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Full Length Research Paper

Jungle justice in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria

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Jungle justice has added another dimension to the neighbourhood insecurity challenge in Lagos metropolis. The reoccurring lynching of suspect(s) in a crime scene, in Lagos metropolis and Nigeria, as well as, the dearth of empirical studies on this heinous crime in Nigeria motivated this study. Thus, this study anchored on Social Disorganisation Theory (SDT) of the Chicago School of Criminology, which identified neighborhood crime and delinquency, emphasizing spatial patterns of behaviours. In-depth interview was employed to uncover the factors, patterns of occurrence, and the security implication of Jungle justice in Lagos metropolis. Purposive sampling technique was utilised to get a sample size of thirty respondents for this study. Content analysis was used to analyze the transcribed data and results showed that jungle justice happens as a result of incessant neighbourhood crimes and insecurities with lack of public and institutional trust in the Nigeria Police Force in the prosecution of a crime suspect. To avert jungle justice in Lagos metropolis, there must be a concerted effort by the public and the Nigeria Police Force to preempt the future occurrence of such crime.

Key words: Jungle justice, crime, insecurity, Lagos.

INTRODUCTION

The ever-present human relationships in a particular community where daily needs are met constitute an avenue for the dramatization of crime. Oftentimes, those caught in the act or mistaken for perpetrators of crimes committed, do get lynched, maimed or eventually killed if there is no quick effort to salvage such act by security operatives, that is, law enforcement agents or civil authorities. According to Uzongu (2011), the incidents of crimes and neighbourhood insecurity have culminated in countless alarms and events of mob actions "jungle justice" against nabbed suspects. Peter (2014) and Amara (2015) separately noted that jungle justice or mob justice has become a form of public extrajudicial killings in sub-Saharan Africa, where an alleged criminal is humiliated, beaten or summarily executed by a crowd (mob), or vigilantes. This form of street justice according

to Samah (2006) occurs where a dysfunctional and corrupt judiciary system and law enforcement have lost all credibility.

The practice of mob justice continues to attract a lot of attention globally. Citizens of countries have resulted in jungle justice when denied swift response of the security operatives to save people from crimes like threats, loss of life and properties, maim, kidnapping, insurgency, arson, and lots more. This has become a major security problem in most developing countries. Mob justice is extensive and all-encompassing in cities and town areas (Attafuah, 2008). In African communities, there are ethnic vigilantes and scarcely does a day goes by without news on gruesome scenes of mob justice. There are notable examples in Nigeria, jungle justice include the activities of the O'odua People's Congress Yoruba vigilante/social

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group in South West Nigeria, the Bakassi Boys in the South East of Nigeria and the Hisbah Vigilante Group and other type of ethnic and neighbourhood vigilante groups in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, events of mob action or jungle justice have shown that the police institution and the legal systems do not enjoy legitimacy from the masses. There are strong indicators of relative socio-economic inequality while assessing justice and public trust in the police tends to be problematic (Reisig et al., 2004). Therefore, in the wake of any security threats, the least chance people get, people prefer to harm or lynch the suspected person or persons without due recourse for states security operatives to take charge. Although this is a direct violation of human rights by taking illegal actions against even a suspected criminal, without following the due process, the inadequacies in the swift response of Nigeria security service men, especially the Nigeria Police when called upon to rescue a crime scene has put into the public hands the legitimacy of community informal policing of their environs which often times leads to jungle justice.

As such, the institutional trustworthiness of the Nigeria Police Force saddled with protection of life and properties have failed to be consciously developed, maintained, and preserved. There is a lack of public trust in the Nigerian security units and servicemen and this has made neighbourhoods in Nigeria to accommodate mob action or jungle justice in times of security threat.

Reports on jungle justice in Nigerian states, Vladimir (2012) noted that in 2012, a necklace lynching involved four young men regarded as Aluu 4; Ugonna Obuzor, Toku Lloyd, Chiadika Biringa, and Tekena Elkanah, all students of the University of Port Harcourt. They were all lynched after they were falsely accused of theft (blackberry phone and a laptop) in Aluu, a community in Ikwerre local government area, Rivers State, Nigeria on 5 October 2012. In Lagos State in 2012, a little boy was said to be burnt alive in Lagos for stealing. In 2014 also, a child reported to be as young as 7 years of age was necklaced again in Lagos for attempting to steal to Garri (cassava flakes) according to Pulse.ng. In 2016, Punch newspaper surfaced online the video of a teenager, believed to have been burnt to death in the Orile, Alafia Bus stop in Lagos for allegedly stealing a wallet. This gruesome video of the boy's lynching generated a lot of fuss and debate on social media, with the public calling for police investigation into the killing. There was also a case public lynching and settling ablaze of some suspected "*Baddo cult*" group in Ikorodu, Lagos State (The Nation Newspaper Nigeria, 2017). This study, therefore, is a qualitative investigation of the phenomenon of jungle justice in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on the tenets of Social Disorganization Theory. In sociology, the social

disorganization theory is one of the most important theories developed by the Chicago School which is related to neighbourhood and ecological theories. The propositions of social disorganization theory were applied to the explanation of crime, delinquency, and other social problems by sociologists at the University of Chicago in the early 1900s. As a booming industrial city, increasingly populated by immigrants of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, the city of Chicago provided a social laboratory (society) and specimen (man) for the development of American criminology. As a theoretical approach to the study of crime, social disorganisation theory has its foundation in the process of social change. Rapid growth and change were viewed as "disorganizing" or "disintegrative" forces contributing to a breakdown in the teaching and learning of prior "social rules" which had inhibited crime and delinquency in European peasant society (Thomas and Znanieki, 1918). Also, Pfohl (1994) affirmed that high rates of non-conformity occur when there is too much social change in a time when the normative order of society is disrupted. Therefore, the theory directly links crime like jungle justice to the neighborhood and ecological characteristics, which is a core principle of social disorganization theory. Additionally, the theory implies that a person's residential location is a substantial factor that determines the likelihood of people involving in the lynching of crime suspects, which is why the study locations of this study are neighbourhoods with a history of jungle justice in Lagos metropolis.

Social disorganization theory better explains the jungle justice in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria amidst other criminological theories. The theory attributes variation in crime and delinquency which jungle justice is a part of. Over time people in Lagos metropolis have resulted in mob justice in the absence or breakdown of communal institutions especially the inadequacies of the criminal justice system, saddled with arrest and prosecution of suspected criminals. This theory further explains that jungle justice happens in the absence of law and order and this disallows offenders or criminal suspects right to life and fair hearing when caught. Jungle Justice is a breach of the law that supports social or communal relationships in a given territory of either relatively small ecological units (neighborhoods, census tracts, communities) or larger units (e.g. counties, states, and nations) that is presumed to be "organized" closely with reciprocally interactions.

METHODOLOGY

The research was descriptive-exploratory and cross-sectional in design. This implies firstly, that the study described certain features of the population using data collected and also unraveled relationships and associations between and among the selected variables. Secondly, it is cross-sectional because the fieldwork was conducted within a short period of time without any attempt to check for changes in trends over time. For the data collection, 30

in-depth interviews were conducted among selected community members most especially youths in Mushin, Ikorodu, Orile, and Surulere. Purposive sampling techniques were utilised for the selection of the respondents. The respondents that constituted mostly the youths were interviewed at bus stops, markets, T-junctions, and other public places that mob lynching takes place in Mushin, Ikorodu, Orile, and Surulere. To ensure the validity of the instrument of data collection, a pilot study was earlier conducted in Ikorodu. Thereafter, data collection started concurrently in those selected locations in Lagos metropolis. While at the analysis stage after data collection, all the elicited data were thematically and content analyzed, after the responses were transcribed verbatim and translated.

Research setting and study population

The study was conducted in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria. Modern-day Lagos, officially as known as "Lagos Metropolitan Area" in 1996 is an urban agglomeration or conurbation (Carpio, 2012) consisting of 16 LGAs including Ikeja, the state capital of Lagos State. This extended urban area makes up 37% of Lagos State's total land area and accommodates about 85% of the state's total population (Eko, 2012). The exact population of Metropolitan Lagos is disputed. In the 2006 federal census data recorded a population of about 8 million people (Lagos State Government, 2015). The figure was disputed by the Lagos State Government, putting the population of Lagos Metropolitan Area at approximately 16 million (Lagos State Government, 2015). As of 2015, unofficial figures put the population of "Greater Metropolitan Lagos", which includes Lagos and its surrounding metro area, extending as far as into Ogun State, at approximately 21 million (Lagos State Government, 2015).

The rationale behind the selection of Lagos for this study is due to the high incidence of recorded cases of jungle justice in Lagos. This is not farfetched from the population growth pace that has threatened the metropolitan safety. Consequently, this has become a security challenge to the Nigeria Police Force. Locations in the metropolis with a history of jungle justice which is Mushin, Ikorodu, Orile, and Surulere were targeted in this study. Furthermore, youths that are largely acclaimed as major perpetrators of jungle justice constituted the majority of the target population.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Here, the results that emanated from the three objectives covered in this study were discussed, logically and lucidly. The deductive method was adopted to seek themes and contents from the In-depth Interview.

Factors responsible for jungle justice in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria

The findings revealed that people out of anger, loss of lives and properties, frustration, lack of police trust, and persistent insecurity are major among other reasons for people taking laws into their hands when a criminal suspect is arrested. The findings clearly corroborate Barron and Madden (2004), that a high level of crime is the primary reason that makes people take the law into their own hands. It was also discovered that community persistent insecurity and lack of institutional trust in the

police in prosecuting a crime suspect as reasons for jungle justice. Glad et al. (2010) have similarly observed that in some circumstances individuals with economic power when they commit a certain crime, whether intentionally or unintentionally approach the authorities and bribe them. In addition, the lack of swift response of the Nigeria Police Force at the instance of arrest of the offender and lack of institutional trust of the police constituted part of the major motivating factors for the angry mobs to carry out jungle justice in Lagos metropolis. A reaction from one of the youths interviewed in Ikorodu goes thus:

"Most times out of anger of persistent theft and general insecurity make community members result to jungle justice. People that have been victimized by criminals often out of anger and vengeance take laws into their hands to demand justice for committed crimes against their lives and properties" (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Participants/Ikorodu/Muslim).

Similarly, the reason for jungle justice in Ikorodu during the height of cult activities in Ikorodu recently was stated as thus:

"Community insecurity in the era of Baddo cult group's criminal activities that perpetrated majorly killings and kidnaps of community members in Ikorodu for rituals, heightened jungle justice in Ikorodu" (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/ Ikorodu/Muslim).

Another participant interviewed acclaimed that:

"Persistent insecurity made local vigilantes to mount guard on their communities and in most cases when a crime suspect is arrested by them, jungle justice happens till maybe the person gets surrendered to the police for formal prosecution but most times the suspect is set ablaze" (IDI/ Male/ Jungle Justice Witness/Surulere/Lagos).

