



Contributions to Migration Theology and its Discourse on Migration and Spirituality

Dorris van Gaal

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Migrant Spirituality

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Dorris van Gaal

Migrant Spirituality

Correlating the Narratives
of African Migrants to the USA
and the *Dark Night*
of John of the Cross

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Photos taken by Dorris van Gaal & Pim Valkenberg and edited by Nadeen Alsulaimi.

These three photos were taken during two different visits to Liberty Park. The first visit (on October 7, 2015) was organized St. Matthew's parish and its Immigration Outreach Service Center. We visited Ellis Island and Liberty Island. Special to this trip was that among the busload of people were immigrants (including myself and some who shared their stories for this research) and that I had just started analyzing the first set of interviews. The second visit was on May 18, 2018, with my dad and husband on the eve of our oldest son's graduation. We just stayed on the Jersey side of the park, but now knowing so much more about the depth of a migration experience, this broad view sums up the tale of the journey. That is what the front cover conveys.

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The photos on the front cover of this book reflect the migration journey of the African migrants who shared their stories for this research. The Statue of Liberty symbolizes the ideal of freedom and the promise of a peaceful life, which directed their choice for the United States as their new homeland. The immigration building on Ellis Island symbolizes the ordeal experienced upon arrival. The remains of the train station on the Jersey shore symbolizes the real deal of their stories. With Ellis Island behind them and the Statue of Liberty in the distance as a goal to strive for, they board the train toward settling into their new life. These photos also reflect the journey of this research project. Since long it has been my dream and ideal to engage in a doctoral research project. It has been quite the journey that sometimes felt like an ordeal. But more than that, it has been a blessing to journey with these beautiful narratives of migration and spirituality. The text in front of you is the real deal and it could not have come to be without the support of many. I am grateful to each and all of you. I am not able to name you all, but to some of you I would like to extend my special thanks.

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To the African migrants who shared their stories, and to all migrants whose stories still need to be told and heard I dedicate this thesis.

The feast of Mary of Magdala: *Apostola Apostolorum*
July 22, 2021



EXPLANATION OF ABBREVIATIONS

For the abbreviated references to the works of St. John of the Cross, I will implement the manner of abbreviation used by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., in their translation of *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991):

A = Ascent of Mount Carmel

N = Dark Night

C = Spiritual Canticle

F = Living Flame of Love

The levels of divisions within a work are separated by periods:

N. 1. 1. 1 = Dark Night, book 1, chapter 1, paragraph 1



CHAPTER 1

MIGRATION AND DARK NIGHT: AN INTRODUCTION

Preliminary remark: note on the origin of the study

“Now that I know, this is a challenging country, but is a country that you see God,” Kuriōka said, “This is the way I am telling people now: This is the real place you experience God.”

In this quote Kuriōka, one of the participants in this research, seems to express that during her migration journey to the United States of America (USA) she experienced a transformation of her understanding of God.

Seeking to understand how experience transforms one's faith and how faith transforms experience has been a recurring theme or exercise in my life as pastoral worker and teacher of theology. It features as I teach students the topic of “World Christianity” and help them gain understanding of the different expressions of the same faith across the globe. It features in my pastoral work where individual believers, but also communities of faith seek understanding of their lives' experiences from the perspective of faith and theology. When I worked in the Netherlands, it featured as migrants from Suriname, the Dutch Antilles, and Vietnamese boat refugees challenged the faith communities with their presence. Theological and pastoral reflections were needed to understand this experience and to enable the change in understanding what it means to be a community of faith in a multicultural context.¹ It still features now as I am living and working in the USA tending to faith formation in parishes that have recently experienced a large influx of immigrants. As an immigrant working with immigrants it has become important to understand how the experience of migration transforms a person's faith.

The research project here before you has been developed within this pastoral context. Below, I will first sketch wider context of this research project: the phenomenon of migration in general and migration of people from Africa to the United States of America in particular.

¹ See for instance: Jorge Castillo Guerra, Frans Wijsen, en Moniek Steggerda, *Een gebedshuis voor alle volken: Kerkopbouw en Kadervorming in rooms-katholieke allochtonengemeenschappen* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2006).

1. Sketching the Context

1.1 *The Phenomenon of Migration*

The migrants whom I have encountered in my pastoral work are but a few examples of the migration flows around the world. All around the world people are on the move. The mobility of human beings has become immense. Hunger, violence, war, poverty, and economic injustice are the main reasons why people leave their homelands to find a safe and dignified life elsewhere. Human mobility is not new to the human existence, as “human beings have always moved in search for new opportunities, or to escape poverty, conflict, [and] environmental degradation.”² The difference in this time and age, however, is that the developments in communication technologies have raised the awareness of this mobility to a global awareness and that people are on the move everywhere on earth.³ Millions and millions of people choose or are forced to leave their homes and country looking for better conditions of life. The phenomenon of migration has become truly global and is impacting many peoples and nations. To support these people and nations impacted by the departure or arrival (or both) of these migration flows, migration, as phenomenon, has become a subject in the studies of many disciplines. In what follows below I will define migration, who is considered a migrant, and why they migrate. I will describe current trends in migration flows and will explain why in the studies of migration religion or faith is a factor to consider when reflecting on migration.⁴

² Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas, and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2009-4th & 2014-5th edition), 2. Note: quotes are generally taken from the 2009-4th edition, as the newest edition was only available in the study room of the library. I took the time to do a parallel reading of both editions, but had the 4th edition at hand while writing.

³ Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience* (New York: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2014), 13-15 and Harold A. Netland, “Introduction: Globalization and Theology Today,” in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, eds. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 18-23. Netland explains how the phenomenon of globalization developed over time. Other articles in this anthology incorporate definitions of globalization and the effect of rapid technological developments as well.

⁴ The sources used for this introduction to the phenomenon of migration stem from both migration studies in the social sciences and from the field of migration theology. In this introduction I will not yet engage the theological reflections on migration, but I will make use of their observations and analysis in regard to the phenomenon of migration as these theologians engage it as a context of theological reflection. This indicates, as I will explain below, that migration theology uses an interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon of migration.

1.1.1 Definitions and Characteristics of Migration

The United Nations define migration as follows:

“The crossing of the boundary of a political or administrative unit for a certain minimum period of time. It includes the movement of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people as well as economic migrants.”⁵

Migration can happen in a country internally, when people move from one district to another (because of natural disasters, or civil wars) or internationally, when people move between nation-states. The Migration Agency of the United Nations

“defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.”⁶

In *The Age of Migration*, Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas, and Mark J. Miller focus on international or intercontinental migration. It is, however, interesting to note that they point out in several instances that analyzing numbers of Internally Displaced People and – in the case of the African Continent – of international migration and specifically migration to the North (Europe & the Americas), that people opting for international or intercontinental migration is still the exception and not the rule.⁷

People migrate for many reasons and with different intentions. Migration happens freely when the reasons behind the migration are things such as jobs (with manual workers often excluded and highly qualified specialist receiving privileged rules of entry), family reunion or marriage between people from

⁵ “Migrant/Migration,” UNESCO / Social and Human science, accessed November 4, 2019, www.unesco.org/shs/migration/glossary.

⁶ “Migration,” United Nations / Global Issues, accessed November 4, 2019, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/>. Although the UNESCO glossary distinguishes refugees from the definition of migrant, in this study I will consider refugees as migrant: “Migrant/Migration,” UNESCO: Social and Human science.

⁷ Castles, de Haas, and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 7, 152-154, and 155-159. For instance, the United Nations statistics on November 4, 2019 show that “the number of globally forcibly displaced people topped 70 million for the first time in the UNHCR’s almost 70 year history at the end of 2018. This number includes almost 26 million refugees, 3.5 million asylum seekers, and over 41 million internally displaced persons.” “Migration,” United Nations: Global Issues.

two different countries.⁸ Another category of reasons that cause people to move out of their own free will is that of seeking a better life. People may seek alternatives to oppression of women, cultural discrimination, ecological disasters, demographic overpopulation, or economic oppression.⁹ Migration may be planned, or migration may be caused by a sudden and necessary flight. In the case of the latter, migration is forced migration. Forced migration is often triggered by “violence that forced people to search for a safe-haven, protection, or asylum in another country. It is often the last resort to turn extreme poverty, persecution and violence caused by social-political, ethnic, national or religious conflicts.”¹⁰ Migration can have a temporary character due to a certain type of job, for instance seasonal workers, diplomats, missionaries, or employees of multi-national companies. Migration has a permanent character, when people migrate with the intention of settlement. Oftentimes, however, the temporality of the intention is fluid and can change from one to the other, but “whether the intention is temporary or permanent, many migrants become settlers.”¹¹

Typically, the experiences of migration are “tough for migrants but are often preferable to poverty, insecurity and lack of opportunities at home.”¹² The context and history of the flows of migration from the age of industrialization (of Europe and North America) until 1945, shows many parallels with the current flows of migration. During the earlier flows of international migration:

“Many of the migrants moved under difficult and dangerous conditions. Sometimes their hopes of a better life were dashed. Yet they had good reasons to take the risk, because the situation was usually even worse in the place of origin... [Today they] still experience many hardships but they often do succeed in escaping poverty and hopelessness in their place of origin and finding new opportunities elsewhere. Being a migrant can be very tough but staying at home can be worse.”¹³

1.1.2 Trends in Migration Flows

To provide further insight in the current characteristics of migration Castles, de Haas, and Miller point to six trends in the current flows of migration.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 152-153. See also: Jorge Castillo Guerra, “Naar een theologie van de migratie: context, perspectieven en thematiek,” *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 44, 3 (2004), 243.

¹¹ Castles, de Haas, and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 94.

