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Christian Kinship in Urban Christianity

Case Study in Translation and Indigenous Agency in the African Context

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Abstract

Research on Pentecostalism, as an emerging religious form, has often focused on its role in the public life of modern Africa, rather than its interaction with socio-cultural categories. Drawing on extended ethnographic research in three Nairobi communities, this article contributes to filling this gap by focusing on kinship within Pentecostal studies. This interdisciplinary study integrates social sciences and world Christianity methodologies to examine this aspect of lived religion. The study found that the use of familial terms in Pentecostal churches underscores the role of local actors in grounding the Christian message in the lives of adherents. This language complements the lived experiences within these communities. Community leaders engage in a continuous translation process, adapting local visions of relational bonds to better articulate the Christian experience within their cosmopolitan context. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge on agency and vectors of Christian religious experience in the non-Western world.

Keywords

African; Christian kinship; indigenous agency; translation; urban Christianity

Introduction

Two business executives meet at a conference, one from Brazil and the other from Nigeria. Noticing a gold locket on the Brazilian's hand, the Nigerian offers a compliment. 'That is a beautiful ornament you have!' 'Yes, it is special. I had it blessed by our father during prayers at our church'. The Nigerian pulls out a small bottle of oil, which she had applied to her hands as soon as she entered the conference hall. 'I got this from my spiritual mother at our prayer meeting to bring to the conference.'

The use of kinship terms in this hypothetical encounter highlights the ubiquity of such terms within the diverse global Christian experience. What does the Brazilian mean by 'our father'? Who is the Nigerian's 'spiritual mother'? Do these kinship terms hold the same

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meaning across different continents? If not, what do they signify, and what implications does this have for our understanding of kinship in various parts of the Christian world? A broad spectrum of Pentecostal churches, such as *Jubilee Christian Church in Nairobi*, Kenya; *United Family International Church in Harare*, Zimbabwe; and *Redeemed Christian Church of God in Lagos*, Nigeria, refer to their principal leaders as 'Father' or its equivalent in local languages. Leading women in the church take the title of 'Mother' or its equivalent in local languages.[1] Student groups also use these terms for their chaplains or, increasingly, for their student leader (Mugambi 2020, 84).

This article examines religious kinship from the perspective of world Christianity studies. It argues that religious kinship, as a social innovation, embodies the relational dimension of lived theologies in urban African Christianity. The article begins by examining the concept of kinship in various contexts. It then considers kinship in a religious setting, drawing insights from research in Kenya and beyond. An analysis follows of kinship as a religious social innovation, addressing the questions it answers and those it has yet to answer. Finally, the article concludes with observations on how kinship relates to the contextualization of African Christians' lived experiences observed in the research. Connections will be made between kinship and translation as a concept in world Christianity.

In the context of this article, kinship refers to that network of relations that emerge from a shared present or past heritage. Common usage of this term without a qualifier denotes family relationships of either consanguineal or affinal nature. In the case of consanguineal kin, the connections between the members emanate from blood relations at the primary level found within the nuclear family or at the secondary and tertiary levels found within the extended family of those related to the nuclear family (Read 2015, 61–2). Affinal relations do not involve direct blood relations. Affinal relations form through marriage and are generally referred to in English as 'in-laws' (Read 2015, 61–2).

Social kinship systems do not derive from family blood relations. They are constituted through a collective commitment to a common social value or framework. This might be friendship, religion, or another social idea. A widely used term for these relations is fictive kinship. The goal of this term is to distinguish the connections from 'real' kinship which, as outlined above, is some configuration of blood relations (Ibsen and Klobus 1972). The term is challenging because of its imprecision given the wide spectrum of social situations that result in kinship that is neither consanguineal or affinal (Nelson 2013, 260). Furthermore, the term's allusion to 'contrived' or otherwise unnatural family relations unwittingly imposes a moral or conceptual value judgement on the nature of the relations in focus. Fictive kinship as a terminology also does not accommodate conceptual equivalent terms across cultures as easily as consanguineal or affinal kinship does. As such, research using the term in many global south, non-English settings poses unintended terminological issues arising from this negative connotation. In this regard, terms such as 'families we choose' or 'voluntary kin' are more precise and helpfully overcome the constraints of fictive kinship as a term for non-family social relations (Nelson 2013, 260).

