development in Africa are now well known and researched; however, very little has been published on neo-Pentecostal journeys as pilgrimages. Developed over more than a century, African Pentecostalism has become the dominant form of Christianity on the continent (Kalu 2008; Maxwell 2006; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001). There has been a tendency in the literature to concentrate on Pentecostals' religious experiences in West Africa (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Meyer 1998), except for David Maxwell's work in Zimbabwe (Maxwell 2006, 1998). Neo-Pentecostalism emerged in Africa during the structural adjustment period of the 1980s. Some have identified neo-Pentecostalism's key features as the baptism of the Holy Spirit expressed through glossolalia, flexible interpretation of the Bible, the doctrine of prosperity, and a deliverance theology (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001, 1).

The article is structured as follows. To understand neo-Pentecostal journeys and mobilities in Africa, which participants describe as pilgrimages, the article begins with an overview of pilgrimage studies. It then identifies its dominant empirical and analytic tendencies in order to de-centre taken-for-granted assumptions about religion and pilgrimage. Then it examines selected case studies in Southern Africa to show the rise of neo-Pentecostal journeys and pilgrimage. The article concludes with a discussion of neo-Pentecostal mobilities' entanglement with indigenous African religions, which highlight the intersections and interdependencies among religions and religiosities on the continent. The article draws on the author's work on religious

transnationalism (Pasura 2012, 2014; Pasura and Erdal 2016) and other scholars' work to make its case. It also draws on an analysis of data gathered from secondary literature, newspaper articles, and media coverage.

De-centring pilgrimage studies: towards understanding religion and neo-Pentecostal journeys in Africa

The two influential theoretical frameworks within pilgrimage studies are Victor Turner and Edith Turner's (1978) depiction of anti-structure and *communitas*, which, it can be argued, overemphasise pilgrimage's unifying functions. Simon Coleman describes *communitas* as "the individual pilgrim's temporary transition away from mundane structures and social interdependence into a looser commonality of feeling with fellow visitors" (Coleman 2002, 356). John Eade and Michael Sallnow (1991) consider pilgrimage as contested, embodying competing for social, cultural, and religious elements and intensifying the forces of conflict. The mobility and the spatial turn have also enriched the pilgrimage debate and the discussion of the semantic meaning of the dichotomous terms 'pilgrim' and 'tourist' (Eade 2014, 25).

Pilgrimage studies debates are often framed through the binary pairs of pilgrimage/tourism and pilgrim/tourist to demonstrate the different and sometimes overlapping experiences of the journey at sacred and secular sites (Zwissler 2011, 331; Reader 2014). Some pilgrimage scholars have sought to destabilise the dichotomies of sacred/secular and pilgrim/tourist, for instance, by seeking to go beyond institutional, bounded, and fixed forms of routes and worship to more informal forms of devotion (Eade 2016). Also, the term 'religious tourism' has been used, coined to capture the blurring of boundaries between a tourist and a pilgrim (Zwissler 2011, 332). These debates are informed and underpinned by Western modernity, which presupposes 'the secular' as differentiated from 'the religious'. Hence, the extent to which pilgrimage is entangled with or disentangled from the economy has been a central focus of pilgrimage studies which reflect dominant assumptions about religion and where religion and religious life should stay—in the private sphere.

Pilgrimage studies have also analysed pilgrimage destinations and sites, the revival and reinvention of routes to sacred sites by organised religious institutions, spiritual groups, and secular groups (Eade 2020, 1). Alongside this, this field of study has paid attention to the way religious practitioners and pilgrims perform pilgrimage rituals. Focusing on two contrasting destinations, the Catholic shrine of Lourdes, France, and the pre-Christian shrine of Avebury, England, Eade explores how "rituals have been invented and adapted over time in the context of pilgrimage to different types of sacred sites", in order to illustrate "the role of institutions and entrepreneurs in creating rituals and sacred places" and to show "the relationship between people and the domesticated landscape" (2020, 9).