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The first trend is globalization and, as mentioned earlier, refers both to the growing global awareness concerning migration and to the fact that migration flows are happening from everywhere to everywhere with the result that the migrant population that arrives in receiving countries becomes more diverse.¹⁴ The second trend is acceleration as the number of migrants is fast on the rise. The third trend to observe is differentiation, which refers to multiple types or forms of migration such as labor migration, refugees, family reunification, entrepreneurial, or retirement. A fourth trend is the feminization of migration. Women take the initiative to migrate to better be able to care for their families. They, for example, leave to take job opportunities in another country (such as domestic helpers –mostly in Hong Kong and on the Arabic Peninsula; or science teachers –in the USA). These women become the persons who prepare the way for the rest of the family or who become transnational parents.¹⁵ The next trend is the politicization of migration. This refers to the development that nations feel the need for global governance and cooperation between sending, transit and receiving countries, which could be seen in the international action taken with regards to the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015. The last trend pointed out is proliferation of migration transition and refers to the fast-changing designation as countries transition from an emigration, to transit, to immigration country. They refer to Turkey as an example. In 2009 Turkey had transitioned from an emigration into an immigration country, but as this chapter is written it has started to function as a transition country, with the start of the earlier mentioned Syrian refugee crisis. To the six trends in migration pointed out in *The Age of Migration*, a

¹⁴ Phan and Cruz mention this fact as a reason for their efforts to build respectively an intercultural theology for the American context and a theology of migration. Peter C. Phan, "The experience of Migration as Source of Intercultural Theology," in *Contemporary issues of Migration and Theology*, eds. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 179-182 and Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, 1-9.

¹⁵ Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, 34-44. See also: Gemma Cruz, *Into the Deep: A Theological Exploration of the Struggle of Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong* (Manila, Philippines: UST Publishing House, 2006) and Talia Richman, "Baltimore recruited a group of foreign teachers years ago: now their visas are set to expire," *The Baltimore Sun*, June 13, 2018 <https://www.baltimoresun.com/education/bs-md-ci-foreign-teachers-20180606-story.html> and "Longtime Filipino teachers had to leave Baltimore amid new U.S. immigration policies. Now most are back," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 14, 2019, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/education/bs-md-ci-foreign-teachers-return-20190304-story.html>. To add a personal note: my children were taught by some of these teachers and most of them arrived in the USA the same year we did (2006). We came acquainted with the family of one of these female teachers as her youngest daughter started in the same kindergarten class as our daughter. They were in the same "English as a Second Language" class together.

seventh trend can be added: the trend of trans-nationalization.¹⁶ Although they do not mention it as a trend, the authors do refer to this phenomenon in their concluding remarks when they observe that:

“It is part of the migrant condition to develop multiple identities... Such personal identities possess complex new transcultural elements, manifest in growing transnationalism and expanding diasporic populations around the world.”¹⁷

Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky define trans-nationalization as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”¹⁸ New in this trend is that migrants become aware of the multiple identities they develop in the context of transnationalism, which can be seen in their artistic and cultural contributions to societies and the socio-economic and political actions they engage in.¹⁹

1.1.3 Religion and Faith in the Study of Migration

Castle, De Haas, and Miller further offer an overview of theories on migration developed in the social sciences.²⁰ The authors critique the narrow perspective of explaining the migratory process from a solely economic perspective and support scholars such as Alejandro Portes²¹, who are proponents of an inter-

¹⁶ Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, 16-17, 25-31, 38, 44-51.

¹⁷ Castles, de Haas, and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 311 (2009 – 4th edition).

¹⁸ Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, “Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends,” in: *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 33 (2007), 131.

¹⁹ Castles, de Haas, and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 311 and Levitt and Jaworsky, “Transnational Migration Studies,” 129-156. For instance, the diversity of backgrounds of the protesters against President Donald Trump’s executive orders to limit access of (predominantly Muslim) travelers and immigrants in the beginning of 2017 was an example of both a trans-national and trans-religious expression of solidarity: Carrie Wells, “Thousands protest Trump’s travel ban,” *The Baltimore Sun*, January 29, 2017, https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/bs-md-bwi-rally-20170129-story.html?int=lat_digitaladshouse_bx-modal_acquisition-subscriber_ngux_display-ad-interstitial_bx-bonus-story.

²⁰ Castles, de Haas, and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 20-49.

²¹ Phan, “The experience of Migration as Source of Intercultural Theology,” 179 & 198. Here Phan refers to Portes to argue that a similar interdisciplinary approach is also necessary for theological reflections on migration. See also: Alejandro Portes, “Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities,” in *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, eds. Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 21-33.

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disciplinary approach to understanding the dynamics of migration systems and networks that influence a migrant's journey and settlement:

“Migration [is] a complex process in which economic, political, social and cultural factors all work together... These conditions are not static, but in a process of constant change, linked both to global factors and the way they interact with local historical and cultural patterns.”²²

Levitt and Jaworsky agree that an interdisciplinary approach to understanding migration is necessary. They however, already in 2007, comment that religion should not be overlooked in understanding the dynamics of migration. They point out that it is very clear that “religion supports and is itself transformed by all aspects of the migration experience – the journey, the process of settlement, and the emergence of ethnic and transnational ties.”²³ Other studies affirm this observation and show how being part of a religion offers a connection with a network of religious communities, both in the country of origin and the destination country: they are supportive of and oftentimes instrumental in the decision to migrate and they offer prayers and support for the journey itself and during the process of settlement.²⁴ Phillip Connor takes this observation further and argues for the need to not only understand the religious networks supporting migrants on their journey, but also for the need to understand immigrant faith. He claims:

“Religion is not merely one aspect among many in immigrant lives; it can encompass everything. Immigrant faith affects daily interaction with non-immigrants, shapes the future of immigrants in their destination society, and

²² Castles, de Haas, and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 25-26.

²³ Levitt and Jaworsky, “Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends,” 140. See also: Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the changing American Religious Landscape*, (London/New York, NY: The New Press, 2007), 84-106.

²⁴ Phillip Connor, *Immigrant Faith: Patterns of Immigrant Religion in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014); Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Moses O. Biney, *From Africa to America: Religion and Adaptation among Ghanaian Immigrants in New York* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2011). Gerrie Ter Haar already pointed to the importance of faith in her research among African immigrants in the Netherlands and Europe: “The religious dimension in migration and its relation to development: the case of Ghanaians in the Netherlands,” *At Home in the World? International Migration and Development in Contemporary Ghana and West Africa*, ed. Takyiwaa Manuh, (Legon/Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2005), 313-330 and *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998).

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influences society beyond the immigrants themselves. In other words, to understand immigrants, one must understand their faith.”²⁵

Religion and faith as factor in migration experiences can be studied from many perspectives, such as the perspective of social sciences as Levitt, Afe Adogame, Moses O. Biney, and Phillip Connor do. In section two of this chapter I will explore how the perspective of theology contributes to the understanding of the faith people who migrate.

1.2 African Migrants to the USA: A Blind Spot

This study focuses on experiences of migrants from the African continent to the United States of America as a source for reflection on the role of faith in migration from the perspective of theology. The choice to focus on the experiences of migrants from Africa comes from the pastoral context in which this research finds its origin. This pastoral context, both on the parochial and diocesan level, has shown that migrants from Africa who traveled to the USA during the last quarter of the twentieth and the first part of the twenty-first century are practically invisible in both statistics and pastoral programming due to the manner in which the society in the USA relates to racial categories.²⁶

In the USA immigrants from Africa are statistically grouped under the category “Black” as defined by the 2010 Census. Even though the “1997 Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity”²⁷ call for a minimum of five racial categories and allows for an “open” sixth category (“Some other race” – to be specified on the form), in the data analysis on the results concerning the Black population these distinctions do not seem to be taken into account. In the 2010 census the following definition is used to describe “Black” or “African American”:

“... “Black or African American” refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. The Black racial category includes people who marked the “Black, African Am., or Negro” checkbox. It also includes

²⁵ Connor, *Immigrant Faith*, 4-5.

²⁶ Paulinus I. Odozor, C.S.S.P., “African Catholics in the United States: Gifts and Challenges,” in *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience*, editor M. Shawn Copeland with LaReine-Marie Mosely and Albert J. Raboteau (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 195 and Malcolm P. Drewery, Jr., et al., *The Black Population: 2010. Census briefs 2010*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

²⁷ Office of Management and Budget, 1997 Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, in: *Federal Register*, vol. 62 (210) October 30, 1997.

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respondents who reported entries such as African American; Sub-Saharan African entries, such as Kenyan and Nigerian; and Afro-Caribbean entries, such as Haitian and Jamaican. Sub-Saharan African entries are classified as Black or African American with the exception of Sudanese and Cape Verdean because of their complex, historical heritage. North African entries are classified as White, as OMB defines White as a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.”²⁸

There is, therefore, no perceived distinction between African Americans and recent Black African immigrants. Here it is interesting to note that some of the participants in the research were already adhering to these racial categories and would self-identify as “Black” on their demographic notecard. I had to ask them to specify their ethnic heritage. This statistical invisibility hinders the pastoral outreach to immigrants from Africa as one of the participants affirms in her narrative:

“African immigrants because at a national level, they are not recognized. It’s usually Latinos or Asian Americans... how many Africans do we have in this country. Every year they are coming... they are everywhere! But again: that stereotyping. And until somebody like you or [name of parish] does something it will remain dormant.”²⁹

This blind spot and adherence to the racial categories was observed on the national level of the Roman Catholic Church as well. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has developed a program to enhance intercultural competency. The introduction to the training modules describes how they were developed with participants from each of the five racial categories, to which a sixth category was added: “migrants, refugees, and travelers.” The category African American referred to descendants of Africans forced to migrate to the USA in the time of slavery and even though the “migrant” category mentioned Africa, the category “migrants” itself was poorly developed and refugees and travelers not mentioned.³⁰ This invisibility is also reflected in surveys conducted by the Archdiocese of Baltimore, where the output of the data, defaulting to the five racial categories used in the national

²⁸ Drewery, Jr., *et al.*, *The Black Population: 2010*, 2.

²⁹ Myizero, interview by T.J.M. van Gaal, January 29, 2018, (Q16: 19).