In this article, an even more precise term is required than these. The occasion for kinship in this study is Christian religious affiliations. They involve mutual acceptance of the relations among community members within an institutional environment that affirms these relations. Our present concern is the use of consanguineal terms for the relationships referred to as religious kinship. We therefore define religious kinship as networks of relations formed within a communal environment that explicitly identifies itself as religious and is bounded by

[1] This emerges from the findings of a 3-year research project on kinship on 3 churches in Nairobi. An exploratory survey on churches in cities across Africa confirms this as a common trend among Pentecostal churches.

common beliefs, a shared leadership system, and the context of regular ritual gatherings. Christian religious kinships, such as those described in this article, would be found within particular church settings. It may also extend beyond the local church to denominations, and even ecumenically, provided the three components of belief, leadership, and worship are present. This article focuses on instances of Christian kinship among some Pentecostal churches in Nairobi. Its scope is the Christian regions in Africa south of the Sahara, which, for ease of reference in this piece, will be referred to as 'Africa'.

Kinship is an essential part of the Christian experience from the inception of the faith. Family is a central theme in the Bible, permeating the narratives and forming a core concept in the construction of Christian community (Hahn 1995). The Old Testament outlines the family as foundational to the formation of Hebrew ethnic and spiritual identity (Voinov 2004). The kinship theme in the New Testament expanded beyond the lineage of Abraham to include the entire Christian community. This reconceptualization breaks ethnic boundaries and introduces the family of God through Christ (MacDonald 2009). This new kinship, as a social organizational principle, was an inherent component of 1st-century Christian culture (DeSilva 2022).

From this point on, kinship continues to be an important aspect of the Christian experience. The Christian family, for example, is a vital model in the early church (Penn 2002). Kinship manifests in various forms throughout the history of the church, adapting to the recipient cultures into which Christianity enters (Hellerman 2001; Alfani and Gourdon 2012; Gibson 1987). As such, kinship as a feature of the Christian experience merits study within the context of world Christianity studies.

Using history, theology, and missiology as core disciplines, World Christianity investigates the growth of Christianity globally, paying special attention to areas where the story of Christianity has been inadequately represented (Robert 2020; Ezigbo 2021; Irvin 2008; Robert 2009; Sanneh 2015; Walls 1996). World Christianity as a field of study benefits from other disciplines, which provide important frameworks for examining aspects of these emerging Christian expressions (Mugambi 2023b). As a case within global Christianity, expressions in Africa contain elements that merit special focus. These include theology, liturgy, praxis, aesthetics, and ecclesiology.[2] With regard to Pentecostal-charismatic churches, much work has been done on the political dynamics (Gifford 2015; 2004; Marshall 2009; Obadare 2018; Chitando 2020). More needs to be done in the social and cultural dimensions of these expressions (Asamoah-Gyadu 2004; Wariboko 2014; Haynes 2017; Premawardhana 2021; Kaunda 2023). The focus here is on religious and communal dimensions of kinship in African Christianity as a subset of global Christianity.

Communality and Christian Expansion in Africa

As a salient feature of emerging Christianity in Africa, kinship lies at the heart of both social and ecclesial structures. Our research finds that kinship models within the Christian religious imagination are a product of the Christian translation process into culture. The use of terms such as 'mum' and 'dad' to refer to church leaders outside Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican churches is a recent phenomenon. Here we distinguish the use of these titles from the theological concept of God as the Father, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Our main concern is references such as those of Jubilee Christian church leaders as 'Dad' and 'Mum'. We are interested in a rise in Kenya of the use of these terms for Christian union student leaders in universities (Mugambi 2020, 84). This application of kinship terms features distinct

[2] Engaging African Realities is one example of a research initiative that examines the elements of Christianity in Africa as a subset of studies on global Christian expansion.

elements from traditional communality during the period that coincides with the recent, unprecedented growth of Christianity on the continent.