It can be argued that pilgrimage studies is underpinned by modernist assumptions of an autonomous, rational, and self-transparent subject who seeks to distance the self from forms of collective belonging and solidarity. By contrast, African cultures are based on *ubuntu/unhu* moral philosophy, which locates the morality of actions within a group and a community (Mangena 2012, 10). Relationality is at the core of indigenous African religions, be it with other human beings and the dead (the living dead) or with the environment or with the land or with the Supreme Being (God) (Mangena 2012; Taringa 2006, 191). As Terence Ranger explains, "instead of 'monumental sanctuaries', African holy places are located at extraordinary natural phenomena. Instead of being occasions for individual journeying and supplication, African pilgrimages are a "ritualization of collective life" (Ranger 1987, 165). Although individuals make journeys to pilgrimage shrines and sites, African rituals are not wholly detached from life's communal orientation and significance.

Gerrie ter Haar (1998) points out that Africa's religious developments are often read through a Western lens, which gives rise to misrepresentations and overlooks significant undercurrents. I appropriate Jacob Olupona's characterisation of contemporary African religion as "a product of globalization, for it is less a single tradition than a sociological context in which the elements of a variety of indigenous religious experiences are combined with Islam and Christianity" (Olupona 2009, 528). Nevertheless, for most Western scholars, 'religion' means 'Christianity'' and, more specifically, a narrow range of Protestant forms, while other religions in the global South are seen as either inferior, primitive or elementary religious forms (Vasquez 2012, 31). Within this scholarship, there is a tendency to privilege religious 'belief' over religious practices, formalised religion over lived religion. It is problematic to export theories and categories of thought developed out of the European context, dominated by Christian thought and religion, to analyse religions in other national or regional contexts.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, 58) reminds us that "indigenous languages, knowledges and cultures have been silenced or misrepresented, ridiculed or condemned in academic and popular discourses" (Smith 2012, 58). John Mbiti, a renowned African philosopher, describes indigenous African religions thus:

> Because traditional religions permeate all departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. (Mbiti 1990, 2)

The same point is echoed by Ezra Chitando, a contemporary African religion scholar; he explains:

> Religion is inextricably intertwined with daily activities (holism), there is no sacred/profane dichotomy and one is not converted to ATRs [African Traditional Religions]: one is actually born into the religion. (Chitando 2018, 17)

It can be argued that finding religion everywhere is an exaggerated characterisation by some African scholars responding to 'armchair' anthropological literature that depicted Africans as a people without religion, the 'primitive pagans'. Therefore, while being attentive to the influence of both the British and the French colonial regimes and projects in shaping the category of religion in Africa to control the powerless (Masuzawa 2005), it is imperative to destabilise the colonial, historical, and ideological templates of what is religion, where to find it, and which perspective informs the analyses. While the European colonisation of the continent imposed arbitrary and artificial borders, African societies are characterised by mobility, flexible boundaries, overlapping networks, and hybrid ethnic groupings.

This article seeks to re-centre alternative sets of knowledge about religion and religious mobilities in Africa, which have been neglected and silenced. This echoes what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls "the sociology of absences", that is, "realities that are 'surprising' because they are new or have been ignored or made invisible, that is, deemed nonexistent by the Eurocentric critical tradition" (de Sousa Santos 2015, 44). Smith argues that

> indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory. Any consideration of the ways our origins have been examined, our histories recounted, our arts analysed, our cultures dissected, measured, torn apart and distorted back to us will suggest that theories have not looked sympathetically or ethically at us. (Smith 2012, 86)

This article argues that, without theoretical reframing, pilgrimage in Africa will remain side-lined from the field's core debates. The previous scholarly neglect of pilgrimage in Africa is due to the conceptual frames brought to these debates; hence what is needed is not only an addition to the empirical range of problems that should be addressed but also a conceptual reorientation of pilgrimage studies. Shifting the frame through which we theorise and understand pilgrimage allows us to consider *the question of African agency*, relegated to the margins, and the tools and frames used to represent pilgrimage in Africa. For an in-depth and holistic understanding of pilgrimage in Africa, it must be historically informed and pay attention to the way the phenomenon is grounded in indigenous religious worldviews. It is also essential to be attentive to the historical role of slavery and colonialism as well as Western concepts such as modernity and globalisation and how they shape conceptions of Africa as the 'other', not only its peoples, religions, and cultural practices but also its sacred shrines and religious functionaries.

