Johara Berriane

7 Transnational Evangelical Spaces in Muslim Urban Settings: The Presence and Place-Making of African Christian Migrants in Morocco

Since the late 1990s, Morocco has been transited by an increasing number of primarily sub-Saharan African migrants en route to Europe. However, due to the reinforcement of border controls by European states, the transit space that Morocco used to be has gradually morphed into a buffer zone, where many of these migrants find themselves blocked and thus need to re-evaluate their migration aspirations. As a consequence, African migrants have tended to settle in Moroccan cities, where they have then managed to integrate into specific niches of the Moroccan urban economy.[1] Despite the comparatively small number of migrants in Morocco (representing approximately 0.2 per cent of the total population), they are becoming more visible in the urban space, and Moroccan society is becoming increasingly aware of its role as an immigration country. This awareness has been growing since late 2013, when the Moroccan King proclaimed that the nation had become a host country for migrants and instructed the government to establish a global migration policy. The main outcome was the launching of two large operations for the regularization of undocumented migrants, during which around 50,000 migrants received residency status.[2] This new political setting has encouraged the more stable and permanent settlement of "regularised" migrants but has failed to limit the arrival and circulation of newcomers.

Although many African migrants still consider Morocco as a stepping stone, transit has never been the sole motivation of migrants entering the country. Recent research has rather shown that even prior to the launching of its migration policy, Morocco had already been a destination in its own right for

1 M. Kettani and M. Péraldi, "Les mondes du travail: Segmentations et informalités", in: M. Péraldi (ed.), *D'une Afrique à l'autre. Migrations subsahariennes au Maroc*, Paris: Karthala, 2011, pp. 53–70.

2 J. Afrique, "Maroc: des centaines de migrants subsahariens interpellés et déplacés", *Jeune Afrique*, 31 August 2018, available at https://www.jeuneafrique.com/622218/societe/maroc-des-centaines-de-migrants-subsahariens-interpelles-et-deplaces/ (accessed 10 June 2019).

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diverse migrant populations from Africa, Europe, and other origins,[3] involving complex and changeable motivations to immigrate.[4] Finally, even the transient presence of migrants in North Africa has an impact on the spaces that are crossed.[5] One way to analyse the effects of this new presence of strangers in Moroccan cities is to look at the effects on religion. The presence of Christian migrants has been particularly visible in cities such as Rabat and Casablanca, where Born-Again Christian groups have been establishing spaces of worship that challenge local conceptions of religious practices and aesthetics, while introducing alternative forms of belonging that fit with the migratory projects of many sub-Saharan migrants encountered in Morocco. The "religious place-making" of Christian migrants represents only one quite marginal aspect and means of participation of the geographically and culturally diverse migrant communities in Morocco. However, analysing migrants' religious place-making – in the sense of "the activity or establishing a particular locality for religious practice"[6]– enables us to extend our understanding of the extent that "moments" spent in Morocco[7] have a meaning for people on the move, who both identify with this space and make it their own, contributing through the allocation of new meanings and values while connecting with transnational religious territories.[8]

This chapter attempts to empirically analyse the extent to which the religious spaces produced by such place-making are embedded in the transnational religious territories and participate in the everyday life and migration projects of their members. Drawing on the "production of social space" as a dialectic relationship between the physical space, the representation of space, and spaces of representations,[9] religious sites are understood here as "dynamic

3 M. Timéra, "Aventuriers ou orphelins de la migration internationale: Nouveaux et anciens migrants 'subsahariens' au Maroc", *Politique Africaine* 3 (2009) 115, pp. 175–195.

4 M. Collyer and H. de Haas, "Developing Dynamic Categorisations of Transit Migration", *Population, Space and Place* 18 (2012) 4, pp. 468–481.

5 S. Bredeloup, "Sahara Transit: Times, Spaces, People", *Population, Space and Place* 18 (2012) 4, pp. 457–467, at 461.

6 G. Hüwelmeier and K. Krause, "Introduction", in: G. Hüwelmeier and K. Krause (eds.), *Traveling Spirits: Migrants, Markets and Mobilities*, New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 8.

7 J. Berriane, "The Moroccan Moment and Communities of Itinerants: Mobility and Belonging in the Transnational Trajectories of Sub-Saharan Migrants", in: O. Bakewell and L. Landau (eds.), *Forging African Communities: Mobility, Integration and Belonging*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 57–74, at 83.

8 D. Garbin, "Regrounding the Sacred: Transnational Religion, Place Making and the Politics of Diaspora among the Congolese in London and Atlanta", *Global Networks* 14 (2014) 3, pp. 363–382, at 365.