Mission history as represented in the 1910 Edinburgh conference on missions did not anticipate the scale of Christianity expansion in Africa as has become evident in the past century (Stanley 2009). Despite speculation in the early 1900s that recently missionized areas were more likely to Islamize, Christianity in Africa south of the Sahara grew rapidly with numerous innovations in form and expression (Stanley 2009). Historic mission churches (HMC) at the beginning of the 20th century relied on models of worship and liturgy inherited from their Western heritage. HMC forms of Christianity initially emphasized literary epistemologies expressed in their catechisms and liturgy. These churches relied heavily on ecclesial structures inherited from their Euro-American cultural and historical roots. In the pre-independence era, the slow pace of contextualization and the close relationship between these new African churches and the colonial infrastructure alienated them from the audiences they sought to convert.

Moreover, the missionary enterprise did not adequately address the issue of social relationships that were being formed within the Christian communities in the early 20th century. The family, as an organizing principle in pre-Christian African culture, did not feature in this new faith.

The earliest instances of effective rapid evangelization came from indigenous missionaries from African Initiated Churches (AICs). Their unique expressions of Christianity resonated deeply with the African imagination (Anderson 2001). The churches introduced orality within their liturgies and lived theology, drawing from local epistemologies. With regard to kinship, the translation process working within their monoethnic churches preserved the social structure of the family. These churches sought to reimagine these social structures within a Christian framework in order to address the role of women and the place of rites of passage such as coming of age as well as marriage (Barrett 1968, 264–78; Mwaura 1984, 85; Kenyatta 1938, 279). This contextual approach to Christianity bore dividends through the growth of Christianity among indigenous communities (Barrett 1968). These churches collectively drew criticism from historic mission churches and colonial authorities alike (Welbourn 1961).

Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity brought Christian expansion in Africa into the 21st century. These expressions became the fastest-growing forms of Christianity between 1980 and 2020 (Zurlo and Johnson 2019; Masci 2015). Pentecostal churches founded independent denominations with indigenous leadership in urban centers. In a short time, these churches gained influence and played a catalytic role in the 'charismatization' of historic mission denominations (Omenyo 2003; Asamoah-Gyadu 2015, 176). Charismatic Christians are found in multiple denominations, providing for contextualized expressions of historic mission churches. This research focuses more on the independent Pentecostal churches and not the charismatic expressions within HMCs.

Pentecostal-charismatics are local in their outlook, drawing from the lived experiences of the people within their context. They are also global in their connectivity and vision for the mission. These communities innovated various Christian expressions. Their liturgies, music, and social relations reflect the African Christian experience. The social relations in these churches incorporate kinship frameworks within liturgies and intra-community relations. These frameworks enable the churches to render their message in social metaphors that resonate with their congregations. We now consider kinship as a broad-based metaphor in religious innovation.

Kinship

Kinship refers to blood relationships or groups that share characteristics or origins. Traditional kinship structures in Africa stemmed from family relations, which broadened into ethnic communities. These communities were bound together by common experiences, culture, and geography. Kinship featured prominently in the writings of early African intellectuals in the 1950s to 1970s. These thinkers composed fiction that functioned as social commentaries reflecting on the rapidly changing social and cultural world (Achebe 1994; 2013; wa Thiong'o 2012; 2015; p'Bitek 1995). Novels and poetry referenced African traditional society, featuring protagonists whose stories connected with and affected their kin. Take for example Mugo in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, or Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1994; wa Thiong'o 2012). Historical, anthropological, and philosophical works of this era established the place of kinship in African society (Kenyatta 1938; Mbiti 1970a). Theological and religious works also affirmed the centrality of kinship as a primary category in the construction of African society, as reflected in diverse ethnic contexts (Mbiti 1970b; Dickson 1977; Pobee 1979; Mugambi and Kirima 1976).