Pilgrimage and neo-Pentecostal journeys in Africa

There is very little published material on pilgrimage in Africa, either on African traditional religion or Christianity, except for West African Islamic pilgrimage

to Mecca (Lecocq 2012; O'Brien 1999), Sudan (Yamba 1995), and diasporas (Rosander 2004). Examining Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, Baz Lecocq observes that the

> West African Sahel is a region with a long history of Islamic presence and a long-standing pilgrimage tradition. Up until today, the region furnishes the largest number of African pilgrims to Mecca despite its geographical distance. (Lecocq 2012, 190)

Christian Yamba (1995) describes how most West African Muslims to Mecca became "permanent pilgrims" in Sudan as few ever moved to Mecca or returned to their countries of origin.

Res Tanner (2003, 128–131) suggests a typology of five forms of pilgrimage in sub-Saharan Africa: individuals who gain a reputation outside their communities for providing solutions to people's personal problems (the focus of this article), sacred places and objects, cult centres, religious foci staffed by professional impersonal intermediaries, institutionalised religious foci with no human intermediaries. Pilgrimages to sacred shrines and cult centres are a long-standing feature of indigenous religions in Africa. The Matopos shrines (also known as the Mwari shrines) in Zimbabwe, studied by anthropologists, historians, and missionaries, constitute a site of multiple narratives of culture and nature, which is linked to the deep past and a dynamic present. The shrines have been a centre for pilgrimage from far outside Zimbabwe's borders, including countries such as Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, and South Africa (Schoffeleers 1999, 420; Ranger 1999). We know the Mwari shrines and the Mbona shrines of southern Malawi for their inclusivity and democratic governance in contrast to ancestral and political cults, emphasising power and hierarchical divisions (Schoffeleers 1999, 420).

As white colonial settlers appropriated vast tracks of land to themselves, the boundaries of their farms cut Africans off from many of their holy places or severed their pilgrimage routes (Ranger 1987; Coplan 2003, 980). David Coplan's (2003) work on popular religious pilgrimage along the South Africa–Lesotho border shows how African pilgrims have re-occupied some highland caves and their environs because they consider them as "sacred to the ancestors". He explains that "pilgrims to the sacred caves practise every form of African religion from pre-Christian Basotho ritual and medicine to independent Apostolic to established mission church Christianity" (Coplan 2003, 978). In Shirley Du Plooy's multi-sited ethnographic study of pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the eastern Free State province, South Africa, the predominantly Sesotho-speaking pilgrims described their motives for pilgrimages as "to search for and solidify ancestor connections, and to secure blessings" and for "the healing implications of these pilgrimages" (Du Plooy's 2016, iii).

This article focuses on neo-Pentecostal mobilities to West Africa as pilgrimages, a term acknowledged and used by believers. West Africa has emerged as a Pentecostal spiritual centre for religious pilgrimage, a space where so-called 'godfathers' mentor young male aspiring prophets from across Africa to perform 'extraordinary miracles'.[1] West African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana find themselves at the heart of neo-Pentecostal religious pilgrimage on the continent, where pilgrims flock for economic, physical, and spiritual deliverance provided by spiritual godfathers. It is also a space where politicians, diasporas, and ordinary believers flock for spiritual rebirth and release from the burden of poverty and the quest for healing and prophecy. West Africa is also important for African American tourists, who visit the Elmina slave castles in Ghana, an important place of departure for their ancestors forcibly taken from their homeland to the United States as slaves (Ebron 1999; Reed 2015). Ann Reed (2015) draws attention to pilgrimage tourism by members of the African diaspora, noting how diasporic groups long for heritage sites in their homelands, which signifies the remembrance of slavery, trauma, identification, and redemption. Similarly, Katharina Schramm (2010) explores the blurred relationship between tourism, pilgrimage, and homecoming events among African Americans in Africa, especially Ghana.

Pentecostalism's history on the African continent shows remarkable growth and expansion and Zimbabwe has not been spared. A new class of young male prophets has emerged, claiming to be mentored by West African godfathers in Nigeria and Ghana with the purported power to make accurate predictions, perform miracles, and exercise extraordinary spiritual healing powers. Emmanuel Makandiwa of the "United Family International Church", Walter Magaya of "Prophetic, Healing and Deliverance Ministry", and Eubert Angel of the "Spirit Embassy Church" have 'spiritual fathers' from West African nations (Mutingwende 2014). Makandiwa and Angel claim that Victor Kusi Boateng of Ghana is their spiritual father. Magaya claims T. B. Joshua of the Synagogue Church of all Nations as his godfather. As Chitando, Masiiwa Ragies Gunda, and Joachim Kügler (2013) put it, Zimbabwe has been gripped by a "prophetic craze" characterised by the emergence of several young Pentecostal church founders who preach prosperity and perform various miracles. "Operating predominantly from urban centres (especially Harare, the capital) and having Pan-African connections ('spiritual fathers' from West Africa), these young prophets transformed the religious landscape in a fundamental way" (Chitando, Ragies Gunda, and Kügler 2013, 9). Similarly, Zorodzai Dube gives the examples of

> Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa and Prophet Eubert Angel who claimed that they possessed the ability to perform supernatural miracles, such as resurrecting the dead, putting 'miracle money' into people's pockets, making possible 'miracle

pregnancies' that would help barren women, predicting job opportunities for job seekers, giving prophecies regarding a spouse, a car, or a house (Dube 2015, 2).

Reported feats include 'miracle babies', 'miracle money', 'miracle weight reduction', and predictions of prominent politicians' death. Critics of the Zimbabwean prophets question the miracles and prophecies. Despite such criticism, people flock from across the country and neighbouring countries, including Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, and Mozambique to be 'ministered' by these young male prophets. On 19 April 2014, Makandiwa's "Judgment Night" at the National Sports Stadium, for example, attracted over 100,000 local, regional, and international pilgrims (Mapimhidze 2014). As Obvious Vengeyi explains, "that the whole Zimbabwean society could concentrate on such individuals to the extent that even politicians, technocrats, economists discussed and consulted them is unprecedented in post-colonial Zimbabwe" (Vengeyi 2013, 31). Examining the rise of neo-Pentecostal prophets within Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political crisis context, Dube asks,

> when the prophets promise people miracle money, miracle healing and other promises, are they helping or are they creating an alternative imagery space to socio-political matters. It seems their involvement spiritualises issues that need real solutions. (Dube 2015, 2)

Religious pilgrimage to West Africa is not only for young prophets who want to gain the spiritual prowess to heal and perform miracles but also attracts the wealthy and powerful, Africa's political élite, the urban middle class, and the well-educated. For instance, South African politicians, such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Julius Malema, and sports stars, such as Ruben Kruger and the late Wium Basson, have visited T. B. Joshua (Sosibo 2014). Members of other African political élites who frequented T. B. Joshua include Malawi's former President Joyce Banda, the former Zambian President Frederick Chiluba, the late Zimbabwean politician Morgan Tsvangirai, and a Ghanaian President, the late John Atta Mills (BBC 2014b).

Jacques Pauw (2006), a South African investigative journalist, described that, from around the year 2000, South Africans, including Afrikaners, started journeying to Lagos to find salvation and healing in T. B. Joshua's Synagogue. As Pauw puts it,

> people returned from Lagos with gripping testimony of disabled rising from their wheelchairs, Aids virus banished, terminally ill restored to their former health and festering sores healed before their very eyes (Pauw 2006, 219).

For example, in Southern Africa, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, and Malawi, the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa in 2014 elicited fears that hundreds of religious pilgrims visiting Nigeria might spread the deadly disease when returning to their countries of origin. An official of the Botswana Ministry of Health was quoted saying, "I do not have the total

number of those already home, but none of those that came back are quarantined" (Mmegi 2014). As the BBC report noted,

> when the Ebola outbreak began in West Africa, the Lagos State government, recognising the vast reach and influence of this preacher [T. B. Joshua], asked that no victims of the disease be brought to the church for healing so that there was no threat to other members of the congregation (BBC 2014b).

It may be instructive to point out an intense transnational religious circulation and exchange between members of the new African diasporas and religious pilgrimage shrines and centres in Africa (see Adogame 2013; Pasura 2012; Pasura and Erdal 2016). As Afe Adogame explains,

> the increasing mobility and itinerancy of religious leaders, freelance evangelists, and members between the homeland and diasporic spaces cannot be over-emphasized… This complex peregrination partly demonstrates an instance of religious transnationalization of African churches in diaspora. (Adogame 2012, 316)

Whereas the expansion of Christianity in the last century has largely been because of missionary work, recent African migration movements from the global South to the North are reshaping Europe's Christian religious landscape significantly (see Adogame 2013; Pasura 2012). These studies show that African Christians in Europe idealise Africa as the new centre and source of religious authenticity.