9 H. Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, Paris: Anthropos, 2000.

entities" that are not merely embedded locally but also represent "the product of wider contacts" and "global forces", in the sense of "the geographical beyond, the world beyond the place itself".[10] From this point of view, the religious sites in Morocco that are utilized and shaped by sub-Saharan migrants may help us explore the manner in which the religious institutions of migrants are simultaneously anchored in particular places and shaped by global change and transnational migration and circulation. Considering the religious place-making of Christian African migrants in Morocco may facilitate our understanding of how, in a state that has only recently recognized its role as a host country, religious minorities negotiate their presence and identify strategies to make their religion visible; moreover, this may shed light on the migrants' position in local power relations and on their means/tools of contestation and local engagement. The adoption of Islam as the official state religion of Morocco and the attempt to control any religious expression in public have certainly had an impact on religious presence in the urban space. This situation constitutes a challenge for Christian migrants, who have to respond to the pre-established "urban spatial regimes" by "marking, crossing and negotiating boundaries between sacred and profane, religious and secular, personal and public spaces [. . .] as they seek to carve out places to be".[11]

This chapter is based on ethnographic research in five different churches recently founded by migrants (two in Casablanca and three in Rabat) that I visited during three stays in 2015, 2016, and 2017.[12] I participated in several religious gatherings and held regular discussions with the members. Additionally, I conducted in-depth interviews with 17 church leaders[13] in the cities of Rabat and Casablanca and five congregants who were particularly active in their churches.[14]

I propose to introduce the Moroccan religious context and describe how migration contributes to its pluralization and Christianization. Then I will focus on the place-making of Charismatic churches and their link with the complex Moroccan migratory pattern. Finally, I will show how church members adapt to the local spatial regime and develop strategies to become locally present.

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10 D. Massey, "Places and Their Pasts", *History Workshop Journal* (1995) 39, p. 183.

11 M. Vásquez and J. Dewind, "Introduction to the Religious Lives of Migrant Minorities: A Transnational and Multi-Sited Perspective", *Global Networks* 14 (2014) 3, p. 258.

12 The fieldwork was funded by the German Historical Institute of Paris.

13 Among them 10 nationals from Democratic Republic of Congo, 1 from Republic of the Congo, 4 from Ivory Coast, 1 from Cameroon, 1 from Nigeria. Apart from one female pastor from Ivory Coast, all the church leaders were male.

14 Three from Ivory Coast, 1 from Republic Congo, and 1 from Senegal. Three congregants were women and two were men.

The Pluralization and "Pentecostalization" of Morocco's Christian Landscape

The Church of the Evangelist J is located in a somewhat dilapidated dwelling house in the popular J3 district in the southern part of Rabat. Believers have to climb several dimly lit spiral staircases in order to reach a small room built on top of the original flat roof of the house that has been converted for use as a church. In contrast to the poverty of the building, the room is fitted with lush red carpet, with one of the four walls covered with a curtain made of golden and silver fabric and four fans suspended from the walls. In front of the curtain, an altar in glass decorated with plastic flowers rests next to a bass guitar. In one of the corners, six stacks of plastic chairs are stored. The Congolese evangelist J arrived in Morocco in March 2013, where he soon commenced with his "mission". J was already involved in a church prior to his emigration from his home town, where he was trained by a Pentecostal pastor. In Morocco, he first led a prayer gathering in the living room of a female migrant before his number of followers increased and he decided to seek a larger space fully dedicated to worship. In late 2014 he established his own church in the aforementioned room after – as he reported – God had instructed him to do so.[15] Collective worship takes place there on four occasions in the week: besides the Sunday service, dedicated to the adoration of God, the believers also meet on Tuesday afternoons for collective prayers, Thursday for spiritual warfare and deliverance, and on Wednesday for night vigils that take place from midnight until dawn. Besides Evangelist J, other members are involved in the church activities: a choir of 4 young Congolese men performs during every collective meeting; during Sunday services or other larger gatherings, a lady at the entrance to the room is responsible for the "protocol" and assigns a seat to each participant who arrives; while a "moderator" leads the vocal prayer and singing that introduce the preaching of Evangelist J or any other invited preacher.