Kinship in Africa remains a core concept that lies at the heart of African communities, serving as an important driving force of societal change. Kinship is also the subject of reflection with regard to state formation and cultural work. As such, social innovation in the area of kinship is not a new concept in post-colonial Africa. Several varieties of social innovation have been developed over time. One of the more important socio-political conceptions of kinship is *Ujamaa*, prevalent in Tanzanian history. *Ujamaa*, in Kiswahili, means fraternity or kinship. In the 1960s, Nyerere, Tanzania's founding president, co-opted the word to refer to a socio-economic political construct developed. *Ujamaa*, in his view, was conceptualized as a social framework designed to drive economic development through productive social relations (Nyerere 1968).

Ujamaa was a version of 'cooperative economics,' bringing people together within a national fraternal identity to provide for each other's economic needs. Drawing on indigenous concepts of community relationships, Julius Nyerere envisioned this social innovation as an indigenous adaptation of socialism. A reaction to Western capitalism, *Ujamaa* also positioned itself as an African critique of conceptions of socialism in the East as construed in post-Enlightenment philosophy. In Nyerere's view, the means of production, distribution of goods, and the instruments of their exchange in post-colonial Tanzania were to be owned and regulated communally by Tanzanians who acted in fraternal relationships with each other (Nyerere 1968; 1987). Nyerere's model cascaded economic potential from the national level down to constituent units in the villages. Nyerere's idea was not the only form of African communality repurposed for socio-economic ends.

In neighboring Kenya, Kenyatta's African socialism (Kenyatta 1965) was incubated. The concept was built on similar principles. Kenyatta's model, popularized as Harambee (let's pull together), envisioned an economic system that harnessed local communality to pool resources in a model that was more voluntary and less centrally driven than Nyerere's. Moi's Nyayo philosophy followed Kenyatta's optimistic view of practical communality (Moi 1986). These two Kenyan presidents presented a form of negotiated communality lived within a capitalist political-economic framework. The basis for these socialist ideas was an ideal fraternity that extended beyond family and ethnicity for the purposes of local and national development.

There were other engagements of politically motivated communality, notably Joseph Mboya's reflection on the subject and Leopold Senghor's ideas on the connection between Negritude and African communality (Senghor 1998; Mboya 1963). Leopold Senghor's Negritude synthesized ideas on the value of African culture and identity in postcolonial

Africa. Senghor was a thinker and the first president of Senegal (Senghor 1998; Anyinefa and An 1996; Senghor 1971; Ba 2015).

The jury is out on whether these expressions of social innovation were successful in accomplishing the economic development their leaders envisioned. *Ujamaa*'s ideal socio-economic outcome used communality as a vehicle for nationalist discourse in post-colonial state-building (Hunter 2008). For some, the success of the project is in doubt (Ikechukwu 2023; Jennings 2017). For others, it remains a viable alternative to extractive socio-economic models that plagued emerging African nations as they struggled to free themselves from colonial structures (Nkongolo 2016). What is clear is that these social innovations were applied in a top-down fashion. The end goal for these ideas of social relations was a political charter to address economic issues.

Whether these innovations accomplished their intended goals is outside the scope of this paper (Jennings 2017; Njaico 2022). What is pertinent here is that these were attempts at social innovation based on non-family, non-ethnic configurations. As socio-economic models driven by political actors, their lifespan depended on the leaders' ability to create enduring structures for them. *Ujamaa* fared better than the Nyayo philosophy, the latter of which faded after Moi's exit from power. Harambee, as a self-help concept, remained in the national psyche in various forms in Kenya. Its longevity has endured not because of Kenyatta's influence, but because of its more organic, practical application of social functions already inherent in communal society.

