

10 “HERE, HERE IS A PLACE WHERE I CAN CRY” RELIGION IN A CONTEXT OF DISPLACEMENT: CONGOLESE CHURCHES IN KAMPALA

ALESSANDRO GUSMAN

ENTERING PENTECOSTAL REFUGEES' LIFE-WORLDS

On a Sunday afternoon in November 2014, I was sitting in a small Congolese restaurant, relaxing and talking with Hérítier and Eric, two young Congolese refugees in Kampala (Uganda); we used to have lunch there together on Sundays after the church service at Fepau, the congregation they belonged to, one of the dozens of Congolese churches in the Ugandan capital city. After almost four hours at church, we were all tired and hungry, so we ate the delicious fish with *fufu* and *sombe* almost in silence, interrupted only by some expressions of appreciation for the food we were eating. It was after finishing our lunch, while discussing the difficulties most refugees in Uganda find in the process of resettlement to a third country, that Eric said: “When you go to UNHCR and talk to them, they don’t understand you. When someone who translates for you has his stomach full of food, he cannot translate correctly, because he cannot feel what I’m feeling while I’m talking.”

I do not know if Eric’s words were directed only to the personnel at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or to me as well; I never found a way to ask him about this (or maybe I just didn’t want to know). However, in the days that followed, and after returning from the field, these few sentences often came to mind as a challenge to the possi-

bility of my fully entering the “life-worlds” (Jackson 2012) of the Congolese refugees I had been working with. I kept on repeating to myself that I had done my best to approach their religious experience—the actual focus of my research—and to be as near as possible to my interlocutors, sharing long hours at church and outside in their everyday activities. True; and yet, as a white researcher from a middle-class background with no experience of forced displacement or tragic losses of the sort that most of the people I had been working with had experienced, was I really able to *feel* what Eric and the other Congolese refugees I met in Kampala were feeling while they were talking to me?

Although I have been working on religious experience in Uganda since 2005, focusing especially on young people’s participation in the Pentecostal movement (Gusman 2013), I had never before experienced such a “margin of inadaptability” (Lanternari 1983) between my capacity to be empathic and the emotions and experiences Congolese refugees expressed, both in their words during interviews and informal conversations, and through their bodies during church services. As a nonpracticing Christian who grew up in a Catholic environment where the public expression of emotions in religious contexts was not even contemplated,¹ I had been challenged in my previous research by the problem of how to approach Pentecostals’ beliefs and experiences of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, glossolalia, and possession by demons. The “problem of belief” is an age-old question in the anthropology of religion, concerning the limits of accessing tacit knowledge and the spiritual experience of believers from the “outsider’s” perspective (Engelke 2002), so I felt in good company in acknowledging the gap between my own spiritual experience and that of the young Pentecostals in Kampala. But now this gap was doubled by the fact that the people I was working with were at one and the same time born-again *and* refugees, most of whom had a story of extreme suffering before their arrival in Kampala.

In spite of all my efforts to get closer to them, I felt I was unable even to imagine the level of suffering some of my Congolese friends were describing to me. How could I “analyze” their religious experience and the role of religion in their lives, given that most of them linked religion explicitly to concepts such as “solace” and “comfort”? My situation reminded me, at least in part, of Renato Rosaldo’s (1993) confession that he was not able to understand the rage the Ilongot reported to him as the reason for hunting their enemies’ heads until he experienced this same rage and deprivation when his wife, Michelle, died during fieldwork. I then started looking for a different approach to the religious experience of Congolese refugees in Kampala,

following Eric's more or less involuntary suggestion not to write with a full stomach, while pretending at the same time to be able to fully understand this experience and the reasons that push refugees to find a "refuge" in Congolese Pentecostal churches in Kampala.

Phenomenological and existential anthropology, together with the concept of a "lived religion," contributed to building the framework for this chapter: to take seriously the religious experience that is so central to the refugees I talked with, to refrain temporarily from judgments and analytical insights (in phenomenological terms, making an *epoché*), and to give greater emphasis to my interlocutors' experience using their own words.² Taking this approach, in this chapter I will not try to "explain" Congolese refugees' religious experience but will rather focus on this same experience as it is "lived" (i.e., rooted in the contexts people are living in, and interpreted and narrated by the social actors themselves) and to show how Pentecostalism helps Congolese refugees to frame their emotional states in spiritual terms (see the introduction to this volume). Thus, the affective states of insecurity, fear, and hopelessness that mark refugees' everyday lives in Kampala are translated into a different realm of emotions in which faith in God and in his plans provides room for narratives of hope. If emotion is the capacity to discursively frame the affective experience (Bialecki 2015), then, in the cases I present in this chapter, religious meaning and language are central to the semanticization of the experiences that born-again refugees reported to me.