This church largely resembles other "house-churches" that have been founded since the mid-2000s by African migrants in Moroccan cities – especially in Rabat – and have contributed to the pluralization of the Christian landscape. Following independence in 1956, the Christian churches built during colonial times served only a limited number of European worshippers, with Christianity being perceived as the religion of the French and Spanish colonizers.[16] Since the 1980s, with the arrival of sub-Saharan students and later of migrants from West

15 Interview 10, Congolese migrant, Rabat, 18 December 2015.

16 J. Baida and V. Féroldi, *Présence chrétienne au Maroc*, Rabat: Bou-Regreg, 1995.

and Central Africa, the situation shifted slightly, with churches inherited from the colonial era, such as the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church of Morocco, reactivated, while later the Protestant landscape – through the foundation of migrant house-churches – expanded geographically and became more diversified.

The mainline churches (Catholic and Protestant) that are officially recognized and protected by the Moroccan state appear to be unable to meet the needs of all Christian believers who currently reside in Morocco. As in other parts of the African continent, Pentecostal and charismatic movements have spread. Although slight doctrinal differences exist between the migrant churches I visited, all the believers and church leaders I interviewed in Rabat and Casablanca said they belonged to "Pentecostal Protestant churches". This links back to a 2013 survey which found 75 per cent of the house-churches established in Rabat to be part of the Congolese revivalist movement (Eglises de Réveil) or a "neo-Pentecostal denomination".[17] Their Pentecostal orientation – as all my informants explained – is the principal reason why they do not attend mainline churches. According to my informants, the main feature of their churches (and Pentecostalism) is the central role of the Holy Spirit, considered to be "God [the Father and the Son] in another shape",[18] who is able to heal and can be perceived through miracles.[19] Besides that, the importance of charisma was emphasized: the ability to function as pastor, evangelist, or prophet is above all a spiritual gift or a "divine grace".[20] During my regular visits of service, the praising of healing and testimonies of visions and miracles were prevalent, while glossolalia took place regularly, all characteristics of Pentecostal practices.[21] This would also partly explain the large number of Congolese house-churches in Morocco compared to other nationalities, since Pentecostal movements have become very popular in the Democratic Republic of Congo since the 1990s.[22] A survey conducted in 2013 by the Protestant Church (EEAM) revealed that 20 house-churches dispersed in several suburbs of Rabat were

17 B. Coyault, "L'africanisation de l'Église évangélique au Maroc: Revitalisation d'une institution religieuse et dynamiques d'individualisation", *L'Année du Maghreb* 2 (2014) 11, pp. 81–103.

18 Interview 12, Congolese migrant, Rabat, 13 January 2016.

19 Interview 3, Ivorian migrant, Casablanca, 21 November 2015.

20 Interview 16, Congolese migrant, Tamesna, 30 June 2016.

21 B. Meyer, "Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches", *Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004), pp. 447–474.

22 S. Kalombo Kapuku, "La pentecôtisation du protestantisme à Kinshasa", *Afrique contemporaine* 252 (2014) 4, pp. 51–71.

founded by migrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Four others were run by Nigerians, one by a Cameroonian pastor and one by a Liberian prophetess.[23]

The house-churches I visited are exclusively frequented by migrants, particularly from Ivory Coast, both Congo states, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and Nigeria. There are English-speaking churches typically run by Nigerians, and French-speaking churches. A few churches are bilingual, and in the Congolese churches the service is usually in French and Lingala, at least when non-Lingala speakers attend. During the Sunday services we may find professional migrants, while in the numerous religious gatherings taking place during the week, we exclusively encounter migrants who are waiting for an opportunity to move northwards.

The very existence of new Christian places of worship in the poorer suburbs of the main Moroccan cities seems to indicate that Christianity is no longer confined to isolated places inherited from the colonial past. However, these semi-private charismatic churches are not a mere side-effect of the permanent settlement of African Christian foreigners in Morocco but rather the result of diverse forms of circulation and mobility.

Morocco's Place in the Migrant Church Leaders' Migration: A Stepping Stone and a Permanent Destination

An analysis of the life trajectories of church leaders in Morocco reveals a direct link between their migration projects and their church activities. It reflects the complexity of Morocco's migration patterns and highlights the churches' position as a "node" that enables both installation and circulation. Among the church leaders I interviewed we can find a broad variety of individuals with different migration backgrounds and life experiences. The time spent in Morocco varies considerably: the more established church leaders, perceived by their fellows as "elders", arrived in 2003,[24] 2004,[25] and 2006,[26] whereas the others came after 2010, with 6 arriving between March 2013 and mid-2015. Nine of the

23 Coyault, "L'africanisation de l'Église évangélique", pp. 99–101.
24 Interview 2, Congolese, male, Rabat, 19 October 2015.
25 Interview 27, Congolese, male, Rabat, 31 October 2017.
26 Interview 12, Congolese, male, Rabat, 13 January 2016.