In another narration of a respondent:

"Many people don't trust the police and there is low police and public relationship because of the ways police have handled criminal cases has made us not to allow crime suspects to be handed over to the police and this leads to lynching of the suspects. People would rather burn at stake a crime suspect than to surrender such accused to the police for prosecution. They do so many a times as warning to other criminals when there is high level of insecurity especially if it is a case of kidnap or killings for rituals" (IDI/ Femlae/Jungle Justice Witness/Mushin/Lagos).

Another respondent said that:

“The quick to rich syndrome that has dominated our society has led to many kidnaps, killing of spouse, incest rape, in most neighborhoods in Ikorodu and this has led to frustration among people because of incessant crime and out of anger such people get lynched till their eventual deaths” (IDI/ Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Ikorodu/Lagos).

Also, many of the respondents interviewed at markets square, T-junction, bus stops, motor parks, and residential areas laid claim that community-based factors like community insecurity, shortage of policemen, ineffective policing especially delay experienced when notified of an ongoing crime makes community members result to jungle justice. One of the respondents succinctly puts it that:

“Community insecurity has led to mob justice especially if it is kidnapping, rape and theft” (IDI/ Male/ Jungle Justice Witness/Orile/Lagos).

The position of another participant depicts the situation of Nigeria Police as regards jungle justice accordingly:

“Inadequate policing and shortage of policemen to numbers of lives and properties in most especially, populated areas here in Lagos have made many communities members to result to jungle justice to wade off potential criminals” (IDI/Male/ Jungle Justice Witness/Surlere/Lagos).

Similarly, it was asserted that:

“Most times when the police are notified of a crime act and suspect is eventually nabbed, to prevent jungle justice there is always delay in police response and this often leads to lynching of arrested crime suspect by the victims of crime committed, till the eventual death of the suspects if not rescued immediately” (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Ikorodu/Lagos).

As observed by a participant also, jungle justice is as a result of the delay in a criminal prosecution. There is always delay in the prosecution of crime suspects and it has been on record that there are reoccurring face of previously handed over crime suspect to the police. So to some extent people prefer jungle justice” (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Orile/Lagos).

Adequately, it is quite revealing that the respondents noted community insecurity, lack of police trust cum slow process of crime suspects’ prosecution and delay in police dispatch when notified of an ongoing criminal act as cogent reasons why community members take laws into their hands in making a crime suspect face justice. This is assertion is however in line with the submissions of Mutabazi (2006) that mob justice is the symptom of a

society where ignorance, an incompetent justice system, and human rights violations impede access to justice. The root cause of the phenomenon is the lack of public trust in the legal and security authorities to properly handle suspected criminal cases. Also, the aforementioned responses assert further the claims of Social Disorganization Theory that jungle justice which is a crime in itself, is factored by number of neighbourhood ecological factors that lead to high rates of crime such as persistent insecurity and lack of public trust in the law enforcement agency which is the police.

Patterns of occurrence of jungle justice in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria

Most of the respondents interviewed said that the level of neighborhood crime experienced is high while some noted that crime is on the average with the presence of local vigilantes who secure such communities. However, theft was what almost all the respondents said is on the daily increase among other crimes like kidnapping, rape, and in recent times ritual killings. The following are the extracted responses. In details, one of the participants interviewed explained that:

“There is high level of petty criminals in Orile. Often time there are recorded events of neighbourhood theft which has resulted to loss of properties. People have for that reason carry out jungle justice more often. Insecurity is so worrisome that vigilante groups are now employed to secure the neighbourhood, which gives them opportunity to carry out jungle justice on caught or reported criminal suspect” (IDI/Male/ Jungle Justice Witness/Orile/Lagos).

In another response, this participant asserted that:

“The presence of local vigilante has to some extent on the rating of average reduced crime in Ikorodu which therefore has reduced jungle justice. People are more vigilant than before and residents have even formed neighbourhood watch to alert others at the sight of any criminal act to be committed against life and properties in Ikorodu” (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Ikorodu/Lagos).

Similarly, another respondent added that:

“The bringing to an end of Badoo cult activities in Ikorodu, has beefed up security and this has to some extent reduced crime and jungle justice. Although there are still be issues like petty theft that attracts jungle justice too which is now common these days because of high rate of unemployment and poverty” (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Ikorodu/Lagos).

In other word of a respondent, it was observed that increasing crime breeds jungle justice:

“In Mushin here, there is still jungle justice due to high rate of crime. Mere looking around you, you can see faces and among them criminals exists because of the over bloated population. These days everyone is a target, nobody knows who is who” (IDI, Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Mushin/Lagos).

It was also observed that crime occurrence and follow up jungle justice is caused by joblessness and need for survival. One of the participants observed that:

“In some neighbourhood the crime rate is on the average but there is always mob lynching whenever a suspected criminal is caught. In my neighbourhood for example, this happens, because there are many idle youths various crimes exists. They engage in varying degree of crime for economic sustenance” (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Surulere/Lagos).

The aforementioned responses show that jungle justice has been consistent in areas with a high rate of crime to the extent that the services of vigilante are now employed to secure lives and properties. It is also revealing that many criminals have taken advantage of the overpopulation that has caused a high level of insecurity which has allowed various crimes, especially in Mushin and Orile. According to Ng’walali and Kitinya (2006), the rise in the incidence of crime usually overwhelms law enforcement unit, which leaves the public to take justice in their own hands. The respondents also ascertained crime that attracts jungle justice in their neighbourhood. One of the respondents interviewed revealed that:

“Kidnap and killings for rituals in Ikorodu has been met with jungle justice” (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Ikorodu/Lagos).

A respondent laid claim that:

“Petty crimes like pick pocketing attract more of jungle justice” (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Orile/Lagos).

Another said that:

“Rape and stealing is always met with jungle justice when the crime suspect is caught instead of allowing the police to take custody of such crime suspect” (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Surulere/Lagos).

Also a participant observed that:

“In Mushin there are a lot of petty criminals that rob people of their valuables” (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Participants/Mushin/Lagos).

Still, in the purview of the research objective, the qualitative data gathered revealed that almost all those that were interviewed unanimously laid claim to the use of tyres and petrol most especially to set crime suspects ablaze if such person is not quickly rescued by the police. Also, other methods like the use of stones, logs of wood, machetes, stones, dirty gutter water, acid, broomstick to torture genital organs, belts or wires, and so on are used when lynching a crime suspect. This however supports the assertion of Fourchard (2008) who argued that more often than not, crime suspects are believably subjected to inhuman treatment that could impact negatively the rest of their lives. These inhuman treatments could be in the form of abysmal torture, subjecting suspects to the drinking of poisons, nailing of suspects on the head, beaten or killing, and burning without recourse to the judicial process. For instance one of the youths interviewed in the street of Orile, Lagos said that:

“Suspect of crime, are always subjected to inhumane treatment as they get tortured with brooms in their genital organs, drinking of dirty gutter waters, acid bath, logs of wood and if not rescued immediately from the angry mob, he or she gets set ablaze as with petrol and tyre on the neck. This is the normal practice of jungle justice in Lagos State” (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Orile/Lagos).

Similarly, another participant described that inhumane judgment melted on crime suspect as follows:

“In case of serious crime like kidnap, rape and murder, the crime suspect is dealt with using cutlass, belts, wire sticks, stones and later set ablaze using petrol with tyre across his or her neck. Last year during the incessant lynching of suspected Badoo cult members, many of those caught or suspected to be members were set ablaze with petrol and tyre. An upcoming comedian in Ikorodu even fell victim before people got to know he was misidentified as Badoo cult members” (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Ikorodu/Lagos).

A respondent put it succinctly as:

“Stones, belt or horse-whip, stick, petrol and tyres are used to deal with suspect of jungle justice till their eventual death” (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Surulere/Lagos).

An interviewee also said that:

“Wires, stones, belt, sticks, dirty water and battery water are most often time use to torture crime suspect to confess committing the crime he or she is accused of” (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Mushin/Lagos).

It is very vivid in the responses as regards the method

used in executing jungle justice that these methods negate the law that stipulates citizens' right to arrest offender and surrender such person to the police for a formal prosecution of the criminal justice system. This, however, supports the definition of Outwater et al. (2011), Ng'walali and Kitinya (2006) and Paulsen (2002) that mob justice is the practice whereby a mob, usually several dozens or several hundred persons take the law into their hands in order to injure and kill a person accused of wrongdoing. However, the information gathered from the in-depth interview conducted among respondents' also revealed that jungle justice occurs often as there is no month in some areas in Mushin, Orile, Ikorodu, and Surulere do not experience public lynching. Although there could be months those areas are jungle justice free when criminals escape being caught. This is attributed to the level of crime occurrence in such a community. A participant had this to say:

"Jungle justice is so common that here in Orile in a month, jungle justice is recorded 2 to 3 times because we experience everyday crime and the police are not that trusted in prosecuting an offender. There have been cases of reoccurring faces of arrested and surrendered criminals in the neighbourhood" (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Orile/Lagos).

Another respondent observed that:

"Jungle justice happens almost every month especially at the market or motor park because in those areas there are more of crimes like pick-pocketing, bag snatching, phone snatching and so on" (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Mushin/Lagos).

Also a respondent in Ikorodu said that:

"Jungle justice was common during the badoo cult nefarious activities in Ikorodu. When anybody connected to crimes like killing of a whole family, kidnapping and rituals is caught people prefer jungle justice because of the gravity of crime committed" (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Ikorodu/Lagos).

The aforementioned responses on patterns of occurrence of Jungle Justice in Lagos Metropolis Nigeria corroborate the tenet of social disorganization theory which classifies jungle justice as a form of street crime which happens as a result of rapid growth and change, viewed as "disorganizing" or "disintegrative" forces contributing to a breakdown in the teaching and learning of those prior "social rules" which had inhibited crime and delinquency (Thomas and Znanieki, 1918). Also according to Pfohl (1994) high rates of non-conformity occur when there is too much social change in much a time which has the normative order of society disrupted.

Security implications of jungle justice in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria

The qualitative data reveals that the majority of the respondents attested that jungle justice has in some ways provided some level of safety for their communities. Potential criminal, criminals or gang of criminals get a strong signal or warning from the events of jungle justice in those communities but that does not mean as said by the respondents in Orile, Mushin, Ikorodu and Surulere that jungle justice as brought about long term security. Intermittently they still experience crime against life and properties which range from petty theft, rape, robbery, kidnapping, and murder. Also, few of those interviewed reported that jungle justice has not in any way provided community safety rather the community is known as criminal dens and many crimes especially petty crime and burglary persists.

A respondent observed that:

"Life and properties are secured to some extent because jungle justice is like a warning for potential criminals. The issue of incessant house bugle though still happens but it has reduced in Surulere. Also cases of rape and kidnapping have significantly reduced" (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Surulere/Lagos).