³⁰ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers: Modules for Training Workshop* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2012), ix. These same categories are also recognized in the subcommittees of the USCCB committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church: <https://www.usccb.org/committees/cultural-diversity-church> - accessed August 16, 2020.

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census, ignored the diversity of ethnicities, even though, pressured by parishes, the latest survey included the possibility for an entry regarding ethnicity or nationality.³¹ The effect is that the diocesan programming also reflects that there is no perceived distinction between African Americans and current African migrants.³²

The presence of an African diaspora in the USA has, however, been noticed and reflected on. In 2007 Jacob Olupona and Regina Gemignani provided insight in the presence of African religious communities and reflected on their impact on religion and society in the USA.³³ Adogame published the results of research on the African Diaspora on three continents and gives a thorough presentation of the relevance and significance of African Christian communities in the dynamics of migration.³⁴ It discusses not only the importance of the global and local networks these communities have developed and the support they offer to many African migrants on their migration journey, but it also reveals how this global African Christianity will impact the religious, cultural, social, economic, and political dynamics of the countries where African diasporas emerge. Even though, Adogame, for instance, points to theological themes that may be affected by migration,³⁵ these studies generally focus on the role of faith and church communities in the dynamics of migration and do so from the perspective of social or religious studies.³⁶ It seems however, that this blind spot regarding the

³¹ For example: "Parish Planning Data Executive Summary - St. Matthew -1305 – Metro East Region," Saint John Neumann Vicariate, accessed September 19, 2017 and August 22, 2019, <https://bemissionarydisciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SurveyResults-Metro-East-Region-05-19-16>. The statistical output is based on the *Annual Consolidated Report for the Fiscal Year of 2015* and compared to the numbers from the 2006 reports. The report was generated on April 6, 2016.

(Note: web link is no longer functional, but PDF was downloaded on September 19, 2017.)

³² "Welcome to the Archdiocese of Baltimore," Archdiocese of Baltimore, accessed September 19, 2017 and August 22, 2019, <https://www.archbalt.org>. The homepage mentions the offices of the different ministries, but the list only mentions Black and Hispanic ministries. A closer look at the webpage for "Black Catholic Ministry" shows that all resources refer to the general African American population. Nothing refers to current African migration to the archdiocese: <https://www.archbalt.org/black-catholic-ministry/>, accessed September 19, 2017 and August 22, 2019.

³³ Jacob K. Olupona and Regina Gemignani, editors, *African Immigrant Religions in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2007).

³⁴ Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

³⁵ Adogame, *o.c.*, 85-100.

³⁶ Connor, *Immigrant Faith*; Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*; Moses Biney, *From Africa to America: Religion and Adaptation among Ghanaian Immigrants in New York*, (New York: NYU Press, 2011) and "Transnational Religious Networks: From Africa to America and

presence of migrants from Africa as noticed in American society and pastoral care in the Catholic Church, can also be observed in recent theological reflections on migration in the context of the USA. For instance, Peter C. Phan only describes Hispanic and Asian immigration and only mentions as resources “Latino/a, Asian, and black theologies ... to construct a US inter-multi-cultural theology.”³⁷ Reflecting on theology and migration in the context of the United States, he does not seem to distinguish African migrant cultures, faith, and theology as a separate source that can contribute to the development of this theology. Therefore it seems that more research might need to be done to discuss migration experiences of African migrants to the USA in terms of theology.³⁸

2. Exploring the Field of Migration Theology and Spirituality

Contributing to understanding the effect of migration experiences on a person's faith from the perspective of theology, places this research in the field of the theology of migration or migration theology. This is a fairly new discipline in the science of theology, but it is developing rapidly.

Migrants have received pastoral attention over time as churches responded to the plight of migrants and offered pastoral support to the settlement of immigrants in their midst.³⁹ But it was not until the late 20th and early 21st

Back to Africa,” in *Christianities in Migration: The Global Perspective*, eds. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, (London / New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 281-298.

³⁷ Peter C. Phan, “The experience of Migration as Source of Intercultural Theology” in *Contemporary issues of Migration and Theology*, eds. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 195. In his reference to the post 1965 influx of immigrants Phan only points to Hispanic and Asian immigration (180-182).

³⁸ The Nijmegen Institute of Missiology has directed research among African Christians in the Netherlands evoked by a similar blind spot in the Dutch society regarding African migrants. See for instance: Judith E. Maaskant, *Afrikaans en Katholiek in Rotterdam: Waar kerk je dan? Kerkelijke verwachtingen van Afrikaanse katholieken in Rotterdam en het migrantenbeleid van de RKK* (Nijmegen: Wetenschapswinkel Nijmegen, 1999); Naomi van der Meer, *Believers in the Universal Church: Processes of self-identification among Catholic immigrants of African Descent in the Dutch religious landscape* (Berlin/Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2010).

³⁹ For contributions to this pastoral care for migrants, see, for instance, documents released by the Roman Catholic Church: *Exsul Familia* 1952; *Pastoralis Migratorum Cura* 1969; *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* 2004; Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, “Contributions of the Social Teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on Migration: From a ‘Culture of Rejection’ to a ‘Culture of Encounter’,” *Exchange* 44 (2105), 415-427, James T. Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America*, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), and as the first draft of this chapter is written, Pope Francis, on September 27, 2017 launched his campaign in support of the migrants' plight: #sharethejourney.

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century that migration was understood as a more and more urgent social issue and a concrete human experience to be taken into account, which then urged theologians to develop a theology of migration.⁴⁰ Once the phenomenon of migration was recognized as a “sign of the times” in which one can “decipher authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose,” the experiences of the world’s migrants and their stories have become a source for theological reflection.⁴¹

The phenomenon of migration, however, is so multifaceted, and so diverse, that the theological reflections on migration have become multifaceted as well. Theologians are now addressing the contexts of the many migrants with their many different circumstances and are taking into account the many geographical and cultural contexts from both the sending and the receiving countries.⁴² Theological reflections on migration are interdisciplinary undertakings. These reflections have arisen from different theological fields, such as biblical studies, Christology, ecclesiology, ethics, and spirituality.⁴³ Below I will first present a short overview of the achievements in migration theology, particularly in the context of the USA with attention to the question whether experiences of African migrants are addressed.

⁴⁰ In 2002 the Scalabrini Missionaries in collaboration with the Transborder Institute of the University of San Diego organized a pioneering conference on migration and theology. The proceedings of this conference were published: Gioacchino Campese, c.s. and Pietro Ciallella, c.s., eds, *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization* (New York, NY: Center for Migration Studies, 2003). Jorge Castillo Guerra reported on this and following conferences in a 2007 article in which he reflects on a methodology for a theology of migration: “Theologie van de migratie: Een interculturele methodologie,” *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 47, 1(2007), 42-64. Dorottya Nagy refers to this rapid development as well: Dorottya Nagy, “Migratie, Missiologie, methodologie: beproefd recept van missiologisch onderzoek kritisch bevraagd,” *TussenRuimte* 6, 1(2013), 10-11.

⁴¹ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World - *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican: Holy See, 1965), §11. See also: Regina Polak, “Migration as a Sign of the Times,” in *Migration as a Sign of the Times: Towards a Theology of Migration*, eds. Judith Gruber and Sigrid Rettenbacher, (Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2015), 47-78.

⁴² See for instance: Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, “Naar een theologie van migratie: context, perspectieven, en thematiek,” in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 44, 3(2004), 241-258, Gioacchino Campese, “Theologies of Migration: Present and Future Perspectives,” in Tobias Keßler, ed., *Migration als Ort der Theologie* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2014), 167-188 and Dorottya Nagy, “Minding Methodology: Theology-Missiologie and Migration Studies,” in: *Mission Studies* 32(2015), 203-233. In these articles the authors point to this complexity of the phenomenon of migration and the challenges this poses for migrations studies and the development of migration theology.

⁴³ Peter C. Phan, “Embracing, Protecting, and Loving the Stranger: A Roman Catholic Theology of Migration,” in *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, eds. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, (New York, NY: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2014), 95-96.

2.1 *Achievements in Migration Theology*

The phenomenon of migration is so multi-faceted and diverse, that already at the very beginning of the rise of migration as locus for theological reflection, Jorge E. Castillo Guerra raised the issue whether “a” theology of migration should be developed or whether the aim should be to develop a multifaceted theology of migration.⁴⁴ A singular theology of migration might be able to point out certain general dynamics in the process of migration; it will, however, not be able to do justice to every group of migrants and their many different circumstances. Each migrant or group of migrants will bring along their own cultural contexts and therefore their own dynamics, emphases, and questions. Furthermore, a theology of migration does not just contend with many different geographical and cultural contexts from both sending and receiving countries, but also with “many perspectives and starts from various migration experiences.”⁴⁵ Castillo Guerra and Gioacchino Campese agree that when speaking of theology of migration “in the singular... the reflection [referred] to is always plural, that is ‘theologies of migration’...”⁴⁶ This study, therefore, opts not to speak of “a” or “the” theology of migration but of “migration theology” understanding it as a multifaceted theology that brings new perspectives to the broad field of theology based on the experiences of the many migrants currently on the move in our world. What follows is a presentation of knowledge gained and developed in migration theology as it tries to engage these many contexts and perspectives and various migration experiences.

2.1.1 *Theological Reflections on Migration and Scripture*

A presentation of contributions made to migration theology begins, almost naturally, with looking at the connections between migration experiences and the primary source of the Christian Faith: The Scriptures. From a Christian and Catholic perspective migration experiences are placed within a “specific biblico-theological frame of reference, incorporating the migration phenomenon into the history of salvation.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Jorge Castillo Guerra, “Naar een theologie van migratie.”

⁴⁵ Gioacchino Campese, “Theologies of Migration: Present and Future Perspectives,” in Tobias Keßler, ed., *Migration als Ort der Theologie* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2014), 174.

⁴⁶ Campese, “Theologies of Migration: Present and Future Perspectives,” 167.