church leaders still wish to migrate northwards. However, others have decided to settle permanently. Pastor P, for instance, who initially came in 2003 in order to continue on to Europe, now wants to remain in Morocco. He lives in Rabat with his wife and their three daughters, and even his oldest daughter – who had lived in Kinshasa for the previous 12 years – was able to join the family in 2016. Besides his religious activities, Pastor P was able to acquire a steady income and, as he told me, "become integrated"[27]: he owns a small shop vending African commodities in Rabat, organizes cash transfers between Morocco and the Democratic Republic of Congo and recently founded an association. Other church leaders – the Ivorians, for instance – who arrived recently, told me that their original intention was to stay in Morocco. This is the case of a female pastor, who in 2013 was sent by her Ivorian church (based in Abidjan) to Casablanca in order to establish a church branch, just after the Moroccan King had announced the launching of a migration policy and an operation to regularize migrants. When I asked the pastor about her plans, she explained to me that she wishes to remain in Morocco and thus is seeking residency, which she is optimistic about, since the Moroccan state provided residency to all female applicants in 2014.[28] When I met her again in 2017, she had residency status and was founding her own church in another suburb of Casablanca.[29]

The fact that churches based in the Ivory Coast have decided to establish branches in Morocco can be interpreted as a subtle shift in the perception and the effective role of Morocco as an immigration country. However, the installation of Ivorian churches in Morocco does not only encourage the permanent settlement and integration of Ivorian migrants but supports multidirectional forms of mobility and circulation too.

Migrant House-Churches as Hubs for Mobility

The religious place-making of migrants in Morocco contributes to the circulation of migrants. During my second interview with Evangelist J, we were constantly interrupted by his smartphone. He apologized on one occasion and informed me that he needed to take a pause in order to send a message to a "sister" (follower) who was in Turkey and needed his spiritual support. This sister – a female Congolese member of his church in Morocco – had left for Turkey

27 Interview 2, Congolese, male, Rabat, 19 January 2015.
28 Interview 3, Ivorian, female, Casablanca, 22 November 2015.
29 Interview 23, Ivorian, female, Casablanca, 1 October 2017.

three days earlier, her aim being to reach Europe. He needed to inform her of the Bible passages she had to read in order to succeed in her journey. Later, I was informed that other former church members were likewise in Turkey, waiting for an opportunity to continue their journey, whereas others had crossed the Mediterranean and were already in Europe. Four other members of his church were planning to travel northwards in the coming month. Evangelist J attempts to maintain contact with the majority of them and even provides distance spiritual coaching before he himself finds an opportunity to join them.[30] In October 2016 he explained that he would soon be leaving Morocco for another place, somewhere he did not yet know – a place "where God will send him". However, before leaving he would entrust his church to someone else who would remain in Morocco and "carry on the work of God".[31] When I met him in late 2017, he introduced me to his "successor", a Cameroonian man who had started to lead the church in order to give Evangelist J time to "get ready" for his second migration.[32]

In his investigation, Coyault found that in every house-church a person called in French *connexion* is responsible for connecting migrants with the networks of smugglers who organize the emigration to Europe.[33] These house-churches are therefore also social spaces that not only provide spiritual and social support in Morocco, but might also help migrants – church leaders included – to pursue their journey northwards. The church of Pastor P, who inherited the "mission" from a Congolese pastor who had left for France, was also a connection point for migrants who wished to migrate to Europe. The church even rented a room furnished with thin mattresses and covers in order to host transient migrants. By late 2015, the number of "clients" had decreased, however, and he had decided to cancel the lease. As an alternative, the small office in his church has been furnished with a thin mattress and is occasionally used to host stranded migrants.[34] Their role as "a connection point" with networks of smugglers has been on the one hand a substantial aspect of the churches' existence. It has on the other negatively impacted on the churches' reputation among local authorities.[35] The tactics used by the church congregates to position themselves more favourably in the local political environment will be discussed below.

30 Interview 19, Congolese, male, Rabat, 26 October 2016.
31 Ibid.
32 Interview 24, Cameroonian, male, Rabat, 24 October 2017.
33 Coyault, "L'africanisation de l'Église évangélique", p. 92.
34 Interview 17, Congolese, male, Rabat, 20 October 2016.
35 Interview 27, Congolese, male, Rabat, 31 October 2017.