To this effect, the second half of the present contribution is designed as a sort of "documentary in words" in five scenes, each of them based on the story of one of the Congolese refugees I met in Kampala. Here, I take on the role of "director": I choose five of the persons I interviewed during my research, select some parts of our conversations, and edit the five scenes in the form of a documentary that describes their religious experience in a context of displacement as reflected in the stories the protagonists in the documentary told me in Kampala. My aim in doing so is to describe the representations of the five persons' spiritual experiences (as well as of other refugees who went through similar circumstances) through their own words, without analyzing their narratives in depth, but emphasizing religious meaning-making as it is lived (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008) in refugees' lives in Kampala.

Based on fieldwork I conducted in 2013 (July–October) and 2014 (November–December) on the role of religion in the lives of urban refugees in Kampala this chapter also discusses the hypothesis that Pentecostal churches become, in this context, a "refuge" in the refuge, a place where one can find comfort and a break from the non-sense of the past and, often,

of everyday life in a displacement context. After introducing the situation of urban refugees in Kampala, I will focus on the presence of Congolese “refugee churches” in town, specifically in the neighborhood of Katwe.³ I will then introduce the “documentary in words,” describing through the actors’ words the five scenes, corresponding to five significant moments in the spiritual and moral life of refugees: their arrival in Kampala; the first few months in town; the counseling session at church; deliverance and healing services on a Saturday; and the church service on a Sunday. Altogether, the five scenes aim to describe the spiritual experience of the Congolese refugees I met during my research in the *Églises de Réveil* in Kampala.⁴

AN EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Anthropology has undergone major transformations in the last three decades, since Marcus and Fischer (1986) declared there was a “crisis of representation” in the discipline and in the social sciences more broadly; the reflections that followed opened the way for new approaches especially aimed at focusing on the less objectified aspects of cultural reality. The reference to the philosophical thought of authors such as Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and William James, among others, had a significant influence on the development of a wide range of phenomenological approaches in anthropology. Robert Desjarlais and Jason Throop (2011) identify four main phenomenological orientations in the discipline: hermeneutic, critical, existential, and cultural phenomenology. According to these authors, these approaches, while having different focuses, share some common points: the attention to life as it is lived, with its indeterminacies and ambiguities; the insistence on participation, with reference to William James’s “radical empiricism” (Jackson 1996); the interest in intersubjective and embodied components in the interaction with the world; and a sort of anti-intellectualist attitude, recognizing that it is not possible to separate knowledge from the world in which people live and act.

Starting from these assumptions, and in search of a suitable approach to the “lived religion” of the born-again Congolese refugees in Kampala, I recognize that the “experience-near” approach (Wikan 1991) that other anthropologists have used to explore religious experience is not possible in my case, as it implies living events that make one close to the people one is working with. I cannot share my informants’ experience in the way Jeanne Favret-Saada (1977) did by agreeing to become bewitched herself, or Paul Stoller

(Stoller and Olkes 1987) being initiated as a Songhay sorcerer. Aware of the limits as well as the potentialities of empathy in anthropology (see Hollan and Throop 2008), I follow the basic assumption of the anthropology of emotions that human beings are able to understand another's emotional state through the channels of empathic (usually nonverbal) communication (Lutz and White 1986).

I understand empathy here as a form of intersubjective emotional attunement that requires intentionality from all the actors involved (i.e., encountering one another in an effort to get close) and that it is not a constant state but rather manifests itself in specific moments, when emotional proximity permits an intersubjective alignment, despite the diversity and “opacity” (Crapanzano 2014) of other people's experiences. At the same time, I recognize that these moments of empathic connection—which can also be labeled a temporary “fusion of the horizons”—are elusive and carry with them the peril of “reducing the irreducibility of another's self-experience to the self-sameness of my own being” (Throop 2010, 777). I thus try to apply Veena Das's suggestion that our goal as ethnographers is “not some kind of ascent into the transcendent but a descent into everyday life” (2007, 15), and that this implies privileging the voices and views of our interlocutors.

The reference to the intersubjective dimension of the ethnographic endeavor is, of course, nothing new, being a part of the very definition of “participant observation”; yet, the specific focus on the intersubjective nature of ethnography has been described specifically in existential approaches (Jackson 1996, 1998). Going back to the original meaning of “intersubjectivity” in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, it has to be conceived not just as actual shared understanding (knowing what others have in mind) but as a “possibility.” As Alessandro Duranti puts it: “Intersubjectivity is thus an existential condition that can *lead* to a shared understanding—an important achievement in its own terms—rather than being itself such an understanding” (2010, 21, emphasis in original).

