

Introduction to the Research

This book is a study of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and visionaries within Pentecostal religious voluntary organizations are (re)imagining their selves, (re)imagining the Australian Christian church, and, subsequently (re)imagining their worlds through Spirit encounter. It is an investigation into local Christian practice within a globalizing world.

However, in order to investigate Christian faith in Australian space, the notion of “local” must be defined, and situated within global religiosity. This section overviews some of the important underpinnings of this book. Arjun Appadurai (1996, 176) refers to the “production of locality” to explain ways local boundaries are carefully crafted within ritual. For him, the local “is an inherently fragile social achievement” that must be maintained, a condition which is a daily reality for “fourth world” leaders and communities around the world. This is due to “globalization,” a word commonly used to refer to the “widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life” (Held et al. 1999, 2). To explain the relationship between “locality” and culture, Appadurai maps out various dimensions of globalization using the concept of five “scapes,” which allows for movement of local cultures, but also avoids their stasis or “reification.” He presents “ethnoscapes” as flows of moving people, “mediascapes” as flows of mediated communication, “technoscapes” of shared technological advancements, “financescapes” of capital flows and “ideoscapes” of innovation and ideas (Appadurai 1990, 296). In addition to these, Thomas Tweed (2009) from the University of Notre Dame suggests “sacrosapes,” that include translocal religious flows. By including religion among these broader movements, Tweed invites “scholars to attend to the multiple ways that religious flows have left traces, transforming people and places, the social arena and the natural terrain” (Tweed 2009, Loc 670; also see Hutchinson 2017a).

There is growing recognition that the global sacrosapes are indeed changing, most notably due to the “Southward shift” of Christianity. Scottish missiologist Andrew Walls (2002) states that in the year 1800, as many as 90% of the world’s Christians lived in the West (meaning Europe and North America). This religio-cultural “Christendom” represented the relationship that had formed with the European lands over thousands of years. Sierra Leonean historian Jehu Hanciles describes it this way:

.... When Granada, the last Muslim enclave on mainland Europe, fell to Spanish armies, Western Europe achieved the culmination of Christendom.

Europe was now territorially Christian, and Christianity was decidedly European. Since church and nation were coterminous in scope, European peoples also experienced Christianity as a territorial ideal – ‘the area subject to Christian custom and the law of Christ.’

HANCILES 2008, 90

Since then, however, the demographics of Christianity have changed significantly, thus producing a “new Christendom.”

By 2002, Walls estimated that more than 60% of the world’s Christians lived in South America, Africa, Asia or the Pacific and were therefore non-European, or non-Western. The significance of this was noted by him within an interview at Duke University:

The original center, Jerusalem, is no longer a center of Christianity - not the kind of center that Mecca is, for example... And if you consider other places that at different times have been centers of Christianity - such as North Africa, Egypt, Serbia, Asia Minor, Great Britain - it’s evident that these are no longer centers of the faith. My own country, Scotland, is full of churches that have been turned into garages or nightclubs... One must conclude, I think, that there is a certain... fragility, at the heart of Christianity. You might say that this is the vulnerability of the cross. Perhaps the chief theological point is that nobody owns the Christian faith. That is, there is no ‘Christian civilization’ or ‘Christian culture.’

WALLS 2000, 2002, 64

The above statements from two colleagues form a useful tension in exploring Christian expressions. On the one hand, Hanciles recognizes that Christianity draws upon a cultural heritage developed from a special relationship with European land. On the other, Walls’ statement, “there is no Christian culture,” points to something significant. Any good anthropologist would question a “culture” that claimed three billion people, stretching across the globe over two thousand years. This highlights a need to examine local practices.

1 Religion-as-Practiced

It is helpful, therefore, to distinguish between the Christianit(ies) which have emerged over the last four centuries of globalization, by proposing that their differences can be identified within *ritual*. While Enlightenment thinkers designated “religion” as a distinct field of scholarship, Talal Asad (2009) notes that most non-Western knowledges are not written down but passed on via