⁴⁷ Pontifical Council for The pastoral Care for Migrants and iLinerant People, *The Love of Christ towards Migrants – Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, (Vatican City, 2004), presentation. See also: Anna Fumagalli, “Die Interpretation der Bibel im Kontext von Migration: ein Gewinn für alle,” in: Tobias Keßler, ed., *Migration als Ort der Theologie*, 76. The researcher is aware

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This has resulted in highlighting the migrant experience and migrant identity as a heuristic instrument, which points to migrant experiences in the stories of the people of Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures, offering new interpretations and applications of these stories.⁴⁸ The biblical experiences as told in the stories of Genesis, Exodus, and, for instance, the laws on the treatment of the stranger, emphasize the biblical call to care for the stranger or the migrant in society, as it brings into memory that “my father was a wandering Aramean (Deuteronomy 26,5).” M. Daniel Carroll R., for instance, explains how connecting migration experiences to biblical language and to the social teachings of the Catholic Church could change the discourse on migration in society and form a framework to critically evaluate the language used for migration both in society in general and in immigration policies in the USA in particular.⁴⁹

Connecting migrant experiences with Scripture, however, has also resulted in acknowledging ambiguities regarding strangers and migrants in the Scriptures themselves. Luis N. Rivera-Pagán and Marion Grau argue that caution is needed when bringing the experience of migration in connection with biblical texts and tradition, especially concerning a one-sided perspective on the “stranger” in the Exodus narrative. Rivera-Pagán reflects on the concepts of xenophilia and xenophobia in biblical texts related to the experience of migrants who encounter both on their journeys.⁵⁰ Grau complements this observation by engaging in a critical rereading of the Exodus narrative in combination with the concepts of migration, liberation and conquest. This critical rereading highlights the different groups with their different interests in the mega-narrative of the Exodus. It is not just about those who migrate to Canaan, but also about those whom the people of Israel encounter on their

that theological or religious reflections on the phenomenon of migration are also conducted in relation to the scriptural or spiritual frames of reference of other religions. See for instance: Alexander Y. Hwang, Allen G. Jorgenson, and Hussam S. Timany, eds., *Strangers in This World: Multireligious Reflections on Immigration*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015); Richard Alba, Josh DeWind, and Albert J. Raboteau, eds., *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspectives* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008); and John L. Esposito, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, and Jane I. Smith, eds., *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States*, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003).

⁴⁸ See for instance: *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, § 14-18 and Anna Fumagalli, “Die Interpretation der Bibel im Kontext von Migration: ein Gewinn für alle,” 77-84.

⁴⁹ M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

⁵⁰ Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, “Xenophilia or Xenophobia: Toward a Theology of Migration,” in Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, eds., *Contemporary issues of Migration and Theology*, 31-51.

journey and when settling in Canaan.⁵¹ Such a critical analysis shows that biblical texts contain an ambiguous attitude toward migrants or strangers encountered. With Rivera-Pagán, Grau therefore calls for a humbler approach to biblical interpretation.⁵²

Critically regarding interpretations of biblical stories does not just arise from biblical ambiguities, but different migrant perspectives or experiences can lead to different and sometimes conflicting interpretations. Compare, for instance, Dianne Bergant's interpretation of the Book of Ruth with the interpretation of Gale A. Yee. Bergant presents Ruth as the "contemporary metaphor of the migrant" ⁵³ who "demonstrates that openness to and incorporation of the vulnerable migrant is the way to restoration or salvation."⁵⁴ Like Yee, Bergant observes the tension between Ruth's proposed position as a resident alien (*ger*) and her self-identification as a stranger (*nokryah*), by which she makes herself vulnerable. Bergant evaluates this as a positive vehicle through which Ruth can become the way to restoration.⁵⁵ Yee, however, correlates Ruth predicaments with the experiences of Asian immigrants to the USA and shows that the Asian-American experience of being seen as both the "model minority" and the "perpetual foreigner" offers a new reading and interpretation of this tension in Ruth's position.⁵⁶ On the one hand "Ruth becomes a model émigré (*ger*)", on the other hand, however, Ruth remains "the perpetual foreigner – a *nokryah* – whose consistent label of Moabite implies that she, [...] is not fully assimilated..."⁵⁷ Her work and her gift of life are not fully recognized. Once Obed is born, Ruth disappears from the story. Many Chinese Americans who helped to build a nation as railroad

⁵¹ Marion Grau, "Circumambulating Exodus-Migration-Conquest: A Theological Hermeneutics of Migratory Narrativity," in Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, eds., *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*, 11-29.

⁵² Grau, "Circumambulating Exodus-Migration-Conquest," 22. Fumagalli and Campese share these concerns in their contributions to Thomas Keßler, ed., *Migration als Ort der Theologie*: Fumagalli, "Die Interpretation de Bibel im Kontext von Migration," 74-75 and Campese, "Theologies of Migration: Present and Future Perspectives," 177. Here Campese also refers to Rivera-Pagán's observations and cautions "to become more careful, critical and honest about our interpretation of the variety of biblical witness."

⁵³ Dianne Bergant, "Ruth: the Migrant who Saved the People," in *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization*, 58.

⁵⁴ Bergant, "Ruth: the Migrant who Saved the People," 60.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-52.

⁵⁶ Gale A. Yee, "'She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn:' Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority," in *Off the Menu. Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, Rita Nakashima Brock, et al., eds. (Louisville/London, Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 45-65.

⁵⁷ Gale A. Yee, "She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn," 60.

workers share this fate of disappearing from history: Their “efforts went unacknowledged.”⁵⁸

Similarly, reflections on migration experiences have highlighted that in the New Testament Jesus is presented as an itinerant. From his early childhood on Jesus has been mobile, exiled, homeless, and crossing borders. These observations have contributed to the development of new interpretations and applications of this rediscovered identity of Jesus Christ. Portraying Jesus as an itinerant and homeless teacher sets him not only among the poor, marginalized, and the vulnerable, but also gives him the opportunity to purposefully cross borders, geographically, conventionally, socially, politically, and religiously.⁵⁹

2.1.2 *Migration and Systematic Theological Reflection*

Building upon Jesus’ itinerant identity in the Gospels and the image of Jesus as the paradigmatic migrant, the phenomenon of migration becomes a new source for thinking about the incarnation and vice versa. In his nature, as both God and human, Christ migrated between the divine and the human, embodying both. Christ as God incarnate becomes the paradigm for divine migration, informing both church and theology to see migration as essential to the church’s history, identity, and theology.⁶⁰ Other scholars⁶¹ point out that recognizing Jesus’ itinerant identity, and that of his disciples, as “the God-intended movement of the Christian Community” warns against the illusions of faith having a permanent place: it teaches about the mobility of faith, with its multicultural facets and faces, as a characteristic of the history of salvation.⁶²

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁹ Hildegund Keul, “The Venture of Vulnerability: Christological Engravings on Disturbing Questions about Migration,” in *Migration as a Sign of the Times*, 167-190; Deirdre Cornell, *Jesus Was a Migrant*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014); Robert Schreier, “Theology’s Contribution to (Im)migration,” in *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization*, 170-180; and Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise, Revised and Expanded*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000).

⁶⁰ Peter C. Phan, “Migration in the Patristic Era: History and Theology,” in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, 35-61.

⁶¹ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*; Donald Senior, ““Beloved Aliens and Exiles”: New Testament Perspectives on Migration”; Stephen Bevans, “Mission among Migrants, Mission of Migrants: Mission of the Church”; and Giovanni Graziano Tassello, “For the Love of Migrants: The Scalabrinian Traditions,” all in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey*, 20-34, 89-106, and 124-140.

⁶² Senior, “Beloved Aliens and Exiles,” 24.

Other contributions of theological reflections on migration resulted in new theological concepts as well as new interpretations of more familiar theological concepts. For instance, Robert Schreiter offers a list of themes and concepts to reconsider and redevelop from the perspective of migration experiences.⁶³ For the concept of reconciliation, for instance, he explains that it needs further development if it is to speak, especially in the case of forced or reluctant migration, to the injuries to mental health and spiritual well-being migrants may suffer on their journey.⁶⁴ Later, he offers reflections on new dimensions to “the Christian Understanding of Reconciliation.”⁶⁵ He approaches reconciliation by looking at the concept from the victim’s, rather than the sinner’s perspective. One example he gives is that the goal in reconciliation and healing is often to “return to the status quo ante,” which especially in the case of migrants is often not possible. Reconciliation and healing, therefore, “should be envisioned as coming to a new place” in which “God brings the victim into a new, transformed state that does not forget or negate the past, but rather puts that past in a new setting.”⁶⁶ This new dimension of the sacrament of reconciliation allows it to function in the process of the healing of scars and trauma migrants suffered and in their effort to regaining agency. Another example is Gemma Tulud Cruz who researched the concept of “border identity” in the migration experience of Filipina women migrating to Hong Kong to work as domestic housekeepers to be able to provide for their families.⁶⁷ While analyzing the religious coping-strategies of the Filipino domestic housekeepers (DH’s) she discovered that their border-experience functions as a new hermeneutical and critical instrument for theology. For them to cross a border is to live on the border, as they live on the borders or at the margins of the society in Hong Kong. This experience becomes revelatory as the DH’s transform the understanding of the border from a line that separates into a meeting place, a true place of encounter. Living on the border they create a space where they can survive, where they find an empowering presence, seek to be themselves, and become responsible for their lives. Transforming the meaning of the word “border” and to use it as a critical, hermeneutical instrument affects other theological discourse as well. Cruz illustrates this by showing how this “border identity” transforms the

⁶³ Robert Schreiter, “Theology’s Contribution to (Im)migration,” in: Campese and Ciallella, *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization*, 170-180.

⁶⁴ Schreiter, “Theology’s Contribution to (Im)migration,” p. 176-177.

⁶⁵ Robert Schreiter, “Migrants and the Ministry of Reconciliation,” in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, 107-123.

⁶⁶ Schreiter, “Migrants and the Ministry of Reconciliation,” 115.

