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Guest Editorial

Migration, Religion and Identity: Missiological Theoretical Issues

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The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed an increase in human mobility due to voluntary or enforced migration as well as due to improved means of communication and travel. Thus, the realm of living of individuals as well as groups has expanded, with many having the experience of living in more than one geo-political or cultural territory and with large numbers of people living as individuals or as ethnic minority groups in places different from their country of origin.

Stephen Castles and Anthony McGrew have underlined the increased interconnectedness linked to these new experiences of migration, which result in the formation of transnational or globally-stretched networks. (Castles 2002; McGrew 1992; Nina Glick Schiller, *et al.* 1992; 1995, Steven Vertovec 2007). Reflecting on these developments, John Tomlinson for instance has coined the term “deterritorialization” in order to call attention to the changes in theory building around such concepts as “locality”, “territoriality” and “nation states” (Tomlinson 1999). Alejandro Portes in his theory formation captures the consciously acknowledged experiences of migrants of their multiple belongings, both in terms of culture or/and religiosity (Portes 2000). By coining the term “superdiversity” Steven Vertovec has stressed, that though groups of people may share the experience of migration, migrants – even when they come from the same ethnic background – form a highly diverse group of people and have very different migration stories; the superdiversity approach underlines that migrants are and remain connected to real localities and territories.

The above-mentioned theoretical approaches and the developments they refer to, pose profound questions to key missiological concepts such as “inculturation” and “contextualization”. What are the worlds, the cultures, the contexts in which people who have a migration (hi)story live? How do the actual locations of residence and former locations of residence interact with each other? Do they coincide or partly overlap? How does locality shape migrants’ experiences and transnational connectivities? And how do these developments shape Christianity and fashion individual and communal religious identities? What is the meaning of terms like “inculturation” and “contextualization” in

relation to migration? Do they lose their validity? Do they need reconceptualization or do alternate terms need to be developed?

This thematic issue of *Mission Studies* addresses some of the questions raised above. The issue opens with an article by Martha Frederiks which surveys and assesses some of the theories developed thus far. The article explores the often taken-for-granted concepts “migrant” and “migration”, reviews theory-building related to the various levels of intersection between religion and migration (individual, communal, national/transnational) and concludes by identifying areas that require further research.

In the second article of this issue Dorottya Nagy explores methodology, demonstrating how a lack of reflection on academic presuppositions results in the propagation and protraction of methodological nationalism in much academic work on religion and migration. She exhorts scholars not merely to explicate their assumptions and methodology but also advocates that the field of religion and migration should venture into more multi- and interdisciplinary approaches.

In the third article Stanley John presents a case-study of Kerala (India) Christians in Kuwait. In his article John describes the divergence in social and legal position of short-term contract-laborers on the one hand and well-established middle-class Indian migrants in Kuwait on the other. John observes that these two groups in Kuwait rarely interact and demonstrates how the disparity in social status of these two groups profoundly affects their potential of religious expression and community formation. Thus, John’s case-study problematizes homogenization of migrants on the basis of ethnicity.

Deanna Womack takes the reader to the United States. Womack’s article displays that by moving to the USA, Arab Christians seem to exchange their religious minority status in the Middle East for an ethnic minority status in America. She especially highlights how second generation migrants contest these identity constructions based on ethnicity and language, resulting in intergenerational tensions and power struggles within Arab Christian communities in New Jersey. Womack also remarks that Arab Christians in the USA suffer from the negative imagery produced by the “war on terror” discourses, which associates Arabs with Muslims, leading to feelings of alienation and non-belonging among Arab Christians in the USA.

In the final contribution to the theme of “migration, religion and identity”, Stephen Pavey and Marco Saavedra introduce the reader to the world of the so-called “undocumented youth activists” in the USA: mainly young adults who arrived in the USA as children accompanying their undocumented parents. Because these young people lack a social security number they cannot legally work or vote and are subject to arrests and deportations. Based on long-term

ethnographic fieldwork, activism and experiences of friendship, Pavey in dialogue with activist Marco Saavedra discloses the callous world of American immigration regulations and its impacts on the lives and human dignity of these undocumented youth. In the second half of the article, the authors explore the challenges that the reality of undocumented youth poses to faith and theology and then cautiously they seek to articulate words of hope and human dignity amidst the fear and despair.

Earlier versions of the articles in this issue were presented as papers in the study group "Migration, Religion and Identity" during the International Association of Mission Studies' Toronto Assembly in August 2012.

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