It is from the point of view I have just outlined that I will approach the religious experience of the five individuals who are the characters in the “documentary in words” that forms half of this chapter. This does not mean I am concerned here only with individual experience, but rather with the processes by which the specific moral experience of being born again simultaneously with being refugees in Kampala becomes possible. As the authors of the introduction to this volume point out, the way religious groups work to shape emotions and affect is not uniform; what they provide are “affective orientations and potentialities that are enacted and embodied along highly

situated paths.” The Congolese people I worked with, although each had a different trajectory and story, have all experienced the suspension of everyday life, the violence of forced displacement, and the need to rethink, spiritually and physically, their place in the world. In other words, they all went through those shifts in orientation to experience that Jarrett Zigon (2007) calls “moments of moral breakdown.” If it is true that “affective trajectories” are modes of orientation that involve both memories and imaginations of the future, then it is my opinion that the Christian narrative of salvation, suffering, and redemption, which is particularly powerful in the Pentecostal discourse, helps Congolese refugees in Kampala to regenerate their moral worlds and re-create a sense of continuity in their experience.⁵

The Pentecostal focus is greatly on *discontinuity*, as is clear from the reference to the “break with the past” (Meyer 1998b) in many of these churches; this idea can help Congolese refugees make sense of their new situation, of the fact of not having the possibility to go back to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) because their families have been killed and their houses burned. And yet, as Matthew Engelke (2010) has shown, languages of break and continuity are not mutually exclusive but can be complementary. The language of continuity, with its identification with biblical stories, especially the story of the forced migration of the people of Israel, can thus become an instrument with which to find continuity in a discontinuous experience, to find solace in the parallelism with the “elected people,” and to rebuild a moral world based on the assumption of a future redemption (i.e., in refugees’ experience, the possibility of being resettled in a Western country).

The idea that the success of Pentecostalism in Africa can be explained, at least in part, from the perspective of emotional and psychological solace has been criticized (Robbins 2009), and I have given it little consideration in my previous works; yet, the way Congolese refugees spoke to me about the church as a place of comfort and of moral regeneration led me to reconsider my previous position from a critical perspective and to think carefully about churches as sites for an expression of emotions that is often denied in refugees’ everyday life.

THE CONTEXT: URBAN REFUGEES IN UGANDA

The DRC has been experiencing enormous waves of forced displacement for the last two decades, due to political repression and the continuous conflicts in the Kivu regions. An estimated population of around 850,000 Congolese currently lives abroad, the majority in other African countries. Uganda is

by far the first country of refuge for people fleeing from the DRC, hosting almost 340,000 Congolese (data, June 2019).⁶ Most of these refugees come from the Kivu region, on the border with Uganda. The backgrounds of Congolese refugees are heterogeneous: men fleeing alone from the DRC to escape persecution; women with children; children or young adults who have lost their families and reached Uganda alone or with other families who have “adopted” them. Data from the UNHCR show that the gender distribution is similar (49 percent men; 51 percent women) and that almost 56 percent of Congolese refugees are younger than eighteen.

According to the UNHCR, in April 2019 more than 1,200,000 refugees and asylum seekers were living in Uganda,⁷ with an increasing number of them deciding to live in the urban setting of Kampala instead of in the camps. Among the 63,100 estimated by the UNHCR, around 30,000 are Congolese. These people usually arrive directly in the capital city, without passing through the camps, in search of security, a better livelihood, and access to services such as hospitals and schools for their children (Omata 2012).

While the literature on urban refugees in the global North is quite extensive, their presence in the towns of the South, especially in the fast-growing African urban slums, began to attract the interest of both international organizations and scholars only in recent years (Dryden-Peterson 2006). Yet, the number of refugees who choose to live in urban contexts is continuously growing, despite the fact that the majority of African countries’ policies for refugees are oriented to keep the refugee population in the camps, with limited or no access to assistance for those who decide to live in urban areas; in some cases, living outside the camps is illegal (Fábos and Kibreab 2007).

In Uganda, refugees who live in urban areas do not receive any assistance from the local government or from the UNHCR; nevertheless, Ugandan legislation concerning refugees is considered a positive exception in the continent, as the Refugee Bill (passed in 2006 but applied only in 2009) recognizes refugees’ right to live where they prefer, to move freely within the country, and to work (Kreibaum 2016). Before this law was passed, the presence of refugees in Uganda was ruled by the old Control of the Alien Refugee Act, which, since 1964, obliged refugees to live in the camps. However, despite improvements to the new law, the Refugee Bill was criticized because it is still largely insufficient to guarantee protection and assistance for those who live in the urban centers (Bernstein and Okello 2007).

In this situation, once they arrive in Kampala, Congolese refugees look

for relatives or friends who already live in the city to receive initial assistance and to find a place to sleep. When they don't know anyone in town, as is frequently the case, they rely on the "protective networks" organized by religious organizations (Sommers 2001), which help them to settle in town and give them instructions on how to move and live in Kampala, including the process of obtaining refugee status. For those who arrive in Kampala from the DRC, the numerous *Églises de Réveil* in town are often the first place where they meet other Congolese and receive a welcome, food, and a form of counseling.

The weakness of the welfare services provided by the government and international organizations leaves room for alternative forms of assistance (and evangelization) from Congolese religious groups, which are numerous, especially in those areas where the number of refugees is higher. Congolese live in different parts of town, but mostly in Nsambya and Katwe, where I conducted my research and where there is the highest concentration of Congolese churches.