⁶⁷ Gemma T. Cruz, *Into the Deep*.

concept of “hospitality” into a subversive counter-cultural dimension in theology. The Filipino DH’s experience God as the host on the border. Therefore, as God is the host and as both the DH’s and their employers become guests of God’s hospitality, their relationships have the potential to be changed.⁶⁸

2.1.3 *Migration and Theological Reflections on Ethics*

Another recent theme in the field of migration theology is that of ethical reflection. In 2002, Graziano Battistella pointed to the need for an ethical foundation for the discussions regarding migration policies. He started his reflections with an evaluation of the status of the United Nations Charter of Human Rights and explained how the Catholic Church came to embrace these human rights as she recognized their “consonance with its mission for salvation as revealed in Christ.” This recognition resulted in reflections on human dignity grounded in the theological concepts of creation and redemption.⁶⁹ This connection between human rights and human dignity opens venues for church and theology to connect ethical reflections on migration to principles such as the international common good and solidarity. This results in a theological perspective on the particular rights of migrants adding reflections on responsibility in regards to these rights.⁷⁰ Daniel G. Groody further develops this connection between rights and responsibility when he writes about a spirituality of solidarity. A spirituality of solidarity arises from the awareness that the Latino/a migrants are the “crucified people of today.”⁷¹ From the perspective of such a spirituality of solidarity Groody voices the need for conversion of those who are in the position to reach out to the migrants and who can work to redeem the world and to transform humanity. Rivera-Pagán finds in Christ’s attitude toward the Samaritans and in the eschatological parable of Matthew 25 the foundation for an ethical theology of migration that goes beyond the contrast between xenophilia and xenophobia. He compares migrants to “the least of mine”, who so become “the sacramental presence of Christ.”⁷² Cruz follows Battistella’s example

⁶⁸ Cruz, *Into the Deep*, 239-248.

⁶⁹ Graziano Battistella, “The Human Rights of Migrants: A Pastoral Challenge,” in *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization*, 91

⁷⁰ Battistella, “The Human Rights of Migrants,” 76-102 and “Migration and Human Dignity: From Policies of Exclusion to Policies based on Human Rights,” in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey*, 177-191.

⁷¹ Daniel G. Groody, “The Spirituality of Migrants: Mapping an Inner Geography,” in *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*, 149.

⁷² Rivera-Pagan, “Xenophilia or Xenophobia,” 42.

when she presents a condensed overview of contemporary migration with a focus on the human aspects of migration. Cruz shows how contemporary migration is interconnected with the phenomenon of globalization and how human rights and dignity are affected in this context of social, economic and political dynamics. She points out how migration is currently characterized by a shift in gender where more females than males initiate migration and explains how this gives rise to the trans-national family, adding another aspect to the trend of trans-nationalism in migration. The theological reflection on these characteristics of migration in relation to soteriology and Catholic social teaching result in “an ethical roadmap for reform of migration policies and approaches.”⁷³

2.1.4 *Migration and Reflections on Church and Sacraments*

Also under the scrutiny of migration theology are the developments of intercultural faith communities and reflections on liturgy as an important contributor to these developments. The increase in the multi-culturality of people on the move shows for a need to take a closer look at inculturation on the local level of church communities. Cruz, for instance, describes the gifts and challenges that immigrants bring to churches and reflects on the ensuing problems and prospects from a theological perspective. As migrants bring their own cultural and religious baggage, they “struggle to express and integrate their particular ways of living the faith.”⁷⁴ According to Cruz, the popular pieties migrants bring to the celebrations especially need recognition and attention. This asks for a new way of being church. Cruz describes this process as both “dialogical and prophetic” and she submits that it will make the universal character of the church more real. Castillo Guerra illustrates this in his research on multi-cultural faith communities in the Netherlands, in which he shows how migrants highlight the importance and the theological meaning of organizing intercultural Eucharistic celebrations. He also describes intercultural diaconry groups, with members of mixed origin, in which migrants are not only served, but in which they serve as well. This allows them not only to overcome material barriers, but also symbolic barriers.⁷⁵ Castillo Guerra and Cruz both point out that it is important to

⁷³ Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, 8.

⁷⁴ Gemma Tulud Cruz, “A New Way of Being Christian: The Contribution of Migrants to the Church,” in *Contemporary issues of Migration and Theology*, 112.

⁷⁵ Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, “From the Faith and Life of a Migrant to a Theology of Migration and Intercultural *Convivencia*,” in *Migration as a Sign of the Times: Towards a Theology of Migration*, Judith Gruber and Sigrid Rettenbacher, eds. (Leiden/Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2015)

realize that this process of creating intercultural faith communities revolves around the tension between affirmation of the migrant's original identity against assimilation and integration into mainstream society with "the need to create a new identity in a culturally different society and faith community."⁷⁶ Schreiter recognizes this tension or dialectic in the experience of migration. He seeks to discover how liturgy can play a role in the migrant's efforts to negotiate the tension between the experience of liminality and the sense of belonging or the ability to participate. He describes how religion and faith are able to offer migrants both a connection to the homeland and a structure in which new identities can emerge. Religion offers the space in which both liminality and participation can be experienced. Schreiter shows that the liturgical experience and its theological content is a possible medium through which the transition from the experience of liminality to an experience of participation can be made.⁷⁷

2.1.5 *Migration and Theological Reflections on Cultural Identity*

The tension or dialectic between a migrant's original identity and the effort to develop a new identity in the new country is not only important to the first generations immigrants, but remains part of the experience of second and third generation migrants. To illustrate this, Campese refers to the hybrid or hyphenated identities, such as Asian-American or Latino-American.⁷⁸

A pioneer in developing a theology that regards such hybrid identity is Virgilio Elizondo, although Elizondo speaks of "*mestizaje*" and emphasizes the new creation of a new identity rather than a hyphenated identity. His theology focuses on the experience of the Hispanics or Latino/as in the USA. Confronted with their and his own daily experience, he asked himself how it might be possible to speak of God and Jesus in a liberating way that relates to the experiences of Latino/as in the USA. *The Galilean Journey* is a report of what Elizondo calls a cultural rereading of the Gospels from the perspective of a marginalized cultural identity, with the purpose of finding dignity and a sense of belonging. The result is the discovery of Jesus' cultural identity as a new hermeneutical principle. The theological importance of Jesus being born

107-129; "Coexistence of Pluralities through Practices of Intercultural Relationships," in *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 2.2 (2018), 169-171.

⁷⁶ Cruz, "A New Way of Being Christian," 101.

⁷⁷ Robert Schreiter, "Partizipation und Liminalität. Liturgie mit Migranten," in: *Theologie der Gegenwart*, Volume 57, 2 (2014), 82-94.

⁷⁸ Gioacchino Campese, "Theologies of Migration: Present and Future Perspectives," in *Migration als Ort der Theologie*, 167-188.

as a Galilean, a marginalized culture at the time, reveals many social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions that deepen the understanding of God's preferential love of the poor. Jesus, incarnated as a Galilean, was a scandal to society. However, God accepts (in the resurrection) what society (in Jerusalem as the establishment) tends to reject. This offers hope and dignity to the Latino people, whom American society tends to reject.⁷⁹

From an Asian-American perspective Rita Nakashima Brock, Yung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-Lan and Seung Ai Yang introduce the voice of Asian and Asian North American women to the theological discourse on migration. In their anthology *Off the Menu*, they offer a diversity of essays in which Asian and Asian North American women seek, each from their own perspective and experiences (such as the above-mentioned reflection on the Book of Ruth by Yee), to provide answers from the perspective of faith and theology to questions concerning the "cultural authenticity" in the identity of the different generations of migrants of Asian descent.⁸⁰

2.1.6 Observations

Reviewing the developments in the field of migration theology, particularly in the context of the United States with attention to reflections on the experiences of African migrants leads to the following observations.

First, reflections on migrant identity form a recurring theme within migration theology. Regardless of their theological perspective, theologians raise questions or concerns regarding a migrant's need to develop a new identity in relation to both the old and the new home country and the tension migrants seem to experience between the wish to affirm their homeland identity and the challenge to become a participating member in the new country. It is also pointed out that the migrant journey does not stop with people who physically cross borders and migrate to a new country, but that the journey continues once those borders are crossed and with the next generations as well.

Second, there seems to be a tendency to focus on a certain ethnic or cultural identity for research and to draw conclusions that then would pertain to an entire group identified with the particular nominator. Dorottya Nagy points to this tendency in migration theology and the risk it carries to (often unconsciously) apply "methodological nationalism."⁸¹ Methodological

⁷⁹ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*.

⁸⁰ Rita Nakashima Brock et al. (eds), *Off the Menu. Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, (Louisville/London, Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), xviii.

⁸¹ Dorottya Nagy, "Minding Methodology," *Mission Studies*, 32 (2015), 203-233. Glick Schiller first raised reflections on methodological nationalism. See: Nina Glick Schiller and

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nationalism, according to Nagy, “may result in the oversimplification of the ongoing complex negotiations of identity at the level of the individual” or may mislead the researcher in regard to “collective self-identifications” and omit “to ask how, based on which patterns, socializations, and categorizations, such identification happens.”⁸² The authors of *Off the Menu*, however, seem to be aware of this pitfall, which is especially developed in Nami Kim’s contribution “The Indigestible Asian.”⁸³ In this article Kim elaborates on the many meanings manifested in the adjective “Asian.” She provides a historical, social, and political genealogy of the term, and then suggests to apply a strategic use of the term Asian that acknowledges the elements of power and inequality it contains. Aquino, Machado, and Rodríguez offer similar reflections in regard to Latina experiences, when they point to the Latina community, as “multivocal” and “culturally plural.” They show their awareness of societal categorizations that affect their identities when they highlight that what binds them is this experience:

“...We live in the United States of America (our physical reality), where we have all experienced racism, sexism, devaluation, and exclusion by a culture and a society that cannot seem to move beyond the white/black focus of its national discourse on race and national identity.”⁸⁴

The third observation is that in this theological discourse regarding migration and migrant identity, particularly in the context of the USA, the experiences of African migrants to the USA are missing. This discourse therefore exhibits the same blind spot in which current African migrants to the USA are invisible and in which their experiences are assumed to be similar to the African American experience. It does seem that in the theological discourse African migrant experiences are not perceived as a distinguished experience of migration. My observation above that some participants in the research sample self-identified as Black, rather than their particular African ethnicity, points to socialization in regard to the racial categories as used in American

Ayse Caglar, “Beyond Methodological Ethnicity and Toward City Scale: An Alternative Approach to Local and Transnational Pathways of Migrant Incorporation,” in *Rethinking Transnationalism: The Meso-link of Organizations* (Abingdon: Routledge 2008), 40-61.