A fundamental concept more germane to this discussion is the idea of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is an attempt to bring into one concept the broad-based elements that comprise the notion of communality as a basis for societal organization. The earliest presentations of this concept in scholarship could be traced in the conceptualization of African societal identity in the maxim 'I am because we are, and we are because I am' (Mbiti 1970a, 141). This maxim offers the broad contours of how societies in Africa, especially south of the Sahara, conceptualized the well-being of the individual through the functional strength of social relations around them.

While this concept has always been embedded in society during pre-independence times, it is only recently that the Christian implications of this concept have been brought to bear in modern Africa. *Ubuntu* was, for example, a key component in Desmond Tutu's Christian-inspired call for forgiveness at the advent of the New South Africa in 1994 (Tutu 1999). Tutu argued that the construction of a viable society in Africa, or elsewhere, required a serious assessment of how individuals needed one another within their shared humanity (Tutu 2004). While *Ubuntu* is yet to be formally adopted into political and social frameworks, the concept remains critical for reflection on social identities in a pluralist Africa that is facing a myriad of challenges (Hailey 2008; Mangaliso 2001; Mbigi 1997; Msila 2008; Ogude 2019). *Ubuntu* is a useful frame of reference for analyzing social strategies and theological engagements whose call is to promote the well-being of the individual within society.

In this regard, *Ubuntu* is not a social innovation in the same way as Nyerere's, Kenyatta's, and other similar social experiments. Rather, Ubuntu is an affirmation and a reclamation of social relational resources already inherent in African pre-Christian society. At the core of this social framework is the notion that people's interconnectedness provides a sense of social identity, which, if leveraged properly, enhances social well-being.

Ubuntu as a retrieval of existing social relational strategies in 21st-century Africa parallels the affirmation of communal social frameworks within Christian settings such as those examined in this article. The fundamental difference between the *Ubuntu* framework and these kinship structures is the narrower application of Christian religious kinship on the basis of shared belief within a community. *Ubuntu*, as a way of framing social relations, extends

beyond the confines of shared doctrine, leadership, and worship. *Ubuntu* envisions a shared humanity that extends beyond race, creed, or boundary.

These broad formulations were the basis for Desmond Tutu's vision of forgiveness and viable nation-building in the wake of South Africa's apartheid era. *Ubuntu*, as a theological framework in Africa's pluralist setting, continues to be the subject of much scholarly reflection. *Ubuntu* forms the basis for engaging communality within Christian discourse as it pertains to development in Africa (Kaunda and Kim 2022; Dube et al. 2016). Gender studies, particularly within Africa, benefit from the broad-ranging elements whose fusion offers a more comprehensive framework for reflection (Oduyoye 2002; 2001; Dube et al. 2023). *Ubuntu* also factors into theological reflection on Christian approaches to family within functional society (Getui 2005; Samita 2005; Tanye 2010; Chukwu 2011). We now turn to religious kinship.

Religious Kinship

Social innovations in religious institutions benefit from institutional structure and potential longevity. Religious kinship addresses social relations from this ecclesial framework. Unlike political social innovation, religious kinship works from the ground up. Each community of faith develops its own approach to kinship based on its understanding of scripture. The community's interpretation of scripture in turn depends on influences that extend beyond denominational theological frameworks.

The 'extra-denominational' frameworks of thought that influence kinship might be historical, social, cultural, or political. The emerging kinship models also benefit from the interconnectivity and mutual learning among Christian groups, both local and global. Free flow of information and ideas, especially through social media platforms, facilitates the spread of kinship ideas among and beyond these churches. This accounts, in part, for some shared notions of kinship found among these groups. The religious kinship terms described here manifest in the way communities address their leaders. Members of the studied churches refer to one another as 'brother' or 'sister'. This is not unique to 20th-century African Christians. The relational phenomenon traces back to the early church in the New Testament and the patristic period.

However, what is unique is the combination of these fraternal terms with the use of parental language, along with constant reference to families within the church. The terms 'father' and 'mother' are frequently used to refer to the spiritual heads of the communities. Furthermore, the language of family is constantly used within worship services. Though the terms are the same as those used in biblical and patristic era discourse, their use occurs in a different historical, social, and religious context. For example, Kathy Kiuna, the bishop of *Jubilee Christian Church*, is referred to as 'mum'.