In similar response, a respondent had this to say in Orile:

"There are still instances of insecurities in the neighbourhood, although the report especially of petty crimes and burglary is not as much like before. Jungle justice has become a sort of streets vigilantism" (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Orile/Lagos).

The findings clearly reveal also that jungle justice is neighbourhood safety. A participant in Surulere observed thus:

"To some extent jungle justice has brought about community safety and security for live and properties. People can now sleep at night. I guess the public disgrace, shaming and beating that crime suspect go through and death if angry mob are not quickly disperse by police to rescue the lynched crime suspect has reduce crime" (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Surulere/Lagos).

In Ikorodu, a respondent had this to say:

"Rape, kidnap and ritual killings of Badoo cult groups in Ikorodu most especially has been reduced of the high level of jungle justice meted out on suspected cult groups. Jungle justice has deterred others to further engage in such nefarious activities" (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Ikorodu/Lagos).

A respondent in Mushin affirmed the security implication on businesses as thus:

“When there is jungle justice especially in busy areas, show owners do fall victims of shop lifting when jungle justice perpetrators lurk around for what to use like petrol, matches, stick, stones and so on, for lynching. Although the knowing that jungle justice in Mushin can happen if caught has sacred many criminals but crime still happens” (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Mushin/Lagos).

Also, when probe further many of the responses gathered from the in-depth interview implies that the level of security that mob lynching has provided for individuals that could be victims of circumstance when misidentified as a crime suspect and get lynched is minimal. They further asserted that everybody is at risk of jungle justice due to misidentification. These affirmations, therefore, corroborate Cloete and Stevens (2004) that the incidence of ‘mob justice’ affects the economy, and, according to social disorganization theory, jungle justice is a product of unfavorable conditions in certain communities. Young people in their productive labour if not killed in significant numbers could have been an economic asset to the country. Also during a public lynching, people can use such evens to rob nearby shops in search of what to use to torture the prime suspect. In Orile, Ikorodu, Surulere, and Mushin, almost all the respondents interviewed asserted that jungle justice has surpassed formal policing. Many of them further claimed that it is on record that police dispatch do come late when notified by community members that crime is ongoing and even when they come either notified or not, people deny them to take charge of the crime suspect for formal prosecution because there is lack of public trust informal policing. A respondent observed that:

“Jungle justice has really affected formal policing because when it happens the victim(s) might have been lynched to death before the police come to the rescue of the situation” (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Mushin/Lagos).

In the word of a respondent, loophole in formal policing breeds jungle justice:

“Formal policing is poor as most of the time in some cases, police have are found abetting crime and criminals. Many at times when people get arrested for crime committed, they get released back to the street” (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Participant/Mushin/Lagos).

Similarly, a participant said that:

“Jingle justice has really made people ignorant of Nigeria Police Force even if they are at the crime scene as

people prefer “instance justice”. Criminals cannot be trusted in the hands of the police. Many at times there are recurring faces of criminals that were known arrested or surrendered to the police by community members” (IDI/Male/Jungle Justice Witness/Ikorodu/Lagos).

In another word of a respondent:

“People have this notion that Nigeria Police Force is complicit in crime and so jungle justice has made them infective. In Surulere many at times people have resulted to justice in their refusal to surrender a crime suspect to police men and the person who might be innocent get lynched and set ablaze by angry mob” (IDI/Female/Jungle Justice Witness/Surulere/Lagos).

The aforementioned security implication of jungle justice which denies the suspect the “right of an offender” aligns with social disorganization theory that attributes variation in crime and delinquency which jungle justice is a part, over time among territories, to the absence or breakdown of communal institutions especially the inadequacies of the criminal justice system that is saddled with arrest, and prosecution of suspected criminals. This theory explains jungle justice in terms of the absence or breakdown of law and order that guarantees offenders or criminal suspect right to life and fair hearing when caught breaking the law that supports social or communal relationships in a given territory of either relatively small ecological units (neighborhoods, census tracts, communities) or larger units (e.g. counties, states, and nations) that is presumed to be “organized” closely with reciprocally interactions.

Conclusion

It was vividly exposed in this study that jungle justice is a factor of consistent insecurity of lives and properties in Lagos State and lack of public trust in Nigeria Police Force and their servicemen. However, Jungle justice is a societal problem that affects lives and properties as no one is exempted from becoming victims of mob lynching and its other attendant dangers it poses to lives and properties. To curb the incidence, there must be a concerted effort of all institutions. Therefore, a number of approaches must be taken in dealing with this jungle justice in Lagos metropolis.

First, citizens should be more aware of their environment and statutory laws that bind them in securing their lives and dignity of other’s lives and properties. The public should educate themselves on their constitutional right to arrest a crime suspect and immediate surrender for formal prosecution. Second, the public should not support any form of instant justice and always group themselves against any form of it at the arrest of a crime suspect. The public should know that

anybody can be a victim of jungle justice and ensure that accused persons of crime committed are handed over to the police for proper investigation. Third, community security groups most especially the vigilante, should be made to understand that jungle justice is a crime itself and as such their duty is also to curb jungle justice. However, community interest groups like landlord associations, youth associations, and clubs among many other organized societies, should preach against any sort of jungle justice in their neighborhood.

Most importantly, The Nigerian Police should be more proactive in their response to crime, to preempt any sort of jungle justice, and be more honourable in dealing with cases of accused person(s) of crime committed. Justice delayed could amount to justice denied; the Nigeria Police Force should therefore make sure the speedy cases of crime suspects(s) and make it public to the victims of such crime(s). In addition, The Nigeria police should establish a police-community trust relationship in their statutory roles of crime prevention and control in their promoting and maintaining law and order. Distress calls lines and police at strategic locations that have history of jungle justice or that are prone to such should be made available. Finally, the activities of the community security groups and local vigilante should be properly and often checkmated by the Nigeria Police and made known to them their limit in the arrest, custody and prosecution of crime suspect(s) in their duties of informal community policing through community workshop on informal policing.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

‘They deceived us’: Narratives of Addis Ababa development-induced displaced peasants

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This paper explores the impacts of the fast spatial expansion of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, on the suburb small-scale farming community. Recently, combined with rapid population growth and booming economy, the city experienced a rapid physical expansion without proper urban planning. The sprawl of the city has dislocated small-scale farming communities in the suburbs and led to one of the major deadly popular protests against land dispossession in the modern history of the country. The physical expansion to surrounding farmlands has threatened the socio-economic life of farming communities surrounding the city through dislocation, resource dispositioning, and why the situation has received ethnic dimension. This study highlights that in addition to the natural urban growth, corruption in the government and the use of land for political leverages have played a significant role in the forced eviction of peasants.

Key words: Addis Ababa, development, displacement, Oromo protest, urban growth.

INTRODUCTION

The recent large-scale foreign control of land in the sub-Saharan Africa countries including Ethiopia has concerned scholars, who worry that land grabs could result in a massive displacement of African smallholders (Baxter, 2010). Many scholars assume that land grabs are part of the larger neoliberal move towards economic globalization as well as mechanisms of land control (Peluso and Lund, 2011), and as such, there is a strong link between land grabs, primitive accumulation, and accumulation by dispossession (Adnan, 2013). However, the current focus of academic interest in land grabbing has mostly concentrated on large-scale land deals in developing countries through the direct involvement of

foreign investors. Zoomers (2010, 429) argues that most forms of land control involve large-scale cross-border land deals or transactions that are carried out by transnational corporations or initiated by foreign governments. This approach undermines the role of the governments of developing countries themselves, as well as the domestic political economy, in shaping land controls and agrarian relations (Benjaminsen and Bryceson, 2012; Lavers, 2012). However, either way, the seizures of land, whether for development or conservation, have inflicted overwhelming social and environmental hardships (Vigil, 2018), leading to the transformation of agrarian environments through

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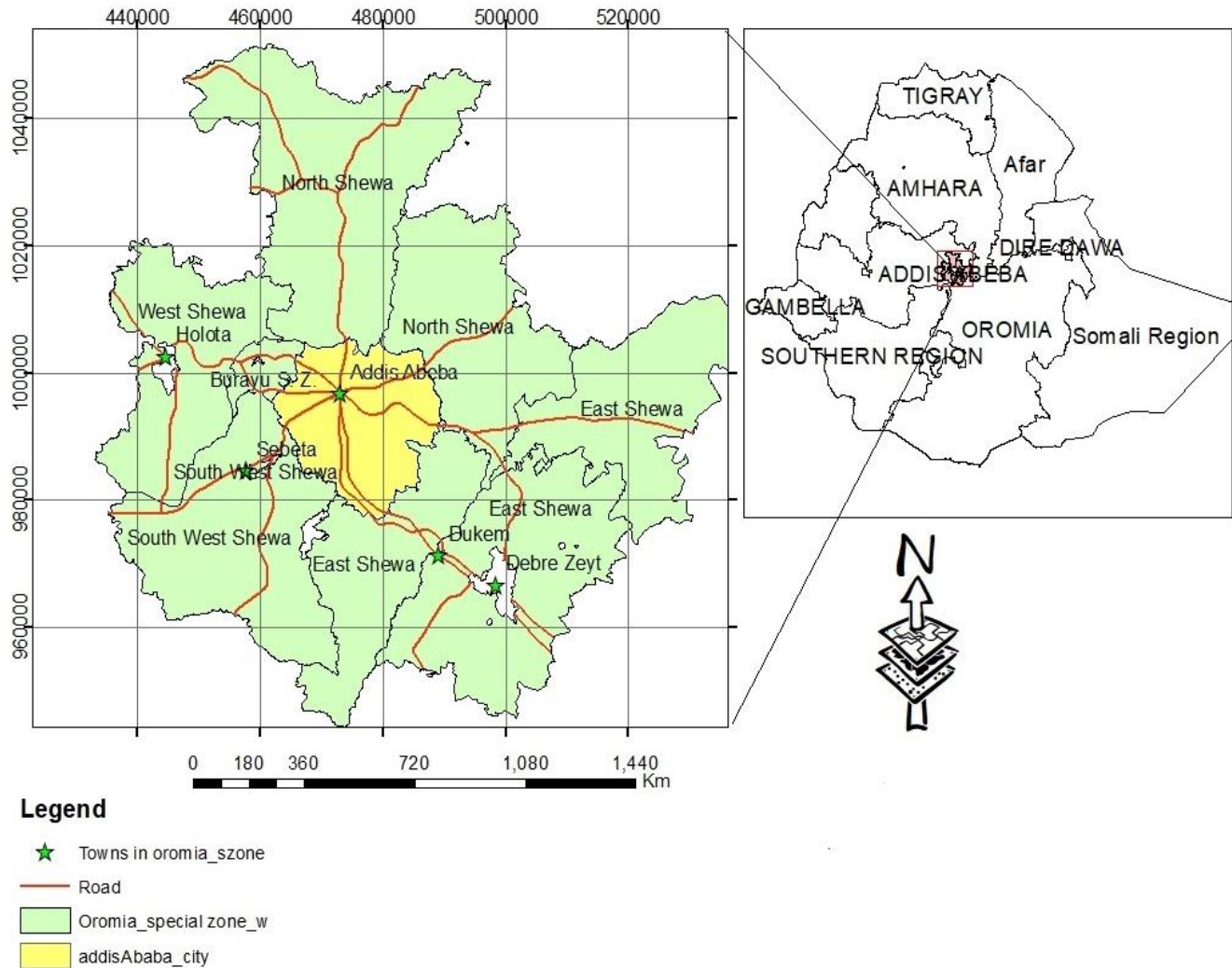


Figure 1. The map of Addis Ababa and Oromia Special Zone mentioned in the manuscript.

urbanization and depeasantization. More specifically, the process is leading to a global pattern of depeasantization and the proletarianization of dispossessed peasants in developing economies (Lavers, 2012; McMichael, 2010).