⁸² Nagy, “Minding Methodology,” 212.

⁸³ Nami Kim, “The Indigestible Asian: The Unifying Term Asian in Theological Discourse,” in *Off the Menu. Asian and Asian North American Women’s Religion and Theology*, Rita Nakashima Brock *et al*, eds. (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 23-43. See also the “Introduction” to this anthology, xiii-xxi.

⁸⁴ María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, Jeanette Rodríguez, *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002), xv.

society and affirms their particular experience in developing a new identity in their new home country. I am aware that singling out a small number of African migrants, from among the 142 nationalities represented in the faith communities that form the context of this research, runs the risks of oversimplification and methodological nationalism. Nevertheless, their migration experiences should be taken into account and the question is raised as to what the experiences of African migrants to the USA can contribute to the theological discourse regarding migration and migrant identity development in particular.

2.2 *Reflections on Identity, Liminality, and Spirituality: Toward the Research Issue*

From the observations above, it becomes clear that in order to address the issue of identity development in the experience of migration one begins with a migrant's first identity within the context of the mother country. Then one considers how the migration journey affects this first identity as a new identity develops in the context of the new homeland. In this process migrants experience a tension between their old and new identities. This tension causes an experience of being in between: being uprooted from the home country, while not yet being settled in the destination country. Below I will explore the theology of Castillo Guerra, who considers the migration journey as process of transitions in identity.

2.2.1 *Migration: Experiencing Transitions in Identity*

From the onset of his theological reflections on migration, Castillo Guerra emphasized the need to reflect on the identity transitions that people experience as they engage a migration journey.⁸⁵ Castillo Guerra explains that the term migration refers to human mobility in regard to a territory and postulates that the experiences of departure, arrival, and negotiating the new society form the fundamental framework for theological reflections on migration.⁸⁶

Castillo Guerra explains, that these experiences constitute three transitional phases, which characterize the migration journey and effect a process of transitions in identity: emigration, immigration, and migration.⁸⁷ Emigration

⁸⁵ Castillo Guerra, "Naar een theologie van migratie," 241-258.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸⁷ Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, "Theologie der Migration: Menschliche Mobilität und theologische Transformationen," in *Migration als Ort der Theologie*, 115-145 and "From the Faith and Life of a Migrant to a Theology of Migration and Intercultural *Convivencia*," in *Migration as a Sign*

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refers to departure from one's place of origin, the place where one's roots are. The migrant becomes an "emigrant," meaning "someone who has left family and friends behind in search of a better future."⁸⁸ Depending on an emigrant's means and reasons to leave (for instance: a free or forced departure or traveling by way of transit countries or directly to one's country of destination), this experience of being in transition can be shorter or longer and sometimes lasts several years.⁸⁹ Immigration, then, refers to the arrival at the destination country. The emigrant, becomes an "immigrant," meaning someone who is "defined in exclusive terms like "foreign," "strange," "alien," even "illegal" that highlight their difference and strangeness to their new society."⁹⁰ An immigrant is confronted with new perspectives (both from the new society as well as from the migrant self) towards his/her identity. In the third phase of the journey the immigrant becomes a "migrant," meaning someone, who after having crossed physical or national borders, now encounters and has to engage "new cultural, political, ethnic, religious, social and labour barriers."⁹¹ In this process of negotiation and settlement the migrant has to develop "a new identity that is able to form a healthy synthesis between a migrant's "double identity as emigrant/immigrant."⁹² The experience of migration, therefore, continues in a more existential rather than in the more geographical manner of moving from one territory to another.⁹³ Castillo Guerra emphasizes that this synthesis between a migrant's emigrant and immigrant identities carries a "transnational orientation."⁹⁴ This means establishing a new identity, in which migrants develop a new and creative way of engaging both identities as they "build their identities according to the linked or connected territories through which they have passed in their migration history."⁹⁵ Participation in the new society then means becoming

of the Times: Towards a Theology of Migration, 107-129. Castillo Guerra notes that the term "migration" refers both to the overall movement of the migration journey and to the third phase of this journey: Castillo Guerra, "Naar een theologie van migratie," 243.

⁸⁸ Castillo Guerra, "Theology of Migration and Intercultural *Convivencia*," 113.

⁸⁹ Castillo Guerra explains how the transition from emigration to immigration is not just a linear process or "simply an intermediated moment," but is compounded by migrants' experiences in transit territories. See: Castillo Guerra, "Coexistence of Pluralities," 164-165.

⁹⁰ Castillo Guerra, "Theology of Migration and Intercultural *Convivencia*," 113.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁹³ Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, "Theologie van de migratie: Een interculturele methodologie," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 47, no. 1 (Januari 2007), 47.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 113 and Castillo Guerra, "Menschliche Mobilität und theologische Transformation," 119.

⁹⁵ Castillo Guerra, "Coexistence of Pluralities," 165.

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accepted in this new enriching and transnational identity. It should be noted here, that Castillo Guerra does not consider participation in the new homeland as becoming assimilated. A migrant's hopes and expectations to participate in the new society should not be confused with a society's expectation of assimilation. In order to do justice to the transnational aspects of a migrant identity, Castillo Guerra develops his reflections on these identity transitions from the perspective of intercultural philosophy, rather than approaching identity transformation from the perspective of acculturation.

Acculturation theories perceive migration from the perspective of the destination country with attention to assimilation (expectation of the home country) and accommodation (effort from the migrant). Nagy's critique to acculturation theories is that they function within the power dynamics of the host society, which will affect the assessment of whether a migrant or migrant group is able to fit in or not.⁹⁶ Porter and Washington's critique, when researching minority identity and self-esteem among Hispanics and Asian Americans in the USA, is that acculturation and assimilation models provide insight in generational and group processes, but fail to explain the dynamics of and variation in personal identity formation and self-esteem, even when individuals are "exposed to the same social forces within a given ethnic group."⁹⁷ Generational acculturation theories, for instance, try to explain the process of acculturation across different generations, and typically consider two models: the linear model, which assumes that newer generations will become "absorbed into Euro-American culture" and the non-linear model, which holds that "acculturation is neither linear nor accelerated over generations."⁹⁸ Recent research points out that neither model fully explains

⁹⁶ Nagy, "Minding Methodology," 212-213.

⁹⁷ J.R. Porter and R.E. Washington, "Minority Identity and Self-Esteem," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993), 148.

⁹⁸ Hisako, Matsuo, "Generational Acculturation," *Salem Press Encyclopedia*, 2019. See also: Paul R. Smokowski, Mimi V. Chapman, and Martica L. Baccalao, "Acculturation Risk and Protective Factors and Mental Health Symptoms in Immigrant Latino Adolescents," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 16, no. 3 (2007), 35-36. One example of a non-linear generational acculturation theory is, the three-generations-theory. Researching white European immigrants to the USA, Hansen characterized the process of acculturation across three generation as developing from attachment to the home-country (emphasis on emigrant identity), to a second generation protest by full immersion in the destination country, to a more balanced acceptance of both identities by a third generation (migrant identity). Markus L. Hansen, "The problem of the third generation," foreword by Oscar Handlin, *Commentary XIV*, no. 5 (November 1952), 492-500. For an evaluation and critique of Hansen's theory see: Eugene I. Bender and George Kagiwada, "Hansen's law of "Third Generation Return" and the study of American Religio-Ethnic Groups," *Phylon* 29, no. 4 (4th quarter 1968), 360-370.

the experience of more recent migrant groups as first generation immigrant parents focus on raising their children bilingually and biculturally enabling them to live in two cultures and relate to their transnational communities.⁹⁹ Castillo Guerra's intercultural approach addresses these developments in migration studies and migration experiences as he considers the dynamics between emigrant and immigrant identities as a dynamic experienced by first generation as well as generations to follow. Furthermore, he not only takes into consideration the effects of the migration journey on the individual migrant's identity, but also on the homeland and the destination contexts. His contribution to the field of migration theology is that he applies this intercultural and transnational approach of identity transformations by introducing the concept of *Convivencia*. This concept allows him to explain the effect of the migration experience on the faith development of not only the individual migrants, but also of the faith communities they leave behind and the faith communities where they find a home in the destination countries.¹⁰⁰

2.2.2 *Migration as an Experience of Liminality*

According to Castillo Guerra, this process of identity development experienced in the three transitional phases of the migration journey carries experiences of loss, sadness, grief, or homesickness, which translate to a general feeling of estrangement or of feeling homeless, displaced, adrift, and uprooted.¹⁰¹ This feeling of estrangement is particular to the third phase of the migration journey as a migrant lives with the physical absence but the mental presence of people and places that have been left behind, while also negotiating the shift from living in between two worlds to becoming more at home in the new society.

Schreier describes this latter experience as an experience of liminality: being imprisoned in the in-between, oscillating between seeking participation in the new culture and the feeling of being no-where. It is the experience of grieving

⁹⁹ See for instance: Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo and Carl L. Bankston, *Issues in US Immigration* (Amenia: Salem, 2015); Susan S. Chuang and Robert P. Moreno, eds., *Immigrant Children: Change, Adaptation, and Cultural Transformation* (Lanham: Lexington, 2011); Paul R. Smokowski and Martica Bacallao, *Becoming Bicultural: Risk Resilience, and Latino Youth* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Castillo Guerra, "Coexistence of Pluralities," 166-172.