Religious kinship groupings are grassroots innovations emerging from creative efforts by church groups to configure social frameworks to address their realities. These church 'families' meet regularly in their homes, support each other when bereaved, and actively participate when members are getting married. Members of the churches enter the communal structures as part of their lived Christian experience. It is important to note that while the initial admission into the Christian family is voluntary, the social relations can turn coercive. One example is the Good News International Ministries church in Shakahola, led by Paul Nthenge Mackenzie. The activities of the church included extreme fasting that led to the death of hundreds in Shakahola in coastal Kenya (Badurdeen 2023).

Urban churches with these social configurations thrive in emerging African cities and cosmopolitan educational settings. Colleges and high schools share the common characteristic of being multiethnic communities. These contexts are cultural melting pots, with people from different ethnic communities, geographic origins, and multiple experiences. Christians within these cosmopolitan settings exhibit multiple layers of identities. They belong to an ethnic community and are part of a family. They are also members of the city's cultural urban identity and have a national identity that fits within a regional African identity. Layered on top of these multiple identities is their religious identity. This is the case in the Kenyatta University Christian Union (Mugambi 2023a). Though allegiances to these identities can sometimes conflict with each other, the members of these cities are constantly negotiating the role of these identities in their lives. They are continually evaluating which identity influences their lived experiences in the church, workplace, school, and among their families and social groups.

Christians in multicultural urban centers and schools share their religious experiences while facing the challenges of the emerging economies of Africa. These emerging economies also struggle with political instability associated with post-colonial democratic realities. These communities are also globally aware. They are connected with a global world from which they constantly draw information. They learn from their global identity and contribute to it, especially through social media. Religious kinship fits within this context, defining a way of being within these complex, competing situations.

Religious Kinship as Social Innovation in the African Context

Since kinship incorporates religious, social, and informal dimensions, it addresses particular questions but also leaves some questions unanswered in its quest to contextualize a Christian experience. Regarding the questions it addresses, religious kinship, from our research, redefines connectivity and relationality among people. It imagines this connection as a religious equivalent to traditional family relationships. However, this is not a bloodline relationship. People are thus linked to one another by what they believe, not by their family heritage. This kinship challenges the notion of blood relations and ethnicity as a basis for engaging with others. The 'ethnic outsider' is now included through religion to form an ethnically inclusive Christian 'we'. While this facilitates communal relationships within diverse urban settings, it raises important questions in political matters that appeal to ethnicity (Ukiwo 2003; Guglielmi 2022; Bangura 1994; Dajwan 2021).

Religious kinship creates families bound together by a shared faith and common leaders. A pseudo-family structure is created where the shared leaders assume the role and are ascribed the function of parents. The designation of matriarchs and patriarchs of a Christian family challenges the notion of age as a factor in family relationships. Within student movements, relative age differences can be overlooked or leveraged for the community's well-being. In student groups, students create familial relations that envision kinship as a religious, socially informed innovation. This facilitates the growth of student groups in dynamic environments whose plurality parallels that of urban centers. These settings serve as preparation grounds for students for religious and social life in highly diverse urban centers. Social groups in churches extend their function beyond fellowship to sustaining financial well-being. For example, groups in churches create structures for microfinance for businesses and emergency funds (Mask and Borger 2008; Irving 2005; Öhlmann et al. 2016). Thus, the groups provide value in society beyond spiritual care.

We have also seen that kinship makes room for those who are marginalized. For example, it creates a social framework for women to lead. Such kinship also allows religious and social status to be ascribed to those whom society might not have previously considered. Single

women in the Kenyan context, through this kinship, can be seen as important contributors to the religious family (Jackson and Kinyanjui 2011; Kiuna 2016). It also allows youth to carry responsibility within the faith context through student-oriented kinship structures. Young people in churches and, especially, in schools find ways to express their faith vibrantly (K. M. Mugambi 2023a). The fellowship of Christian unions is one example in Kenya. These groups, initially marginal in historic mission denominations, now contribute significantly to the leadership pool that sustains Pentecostal worship and mission.