One of the new frontlines of land grabbing in developing countries is an urban expansion (Peluso and Lund, 2011). Africa remains the least urbanized continent, but the continent is currently experiencing the fastest urban growth rate in the world (Brückner, 2012). In Ethiopia, approximately 21% of the population live in urban areas, but the rate of urbanization is expected to accelerate at an annual rate of about 5% (Ozlu et al., 2015). Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital and the diplomatic center of Africa, is one of the fastest-growing cities on the continent, with an estimated total population of four million, accounting for approximately 30% of Ethiopia's urban population (Spaliviero and Cheru, 2017). The city, which was established in the 1880s by Emperor Menilek (r.1889-1913) in area predominately settled by the Oromo

and swiftly grew to become the political and economic capital of Ethiopia (Dibaba, 2018).

Since its establishment, Addis Ababa (Figure 1) has been growing spatially displacing the surrounding peasants (Chala, 2015). The uncontrolled expansion of Addis Ababa and the eviction of the peasants from the city's peripheries is related to the center-periphery power relationship that has developed in the country over the last 150 years as well as more recent developments in the contemporary global political economy (Degefa, 2019; Wayessa, 2019). This paper explores the impact of the spatial expansion of Addis Ababa on the small-scale farming community around the city. More specifically, it examines how the physical expansion of Addis Ababa is threatening the socio-economic life of the surrounding farming community through land and resource dispositioning. It further examines how government agents have been using land around the city for political leverage and means to silence political dissents.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the research was collected between 2016 and 2019 through fieldwork, interviews conducted via email, and by telephone. Fifty participants, including dispossessed peasants, government employees, activists, and scholars, within the age range between 23 and 67 were consulted. Interviews consisted of a structured set of questions that all participants were asked to compare responses by occupational and gender backgrounds to look for consistencies and/or discrepancies in responses. Besides, documentary evidence, news outlets, and magazines were consulted and checked against data obtained through interviews and observation. Study shows that biases can be reduced and data validity can be maximized through methodological triangulation by playing each method off against the others to improve the validity of our research outputs (Denzin et al., 2018). As such, in the analysis, data obtained was triangulated combining through peasant interviews, information obtained from observations, documentary evidence, and interviews with government employees. When the data collection process had been completed, a within-case analysis was conducted by organizing each body of data into exploratory and descriptive display formats to address the research questions (Miles et al., 2014), and conclusions were drawn and discussed in a broader empirical context.

RESULTS

In Ethiopia, peasants are dispossessed by unplanned urban expansion, the development of agro-industries, and the modernization of the rural economy. The land dispossession of peasants needs to be better understood. In keeping with this, in the following, the state's commodification of land, the dispossession of smallholders because of urban expansion and modernization, and the peasants' reaction against dispossession and its consequences were discussed.

The commodification of land and dispossession of smallholders

The present spatial expansion of the Addis Ababa is affecting the livelihood of small-scale farmers by displacing them from their farmlands and polluting the surrounding environment through uncontrolled waste disposal at the city's edges. Using the development agenda as a strategy of acquiring land from its traditional owners, the government commoditized land. Besides, the government reported controlling homeland and diaspora based opposing individuals through offering special benefits including grating land to silence them. Some dispossessed citizens have stated that they were forced from their ancestral land, and some of the displaced family members became homeless in the city since they do not have enough income or job security to rent.

Although land is a mere commodity for government agents and the fortune seekers, the dispossessed people see land not just as a resource and use the phrase *lafi keenya lafee keenya* (literally translated as "our land is our bone"), in which the bone metaphorically represents a

lineage. Thus, passing land on from generation to generation represents the continuity of lineage, while land deprivation means the disruption of this lineage. The displacement of smallholders disrupts the traditional social life of the peasants as well as their livelihoods. During the 2010 national election TV Debate, a member of one of the opposition parties expressed his party's concern about corruption and the large-scale forced displacement witnessed across the country, especially around Addis Ababa:

"... as indicated in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia [FDRE] constitution and the ruling party policy document, land is public and remains the property of the state. However, is land public property now? Or is it state property? Can it be the property of both? In our opinion, land is no longer the property of the people or the state. Land has become the private property of the ruling party leaders, who sell it as they like, give it to their associates, distribute it freely among their families and their friends. Land is a way of recruiting party members; land represents blackmailing even educated people to stop them from speaking out for justice. For political purposes, land has become a magnet to attract diaspora [...] while ordinary citizens have no plot on which to build the most basic shelter. For a few people, land has become a short cut to accumulating wealth rapidly [...]. We know that land is this country's most important asset. Based on the link between people and their assets, it seems that Ethiopia is now divided into four classes. The first class are those who give away land [rent-seeking higher state officials], the second class are those who are awarded land by the authorities [lower officials, new party recruits and the relatives of officials], the third class represents those who sit back and watch while these transfers occur, and the fourth class are the peasants who are victims of the forcible displacement and dispossession" (ETV, 2010).

In a related TV interview, former State Minister of Ministry of Communication Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia stated that:

"...in my opinion, more than 55% of the displaced and dispossessed people are Oromo peasants. For the construction of real estate projects alone, around 4.8 to 5.2 million km² of land have been snatched from the peasants. This ruined the lives of 29 rural kebele [a rural municipality], each with an average of 1000 households, meaning an estimated 150,000 people" (ESAT, 2014).

One woman stated that after her family became a victim of displacement, her husband had become a security guard in one of the commercial buildings built on the site of their former rural village, while her two adult sons were daily laborers with no job security and low pay. Another interviewee reported that the forcibly displaced peasants

Table 1. Socio-Economic situations of selected displaced peasant households before and after land dispossession.

Socio-economic variable (n=50)	Before dispossession (%)	After dispossession (%)
Breed livestock	47 (94)	2 (4)
Meet annual food crop needs	47 (94)	1 (2)
Hold customary social gatherings	44 (90)	3 (6)
Involve in non-farming labour work	6 (4)	36 (72)
Access to safe drinking water	41 (82)	9 (18)
Private spaces to practice traditions	49 (98)	6 (12)

who used to sell their own surplus grain to give themselves an income are now relying on the markets to buy food. The peasants have been deprived of their customary land rights and livelihoods, and have been transformed from interdependent producers to daily laborers (Table 1).

Moreover, due to the disruption of communities, their children lost the opportunity to learn in their language and practice their traditions. Participants reported that they were told when the government acquired their lands for development that each family member over eighteen years of age would be given 250 km² on which to build a house now or in the future. However, later reports revealed that most unmarried adult men and women in households were not given what they were promised. Accordingly, of the total of eleven unmarried adult men and women, only four of them were given sites. They were not also given the chance to register for newly built condominium housing since they were rural and had no urban identification cards required for the registration.

The integrated master plan

The adoption of Addis Ababa's new master plan is part of a national move towards economic transformation. This master plan, the Integrated Master Plan for Addis Ababa and Surrounding Oromia Special Zone, is looking to incorporate Oromo cities within a radius of roughly 100 km from Addis Ababa engulfing any Oromo rural communities within that area.

Oromo activists reported that the land dispossession plan was not only targeting smallholders and peasants around the city, but the whole of Oromia regional state. The state risks being split into western and southeastern areas, possibly restricting free interaction between the farming communities in the two areas and weakening the unity of the people. Activists claim that successive Ethiopian regimes have weakened the Oromo people by dividing them along regional lines to weaken Oromo ethnicity. According to them, the Integrated Master Plan, therefore, is a system of government planning with short and long-term economic and political objectives.

As part of its new master plan, the Ethiopian government promises to provide an enhanced waste collection and waste treatment system for the city, enlarged green area coverage in the inner city and the establishment of affordable and standard housing by constructing residential buildings mainly in new rural areas incorporated into the city under the master plan. However, the plan has not considered the fate of smallholders around the city, and as a result, the strategy to modernize and expand Addis Ababa comes at the expense of smallholder communities who are forced out and given little chance to integrate into urban life.

With the agenda of improving infrastructure, increasing green spaces in the inner city, and modernization, the city administration has demolished many poor neighborhoods. It has been widely observed throughout the city that the demolished poor neighborhood sites have been replaced by industrial areas where national and international corporations have established large-scale business enterprises. For most of the displaced households, new affordable residential apartment buildings (condominiums) were constructed mainly at the city's outskirts in areas from which smallholders were displaced. This has involved massive real estate construction as well as the establishment of industrial parks. The displaced peasants have not been given affordable houses because the urban policy processes excluded them from the development program, failing to give them compensation for the lands, although the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (restructured as the Prosperity Party in 2019) policy document underscores the importance of linking urban and rural areas to support rural development. The dispossessed peasants consulted reported that they regularly face harassment from government agents and developers if they are found pasturing cows and collecting firewood even in land enclosures that have yet to be developed. In interviews held with a community of the displaced peasants, the participants stated their concerns as follows:

"We lost the land we inherited from our mothers and fathers. The government officials forced us to sign an agreement of eviction to give up our land for

condominium constructions with a compensation payment of 18.50 ETB (0.60 USD) per square meter. Now we have nothing and some of our community members are forced to become security guards while others are daily labourers in construction companies with no enough pay or job security. The payment is as low as 50 ETB (1.7 USD) per day.

Sewerage from the new residential buildings and the city has polluted the stream we used to use for drinking and for our livestock [...] We are refused access to the clean water supplied by the city for the residents of the condominiums [...] We are forced to travel for two hours to find an unpolluted stream for drinking water and for our livestock [...] When we try to appeal our case to the government, local officials bribe our few educated coordinators and we cannot move forward with the legal case” (OMN, 2018).