CONGOLESE "REFUGEE CHURCHES" IN KAMPALA

The role of religion in contexts of displacement, especially regarding urban refugees, has been little explored to date.⁸ The few existing studies on this subject usually focus on the creation of churches and faith-based organizations as actors for assistance in social welfare in circumstances where national states and international organizations fail to provide help to urban refugees (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011; Lauterbach 2014). While those topics are highly important, in this chapter I argue that the specific spiritual role of religious belonging in refugees' lives has been understressed and that there is a need to take it seriously. Religion does not enter in refugees' lives only as a resource in an emergency or as an instrument to establish social networks in the new setting; it also helps to make sense of a suffering that is often hardly understandable for those involved (Shoeb, Weinstein, and Halpern 2007; Adogame 1998).

An important aspect of the Congolese diaspora is the foundation of *Églises de Réveil*, which are linked to a mother church in the DRC or start a new congregation in the countries of arrival. Although churches of Congolese origin have been installed in Europe since the 1970s, a recent wave of Congolese churches has appeared in Europe, North America, and Africa, attracting the interest of anthropologists working in Canada (Mossière

2010), Belgium (Demart 2008), France (Mottier 2012), and Uganda (Lauterbach 2014). A significant case in this respect is the presence of recently founded Congolese “refugee churches” in Kampala. In November 2014, there were fifty-five Congolese churches registered under the association *Communauté Chrétienne Congolaise en Ouganda* in Kampala, and seventy in total in the country.⁹ However, this figure depicts only a part of the scenario: according to the leader of the association, there are around 150 *Églises de Réveil* in Kampala alone.¹⁰

During my fieldwork, I mapped the presence of Congolese churches in the suburb of Katwe, a poor, rapidly expanding neighborhood with a significant component of Congolese refugees. I was able to locate fourteen churches in the area, considering only the congregations that have a fixed location, not those meeting in private houses (at least three or four on Sundays). All of these churches, with just one exception, arrived in Kampala or were locally founded after 2000. Their congregations usually are small, ranging from thirty or forty up to around three hundred members, and the size fluctuates, as members move quite frequently from one church to another, travel abroad, or move to a different neighborhood in Kampala and look for another church. Because of the composition of the congregations, these churches usually lack the means to build a permanent structure and are constructed of simple and perishable materials, such as wood and metal sheeting. The congregations of these “refugee churches” reflect the refugee population in Uganda, with a high number of children under the age of eighteen (around 30 percent of the total) and similar proportions of men and women, while the large majority of church officers are men. I conducted most of my research in three of these churches (*All Saints’ Church*, *Église de Jesus Christ*, *Fepau*) and met those persons who became the characters in the five scenes of the “documentary in words” that constitutes the second part of this chapter. Their stories are not unique, but rather are representative of similar experiences other refugees told me; the aim of the following sections is to represent, through the voices of these five characters, the role of religion in the lives of Congolese refugees living in Kampala.

Scene 1. Arrival in Kampala:
Fear and Disorientation (Héritier)

Many Congolese describe their arrival in Kampala as disorienting: very few of them speak English before arriving in Uganda, and their efforts to communicate in Swahili are frustrated, as most Ugandans do not like Swahili or speak only a little. The taxi park, where the buses usually end their trip to Kampala, is a chaotic space, filled with hundreds of *matatu* (collective taxis) waiting to leave; most of the refugees I met reported that, after getting off the bus, they experienced a deep sense of solitude and dismay. Only a few of them had a contact in the form of a friend or relative. Some were taken to the police station, but in most cases people directed them to a church in order to find assistance and a place to sleep.

"Refugee churches" are often the first actor to give assistance (food, medicine, shelter) in the emergency of people just arriving from the DRC; this is not reserved for church members only but is given to anyone in need (Lauterbach 2014). Congolese Pentecostal churches are more efficient than other religious actors in providing this primary form of assistance; Stephen Kuteesa, the country representative of the Catholic Jesuit Refugee Service, admits:

There are very many Congolese Pentecostal churches in this area and in Kampala. We have to partner with them: when you interview people you can even get none who would say, "When I came, I was hosted by a Catholic church." It is very rare, actually, if it is there. When they come, they will tell you "On arrival, I was received by friends who took me to a Congolese Pentecostal church" . . . so you realize that most of these people are already attached; you can't break this bond, because it is something that is already getting them together.¹¹

The story of Héritier illustrates the reasons some of the Congolese refugees in Kampala converted to Pentecostalism after their arrival in Uganda.¹² At the time he fled from the DRC, in January 2011, Héritier was nineteen years old; he came alone, after escaping from the people who had attacked and killed most of his family. In 2014, Héritier had been living in Kampala for almost four years, except for six months when he went to a camp "because I was hungry and had no means to survive here in town. But life there was

even harder, and after a few months I decided to come back to Kampala.”¹³
This is the story of Hérítier’s arrival in Kampala:

When I arrived here in Kampala, I didn’t know where to go; I just had a small bag with a few clothes in it; no documents, and only 30,000 Ugandan shillings [about 10 euros]; I was tired, lost. . . . I did not speak English, and I felt so weak and bad for what I had gone through. It was six in the morning when we arrived. I was a Muslim, at that time a serious Muslim. So I entered a mosque and stayed there all day long, without doing anything. During the prayer, I prayed; for the rest of the time I just stayed there, I felt so bad. After the evening prayer, when everyone was leaving, I hid myself for one hour behind a curtain, then when no one was around I lay down and slept until five in the morning, when I woke up for the first prayer. I hid my bag and went out; I was afraid of the police because I had no documents. I was hungry and felt extremely weak. I had not eaten anything for the previous two days. I feared to cross the road, so I sat down in a bar near there and asked for some tea and bread. While I was eating, a little boy of seven or eight years stood in front of me and said, “Maman, regarde, c’est Hérítier.” I turned my head and saw the woman, she was a friend of my family in Congo; they took me with them, and I lived with them for the next two years. I will never forget that first day here in Kampala, and the gift God sent me with that woman.¹⁴

This was the last occasion on which Hérítier entered a mosque; he was disheartened because the imam did not help him, and he had to hide in order to spend the night in the mosque. The family who “adopted” him was Pentecostal, so he started going to the same church (Fepau), where at the time we met he was responsible for the sound mixer and the music arrangements. Hérítier’s adoption by the family he met on the first day is not at all an isolated case within the community of Congolese refugees in Kampala. On the one hand, refugees compete to get the little aid that international organizations offer and to obtain resettlement by every possible means, including bribing police officers and witchcraft. On the other hand, the other side of this Hobbesian “war of all against all” is a deep sense of solidarity that pushes people who live with a family (sometimes already eight to ten people) in a space of no more than twenty square meters to host a newcomer when he or she is alone and has nowhere to go.

Scene 2. The First Months in Kampala:
In Search of Oneself (Hortense)

Hortense is a tailor who arrived in Kampala from Bunya in 2002 with her three children. Her story shows the hardships single mothers face in conditions of exile, the difficulties people go through during the first months after their arrival in Kampala, and the different roles religious affiliation can play in such a situation. Praying is often referred to as one of the main means people use to recover from the violence experienced in the DRC and to find the strength to start a new life in Kampala, a context perceived not only as “strange” but often as hostile too.

Hortense interpreted the whole of her long stay in Kampala (she was resettled in Norway in December 2014) in light of God’s plan for her and her children, stressing the importance of faith to survive in the new context at the beginning, and the role of the church in providing the networks that allowed her to begin her activity as a tailor and open a small shop in the suburb of Nsambya:

The first place where we stayed here in Kampala was a Congolese church, near here, in Nsambya; we stayed there for three months; I was just trying to recover, doing nothing, I felt like I was no more able to work. After three months I decided that I had to do something; I asked a lady I had met in church to host my three children and started to live outside, on the streets. I did some small jobs to pay for food for my children, but I spent most of the time praying. I was praying, walking and praying; when I was tired I entered a church and slept for a while, then I woke up and started praying again. I left my children to that woman for three months. I felt I really needed to be free and pray; when I see such a desert, I multiply my prayers. Therefore, I was trying to look into myself and understand why nothing was going in the right direction, in my life. I asked God, “O God, why all this suffering? Why is this not going to an end?”

After three months living this way, Hortense started feeling better and able to work, but she had no means to start an activity; retrospectively, she attributed her opportunity in opening the shop to her faith and her prayers:

It took three months, then I felt restored, and God helped me, connecting me with generous people at the church, who bought a sewing machine for me and gave me some money to pay the rent of the shop for the first three months. This is how I started my new life, and since then God has made

many things in my life, so I was able to send all my three children to school and keep them away from dangerous situations. Life here is hard for refugees, we need discipline; either you live in Christ or in the chaos, there is no other choice. Christ is the only one who never leaves you alone when you are in trouble.

This topic of the Manichaean struggle of chaos versus order (Satan vs. Christ) is a topos of the Pentecostal discourse about the “world-breaking” process (Robbins 2004) through which believers break with their past. In the case of the Congolese refugees, breaking with their lives in the DRC is frequently said to be a necessity: although some of them plan to go back to their home, most are aware that they will never live again in Congo because their relatives have been killed and their houses burned. Especially during the first months in Kampala, thoughts often go back to one’s previous life. Hortense told me:

When your heart is troubled, you are not able to do anything. You start comparing your actual life with the life in Congo; but here, we are in Kampala, you don’t have your family and friends here. No one helps you except Christ; even if some people can help you, they will travel, or will not be able or willing to help you more, and will finally leave you alone with your problems. Only God will never leave you alone—my life is a testimony to this. That’s why, when someone arrives from Congo, I always said: “You need to be patient and perseverant, and trust God”; because only God can heal you and give you a new life.¹⁵

The need to break with one’s life in Congo is one of the reasons for the frequent recourse to deliverance in “refugee churches” in Kampala (Gusman 2016). Yet, chaos and dangers are not confined to the past: Hortense stressed that these dimensions are part of the present too. In her testimony, informed by the Pentecostal discourse about evil, suffering is the result of the activities of demons and witches in the physical world (Pype 2011). I will return to the theme of deliverance in the fourth scene.