Pilgrimage to religious figures is not a new phenomenon and this article cannot cover all religious pilgrimages because they have been an integral part of the history of African religions. In Zimbabwe, between the 1950s and the 1970s, Mai Chaza emerged as a famous female prophet and miracle worker, healing the blind, sterile women, and people possessed with alien spirits (Scarnecchia 1997). In 1994, the Malawian prophet Billy Chisupe had a dream in which ancestral spirits showed him a tree whose bark they said could cure AIDS (Schoffeleers 1999). Many people construed this as a hierophany, thus paving the way for pilgrimage to Chisupe's village, Chikamana, to take medicine. Estimates suggest that, from February to June 1995, between 250,000 and 300,000 people visited the healer (Schoffeleers 1999, 407). Some pilgrimage centres are short-lived while others last for centuries, as Matthew Schoffeleers explains: "The ones with a limited lifespan, which nevertheless draw massive crowds, often originate in response to an urgent crisis. Chisupe's village, Chikamana, is or was such as centre." (Schoffeleers 1999, 419) The rise and popularity of these religious figures provide spaces of recognition for groups of women and men marginalised by the demands of impersonal, modernist, colonial, and post-colonial societies. Also, it can be seen as a re-vitalisation of the quest for health and well-being sourced from religious functionaries who appropriate traditional healing practices.

The rise of neo-Pentecostalism in Africa is often reductively explained in terms of modernity and its malcontents (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). In most African states, the post-colonial euphoria for economic and social transformation has been replaced by an awareness of economic vulnerability and political fragility. The explanation lies at the confluence of several colonial and post-independence factors: a violent and fraudulent process of colonisation and domination that dehumanised black people; the hegemonic struggle for decolonisation culminated in largely symbolic independence devoid of material gain for the majority black population. Asonzeh Ukah observes that some scholars trace the growth of Christianity in Africa to "the expansion of neoliberal market system, improved technology—travel and communication—and the expansion of Euro-American modernity together with failed expectations or discontents of modernity" (Ukah 2012, 503). It can be argued that Pentecostal churches have become new agents of socio-political and economic development. We should understand the creativity and innovation that undergird their theologies and pilgrimage within the complex wider frameworks of African governments' socio-political and economic deficiencies. However, there are varied and multi-faceted factors that contribute to the African states' fragility, not least because of colonialism and neo-colonialism, the neoliberal agenda, corruption, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Neo-Pentecostalism and the indigenous African religiosity nexus

This section of the article pays attention to the entanglement of neo-Pentecostal mobilities with indigenous African religions in order to draw attention to the intersections and interdependencies among religions and religiosities on the continent. It is argued that the different versions of African Christianity interact with indigenous forms of African religion in complex and dynamic ways. Within the Zimbabwean religious context, Chitando explains that

> the spirituality and disposition toward sacred reality nurtured by ATRs [African Traditional Religions] have been the bedrock upon which guest religions have built to achieve their growth. In particular, Pentecostalism has interacted with ATRs in ways that are varied and complex. (Chitando 2018, 17)

Francis Nyamnjoh and Joel Carpenter persuasively argue that

> many an African does not allow their embrace of Christianity to serve as an ideological whip to flog their indigenous cultural beliefs into unmitigated compliance with the one-dimensionalism of Christianity and/or Islam (Nyamnjoh and Carpenter 2018, 298).

Religious journeys to Pentecostal pastors and prophets within countries and across nation-state borders by people seeking to be freed from generational

curses are a new pattern of transnational mobility across the continent. For many African neo-Pentecostal churches, the belief in generational curses is central to their teaching and theology (Banda 2020, 1; Chitando 2018, 19). As Collium Banda puts it, "at the centre of the doctrine is that ancestors pass to their descendants their unfavourable spiritual conditions such as the guilt of their sins, ill-luck, poverty and undesirable personal characteristics" (Banda 2020, 2). Within the Ghanaian Pentecostal context, Seth Tweneboah explains that

> the individual is held as being caught up in an actual or a potential vessel of demonic possession that must be broken free. Present miseries and misfortune are cast as echoes of an immoral past life, personal or ancestral… In recent times, some neo-prophetic actors have specialised in casting out demons and ancestral deities. (Tweneboah 2021, 108)