In a similar interview, a dispossessed and disheartened husband and wife shared their experience and told me how their lives had changed following the dispossession of their land as well as the tricks and empty promises involved during their displacement in the interviews with the ruling party owned radio station known as Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C:

“We used to cultivate *teff*, wheat, peas, and other crops. I used to harvest around thirty quintals per year. We used to live a happy life [...]. We had enough food grains [...] we used to buy only salt and food oil. Seven years ago, peasant households living around here were called and told to give our land to the government as it was needed for investment. We asked what would happen to use, and they told us they would give us land, supply clean water, build clinics, and electricity supplies. Then they gave us 18.50 Birr (\$0.60) per square meter for cultivable land and 9 Birr (\$0.30) per square meter for the pastureland. We did not know about handling cash and now we have no money and no land [...] I am an old man and to keep my family alive, I work as a labourer in construction...” (FBC, 2018).

The dispossession of peasant land is also embedded in the arts and music of the cultural group with which the peasants are linked. The agony and resentment of the displacement of peasants around the city or incorporated into Oromo arts as evidenced by artists’ lyrics. One of several songs composed goes as follows:

In the past mother feeds her offspring,
Now she tied up her waist within their waistbands;
What was left for the future is gone.
Oh, my homestead, for my children you are hell, for others you are paradise.
When I look down on Finfinnee [Addis Ababa] from Mount Entoto,
I see lines of high-rises; there is no hut for me there.

Oh, my homestead, what did I do?

Tell me if you have heard anything.

Speak, my homestead, where my umbilical cord lies buried.

Tell me how can I sleep when I have been robbed by others?

The land is in my bones

Who can abandon their bones?

The lyrics of these songs metaphorically blame the land, which is welcoming others at the expense of the people who claim its customary ownership. It is common practice for Ethiopian peasants to use metaphors to express their disappointment in their dispossession at the hands of a repressive regime. The peasants were dispossessed through coercion and broken promises, and the government leased some of land to private investors while keeping the rest to develop with the help of international financial institutions.

Although protests forced the Ethiopian government to scrap the master plan for the new city the people who were displaced are still suffering the consequences. This is because land continued to represent a means of accumulating wealth and making new friends among political leaders. More importantly, the scrapping of the master plan and the associated political situation offered government officials more opportunities to engage in land-related political power abuse and corruption, as there are no effective regulations in place to monitor land-related activities. Meanwhile, the compensation peasants given were significantly lower in comparison to land values in Addis Ababa, where the lowest lease value in 2016 was over 200 ETB (\$6.70) per square meter. Moreover, most of the displaced peasants were illiterate and had no idea how to handle cash, and no advice was offered to them. The individuals interviewed stated that money was nothing compared to land. They expressed resentment when they reflected on how they had lost the land they had inherited from their families and were planning to pass on to their children. One of the displaced elders told me that their rural village had been destroyed, their families dispersed and their social fabric has broken.

Ethnic Oromo peasant resistance

The peasants have never been irresponsible about their alienation, although the government has implemented its policies under legal cover. The resentment of peasants around Addis Ababa reached its climax with the announcement of a new master plan that sent shockwaves to the Oromo communities living in different parts of the country in the State of Oromia as well as Oromo communities in the diaspora. The protests were rooted in the long history of modernization policies in Ethiopia that marginalized Oromo peasants. According to the people interviewed, the Oromo have historically been

marginalized in Addis Ababa and lack economic and cultural representation, which means that this resentment has accumulated over time. The Oromo stated that while the city has offered them few socio-economic gains, its sprawl has destroyed their livelihood through displacement and the pollution of the local environment through deforestation associated with new construction and the unregulated disposal of the city's waste into surrounding rural village land. The resistance against the master plan or the "Master Killer," as it is colloquially referred to by the protestors, has claimed over 140 lives. The people we interviewed stated that instead of solving preexisting problems related to the unchecked spatial expansion of Addis Ababa, the master plan succeeded in little more than allowing legalized eviction, affecting the livelihood of small-scale farmers by displacing them from their farmlands. Following the deadly protests, the master plan was shelved. In one forum held regarding the master plan, the ruling party official who is now the mayor of Addis Ababa claimed on state-owned Television broadcaster:

"The issue of Addis Ababa and the surrounding cities is not an urban issue; it is a question of identity. When we say identity, we mean the plan should respect and incorporate Oromo identity, history and politics [...] We already know about the expansion of Addis Ababa [...] What we want is not an Addis Ababa that grows by evicting Oromo peasants, but one that embraces the peasants and their children" (OTV, 2014).

Shelving of the Master Plan, however, did not stop the continuing conflict over the land around the city. The government fell back on the concept of public ownership of land, which legalized the dispossession of peasants because it was the government authorities themselves that carried out much of the illegal appropriation of land. In other words, regardless of the claim, eviction and tricking the peasants to concede their land with poor compensations from the peasants is going on as usual under his leadership.

The Oromia Regional State, which governs the rural villages around Addis Ababa, superficially opposed the plan, but the covert complicity of some Oromo regional officials in the illegal land deals extended to an attempt to legitimize their ownership of the land they had amassed from dispossessing the peasants. When the resistance ignited by the master plan took a more radical dimension, the Federal Government of Ethiopia reshuffled its leadership, bringing what appeared to be more progressive leaders to power in 2018, at which point some democratic political reforms were introduced, allowing conflict-generated diasporas and exiled political parties to return to the country. The new leaders who had been vocal in criticizing the dispossession of poor peasants now sat back and made little effort to reverse the displacement. Instead, efforts are now being made to

formalize the land seizures, which implies that the dispossession of peasant land is being accepted as a means of modernization and development. The reality is that the wealthier and more powerful elites are now becoming wealthier and more powerful by depriving the masses of the most important asset, forcing the once self-sufficient producers to sell their labour to the group that dispossessed them. More importantly, the use of land as a means of appeasing activists and individuals with different political views from the government continues even under the so-called the new reformist leaders, who are disabling coordinated resistance against land alienation of smallholders.

DISCUSSION

The growth and expansion of Addis Ababa have brought disputes and disagreement, and there are two contesting views on the current size and the development of the city. The first attributes the current state of the city to its central geographic location and booming economy, which attracts hundreds of thousands of people from all corners of the country (World Bank Group, 2015). The city's rapid population growth led to congestion in the inner city, limiting green spaces and affecting the poor neighborhoods particularly badly, meaning that the city has expanded to take in surrounding rural areas (Spaliviero and Cheru, 2017: 2). Addis Ababa's current expansion to the periphery is presented as being driven by a lack of space in the center and an effort to modernize the city.

The second view, mainly supported by Oromo nationalists, attributes the current unchecked spatial expansion of the city to Ethiopia's modernization policy that deliberately targets smallholders. This view views the expansion as a politically motivated land grab. Major development projects in the country have targeted smallholders whose land-use strategy is considered inefficient in terms of contributing to Ethiopia's economic transformation. Supporters of this viewpoint see the modernization of Addis Ababa through expansion into the surrounding rural villages while increasing green spaces in the inner city as part of the ongoing displacement and dispossession of smallholders who have few socio-economic opportunities, leaving them economically marginalized and politically unrepresented. Oromo nationalists claim that historically the city has failed to absorb the displaced smallholders and that the displacement and the Oromo's political and economic marginalization and ethnic othering shows that the government of Ethiopia still only reflects the identities of the northern elite, meaning that feelings of ethnic otherness are becoming normalized.

Quinn and Halfacre (2014) examined the social, emotional, and cultural attachments of peasants to the land they used to cultivate beyond its use as the base of

their subsistence. Terminski (2014: 13) states that the displacement of people from their land in the name of development not only deprives them of their sustenance but also destroys the cultural, spiritual, and emotional fabric of their lives, which are strongly linked to the land. The benefits of the dispossession are kept in the hands of the already wealthy elites. Baird (2011: 11) stresses that the neoliberal perception, which is that peasants are “making unproductive use of resources and are resistant to integration into the market economy” motivated the large-scale land concessions and the removal of peasants. This same perception is documented elsewhere in Ethiopia, where the indigenous people of the Omo valley are dispossessed land by the government because the land was “idle” or underutilized and would be better used contributing to national development plans, although peasant farmers had been using the land for cultivation and grazing (Daniel and Mittal, 2010: 19). As seen in Addis Ababa and elsewhere in Ethiopia, subaltern communities who are victims of the projects are rarely embraced in the development program. For instance, although Addis Ababa is located in the Oromia State, ethnic Oromo smallholders comprised the majority of the inhabitants surrounding the city, and the Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, within the city only around 20% of the city’s total population is Oromo. Thus, it appears that while the city is expanding into the Oromo farmlands, it is not absorbing the displaced Oromo peasants or assimilating the people into the dominant urban cultural group since they do not have private space to practice and maintain their cultural traditions in the urban setting. The suppression of the ethnic identity by the city’s social structure led to the underrepresentation of Oromo in the city.

Ethiopia’s ambition of rapid economic development and transformation has led the country to “pursue the strategy of fostering the governance and management of rapid urbanization to accelerate economic growth” (Spaliviero and Cheru, 2017: iii). According to the World Bank (2014), Ethiopia’s government has also focused on improving urban infrastructure by building more resilient and greener cities in the country. In 2015, during the first Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), Addis Ababa received a new master plan that set out to expand the city into the surrounding rural areas, involving a massive dislocation of the neighboring agricultural community. According to the World Bank (2014), the adoption of Addis Ababa’s new master plan is part of the nation’s move towards economic transformation, a move that involves standardizing housing by constructing new residential buildings mainly in formerly rural areas that have been incorporated into the city by the new master plan (Spaliviero and Cheru, 2017: 49). The displaced peasants have not been given affordable houses because the urban policy processes excluded them from the development program, failing to give them compensation for the lands even though the FDRE policy

document underscores the importance of linking urban and rural areas to support rural development. As a result, the new economic transformation, like its predecessors, has failed to embrace the historically marginalized smallholders around the city.

Studies associate the present-day dispossession of peasants, especially in the Global South, with the continuity of primitive accumulation of capital or accumulation by dispossession (Baird, 2011; Harvey, 2003; Perelman, 2007; Terminski, 2014; Webber, 2008). According to Harvey (2003: 145), “displacement of peasant populations and the formation of a landless proletariat has accelerated” in several countries over the last fifty years. This aligns with Baird’s (2011: 11) work in Laos, where he observed: “...the concept of primitive accumulation is useful for understanding how the development of large-scale economic land concessions are impacting on rural peoples.” Baird (2011: 11) also identified how many farmers are “rapidly being propelled into wage-labour markets in ways that cannot be considered voluntary”. It was argued that the current state of dispossession of smallholders around Addis Ababa for development projects through the involvement of local and international financial institutions is part of the ongoing process of primitive accumulation. Although the displaced peasants were not directly coerced into joining the labor market, people whose livelihoods were based on the land are now being forced to join the labor market to ensure their survival. However, limited opportunities in the labor market mean they are forced to work at extremely low pay rates with no security. Meanwhile, investors benefit directly from the dispossession of the peasants and are now treating the peasant laborers unfairly.