Scene 3. Haunting of Spirits: A Difficult Conversion (Roger)

Roger came alone to Kampala from Goma in April 2012. After two and a half years living in Kampala, he still felt “out of place”; one could see him walking in the streets near Katwe, hanging his head, with a bundle of clothes on his right arm. He went around trying to sell something, but he was not

able to get accustomed to this kind of life. In the DRC he was the son of a *chef coutumier* (*mwami*, a traditional chief); his family had a nice house, big and well furnished. He could not accept the fact that someone was now living in his family's house, after killing his father and other relatives. Roger was able to run away, as his two brothers apparently did, but he had had no news of his family since he arrived in Kampala.

The story Roger told me is one of extreme violence (before arriving in Uganda, he was kidnapped by a group of rebels and kept in the forest as a slave for four months), witchcraft, and conversion to a religion in which he found some relief in counseling sessions. As Roger recounted:

During the first eight months in Kampala I slept outside the police station in Old Kampala. I had no place where to go, and I was terrified that someone could come and look for me here to kill me. One day, it was February of last year, a pastor saw me there and talked to me. When I told him my story, he took me with him to his church, and I lived there for some months. I was traumatized, my head was not able to think clearly, and I had some problems with my stomach. The pastor and other people of the church came during the day and talked to me, they taught me the Word, and they counseled me. I even started singing in the choir.

This was the first time Roger was ever in a church; as part of the traditional, kinship-based system of power, his family had its own "familiar demons" (*mapepu*), as Roger called them. This made it particularly difficult to complete his conversion, as "demons are coming back to me, struggling to resist my will to be baptized in Christ." He frequently went to church for counseling on Thursday afternoons. He described how he felt an internal struggle between the Holy Spirit and his familiar demons and felt confused:

When I'm in church and sing in the choir, I feel happy and I really want to be baptized; but when I'm in my room alone, I start thinking about my past and what happened to me, and the demons sometimes arrive. . . . They tell me they can help me take revenge against those who killed my family. I want to be a good Christian, you know, I want to be free of these things, but my thoughts are still confused; I don't feel free from my past yet.¹⁶

During counseling sessions, the pastor, after giving Roger advice on how to live and how to keep strong in his Christian life, prayed for him. Roger's body started shaking, until he fell down on the floor: his body and his mind had become an arena for spiritual warfare between good and evil.

Scene 4. Saturday at Church:

Deliverance and Healing Service (Célestine)

Collective deliverance is frequent in Congolese churches in Kampala. Some congregations organize sessions of deliverance during one of the weekly services, while others have a specific deliverance and healing session, usually on Saturdays. As Cazarin and Burchardt convincingly show in their chapter in this volume, deliverance sessions are part of a process of “emotional resocialization” through which believers’ emotional repertoires are synchronized. Violence, wars in the DRC, and the difficulties refugees face in their lives in Kampala are explained in religious terms, as the result of the strong links people have with “traditional spirits”; believers are invited to bring their “fetishes” to church in order to burn and destroy them and break the covenant with the evil spirits (cf. Sasha Newell 2007). This iconoclastic attitude toward the tools of mediums and witches is part of the process of breaking with the past. Deliverance also has a prognostic component for Congolese refugees: the perspective of a future deliverance, often seen in terms of “traveling abroad” and achieving ultimate resettlement in a Western country, is central in the worldviews of Congolese refugees (Gusman 2018); in this way they are able to locate their suffering within God’s plan and to make sense of the hardships they face in their daily lives by attributing them to the presence of demons that continue to follow them even after they have fled from the DRC (Demart 2008).

It was during one of these sessions that I saw Célestine crying out loud while lying on the floor of the All Saved Church; I had met her before, as she was a friend of Eric’s. Outside the church, Célestine had appeared strong, a hardworking woman who went around selling small jewels or doing housework in exchange for small sums of money. Her husband had been killed in their house in Goma, but she had been able to escape with her three children and reach Kampala. I had an image of her as a very active woman, always smiling and welcoming people in her house, so it was strange, at first, to see her lying on the floor for more than half an hour.

The following is how I described the deliverance session in my field notes that same morning:

After the fasting session, it’s time for adoration; it starts as a series of joyful songs, but then soon turns into an incredibly powerful deliverance session, one of the most intense I have ever seen.

At first, only one pastor is delivering those who are showing the signs of possession (jumping or turning around, hurting other people). It's a real, physical fight between the demon and the pastor. It's around 1:00 PM (after four hours since we entered the church) when the atmosphere changes again; now the endless sound of the drums, the more and more disorganized songs and convulsed dances make more people show the signs of possession. There are now at a time four to five people shouting, jumping, rolling on the floor; the three pastors go around in the church, tired, covered with sweat, to keep on fighting with the many demons who are attacking the believers. The floor is covered with those who have already been delivered and now lie washed out, some of them crying. At the end, almost half of the participants have gone through deliverance; at 2:30 PM, with a last prayer, the service ends.