¹⁰¹ Castillo Guerra, "Menschliche Mobilität und theologische Transformationen," 122. To indicate such a feeling of "estrangement" in Dutch, the word "ontheemding" would be used. "Heem" refers to home or homeland ("Heimat" in German). Literally translated into English it would mean "de-home-ed." The intensity of the feeling represented by this Dutch word is hard to capture in one English word.

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a loss of identity without having yet the perspective of something new.¹⁰² In terms of the theories of Arnold van Gennep and Victor W. Turner: migrants become liminal persons, who experience living in anti-structure.¹⁰³ Migrants experience separation upon moving out of the context of the known social structure (the pre-liminal phase) and upon entering the new context discover that the conventions and categories of that known social structure no longer function. This consequently effects an experience of anti-structure (the liminal phase) in which they find themselves outside of the social structure left behind while not yet (fully) participating in the new social structure (the post-liminal phase).

From listening to experiences of migrants in my pastoral work, I came to understand that a migrant's inability to negotiate living with the physical absence but mental presence or memories of people and places that have been left behind, can hamper the shift from living in between two worlds to becoming more at home in the new society. This can cause an experience of impasse in the liminal phase. Constance FitzGerald, O.C.D., provided insight in experiences of impasse and liminality from the perspective of the experience of a dark night in the spirituality of John of the Cross.¹⁰⁴ Although John of the Cross is a sixteenth century Carmelite poet and mystic from Spain, FitzGerald claims that his writings and insights continue to speak to contemporary experiences of impasse and liminality and can provide people or communities a framework within which to "understand, name, and claim [them] as an experience of God."¹⁰⁵ She supports this claim with two

¹⁰² Robert Schreier, "Partizipation und Liminalität. Liturgie mit Migranten," 82-94.

¹⁰³ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, transl. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee and introduction by Solon T. Kimball (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1960) and Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago IL: Aldine Publishing Company). Van Gennep observed the meaning and effect of the experience of liminality in rites of passage. He distinguished rites of separation (pre-liminal), rites of transition (liminal), and rites of incorporation (post-liminal, and pointed to the existence of transitional periods (that can obtain an independent state in which people experience being on the *limen* or on the threshold (10-11, 19-22, 189-194). Turner expanded the meaning and effect of liminality beyond the context of rites of passage in his theory that each society is characterized by a dialectic between anti-structure, caused by liminal persons or entities (*communitas*), and structure, formed by institutionalized roles, positions, and norms (94-130 and 166-203).

¹⁰⁴ Constance FitzGerald, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope: Crisis of Memory," in: *The Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 64, ed. Jonathan Y. Tan (Cincinnati, OH: Xavier University, 2009), 21-42. Constance FitzGerald, "Impasse and Dark Night", *Living with Apocalypse: Spiritual Resources for Social Compassion*, ed. Tilden H. Edwards (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1984), 92-116.

¹⁰⁵ FitzGerald, "Impasse and Dark Night," 93-94.

suppositions, namely: that “our experience of God and our spirituality must emerge from our concrete, historical situation and must return [there] to feed it and enliven it” and that “a great number of contemporary dark night or impasse experiences, personal and societal, cry out for meaning.”¹⁰⁶ Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., affirms these observations when he writes in the introduction to the translation of the poem and John’s commentary *The Dark Night*:

“Our horizons open to many possible forms in which we may experience a dark night, according to the grace, state in life, and historical or personal circumstances of the individual. John leaves each reader and each age the task of making the suitable applications. What is essential is that the sufferings and privations bring about a growing response of faith, hope and love...”¹⁰⁷

This raises the question whether the perspective of spirituality can contribute to understanding the experience of liminality in the context of migration experiences.

2.2.3 Migration Experiences and Spirituality

According to Kees Waaijman, the study of spirituality concerns the “divine-human relational process” and perceives “life as a phased process marked by changes.”¹⁰⁸ Each of these changes is an invitation to encounter God in a new way and to transform one’s faith and understanding of one’s self and of God. In this “phased process marked by changes,” the experience of liminality is seen as a core experience of spiritual development. Waaijman defines the experience of liminality as an experience of anti-structure in the context of counter movements, which can affect spiritual growth.¹⁰⁹ “Uprootedness” is one of the life experiences that constitute a counter movement affecting liminality. Waaijman refers to the experience of migration as an experience of uprootedness: “Having gotten outside of the security-zone of their own

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰⁷ Kieran Kavanaugh, “Introduction to the Dark Night,” in: John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Transl. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991), 357.

¹⁰⁸ Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 34 and 423-426.

¹⁰⁹ Waaijman, *Spirituality*, 213-214 and 261-275. Waaijman builds his reflections on the function of liminality in the process of spiritual development on the theories of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner.

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homes, [migrants,] refugees and exiles... are brought back to the core of life.”

¹¹⁰ As such, experiences of “uprootedness” can cause a process of spiritual transformation. Castillo Guerra points to two examples of the transforming effect of migration experiences on faith: how migration journeys transform practices and devotions of popular religion that have their origins in the home country; and how migrant members effect transformations in the receiving faith communities that are intercultural and “transcend material space.”¹¹¹ He observes that

“Migrants begin a process of inner transformation related to the process of identity transformation that is inaugurated when they cross international borders. They find in their transformed faith, a support that enables them to face the crises provoked by different barriers interposed during their journey and to face the pain of nostalgia and the experience of realizing that they are uprooted.”¹¹²

Considering that migrants seem to experience liminality in the process of identity development and considering that liminality is seen as a core experience in spiritual development, then Castillo Guerra’s observations affirm that such process of identity development is indeed related to a spiritual development. These observations, then, answer the question raised above affirmatively: the perspective of spirituality can contribute to understanding migration as an experience that causes both the development of identity and of faith.

Daniel Groody and Gemma Tulud Cruz raised the question how migrant experiences affect a migrant’s faith and understanding of God. They contributed pioneering reflections to the theological discourse on the characteristics of migrant spirituality.

Groody and migrant spirituality

In his contributions to migration theology, Groody reflects on the experiences of Mexican immigrants to the USA in the framework of three interrelated levels that, according to him, are part of a migration theology: the pastoral level, the spiritual level, and the theological level.¹¹³ The pastoral level considers the physical journey of the migrants and the response or support this

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹¹¹ Castillo Guerra, “Coexistence of Pluralities,” 169.

¹¹² *Ibid.*,” 167.

¹¹³ Daniel G. Groody, “The Spirituality of Migrants: Mapping an Inner Geography,” in *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*, 139-156.

evokes from faith communities. The spiritual level pays attention to the “inner” journey of the migrants and seeks to listen to them in order to understand how they “speak about the ways they perceive God accompanying them in their journey and how they respond to God’s initiative in their lives.”¹¹⁴ Finally, the theological level connects these two levels and seeks to discover how the migrants’ journey can offer a new metaphor for Christian spirituality. In his book *Border of Death, Valley of Life*, Daniel Groody offers an illustration of the pastoral level and a first effort to address the spiritual level.¹¹⁵ He describes how a pastoral program, a retreat called “Missionary Encounter,” reaches out to immigrants from Mexico to help them process their migration experience within the framework of the Catholic faith. Groody highlights the strength of this program, namely: its intercultural approach that integrates tenets of the Catholic faith with the tenets of the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. This enables the program to offer its participants a religious framework that speaks to their Catholic and their Mexican spiritual identity. Groody describes the process of conversion or spiritual transformation effected by the different phases of this retreat program. In this ethnographic study participants explain how the religious framework and theological concepts, offered to them during the retreat, help them to process their migration experiences and to reclaim their identity and agency in reconciliation with God. Although the retreat attendees who participated in this study share their migration experiences, it seems that this study does not consider the migration experiences of participants as a primary source from which theological concepts and a religious framework can be developed. It rather researches how theological concepts and a religious framework offered to them support the participants’ insight of how their faith and understanding of God has changed in their migration experiences.

About 10 year later, however, Groody returns to the experiences of Mexican immigrants who cross the border into the USA and whom he encountered in 2003. He then offers “a beginning of an attempt to understand the spirituality of migrants that connects their inner and outer journey,” thus recognizing the realities of their journeys as a place of revelation.¹¹⁶ It is an effort to address the theological level and contribute to the development of a new metaphor for Christian spirituality. Groody describes the characteristics of the spiritual

¹¹⁴ Groody, “The Spirituality of Migrants,” 140.

¹¹⁵ Daniel G. Groody, *Border of Death, Valley of Life: An Immigrant Journey of Heart and Spirit*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

¹¹⁶ Groody, “The Spirituality of Migrants,” 141. See also: Daniel G. Groody, “Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of a Crucified People,” *Theological Studies* 70, no. 2 (June 2009): 298-316.

journey of the migrants from Mexico by drawing an analogy with the places along which these immigrants from Mexico travel to the USA. In their departure they develop a spirituality of sacrifice: as they leave their homeland in the hope for a better future, the emigrants sacrifice their lives (often literally) for others. In their journey through the desert they develop a spirituality of suffering: their journey through the desert is a journey of surrender, total loss, and purification. In this experience of kenosis they find the hope in “a God who understands, through the experience of Jesus, the grueling contours of their journey and walks in solidarity with them.”¹¹⁷ Finally in their experiences as unaccepted and undocumented strangers they develop a spirituality of the Cross. Groody connects these findings to the theology of Ignacio Ellacuría and Jaroslav Pelikan in which he finds the encouragement to search for those who reflect Jesus’ image in today’s world. He concludes that migrants are “the crucified people of today.”¹¹⁸ Using this Christian theological metaphor as a way to “conceptualize what the immigrants are experiencing in the contemporary world” and relating their experiences to Jesus’ life, suffering, death, and resurrection, Groody concludes that migrants participate in the paschal mystery.¹¹⁹

According to Groody, these observations deepen the understanding of Christian spirituality as a spirituality of freedom and a spirituality of solidarity. A spirituality of freedom is seen in the hope the migrants find in God, as God comforts the crucified people: God alone can offer true freedom as God “migrates to his people in love... [and draws them] into the reconciliation of the divine embrace.”¹²⁰ The spirituality of solidarity finds its ground in the scandal of the Cross that challenges structures and policies that perpetuate poverty and migration. In the response of solidarity, which migrants evoke, they become “active agents in the world’s redemption” and their journey becomes “a point of Christian revelation and human transformation.”¹²¹

In this article Groody offers a redefinition of Christian spirituality, which is based on the experiences of migrants from Mexico to the USA. Although Groody tries to maintain the connection between understanding their migrant spirituality and the theological response it evokes by speaking of a spirituality of freedom (from the perspective of the migrants) and a spirituality of

¹¹⁷ Groody, “The Spirituality of Migrants,” 147.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

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solidarity (as a response to the migrants' plight), he seems to shortchange the migrant's experiences.