The dispossessed peasants in villages around Addis Ababa were promised a clean water supply, health services, and other social provisions. In principle, this is the core of Ethiopia’s urban policy, which seeks to develop urban areas while improving the living standards of the surrounding rural villages (AACPPO, 2017). The reality is, however, that their own government tricked the peasants and promised services, which they could not provide. While displaced peasant families need to travel for two hours to collect water from streams, tap water put in place by the city is available within less than 50 m, but not to the peasants. This situation aligns with Bassett’s (1988) claim that urbanization brings better health services and affordable housing opportunities only to the politically and economically dominant group, and has a profound negative effect on the way of life of economically and politically weak suburban small-scale farmers. Adnan’s (2012) case study in Bangladesh shows that “the neoliberal policy of privatizing state lands provided” government officials with “the kind of legal cover” that they needed to “legitimise illegal possessions” of land for their personal benefit. Similarly, it appears that the Addis Ababa’s new master plan has been set out to

legalize lands illegally taken from peasants by government agents and their allies. Moreover, although the new Master Plan was compromised since government officials had already appropriated land illegally, there are efforts to put legal jurisdiction of Addis Ababa into place to safeguard interests of the corrupt officials, who will gain more allies through land allocations.

Conclusion

Growth and expansion of a city are natural and unstoppable. The case of Addis Ababa cannot be seen differently. However, the Addis Ababa's expansion has received ethnic demission from the displaced Oromo peasants. The Oromo peasants are not opposing the city expansion, but they wanted to be accommodated and incorporated in the city's development program, including registration for the government-subsidized condominium housings being built. The peasants also demanded appropriate compensations on conceding their farmlands. However, some officials in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia use the land for political leverage, as shown by the clandestine distribution of land among loyal members and as a means of silencing dissidents. The urban elites who are the majority in the city oppose ethnic Oromo special interests in the city support the officials. The Oromo peasants, nationalists, and activists interpreted the situation part of ongoing discrimination against ethnic Oromo and evicting peasants due to Addis Ababa's expansion echoes the center-periphery power relationship that developed during the nineteenth-century imperial expansion and incorporation of Oromoland into Ethiopian Empire (Hassen, 2002; Ta'a, 2006). This political competition among Oromo nationalists and Amhara-Tigray elites has been framing the politics of Addis Ababa and its surroundings at least during the last thirty years but the situation of the Oromo peasants gets worse as the day goes on.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

Queer spirituality of black lesbians in Bloemfontein, South Africa

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Research on lesbian women and their sexuality has increased since the adoption of a democratic constitution in South Africa. Yet a large part of the research has focused more on the prevalence of rape on Black lesbians in South African townships, while a substantial amount focused more on the lived experiences of Christian gays. The available body of work above has been taken into consideration and, therefore, this paper documents how Black lesbians construct their spiritual identities. This exploration involves an examination of how the research participants manage to integrate their spiritual/religious identities with their different sexual orientation. For this enquiry, a qualitative research approach was used, and phenomenology was identified as the best approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants who identify themselves as Christian, and who also self-identify as lesbian.

Key words: Christianity, sexuality, spirituality, lesbian, identity, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

INTRODUCTION

In 2017 an interesting development took place in one of the big and well-known South African Charismatic Churches, the Grace Bible Church in Soweto (TshisaLIVE1, 2017). This Church is currently under the leadership of Pastor Musa Sono and it is one of the Churches that are attended by several South African celebrities and wealthy Black South Africans. On Sunday, 22 June 2017, Pastor Heward-Mills, a popular Ghanaian pastor, was invited as a guest speaker at Grace Bible Church. The sermon was titled “why your soul is important?” and it was based on the book of Luke 16: 24. According to Somizi Mhlongo, in the middle of his sermon, Pastor Heward-Mills, said “[y]ou don’t find two male dogs or two male lions or two male impalas... two male cats, even lizards, two male elephants. There is

nothing like that in nature. It is unnatural” (Davis, 2017). Just after the sermon and during the offering, Somizi Mhlongo stormed out of the church service reportedly feeling offended by the statement. Somizi is a popular South African celebrity who lives openly as a gay. After the service, Somizi posted a video on twitter where he expressed his great disappointment at the interpretation of the Bible by the preacher. In the video Somizi accused the preacher of being homophobic by positioning same sex relationships as unnatural and therefore unholy. This matter caused great media furore and, receiving mixed commentary on social media. Some people were blaming Somizi as a disobedient Christian who does not want to repent, while others argued that the incident demonstrates that the church is still one of the most intolerant institutions towards sexual minorities. If one applies their mind to Somizi’s issue, it was obviously not an easy decision to leave the Church after feeling judged by the preacher who, in this case, supposedly spoke on

¹ TshisaLive: South African online entertainment and celebrity news hub. You may follow the story on the following link: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/tshisa-live/tshisa-live/2017-02-06-im-tired-of-the-church-using-the-bible-to-be-homophobic-says-somizi-mhlongo/>

behalf of God. Even after his experience, Somizi still insisted that he will attend his Church and that he would not be discouraged by homophobic preachers. Somizi's dilemma is just one example of the many individuals that experienced a bias against LGBTQI Christians in Church. At least in this case, Somizi is a well-resourced individual who is known very well for being unbothered by people's opinions of him. Somizi's reaction gave an impetus for deeper discussions about the intersecting, stigmatised, and multiple identities of lesbian and gay individuals within religious institutions.

According to Woodell et al. (2015), lesbians and gays who identify themselves as Christian are caught between the conflicting views that are related to church culture, church theology, and their sexual identities. Church cultures differ with some churches being more conservative than others, regarding lifestyle choices and how church members represent themselves. Equally, church theologies are inconsistent regarding how to approach same sex relationships. In some churches it is viewed as a possession of sorts, a transgression from which one should repent or the message that God loves us all is used to recruit LGBTQI members into salvation. As Somizi's case suggests, one's self-identified sexual preference and identity may conflict with prevailing church culture and theology. One would also assume that the tension between church culture, theology and sexual identities would result in fewer openly LGBTQI individuals in churches, but alas, more and more LGBTQI individuals openly support and still attend their churches. Notwithstanding that, many churches are viewed as "hotbeds of homophobia". Over the years, many biblical interpretations have come forth, with some perceiving homosexuality as a choice and therefore a sin (Peppler, 2006: 42-43; Cameron-Ellis, 1999: 17). Contrarily, others are arguing that all human beings are created by God, in his image, and having a different sexual orientation is also a purpose from God (Stronski and Remafedi, 1999: 155). Further, there is also a feminist approach to the discussion who rejects male privilege, which remains a fundamental Christian principle where men dominate women in both the private and public sphere (Wiegman, 2008: 42). While taking note of that, this paper is not a theology enquiry to examine the various doctrinal positions on LGBTQI communities. Yet this paper does present the emic perspectives of lesbians in relation to their spirituality, given the homophobic Christian context that they find themselves in. This paper takes more interest in queer spirituality as a reason why sexual minorities, with a common mind and need, are able to find God and their spirituality in the midst of homophobic calamities. This work recognizes the fact that most research on queer practices has focused mainly on queer

men, with women's issues rarely explored or merely being discussed alongside those of men (Varner, 2004: 79). Therefore, this paper examines queer spiritualities with a specific focus on Black South African lesbians who either affiliate or detach themselves from any Christian denomination. The focus here is more on the question of how Black Christian lesbians in contemporary South Africa negotiate their sexual and their spirituality identities.

South Africa and LGBTQI community

It is a known fact that, in the past in South Africa, having a different sexual orientation was regarded as taboo and, as a result, the LGBTQI individuals were treated as criminals from 1948-98 (Thompson, 1990). According to the United Nations report of 2015, many African countries still have many cases of open condemnation of same sex relationships. Much has been documented about the discrimination and violence that are targeted at sexual minorities and particularly Black lesbians (Abaver and Cishe, 2018; De Waal, 2011; Judge, 2017). Ironically, in the early years of democracy, South Africa had one of the highest number of incidents of rape in the world, and (Gqola, 2015; Matebeni, 2011) "corrective rape" emerged as a specific form of sexual violence regarding Black lesbian women. Incidents of homophobic-driven attacks increased in the early post-apartheid dispensation, with Black lesbians being the victims of rape, violence, and even murder. This is still the reality of many Black lesbians today.

The South African constitution states that no one may be discriminated against based on race, gender, sex, culture, sexual orientation, or religion, among others. South Africa is the first African country to include a sexual orientation clause in its constitution (Bill of Rights, Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). This clause was the first step to legalising other sexual orientations in South Africa. Through the constitution, all discrimination is outlawed, with sexual orientation mentioned specifically and same-sex marriage legalized. This, along with the continued activism from the LGBTQI community and allies, facilitated the public visibility of LGBTQI citizens and their social inclusion. Recently, the LGBTQI community is becoming more visible within communities and they are no longer mute about their rights as members of the community. Sexual minorities have become more active in public spaces, which contribute to building a more inclusive South African society. Despite the country's liberal constitution and the change of mind-set in terms of the general societal perception around the LGBTQI community, the religious

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communities, including Christian churches, seem to be taking longer to accept the law prescriptions regarding the acceptance of different sexual orientations and sexual preferences. Except for Church leaders like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who has spoken out against the discrimination of sexual minorities in the Christian church, most Church leaders have been silent or negative on the matter. LGBTQI individuals are often only welcome in churches if they remain silent about their sexuality or if they agree to change their sexual orientation. Many organisations and social institutions have advocated for gay rights and have supported movements surrounding the LGBTQI society, yet religious institutions have been rather reluctant and unsupportive (Besen and Zicklin, 2007: 250). LGBTQI individuals have experienced different struggles that resulted from the position of Christianity (Subhi et al., 2011). Traditionally, mainstream Christian denominations still condemn different sexual orientation and view it as a sinful act (Montoya, 2000: 155). As already noted, Somizi's case is just one of the many experiences that LGBTQI people go through in their churches. In the past, it was easy for the church to reject the LGBTQI community, but the onset of the South African legislation that protects sexual minorities means that churches must rethink their stance regarding their LGBTQI members.