Besides the role of migrant-churches as connection points for the circulation of "transit" migrants who are travelling northwards, the existence of these house-churches today also facilitates the South-North and North-South mobility of images, individuals, and money. This circulation is particularly important when the church-leader becomes an intermediary for financial support from abroad. This is the case of Pastor P, who, with the help of his mentor who entrusted him with the church prior to leaving for France, made contact with a Pentecostal church based in the United States and run by a Nigerian pastor. This financial support initially enabled a move to a larger room – the basement of a villa – entirely dedicated to church activities, nowadays a meeting point for many Christian migrants from Rabat. Pastor P's church contributes further to the transnational circulation of religious preachers, goods and migrants between Africa, Europe and North America. In May 2016, a Nigerian supporter came from the United States to Morocco in order to organize a 5-day workshop on leadership in Rabat, and on the same occasion consecrated P as the Reverend of his Church in Morocco. A few months earlier, P had hosted two Congolese preachers from Brazzaville, who, on their way to a religious gathering in France, had stopped in Rabat in order to organize a religious seminar in his church. One year before this, his followers had welcomed a French Pentecostal preacher who had led their Sunday service. The visit of international preachers appears to be a common practice also in smaller and less prominent Congolese churches. Evangelist J also plans to welcome a Congolese pastor from the United Kingdom, with whom he had become familiar thanks to a former follower who had left for London.[36] The North-South circulation driven by Congolese church-leaders in particular is likely to be linked to the Congolese diaspora in the West, where transnational religious territories play a particularly important role[37] through supporting those Congolese migrants who live in Morocco.[38]

Even in this small sample of interviewees we can notice a broad variety of social profiles and aspirations among the African Christian leaders encountered in Morocco. Whereas "transit" was previously conceived of as the main aim for the majority of the interviewed pastors, a diversification of migration projects is the rule today. This reflects perfectly the complexity of Morocco's current migration pattern, mainly characterized by an overlapping of more or less temporal installation and consciously planned immigration. The charismatic house-churches are therefore also integrated in the transnational Christian spaces that

36 Interview 19, Congolese, male, Rabat, 26 October 2016.

37 Garbin, "Regrounding the Sacred", pp. 363–382.

38 E. Goldschmidt, "Migrants congolais en route vers l'Europe", *Les temps modernes* 620/621 (2002), pp. 208–239.

encompass the migrants' countries of origin (e.g. the Republic of Congo and Ivory Coast), Moroccan cities and the African diaspora communities in Europe and North America. This mobility is further enhanced by the participation of the charismatic churches from Rabat and Casablanca in Christian "cyber territories".[39] The circulation of pictures and films of sermons and religious gatherings among virtual social networks and the YouTube internet channel enables religious leaders to compensate for their local invisibility and advertise their events. In this manner, they also participate in "a transnational evangelizing strategy"[40] that enables them to connect with other Christian communities – primarily in the West. Installation and planned immigration have both had an impact on Moroccan cities, among others, through the establishment of migrant house-churches in the popular migrant districts. But how do house-churches negotiate their presence in Morocco, and how do they cope with the constraints of a highly restrictive spatial regime?

Presence-Making in Invisible Places

Except for the small minority of Moroccan Jews, who are recognized and protected, Moroccan citizens are officially Muslims with Sunni Islam representing, by constitution, the state religion. Moroccan law does not allow Moroccan Muslims to convert; it condemns Shia Islam and combats Christian proselytism. The Christian mainline churches (Catholic and Protestant) inherited from the colonial era are recognised and protected by the Moroccan state, but are only officially perceived as places of worship for foreigners and are controlled and monitored.[41] Yet the question of religious freedom has been repeatedly raised in public and virtual social networks since 2011, with several movements and organizations campaigning today in favour of legal reform that would allow Moroccans to freely choose their religion instead of being considered Muslim by birth. However, any religious reform has yet to be planned, and Christianity – notwithstanding the existence of Moroccan Christians, who have become more vocal through online channels and virtual social networks – is still seen as the religion of the foreigner. Besides, within the Muslim sphere the state is increasingly

39 Garbin, "Regrounding the Sacred", p. 366.

40 Hüwelmeier and Krause, "Introduction", p. 8.

41 In 2010, the Moroccan State accused numerous French and North-American clergymen of proselytism among Moroccan orphans and expelled them from the country, while in 2017 a Moroccan man was arrested after he entered a Christian church in Marrakech.