Neo-Pentecostal pastors and prophets perform deliverance ritual services to liberate believers from generational curses. Nisbert Taringa and Macloud Sipeyiye (2018) use the neo-Pentecostal church "Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa" (ZAOGA) as a case study of the complex interactions between indigenous Shona traditional religious beliefs and practices. The church teaches a theology of deliverance from the "spirit of poverty" (Maxwell 1998), a generational curse caused by ancestors. Hence, "any failures in all dimensions of life, as well as the precarious state of the country of Zimbabwe in general are attributed to a demonic ancestral spirit" (Taringa and Sipeyiye 2018, 205). As neo-Pentecostalism thrives by seeking to distance itself from African traditional beliefs such as witchcraft, extended family, and ancestral spirits, these beliefs are its shadow, its perpetual nemesis.

In Africa, religion and healing are inextricably linked (Chiluwa 2013, 8). The African continent has been shaped by violent and exploitative structures and experiences of enslavement, colonialism, the liberation struggle, and neoliberal capitalism. It is in this historical context of violence that healing has been, and continues to be, the centrepiece of religious and spiritual mobilities in Africa. African Pentecostal movements have appropriated and harnessed this fundamental aspect of indigenous religiosity. As Ogbu Kalu (2008) argues, African Pentecostalism is intimately connected with and informed by African indigenous religiosity, where the issues of divination, health, and well-being are central. Similarly, Rijk van Dijk (2000, 12) argues that African Pentecostal leaders are inspired by African concerns about life, fortune, misfortune, healing, and protection, which the missionary churches ignored. The religious aura surrounding T. B. Joshua, who makes claims to heal and perform extraordinary miracles, illustrates Pentecostal leaders' popularity and the way religious figures can be centres of religious pilgrimage (for Billy Chisupe, see Schoffeleers 1999).

The neo-Pentecostal pilgrimages are overlaid on indigenous African pilgrimage rather than working on a *tabula rasa*. In Zimbabwe, just as in many parts of Africa, missionaries created new Christian holy places and pilgrimages, such as the Anglican Bernard Mizeki shrine in Marondera, which were a calculated attempt to claim control over men and land (Ranger 1987, 177). For instance, Sekgothe Mokgoatsana, Mischeck Mudyiwa, and Tabona Shok (2020) use the example of the Mutemwa shrine, located in the North Eastern part of Zimbabwe and closely connected to life and charity works of John Randal Bradburne (1921–1979), to demonstrate that pilgrimages to holy places are a popular and common phenomenon within African Christianity. Although these shrines are associated with a particular Christian denomination, pilgrimage to these sites cuts across denominations and is driven by a search for healing. Drawing examples from Roman Catholicism, mainline Protestantism, and Pentecostalism in contemporary Ghana, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2007) illustrates the appropriation of sacred places for pilgrimage. The holy sites, formerly associated with traditional religion, have been reinvented in popular Ghanaian Christianity as places of divine-human interaction and, therefore, forge links between African indigenous and biblical traditions. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2007, 85) explains, "Christianity and African traditional religions have always formed a radical opposition. Yet in converting traditional sacred places for Christian uses, the worldviews underlying indigenous religions and cultures have remained significant."

African Indigenous Churches (AICs) are also associated with sacred places which pilgrims regularly visit. The explosion of AICs across the continent, such as the "Celestial Church of Christ" in West Africa, the "Zion Christian Church" in South(ern) Africa (Müller 2013), the "Johane Masowe Chishanu Church" in Zimbabwe, and the "Simon Kimbanque Church" in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Garbin 2019), show the nexus between African indigenous beliefs and Christianity (Olupona 2009, 529). For instance, Retief Müller's comprehensive study of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in South Africa, one of the most significant religious movements in Southern Africa, demonstrates how it has integrated "aspects of Traditional African Religion" within its Christianity, which "defies labelling under pre-existing categories" (Müller 2013, 6). The most distinctive feature of the ZCC is the pilgrimage. ZCC is described as a "travelling church"; as Müller explains,

> by going on pilgrimage to Moria, urbanized ZCC members are involved in a ritual enactment of reverse migration, travelling from their homes on a similar route as their parents and grandparents before them, but in opposite direction (Müller 2013, 9).