At the end of the service, I asked Célestine about her experience of that morning, and she responded as follows:

The service on Saturday morning is my space. I ask a friend to stay with my children and come here alone. I need this moment; the church is a space where I can sing to God, I can pray, pray, and pray, until I feel exhausted. I asked God to help me, to protect my children. It is also the place where I can express my emotions. During the week I work hard, every day. I go around, I walk for hours, my feet even hurt, but I know that I have to walk more if I want to sell my stuff and have the money to pay the rent, to buy some food. I don't have lunch, sometimes I just drink some water and go on working; I don't have money, and I don't have time to stop. I'm always worried, I fear that one day the landlord can kick us out of the house if I'm not able to find the money for it. When I go back home, in the evening, I'm so tired, sometimes the day was bad, I had not sold anything, but I have to smile and tell my children everything is OK, that life is good, and we have to be happy. But it's hard, it's hard to be here alone. . . . During the week I have to keep on walking and smile to my children. I cannot cry; but here, here is a place where I can cry.¹⁷

The deliverance session, with its emotional effervescence, can thus be seen as lying beyond the "problem of belief"; as a space in which to express the emotions that are not allowed in everyday life, it provides a context in which suffering can become a dignified performance.

Scene 5. The Sunday Service: Staying Together (Fidèle)

Building a shared sense of “community” in diasporic contexts is a complex process, made even more difficult in the case of the DRC: Congolese people express the fear that the conflicts of their homeland may extend into transnational spaces among diasporic groups, thus preventing them from re-creating a sense of “home” and belonging in their exile (Russell 2011). In this situation, religious affiliation can become an instrument that transcends ethnic and national boundaries. This feeling of “being together” is central to the religious experience of Fidèle; in the DRC he was a member not of an *Église de Réveil* but of a classic Protestant denomination. When he arrived in Kampala in 2011, he had no place to stay, so someone referred him to *Jésus Seul Sauveur*, a Congolese Pentecostal church; he slept there for three weeks, then the pastor helped him to find a small room to rent. In the meantime, he had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

Many among us lost our families in DRC or came alone to escape persecutions. We arrive here as individuals, but once we arrive in church, we already find a new family in which we can share our experience and find some help. We went through very bad experiences in Congo, so we have serious problems, internally. But when you enter a Congolese church and you hear other people speaking your own language, you already feel better. And from that moment you know that, if you are in need, someone will help you; if you fall sick someone will come and visit you at your place; you are no more alone.

To Fidèle, this was not so much a matter of material help but of spiritual relief; he did not see the church as a provider of services but as a “refuge” from the hardships of everyday life:

I don't receive any material help from my church. This was only at the beginning, when I arrived and had nothing, no place to go. After some weeks or months, pastors tell you: “Now, you have to do with what you have.” New people come, they have to help the newcomers; you see, means are limited here. So we don't come here looking for help from the pastor, but to stay together and pray to God. During the week, we are all busy struggling to find some money to buy food, we don't have time to stay together, to share thoughts and feelings. We don't try to obtain something from each other, because we don't have anything; when someone has no money to buy food, we collect 2,000 or 3,000 Ugandan shillings, that's all we can do. We come here to stay together and pray to our God.

Yet, there is another dimension to this discourse about “staying together,” that is, the construction of the image of a morally self-righteous church member and of a community of people who are morally right. This construction is used to build a sense of “we-ness” and to negotiate their marginal position in relation to the wider Ugandan society (Brodwin 2003); the “break” not only with the past, but with the outside world, is an exercise in boundary-making (Daswani 2013):

The people here, we are all together, we are never alone because we have all the same God, and God illuminates our lives. But outside, there are people who walk alone, in the darkness, they don't follow the light of God. It is very dangerous, in our situation, to stay far from God and alone; it is easy to take a bad way—you end up meandering, and you can easily become a bandit.¹⁸

CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN CONTEXTS OF DISPLACEMENT

The idea that fieldwork can lead to something different from the ethnographer's initial approach to the research topic is part of the rhetoric of “good ethnography”; instability and mutation are constitutive of the fieldwork experience, and “the worthiest of questions are not at all guaranteed to remain stable through the empirical course of their resolution” (Faubion 2009, 162). What Eric said during our Sunday lunch challenged me to think more carefully about my limits in understanding his (and other people's) experience of fleeing the DRC and of being a refugee and a born-again Christian in Kampala.