Aspects of Failure in Kinship

This kinship, however, seems open to aspects of abuse. Traditional norms in African communities discourage the questioning of parental authority. These norms contribute to an environment that does not challenge the misuse of power, particularly against those who are vulnerable within the community. It appears to enable some leaders within the movement to use their positions of relative power to exert unscrupulous control over individuals, sometimes engaging in financial coercion, fraud, and deception.

This kinship also has not yet built a theological consensus on systemic injustice. Its efforts are more focused on personal growth and prosperity at the expense of challenging systemic failures (Gifford 2015; Obadare 2018; 2022). While the Christian message challenges systems that perpetuate injustice, this kinship as applied in some churches has not evolved viable approaches to speak truth to power and organize viable activist strategies.

While there is a fair amount of similarity in the kinship structures within churches, there is diversity in how these communities address social evil. Some churches' efforts are rudimentary, while others have developed elaborate discipleship programs supported by regular teaching on the subjects (Mugambi 2020, 131–60; Miller and Yamamori 2007, 1–14).

This kinship within churches also has achieved mixed results with the poor. It addresses the poverty of those within its community, but different churches have different approaches to their relatedness with the poor outside the kinship circle. Some groups are very aware of and concerned about the plight of the poor both within and outside their circle, while others focus only on the poor within their circle. There is no uniformity in the way this kinship is practiced in the different churches with respect to the destitute and poor. The use of similar kinship terms does not in any way imply that the churches have similar approaches to particular problems endemic in their urban context.

Religious kinship innovations, with their positive and negative implications, reflect global south Christian priorities. They address diversity, poverty, political dysfunction, and economic distress. These emerging kinship priorities are not reflected in historic mission Christianity from the northern hemisphere. This is of interest to world Christianity studies because of its implications for understanding Christian expressions in places previously underserved in Christian studies.

Summary

Alternative kinship in the studied Pentecostal churches is an attempt at Christian contextualization in the lived theology of urban African Christians. Religious kinship articulates Christianity using viable, locally available social vocabulary. This kinship translates the message within the community using familiar social language. The kinship forms found within this study are of a social nature but make extensive use of consanguineal terms. The churches draw their legitimacy from the sacred texts and use the injunctions therein to buttress their social frameworks.

The result is a unique perspective on relationality, distinct from the social structures of historic mission Christianity inherited from the missionary era. This kinship relates scripture to people through relationships and demonstrates the power of indigenous agency in reconfiguring the Christian message during the translation process. It provides a context for Christians to live their lives within a dynamic environment. The communities' construction of social identities may on the surface resemble the communalism of *Ubuntu* applied within the pluralist settings of urban Africa. The fundamental difference is that the bounds of this social relation are within the broad Christian confines of liturgy, doctrine, and polity. In this way, they fundamentally differ from the wider application of *Ubuntu* philosophy that extends to the wider humanity. It remains to be seen how this conceptualization of alternative kinship will be sustained, especially in those places where the boundaries of doctrine, polity, and worship are challenged by the pluralist realities of modern Africa.

Christian religious kinship discussed above brings marginalized groups, such as women and youth, into the center of the Christian translation process. It represents the social relocation of the dislocated through the application of the Christian message. This translation is ongoing and not yet complete, as it has not yet addressed particular societal issues. These areas of ambiguity and relative dysfunction include leadership excesses within some Pentecostal churches, theological responses to systemic injustice, broad-based reflection on urban poverty, and environmental issues. The unevenness of kinship resolution to these issues across the African continent demonstrates the ongoing nature of translation. However, alternative kinship in these churches has originated multiple viable responses to the dynamic socio-economic and political environments. These forms of kinship thus constitute a social innovation in constant transformation as people live out their theology within African urban Christianity in the 21st century.

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