attempting to control the entire religious debate by integrating (and co-opting) every dissident religious scholar within the publicly funded Council of Islamic Scholars and prohibiting any divergent religious expression in public.[42] Despite this, the nation attempts to promote the international image of an inclusive country that welcomes immigrants and refugees, where their human rights have been protected through the establishment of a global migration policy that has also to contribute to the tolerance of the religious and cultural diversity of its immigrants. The tensions between Moroccan society's fear of a Christian presence and the official policy of welcoming are also perceivable in the charismatic church members' strategies to consolidate their presence and place within the cities' suburbs, thus challenging the very restrictive spatial regime, as well as the "different concepts of the religious and the secular".[43]

The Christian churches that I studied have very similar spatial histories: initially, a few people start out meeting in a living room, before they then rent a place entirely dedicated to church activities and decorated in such a way as to emphasize its distinctiveness. This expansion is also quietly dynamic: new churches are founded, others expand, and only a small number disappear. Between 2015 and 2016, I was able to identify two newly founded house-churches in Rabat and one in Casablanca. Other churches – such as the Congolese Église du Feu de la Restauration – have founded new branches in Casablanca itself or in the newly built housing suburb of Tamesna, where many Congolese migrants have recently settled.[44] The headquarters of The Light of God moved to the city of Mohammedia in late 2014 – situated between Rabat and Casablanca – where its Nigerian and Congolese leaders were able to rent a large building while retaining the small house-church in Rabat.[45]

Due to the legal and economic precariousness of the Christian migrant communities and their subordinate position in local power relations, these successful spatial careers are coupled with uncertainty and marginality. All the churches I visited are located in the most run-down buildings in the street. Some churches are located above brothels or illegal vendors of liquor.[46] Others, such as La Manne Cachée, had had to relocate up to five times before their leaders were able to find a stable and safe site for their religious gatherings.[47]

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42 M. Zeghal, *Les islamistes marocains: Le défi à la monarchie*, Casablanca: Le Fennec, 2005, p. 244.

43 Hüwelmeier and Krause, "Introduction", p. 8.

44 Interview 15, Congolese, male, Tamesna, 30 June 2016.

45 Interview 1, Congolese, male, Rabat, 24 October 2014.

46 Interview 10, Congolese, male, Rabat, 18 December 2015.

47 Interview 12, Congolese, male, Rabat, 13 January 2016.

In the several discussions I had with migrant pastors, the ability to rent premises solely dedicated to worship is already perceived as a sign of divine grace and the particular charisma of the church leaders. My informants – the successful pastors – consider it their religious mission to "conquer [. . .] territories for Jesus" in Morocco. Evangelist J, for instance, told me during our first meeting:

> In the Bible it's said, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations." That's what I am actually doing, even if I leave Morocco, I know that God will give good things to Morocco and God's work will be carried forth. After I leave, other servants of God will continue His work here.[48]

This statement, however, somewhat contradicts the relative "invisibility" of his church and ignores the local political restrictions that prohibit Christian proselytism. All my informants, perhaps in order to protect themselves, acknowledged their difficulty in reaching out to Moroccan locals, whom they consider to be all Muslims. Indeed, some of my interviewees were very surprised to learn of the presence of Moroccan Christians who, like themselves, also meet in private.[49] Therefore, the pastors primarily evangelise other African migrants and are rarely in contact with their Moroccan Christian fellows. One explanation might be the very different socio-economic backgrounds of these two communities, which do not share the same living conditions or spaces. Although there is no effective interaction between Moroccan Christians and African Christians, both groups similarly challenge the highly restrictive Moroccan regime by extending into other spaces, such as "cyber territories",[50] that facilitate their visibility within the local Christian migrant community and the transnational Christian spaces. For African charismatic churches, a local presence is also achieved through the churches' participation in the urban soundscapes, despite the conflicts that arise.

Indeed, although churches are not publicly visible, religious gatherings do not occur without becoming audible. In late October 2016, Evangelist J invited me to attend a religious gathering on a Sunday afternoon. It was the last session of a three-day seminar that he had organized. When I arrived in the street where the church is situated, I could already hear the drum, the electric bass guitar, and the religious songs in Lingala[51] that passed through the wall and

48 Interview 10, Congolese, male, Rabat. 18 December 2015.

49 Interview 3, Ivorian, female, Casablanca, 22 November 2015; Interview 10, Congolese, male, 18 December 2015; Interview 15, Congolese, male, Tamesna, 30 June 2016.