Queer theory and spirituality

The Queer theory is hard to clearly define as it is an evolving body of work that draws and builds on the existing theories of identity and power (Watson, 2005: 69). This theory has its origins in lesbian and gay studies and Teresa de Lauretis first promoted it during the 1990s (Jagose, 2009: 157). According to Katherine Harris (2005: 1), even though Queer emerged from gay and lesbian studies, the two are not synonymous. The Queer theory goes beyond simply exploring the aspects of gay and lesbian studies, it touches on those ignored assumptions of gender, sexual orientation, and relationships (Meyer, 2007: 15). The theory does not restrict itself to individuals who identify themselves as LGBTQI, but instead accommodates everyone in a marginalised position (Giffney, 2004: 73). The Queer theory challenges the notion of defined identity categories and it refutes the norms that create the gender binaries of acceptable and non-acceptable sexualities (Meyer, 2007: 15). Queer theorists therefore reject the "idea of sexuality as an essentialist category determined by biology or any standards of morality and truth" (Harris, 2005, 1). Within the Queer Theory, there is no standardized set of norms but rather a preference for flexible and developing norms that different people may fit into (Harris, 2005: 1). Therefore, the Queer Theory aims to disrupt the binaries that were created to construct the society in a certain way, with the hope of destroying the differences and

dismantling any inequality (Schippert, 2005: 90). The constant differentiation of masculinity and femininity also indicates the performative aspects of gender, which then makes the work on gender performativity by Butler (1993), an important contribution to this study.

Butler (1993: 21) argues that gender is performative and that it is constructed through a repetition of acts. By using the concept of drag, Butler views sexuality as something that is acted out on, something that is not essentially true but expressed as a reality. For Butler, "[g]ender performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted" (1993: 22). What is meant by this, is that gender is not just a given, we must perform it. One can argue that Christianity reinforces femininity with their set standards on female presentation (for example, acting pious and submissive and wearing dresses). Lesbians do not necessarily conform to these standards and they therefore become outsiders and susceptible to discrimination by those who regard them as sinners or rebels. They clearly do not conform to the heteronormative standards and therefore their experience of the church/religion can impact negatively on both their spiritual and sexual identity, which seems to be incompatible. The refusal of gender and sexuality as fluid makes heterosexuality a "constant" and acceptable sexual attraction because of the binary that is created with the participation of the feminine and masculine aspects (Butler, 1993: 22). Butler's work challenges the rigid binaries that are socially constructed and this makes her contributions to this study, relevant and valuable. According to Tongprateep (2000: 197), spirituality is part of the human experience that cannot be scientifically proven and, therefore, it can easily be deemed as an unimportant aspect of life. Conversely, Manning (2012: 2) argues that spirituality is the ability to find meaning in life, while responding to that meaning and establishing a relationship with God/other. Spirituality can be understood as an experience that will be narrated by the Black lesbian women that are currently under study and the meaning attached to those experiences will be interpreted.

Religion and spirituality play an important part in most peoples' lives, including those who identify as queer (Garcia et al., 2008: 412). Although religion and spirituality have come to assume different meanings for different people, research indicates that both aspects influence the individuals' sense of meaning and provide a source of social support (Hill et al., 2000: 52). Religion is understood to be a system of organized practices, beliefs, and rituals, and spirituality is about a personal connection to the sacred (Schlehofer et al., 2008: 412). Religion is also viewed as hierarchical, supportive of male supremacy, heteronormative, and as a gender-normative institution. Even though religion and spirituality are sometimes separated, the spiritual experiences that people have, are mostly encountered within religious spaces and practices (Schlehofer et al., 2008: 412).

These experiences not only manifest through an interaction with God or religion but may also be experienced through worship or other forms of interactions, both within and outside the church (Pretorius, 2008: 148). The current study is interested in these spiritual experiences and it furthermore aims to explore the other forms of spirituality that the participants practice outside their Christian denominations.

People have reported positive outcomes from participating in religious activities and being part of a religious doctrine. Yet qualitative studies (Schuck and Liddle, 2001; Murr, 2013) suggest that most LGBTQI individuals have reported negative feelings and experiences (shame, guilt, isolation and rejection) from being part of a religious doctrine. Due to this negative feedback, the spiritual experiences of LGBTQI individuals may be restricted and they may seek other ways of engaging in spiritual activities. For example, in the South African context, LGBTQI individuals may also resort to other forms of spiritualities, which include, but are not limited to, the spiritual veneration of ancestors (Stobie, 2011: 159). These other forms of spirituality that are not religiously bound sit outside the scope of this research.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was utilized for this study. This study was explorative in nature and was intended to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, reasons, and opinions of the research participants, within their natural setting. This study followed a non-probability snowball sampling method. Non-probability sampling tends to focus on a smaller sample and is less interested in making statistical inferences, but instead aims to examine a real-life phenomenon (Taherdoost, 2016: 22). This approach also made it easy for the potential participants to participate as the referral is from a trusted source. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and face-to-face interviews. Ethics approval for this study was granted by the University of the Free State and all university protocols were adhered to during the process of this study. All participants were provided information regarding the research study. The participants were also required to sign a consent form and it was explained that they could withdraw from the study at any time, should they feel that their rights were not being respected. The participants were also assured that their identities would be kept anonymous.

FINDINGS

Brief participants' background

Mpho

Mpho is a 27-year-old female who grew up at Empangeni, in Kwazulu-Natal. Mpho grew up in a Christian family that was a part of the Roman Catholic Church. Mpho became aware of her sexual orientation at the age of 14 while doing Grade 9. At that age, she did not know much about being attracted to the same gender and this resulted in her feeling guilty. Having been raised

and indoctrinated into a Christian family, she felt guilty of even thinking about her feelings at the time. She attends Church and preachers do preach homophobic sermons, but she does not allow that to in her way and she does not mind people judging her. She believes that if she is right with God, the rest does not matter.

Kimberly

Kimberly is 27 years old and she grew up as a very reserved person. Kimberly grew up in the Anglican Church. She spoke up strongly against the Anglican Church and it appeared as if she no longer takes religion seriously. She still prays and believes that she is a strong Christian even though she no longer attends Church.

Anele

Anele is a 20 year old who identifies herself as a butch lesbian. She suspected herself of being a lesbian in Grade 8, even though she was not sure what this meant for her future. She realized that she was attracted to women and she often complemented them. She often wore and felt more comfortable in men's clothes. She was raised in a Roman Catholic Church. At church, she was one of the priest's favourites and she was often the one who would carry the offering basket among the church members and she would then take it to the priest after the offering. One day she went to church wearing pants and the priest said to her, "If you still love serving God with facilitating offering, you need to start wearing skirts or dresses". She still goes to Church and in the beginning; it was hard to listen to the homophobic sermons and judgmental attitudes of the Church people. Yet she cares more about God than people.

Gift

Gift is a 21 year old woman and she identifies herself as a butch lesbian. She identifies herself as a born Christian who dedicated her life to Jesus Christ as her Lord. Her parents are also born Christians from the Apostolic Faith Mission. She grew up attending the Apostolic Faith Mission, but then became Catholic when she went to a Catholic school. Gift accepted her sexual orientation when she was in high school, in grade 9. As time went by, the word lesbian started making sense to her and, as a result, she started to think seriously about it and its implication for her and for her spiritual life as well as what people and the Church people will say once they know about her sexual orientation. Now she attends Church and she even visits other Churches. Sometimes she gets discouraged from hearing the homophobic comments and sermons, but she does not allow that to get the better

of her.

Thato

Thato is 20 years old and she is from Limpopo. Thato said that it was in 2014, at the age of 15, that she experienced her first crush on a woman. At first it was an awkward feeling for her, considering that she was highly active in Church ever since Sunday school. With a sense of conviction, Thato said:

Look with no one telling you, not even the Church people or the priest. The moment you lust after another woman you are the first person to feel guilty, not because you know the Bible says but it feels abnormal and uncomfortable and that is exactly how it felt for me. We grow up knowing that boys lust after girls and not same gender wanting each other and that is fact.

People looked at Thato as just another “tomboy” and did not necessary associate her with being a lesbian. As time went by, she heard that some Church girls were gossiping about her, and they suspected that she was a lesbian. She does not remember ever coming out to tell people that she is lesbian and only some people who currently know that she is dating another woman, know that she is lesbian. She no longer goes to Church but she prays, and she believes that her spirituality is intact. In fact, she believes that she is better off without the Church people. The Church was the only place where she felt judged and since she does not go to church, she is more at peace and she feels that God is always closer to her.

Puleng

Puleng is 20 years and she grew up in one of the Bloemfontein Townships. Puleng accepted her sexual orientation at 13 years old. Just like Thato, Puleng was perceived as just another tomboy who would grow up and start dating men. At some point, she also felt that people were correct. Puleng never felt discriminated against in her township because there were other girls who were lesbian, and it seemed as if most people were okay with her lifestyle. The only time she felt judged was in Church when the preachers mentioned homosexuality as one of the sins that God detested. At the time, she felt like the preacher knew about her and that the sermon was directed at her. Puleng does not go Church anymore; instead she prays with her friends and sometimes even have bible studies with other lesbians. She believes that God created her to be what she is, and she will not allow “naïve Church people” to judge her, therefore, she does not go to church. She believes that her spiritual life is better off than for her to be grieved by homophobic sermons at Church.

The interview process as therapy

The interviews were conducted by Nombulelo Towa, who was also a young woman and a student at the university of the Free State that the time. For reason, all participants enjoyed the interviews and they all noted that this was the first time that someone asked about their lives, choices, identities, and more especially, their spirituality. They seem to have enjoyed the opportunity to have someone listen to what they had to say. Also, they cherished the opportunity to openly speak out about their sexuality without the fear of intimidation. Moreover, the line of questioning and the questions that were asked made them reflect on their personal lives. One of the participants, Mpho, mentioned that the study unlocked a lot of things within her as she stated “I have been battling with many things especially when it comes to spirituality and religion; this process made me see things in a different light and it has created an opportunity for me to actually think about tackling things in a different manner”. In addition, it became clear that the participants became aware of certain discriminatory habits within Christianity due to their sexuality. While a historical conflict between religion and homosexuality was evident, other concerns were raised regarding the lived reality of the research participants. Kimberly said, “This has been very therapeutic for me, I have never been given an opportunity to speak my mind and my experience so openly.” This seems to have been a safe and therapeutic experience for the participants who seem to have seen this as an opportunity to contribute in the meaning making process of sexuality and spirituality.

Childhood background and Christianity

For some reason, all the participants were raised in orthodox and conservative Christian families. For example, the 27 year old Mpho was raised in the Roman Catholic Church, Kimberly was raised at the Anglican Church and Gift was raised at the Faith Mission Church, which is a Pentecostal Church. Some of them even attended Christian schools and the reason they gave for attending such schools is that their parents believed that Christian schools would teach them Christian values. Some of their parents were convinced that Christian Schools performed better academically than other schools. Also, all of the participants attended children’s school from an early age and, while they were teenagers, they were forced to go to Church by their parents. The participants’ spiritual background shows a strong influence from Christianity. The fact that all of them were raised by Christian families, with Christian values, is a perfect example of almost every Black South African youth, until the youths decide on their Religion or Church, habits and principles for themselves. Their background elucidates that when they realised their sexual

orientation, they did not only feel that they were going against the social norms, but also that they were going against the spiritual convictions that they were introduced to by their parents. For example, Thato said that, "In Christian School, they taught us about men and women, Adam and Eve and homosexuality was introduced as a sin that God hated more than other sins. Therefore, when I realised my attraction to women, I felt guilty and I felt like I was sinning against God". Mpho stated that she knew nothing about homosexuality as she was only exposed to heterosexuality. For most of the participants, it was not easy to accept their sexual orientation and some even tried to deny it.