Members of South Africa's ZCC embark on a cross-border pilgrimage to neighbouring Botswana to pray for rain (Müller 2013, 159). Thus, we should

be wary of overemphasising the distinctions between the varieties of Christianity in Africa and indigenous religions. As Nyamnjoh and Carpenter argue,

> African Christianity or African Islam simply affords Africans an opportunity to add another layer of complexity to their toolkit of personal identification (adopting Christian and Muslim names for example, without giving up their African names) and to their cultural and ethnic forms of being (Nyamnjoh and Carpenter 2018, 298).

This article contributes to the growing scholarship which seeks to de-centre taken-for-granted assumptions about religion (Bender et al. 2012) and focuses on the margins where the core is being challenged. Paying attention to the entanglement of neo-Pentecostal mobilities with indigenous African religions draws attention to the intersections and interdependencies among religions and religiosities on the continent.

Conclusion

Religious journeys to neo-Pentecostal pastors and prophets within countries and across nation-state borders by people seeking to be freed from generational curses and in search of healing and miracles are a new pattern of transnational mobility across the continent. The present discussion of neo-Pentecostal journeys and mobilities in Africa is not exhaustive but seeks to show how contemporary Christian pilgrimages are not produced by some eradication of indigenous African journeys and pilgrimage but are overlaid on it. Rather than seeing contemporary neo-Pentecostal pilgrimages as a rupture, it is imperative to see continuities and re-appropriations of African indigenous spaces and traditions. Thus, it is important to explore the changing roles of these sacred sites and the meanings that pilgrims attach to and invest in them. Emphasising the changing history and meaning of African pilgrimage and sacred shrines allows sacred sites to be treated as relational, fluid, and unstable over time, rather than seeing them as fixed holy spaces and units. Contemporary pilgrimages in Africa are a complex, multi-faceted, multi-dimensional phenomenon irreducible to any one domain or discourse, arising or emerging through the interplay of individual journeying and the ritualisation of communal life.

It can be argued that, within the African context, characterised by weakened state governance and aggressive neoliberal capitalism, neo-Pentecostalism has the effect of embedding this form of economic organisation in human social life in a way that reinforces capitalism. Some scholars connect Zimbabwe's political and economic crisis, which peaked in 2008, and the rise of neo-Pentecostal prophets (Chitando, Ragies Gunda, and Kügler 2013). Rather than addressing the structural issues of poor governance, corruption, and the lack of the rule of law and human rights, which some perceived as the cause of the crisis, these prophets shifted people's attention to individual sin, witchcraft,

and the prosperity gospel (Biri and Togarasei 2013, 82). Prominent Zimbabwean politicians have also sought spiritual guidance from T. B. Joshua to help them navigate the country's treacherous political landscape. A preoccupation with the political economy of African Pentecostalism can divert us from seeing that the phenomenon is grounded in indigenous religious worldviews, Pan-African connections, and the agency of Africans.[2]

African neo-Pentecostalism is bringing people together in large numbers, creating trans-ethnic and Pan-African identities. The growth of African Pentecostalism and the primacy of deliverance theology, healing, and the performance of miracles has intensified the flows of migrants and pilgrims within and across nation-state boundaries. Technologies and the religious fervour on the continent have captivated a new sense of collective identity among Africans beyond the trappings of colonialism and slavery and discourses of poverty and HIV/AIDS. The alternative forms of identity, based on religion, are augmenting and sometimes replacing ties of allegiance grounded in family, nation, ethnicity, and kinship. It is possible to argue that cross-border religious transactions have become the dominant mode of interactions on the continent. While migration and pilgrimage provide opportunities for cross-cultural experiences across the African continent, which are giving rise to some Pan-African collective identity, xenophobic violence in South Africa in 2008 and 2014 illustrates how mobility from one country to another can also ferment ethnic and Afro-phobic tensions and conflict.

Notes

1. Although used as a religious term in the Catholic Church tradition, the concept of godfatherism is now part of the Nigerian political vocabulary to denote rich men whose contributions to campaign funds help candidates to win elections (Albert 2005; Familusi 2012).
2. Pan-Africanism is an important issue that cannot be dealt with in detail in this article; however, as an ideological discourse and political movement, it sought to end colonial rule and unify all African people across national boundaries. In the post-colonial context, the African Union and its precursor, the Organisation of African Union, exemplify Pan-Africanist aspirations.

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Disclosure statement

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