50 Garbin, "Regrounding the Sacred", p. 366.

51 A language spoken by Congolese.

permeated into the street. Whereas no visible sign indicated the existence of a church in this street – a common feature of all migrant churches I visited – the music and loud praises of God clearly suggested that a religious meeting was taking place. Christian migrant churches seem, therefore, to be rather present through their audibility as opposed to their visibility and, through their sound practices, help to shape and sacralise the Moroccan urban space, since "sounds transgress spatial boundaries and mediate between public and private, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility".[52]

This participation in the "audible city"[53] does not take place without causing conflicts with the immediate neighbours. During my fieldwork, I never witnessed complaints from the neighbours or the intervention of the police. However, all my informants had at least once been confronted with conflicts with their neighbours who felt disturbed by the "noise" and knocked on the building, threw stones at the windows or even made complaints to the police.[54] My informants were fully aware of the fact that they were disturbing their neighbours – particularly during their nightly prayer vigils – and attempted to identify measures to reduce the sound level through closing the windows and door or insulating with sponges or egg cartons the walls that separated the house-church from the neighbours' houses. However, usually after one hour of prayer and chanting, these small, overcrowded rooms become uncomfortably hot, as the ventilators no longer provide sufficient fresh air and the believers are forced to open the door in order to be able to breathe normally. For that reason, perhaps, it is primarily these churches that share the dwelling with their landlords, who – in exchange for "the disturbances" caused by these religious gatherings – charge an exorbitant rent[55] or are in dwellings where only African migrants live, who would not risk complaining and conflicts. Whereas disturbance was at the beginning a main reason for the spatial instability of the Charismatic church communities, who got expelled by their landlords due to pressures of the local authorities, a subtle change of the authorities has been witnessed since the launching of the operations of regularization in 2014.[56] Since that time, local authorities have tended to ignore complaints made by neighbours – as long as the religious

52 M. de Witte, "Accra's sounds and sacred spaces", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32 (3), pp. 690–709, at 692.

53 Ibid.

54 Interview 2, Congolese, male, Rabat, 19 October 2015; Interview 16, Congolese, male, Tamesna, 30 June 2016; Interview 19, Congolese, male, Rabat, 26 October 2016.

55 Interview 2, Congolese, male, Rabat, 19 October 2015; Interview 16, Congolese, male, Tamesna, 30 June 2016.

56 Interview 26, Ivorian, male, Rabat, 26 October 2017.

gatherings do not take place in public – and even consider church leaders important representatives of the migrant communities that Moroccan cities have to "integrate".[57]

Complementary Spaces for Recognition

During my first meeting with Pastor P, he explained to me that in early 2015 his church was officially registered and now has the status of an association:

> Before we didn't have the papers, before we didn't have the papers, but now God blessed us by helping us to found an association. We have an association within our church and that enabled us to have the papers [to have a legal status] and we also have many different departments, a social department, a cultural department and we also pray.[58]

Pastor P's association is dedicated to francophone culture and music. It is the official tenant of the basement where the church meets. His first motivation was to avoid any conflict with the local authorities. Moreover, as he and several of his fellows had received their residence permit in 2013, they now had a legal right to seek official permission for their activities. Despite his association having been founded primarily in order to gain a legal status and be allowed to organize gatherings, this association is more than a mere a facade for church activities. On the contrary, they regularly organize sport activities in the neighbourhood, distribute food and clothing donations, and host music concerts, for which they advertise in public spaces. All this, Pastor P considers as representing the charitable and cultural dimension of his church, which – through the association – can be made public.

Among the church leaders I interviewed in Morocco, four had decided to found a local association[59]; others informed me about their intention to adopt a similar approach.[60] This social activism of church leaders has to be linked to the mobilization of migrants that has been witnessed generally in Morocco

57 Observations and discussions with Moroccan human rights activists during a meeting organized by a Congolese pastor, Mohammedia, 25 November 2017.

58 Interview 2, Congolese, male, Rabat, 19 October 2015.

59 Interview 1, Congolese, male, Rabat, 24 January 2014; Interview 2, Congolese, male, Rabat, 19 October 2015; Interview 13, Ivorian, male, Casablanca, 15 January 2016; Interview 26, Ivorian, male, Rabat, 26 October 2017.