These considerations led me to shift my approach and adopt a less analytical one, in which empathy and intersubjectivity play a major part and which is not aimed at explaining the religious experience of the Congolese refugees I had worked with in Kampala, but rather at focusing on this experience as it is lived and represented in their own words. A significant number of Congolese refugees (around 30,000) live in the capital city, mainly in informal structures and in difficult living conditions; upon their arrival, many among them speak poor English or no English at all. In this situation, they describe the urban setting of Kampala as disorienting, hostile, uncomfortable, and dangerous. With limited assistance from international organizations, and unlikely to find a formal job, most of them turn for assistance to the numerous Congolese Pentecostal churches that have been founded in the city, especially in those poor neighborhoods like Katwe where Congo-

lese refugees live. As I have shown with the five scenes of the documentary in words, in the *Églises de Réveil* they find both material help (as in the stories of Hortense, Roger, and Fidèle) and spiritual support; this led some of them (Héritier, Roger, and Fidèle) to convert to Pentecostalism after their arrival in Kampala.

These two aspects are significant to explore; yet, in this chapter I have focused especially on “refugee churches” as spaces for the expression of emotions and of ritual effervescence (Mossière 2007b; Jennings 2015). The religious discourse shifts everyday experience onto a different level, that of God’s plan; in this narrative of suffering and redemption, the experience of suffering, marginality, and displacement becomes dignified (see also Brodwin 2003). In this way, it helps Congolese refugees to map the affective trajectories they experience through time onto emotional categories: for instance, fear derived from living in an environment perceived as hostile and dangerous is mitigated by hope that comes from the prediction that good things will happen (redemption). These “moral emotions,” conveyed through religious ideas and practices, are also “moral judgments” that guide actions in everyday life (Parish 1994).

Part of this approach is the choice to organize the ethnography in this chapter as a “documentary in words” describing five scenes in the life-worlds of Congolese born-again refugees in Kampala through the voices and stories of five characters. With this documentary I have shown that religious experience in a context of displacement is marked by a significant component of discontinuity following the escape from the DRC. This situation can be described in terms of a “moral breakdown,” one in which Pentecostalism, with its ritual effervescence and the stress on the communitarian aspect, can become a means to express emotions that are contained in everyday life and to create a feeling of “being together.” Religious experience is thus a “refuge in the refuge” and a meaning-maker, for the references to suffering and redemption and to the break with the past help Congolese refugees re-create their moral worlds after the violence they have experienced, and escaped from, in the DRC.

NOTES

1. The post-Conciliar Catholic Church leaves room for a certain degree of emotional expression, i.e., with more lively music; yet, here I am referring to a rural district in the northwest of Italy in the early 1980s, where the main innovation consisted of playing acoustic guitar instead of the organ during the Sunday “youth service.”

2. “Lived religion” is a fluid and elusive concept, which has been applied especially to the American context (Hall 1997); I use it here as a tool to approach the religiosity of individuals and groups as rooted in their life-worlds (Streib, Dinter, and Söderblom 2008) and to acknowledge the work of social agents as narrators and interpreters of their own experiences and stories (Orsi 1985).

3. With the expression “refugee churches,” I mean churches where the majority and sometimes almost the totality of the congregation is composed of refugees or asylum seekers. Katwe is one of the poorest and fastest-growing neighborhoods in Kampala. If in the 1960s it was still largely occupied by forests and swamps, it has been expanding for the last three decades, mainly through informal settlements.

4. The name *Églises de Réveil* (Awakening Churches) refers to a constellation of churches originating in Congo and in other French-speaking countries. These are Pentecostal-like churches, both independent or part of larger evangelical denominations, that call themselves *Églises de Réveil*, in opposition to “classic” evangelical denominations.

5. I do not mean here that this narrative of salvation and redemption is the only or even the main reason that Congolese refugees turn to “refugee churches” in Kampala; I recognize that the material help and support these churches provide, especially to newcomers from the DRC, are important aspects, especially in the absence of welfare from the Ugandan government and from international organizations (see the next section). In three of the five stories I present in this chapter (Hortense, Roger, and Fidèle), the role of these elements is evident. Yet, my aim here is to show that the specific spiritual role of religion in refugees’ lives has been understressed and that there is a need to focus on this dimension, too.

6. UNHCR, Operational Portal, Refugee Situations, “DRC situation,” <http://data.unhcr.org/drc/regional.php> (accessed June 5, 2019).

7. UNHCR, Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Portal, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/uga> (accessed June 5, 2019).

8. Two issues of the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, whose topics, respectively, were “Religion and Spirituality in Forced Migration” (no. 2, 2002) and “Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement” (no. 3, 2011), are an exception in this regard.

9. The *Communauté Chrétienne Congolaise en Ouganda* was established in Kampala in 2010.

10. Personal communication, December 2014.

11. Interview with author, August 23, 2013.

12. While some of the Pentecostal Congolese I met in Kampala had already been born again in their home country, a significant number of them converted after their

arrival in Uganda, usually coming from Catholic or “classic” Protestant churches. I was able to identify only two Congolese who converted from Islam.

13. Interviews with Congolese refugees have been translated from the French by the author.

14. Interview with author, December 12, 2014.

15. Interview with author, September 10, 2013.

16. Interview with author, December 9, 2014.

17. Interview with author, October 7, 2013.

18. Interview with author, December 18, 2014.