Homophobic church beliefs and homophobic sermons

Participants said that the church perceives homosexuality as either spirit possession or mental illness. Mpho said that, sometimes at the Church youth services, the youths, more especially males, would start a discussion around whether homosexuality is sin or not and they would further request the youth pastor to lead the discussion. In general, participants felt that Church practices and sermons were designed to judge homosexual people and Church members were also negative towards lesbians. The participants were scared of coming out to their church peers about their sexual orientation, because they knew that the Church perceived homosexuality as sin. Mpho said that she confided in someone she trusted from her Church, about her sexual orientation, and the person said that she needed to tell the Pastor so that he could exorcise the demon. The person that Mpho confided in went on to tell other Church people and, as a result, she was treated like an outsider at some point.

To some extent, Thato felt safe about her sexual orientation at the Catholic school, mainly because it was a girl's school, and no one would have suspected that she was lesbian. Thato said, "At the Christian school I was more comfortable because it was a boarding school and there were other lesbian girls." Kimberly mentions that, when women appear or resemble some form of masculinity by the way they dress, that becomes a problem for the church. The church considers the women's masculine expression as misrepresenting the sex you were born with. Issues of masculine dominance are important in understanding gender discrimination, exclusion, and violence against women. Not only that, the Church member needed to know one's sexual orientation, but also they were negative to women or girls who wore men's clothes, including trousers that are perceived to be for men. Mpho said, "because I prefer to wear a certain kind of clothes I am perceived to be a lesbian; fortunately I am a lesbian and I wonder what would have happened if I was not a lesbian." Anele concurred with Mpho by saying, "This other time I went to

Church wearing pants. I am responsible for collecting money from the congregants. I took the money to the priest and he was like "if you still want to do this, wear dresses or skirts". The contributions that were made by Kimberly, Mpho, and Anele indicate that masculine lesbians are a threat to men because their appearance and behaviour are regarded as divergent from a normative understanding of gender and sexual orientation.

Mpho further said that she chooses where to sit at church and she avoids sitting next to certain people, otherwise she will not enjoy the church service. Kimberly said that one of the reasons she stopped attending church is because, whenever the pastor preached badly about homosexuality, those who were aware of her sexual orientation would look at her. She further said that she thinks some look at her with a judgmental attitude, while others, more especially the youths, looked at her out of concern. "Of course we do not go around telling people in church that we are lesbians, one a few people from the area where we live know then they tell other who then created church gossip out of it", said Thato, who also no longer goes to church. All participants have been offended more than once by their pastors' sermons, which they felt were homophobic.

Separating one's relationship with God from the institutional church

Some participants like Kimberly, Thato and Puleng no longer attend church. They individually took this decision after experiencing various forms of emotional abuse and discrimination. Some of their experiences have already been noted. Kimberly said that after her pastor's wife confronted her about being a lesbian while accusing her of influencing other girls, she decided to stop going to church. "I did not want to be seen as the devil and so I stopped attending church and that does not mean I hate God; I still have a relationship with God." Thato said that she prays a lot and her relationship with God is stronger. The participants who stopped going to church did not see this as a deterrence from their relationship with God and for being spiritual. Gift said, "It was not God who judged us, it is the homophobic preachers and judgmental Christians". These participants argued that the decision to not go to church does not mean they are now far from God, in fact they are now a lot closer to God as they do not have to hear homophobic and judgmental sermons. They all felt that hearing judgmental sermons and being among people who kept on judging them, was detrimental to their spiritual lives and, therefore, they decided to stay and pray from home. The participants still regarded themselves as committed Christians with close a relationship with God. The idea is that their spiritual lives are not based on the Church as an institution, but rather on their relationship with God, which is still intact.

The participants noted that the strong network system of lesbian girls kept them spiritually strong and during their meetings they would have a braai as well as discussions, bible studies, and prayer. Such meetings are used as an affirmation of their sexual orientation as well as the build-up of their spiritual lives.

Staying at church no matter what

For Anele, Mpho, and Gift, staying at home and not going to church was not an option. This group was resolute that they would still go to Church no matter what, “unless they chase me away, I am not going anywhere”, said Mpho. “After taking a break, I went back to Church and told myself that they would have to accept me as I am,” said Anele. Some participants were even used to homophobic sermons while others were used to being called names. Mpho said, “My biggest fear was accepting that I was lesbian and coming out to my parents about it, now that it happened there is nothing scaring more than that”. Gift said, “the fear of being judged is nothing compared to coming out as a lesbian, for years I struggle with who I am now I cannot let Church people judge me” There seems to be an agreement among the participants that overcoming the stigma of being lesbian was the biggest fear to overcome. The first fear came with accepting themselves and second was being accepted by their families and friends. It was no longer a major issue for them to be accepted or rejected by the church, given that they have already overcome the worst fears in their lives. Even though the participants were no longer as active in their participation within the church gatherings as in the past, they were still consistent in their attendance. Some of those from outside Bloemfontein, like Mpho from KZN, stopped attending their home churches, but they were motivated after attending the Campus Church in Bloemfontein and, as a result, when they arrived back home they went back to attending church. At the campus church, which is predominantly attended by university students, they met other lesbians who are older and more experienced than them. Their interaction with other peers at Campus Church made them realise that God is not angry at them and that it is simply how the Church interprets the Bible and, in turn, judges them. Mpho said, “...we have been created by God and if God did not want us to be lesbians he would not have created us, in fact some of us fought against being lesbian for a long time”.

How did they maintain their spiritual lives?

The participants are praying people, whether at church or at home, even those who have stopped going to Church were individuals that prayed. For them, their spiritual lives did not depend on Church attendance, but rather their relationship with God. Those that were still attending

church adopted an attitude like Somizi Mhlongo, and stated that they were at Church to worship God. Anele laughed and said, “I see some church people have decided to make my business theirs, I don’t care because they are making things difficult for themselves, I am cool and I am at peace with God”. In addition to what Anele was saying, Mpho said “... they will go to hell while judging us, I wish they could focus on themselves”. Their attitude towards other’s perceptions seems to be a coping mechanism and they all seem to be strong when it comes to the knowledge and acceptance of God’s unconditional love. The participants had their own spiritual meetings where they pray and read the bible together. They also read other books and listen to recordings that spoke about being a lesbian and a Christian. For instance, Anele said, “at some point I felt guilty for being a lesbian until I attended one of our discussions which were led by Nozipho and it made me accept myself the way I am”. Chilling, having drinks and chatting as a group also seem to have been one of their methods to spiritually discharge. They spend hours chatting and advising each other on different matters and, as a result after such meeting, they each felt better and realized that they are not alone.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the lived experiences of lesbians in relation to faith and spirituality. While there are slight variations, the participants embodied a queer Christian identity, which was widely accepted by some of their family members and in the communities that they came from. The study also revealed stories of painful and isolating experiences when sexual identities are negotiated with religious identities. This was, in part, the impact of the homonegativity that were experienced by the participants in the churches that they were members of. In addition, the participants’ communities seemed to have high amounts of religious activity that were bound to influence them in significant ways. As we have previously shown, the Christian community regards same-sex relationships as unnatural. Although the LGBTQI community has been granted protection in the constitution, it has been rather difficult for the church community to accept the participants as equal members of the church. Consequently, some members decided to stop going to Church, while some still attend.

For many of the participants, the church continued to symbolize a place of refuge and it was a major part of their upbringing. Yet the church now occupied a complicated position in their lives. Their religious institutions, particularly the Christian churches in this case, were still struggling with ‘the issue’ of same-sex relationships and, as a result, were still responding in homophobic, micro aggressive and judgmental ways. Nonetheless, the church’s hostility towards the

participants did not deter them from praying and being spiritual. This persistence underscores the significance of spirituality in the lives of the participants and provides the impetus to employ strategies to overcome any perceived conflict between their Christian and sexual identities. An important strategy that was used by the participants was to re-negotiate their Christian identity rather than their sexuality. Most of them are able to separate their relationship with God from the church itself. This could be associated with the belief that their relationship with God remains stable, while their relationship with the church has been negatively affected because of the discrimination they experienced. For the participants, no identity had to be accepted or rejected, and they recognized the intersectionality of who they are. It should be mentioned that those participants who were still attending Church, were no longer participating in church activities like they used to do, but being in church still benefited their spirituality.

To be clear, the object of this reflection is not to belittle the value of church culture and church theology, but while searching for spiritual and religious support, the participants have found solace outside of the official church structure. This study suggests that the LGBTQI people of faith might have gone through a process of being a part of religious denominations, to being more spiritual individuals who are involved in spiritual practices outside of the church. One could argue that their challenges re-directed their commitment and made them even more spiritual than denomination conscious. During the current pandemic of COVID-19, communities are being forced to confront deeply ethical and arguably religious questions. Also, the lockdown regulations in South Africa made things worse for the religious communities; for more than three months religious gatherings of any kind were prohibited. The response to the fear and disorientation caused by COVID-19 has (re)directed people to spirituality and faith. It is heard in messages from employees that encourage people to pray or to seek strength, hope, and a sense of comfort in God. As Shedadi and Partington (2020) suggest, COVID-19 has reminded people of the fragility of life. Sadly, this is also the reality that Black lesbian women in South African know only too well (Matebeni, 2018). Perhaps at this time, as a country, as a world, we understand a small piece of the strategies that are documented in this study. It is an opportunity to understand how participants of the study routinely engage with spirituality in solace and in this isolated manner. Church goers are engaged in a more intimate relation with their spirituality. The privacy of online and the ability to consume sermons, gospel music, and different interpretations of the bible are results of the pandemic. These lessons can be learned from queer spirituality, as it is espoused by the participants in this study as a re-conceptualised spirituality that exists outside of the church building and outside of religious indoctrination. For survival and as coping mechanism

participants of this study embrace a kind of spiritual wholeness which is fluid balanced. This is a kind of spirituality that does not discriminate against one's sexuality, gender, age or even church association.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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ⁱ Gqola and Matebeni have contested the use of the term "corrective rape" and argued that the term makes 'curative' rape something exceptional or that there is a 'normal' rape (Gqola). Matebeni argues that the term adds an element of blame on the victim, as if the crime was warranted to discipline her for behaving in an unwanted manner. (see Gqola, P., 2015, Rape a South African Nightmare). See Matebeni, Z., 2011. Exploring Black sexualities and identities in Johannesburg. Phd thesis (WITS)

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