60 Interview 15, Congolese, male, Tamesna, 30 June 2016; Interview 16, Congolese, male, Tamesna, 30 June 2016.

since 2005, where religious leaders have largely been involved. After the national and international media broadcasted a violent repression by Moroccan and Spanish border agents, resulting in two assaults upon migrants who had attempted to climb the barbed-wire border fences separating the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla from Morocco, the migration issue in Morocco became more visible. These events stimulated the further expansion of action by civil society to address the migrants' concerns. Migrants began joining forces to demand recognition of their refugee status and press for enhanced regulation of their residence rights in Morocco.[61] This process led to the establishment of several informal associations founded by African migrants with the aims of highlighting the plight of sub-Saharan migrants for audiences in Morocco and abroad, while also submitting claims for the recognition of their rights.[62] These irregular migrants' associations became more visible with the cooperation and support of local and international NGOs, which are recognized by the state and can ensure the participation of irregular migrants in demonstrations and public sit-ins.[63] A large component of this mobilization has taken place in Rabat, where embassies and international organizations are primarily located and where many migrants have decided to settle after their failed attempts to cross the Spanish border fences. In Rabat, this mobilization led further to the foundation by migrants – among them also future leaders of migrant house-churches – of a social organization called "Le Comité d'Entraide", that is supported by the Protestant Church of Morocco.[64] The initiative of migrant church leaders to found associations can therefore be perceived as being part of this trend. It shows further the social and charitable dimension of the churches, an element that was often emphasized by my informants. We can even ask whether this mobilization trend also initiated the place-making of Pentecostal migrants. Certainly, it was in 2004 that one of the first house-churches was founded in Rabat. I was able to meet one of its founders, a Congolese migrant who had left his country in 2000 with the initial project of immigration to Europe. After failing to cross the fences of the Moroccan-Spanish border, he decided to

61 M. Alioua, "Le 'passage au politique' des transmigrants subsahariens au Maroc", in: A. Bensaad (ed.), *Le Maghreb à l'épreuve des migrations subsahariennes: Immigration sur émigration*, Paris: Karthala, 2009, pp. 279–304, at 293.

62 A. Pian, "Entre 'visibilisation' et 'invisibilisation', les migrations subsahariennes au Maroc", in: Bensaad (ed.), *Le Maghreb*, pp. 63–86, at 75.

63 L. Feliu i Martinez, "Les migrations de transit au Maroc: Attitudes et comportement de la société civile face au phénomène", *L'Année du Maghreb* (2009) 5, pp. 343–362.

64 Interview 28, Congolese, male, Rabat, 2 November 2017. He was in charge of a social organization supporting vulnerable migrants.

settle in Rabat in order to found – with other fellows – a charismatic church called *Plénienne*. This house-church, as he recalled, was also a place of mooring for stranded migrants and became regarded as a migrants' smuggling organization, leading to numerous police inspections and expulsions. My informant, for instance, had been arrested four times in the church and expelled by the Moroccan security forces via the Moroccan-Algerian border. His situation, however, changed considerably after he commenced work with local and international NGOs and faith-based organizations such as Caritas Maroc and the aforementioned Comité d'Entraide. In 2013, he was given residency by the Moroccan state and today he is responsible for an education programme for migrant minors operated by a Protestant faith-based organization.[65]

A shift in the Moroccan perception of African church leaders was also perceptible at a meeting organised by a migrant association which, with the support of the publicly funded Moroccan Human Rights Council (CNDH), was officially founded in late 2017 by two church leaders from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria. During this meeting, the CNDH officials emphasised the Christian background and engagement of the two migrants as a very positive aspect that would enable them to "make a better work".[66]

Conclusion

The charismatic migrant house-churches in Morocco are communities that function as social networks and facilitate the local insertion of transient migrants through offering a safe place for rest, the creation of socialities and the ability to connect with NGOs that provide services to migrants in need. These spaces also become vital for the shaping of a sense of belonging in moments of circumstantial solidarity and itinerancy, or when the migrants cannot rely on strong social networks. In these spaces, the membership changes constantly, depending on the migration flows and the opportunities that arise to cross the Mediterranean or find an income, which either terminate or restrict involvement in church activities. When the practitioners decide to pursue their journey or their professional life project, their membership may continue via online or telephone communication between the traveller and his fellows or the church leader left behind. During the moment of religious involvement, the church

65 Interview 27, Congolese, male, Rabat, 31 October 2017.

66 Observations and discussions with Moroccan human rights activists during a meeting organized by a Congolese pastor, Mohammedia, 2 November 2017.

functions as a space of becoming, where migrants experience a more intense religiosity, become Born-Again Christians and experience their migratory journey as a spiritual test.

This scenario exemplifies how the religious place-making of migrants signifies processes of stability for migrant communities which consider Morocco a place of permanent settlement. However, these places are also hubs for migrants who want to move northwards and initiate reverse circulations between Morocco and their countries of origin as well as Europe, integrating Morocco in this way into transnational evangelical territories.