First, his insights put a larger emphasis on the spirituality of solidarity and the need for conversion of those who are in the position to reach out to the immigrants and who can work to redeem the world and to transform humanity. This emphasis on the spirituality of solidarity seems to add another burden on the shoulders of the immigrant, namely: to serve as the "crucified people of today's world" and as such call others to solidarity.

Second, in the migrants' experiences Groody highlights their suffering and position as victims. He presents their spirituality as a spirituality of the Cross. Even though he states that migrants in their experiences participate in the paschal mystery, the emphasis remains with the experiences of suffering and sacrifice. His effort to connect this experience to a spirituality of freedom does not fully resolve this. For, when he speaks about the spirituality of freedom Groody refers to the hope experienced in the divine embrace of God's love, which comforts the migrants in their suffering, but he does not show how this experience of hope enables migrants to cope and become agents of change in their own lives.

This raises the question whether Groody's perspective on spirituality is fully able to relate to the migrants' experiences. Groody considers spirituality in the context of learning how the migrants' inner journeys of faith "inform, enrich, and even transform the church."¹²² This creates a tension between spirituality as a general goal and spirituality as an intensely personal experience. This tension is visible when Groody cannot seem to maintain the relationship between a Christian spirituality of solidarity as the "general goal" to address "the social challenges of our own day and age" and the specific migrant experience of spirituality and their specific means to address the challenges in their lives.¹²³ Although Groody offers insights regarding migrant spirituality that are of benefit to the understanding of Christian spirituality beyond the migrant experience, the need remains to gain insight in how their spiritual journey of faith and of understanding God in the experience of migration, supports migrants to become agents of change as they engage with and try to settle in their new home country.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 140.

¹²³ Here I am indebted to Kees Waaijman. His observations regarding the problematic relationship between spirituality and moral theology helped me understand this tension in Groody's reflections. See: Waaijman, *Spirituality*, 393-394.

Cruz and migrant spirituality

Cruz also endeavors to show how migrant experiences will indicate new contours of a Christian spirituality. Cruz considers spirituality as “concerned with the depth dimension of human existence insofar as it is about the authentic human quest for the ultimate value, or the human person’s striving to attain the highest ideal or goal.”¹²⁴ Furthermore, Cruz points out that this quest for human authenticity or personal integration happens “in the face of forces of fragmentation and depersonalization.”¹²⁵ Therefore, in order to discuss Christian spirituality attention needs to be paid to the experiences of people and how they articulate these experiences. That is what Cruz sets out to do in her reflections on migration and spirituality: to articulate the experiences of migrants, how they survive, and how they try to maintain their human dignity.

First, after scrutinizing many sources describing migrant experiences, Cruz distinguishes four values in the migrant way of life, which “drive, sustain, empower, and strengthen migrants” on their journey.¹²⁶ “Courageous hope” refers to the enduring hope migrants develop, because, in the midst of many perils and challenging situations and circumstances, “they fiercely and desperately believe in the promise of a better future” and “possibilities of transformation that can never be fully spoken of.”¹²⁷ “Creative resistance” describes the manner in which migrants respond to “problematic conditions” and “death-dealing situations” as they turn elements of folk culture, wisdom, and spirituality into “creative and potentially liberating strategies.”¹²⁸ “Steadfast faith” refers to the migrants’ deep religiosity they exhibit during all stages of their migration journey both in individual prayer and devotions and in the importance of being able to participate in communal celebrations of faith in which there is space for their own cultural expressions of this faith. Migrant faith, according to Cruz, is characterized by the belief that “God’s grace permeates the earth and meet us constantly [...] in our relationships, in the created world or in the events of our daily lives.”¹²⁹ “Festive community spirit” is connected to the migrants’ deep religiosity and the importance of nourishing this faith in community. Fellowship and the festive and inclusive nature of social gatherings display the messianic banquet anticipated in the Eucharist. These community gatherings often include shared meals and are

¹²⁴ Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, 127.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 129-134.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

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“potent reminders that Christian life is not just about individual salvation but also about collective liberation.”¹³⁰

Second, Cruz shows how these four values articulate a Christian spirituality. In her theological reflections she describes two forms of spirituality that can be related to the migrant experience, before offering a third option, which, in Cruz perspective, better reflects the migrant experience. She first describes a “Spirituality of the Cross” and closely follows Groody in how he aligns the effect of migration experiences on a migrant’s spiritual development with the geographic reality of the migration journey from Mexico to the USA. She points to Groody’s reflections on migrants as the “crucified people,” and his emphasis on the migrants’ suffering and the call to solidarity.¹³¹ Next, Cruz describes a “Spirituality of Pilgrimage.” She compares the migrants’ journey to the journey of the Israelites through the desert and to the concept of the church as a pilgrim people. It is a journey toward “the eschatological destiny of all humanity.”¹³² Cruz recognizes that migrant experiences relate to the wilderness experience of the people of Israel, in which the experience of being uprooted “clarified for them [the Israelites] their need to shift their focus on God.”¹³³ Cruz raises two reasons why this focus on God and why perceiving this pilgrimage as a spiritual ascent to God does not fully relate to the migrant experience: 1) that migration experiences emphasize an experience of descent rather than ascent and 2) that spiritualities of ascent assume leaving the mundane behind. As “for migrants the search for God and the encounter with God is rooted precisely in what may amount to mundane things,” Cruz suggests it is better to speak of a “spirituality of *lo cotidiano* (daily life).”¹³⁴

These reflections lead to the form of spirituality, which according to Cruz reflects the migrant experience best: “a spirituality of hope and life.”¹³⁵ She develops her theological reflections regarding the characteristics of this spirituality in conversation with theologians such as Jung Young Lee, Delores Williams, Ivone Gebara, and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and their theologies of survival, struggle for quality of life, and *lo cotidiano*.¹³⁶ This spirituality of hope and life finds its expression in the survival quality of life, which is nourished and supported by the virtues of hope, faith, and love and by prayer

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 140-143.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 143 and 146.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 144-145 and 146-147.

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and joy. The value of “creative resistance” exemplifies how migrants attain quality of life in their struggles to survive and migrant’s “courageous hope,” “steadfast faith,” and “festive community spirit” are expression of the theological virtues, prayer and joy. As Christian migrants celebrate their faith, they connect their experiences to the life of Christ. Jesus’ life was filled with both “great promise and great suffering” and Christ’s “resurrection offers migrants hope that they will also overcome all that threatens their lives, even as they surrender in trust without knowing the final or even intermediate outcome of their journey.”¹³⁷

Cruz in her reflections on how migrant experiences contribute to new perspectives on Christian spirituality complements Groody’s reflections in that she does show how migrants become agents of change on their migration journey. Rather than emphasizing the presence of the cross, she emphasizes that the entire scope of the Paschal Mystery is present in migrant experiences. Cruz points out that when migrants seek justice and a better life, they also seek the values of the Kingdom of God, while accepting that the experience of the Cross is part of that search. This allows her to see that migrants “are not just victims but also subjects and agents of their own destiny.”¹³⁸

Furthermore, Cruz emphasizes that migrant spirituality develops in daily life experiences. Cruz posits that migrant experiences bring that dimension to Christian spirituality, emphasizing that it is a way of life, grounded in Jesus’ way of life, “in which the invisible heart of God is made visible to the world.”¹³⁹ Cruz explains that migrant experiences show that Christian spirituality should not be merely concerned with interiority, but should seek “an integration of all aspects of human life and experiences.”¹⁴⁰ This concern connects to Cruz’s critique regarding spiritualities of ascent: that they assume leaving the mundane behind as they focus on the ascending movement toward God. Cruz seems to assume a dichotomy in spiritualities of ascent that excludes the possibility of experiences of ascent in the realities of the struggles of daily life. Descending into the mundane struggles of migrant life, then, would contradict ascending to a closer relationship with God. Cruz, however, characterizes the quest for human authenticity as a “continuous dynamism of self-transcendence”¹⁴¹ and prayer as “a spiritual grace that

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁴¹ This connects to Waaijman’s definition of the material object of spirituality (which he bases on the work of Sandra Schneiders), namely that spirituality describes the ongoing “project in

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facilitated human transformation,” which both result in a deeper understanding of truth and true goodness.¹⁴²

This raises two questions. How do migrants perceive their migrant experiences: as experiences of descent into the mundane, as experiences of transformation or as both? And how do migrants speak about their relationship with God in such experiences? Therefore, the need remains to come to a better understanding of how migrants experience transformation of self and of their relationship with God on their migration journeys.

2.2.4 *Observations*

As pointed out above, Castillo Guerra explains that the transitional phases of departure, arrival and negotiation cause identity transitions in the context of the tension between structure and anti-structure. It was also pointed out that this tension between structure and anti-structure constitutes the experience of liminality in which a new understanding of a person's faith and relationship with God can develop. This affirms the observation that the perspective of spirituality can contribute to understanding the development of identity and faith in the experience of migration.

Both Groody and Cruz contribute pioneering reflections on possible characteristics of a migrant spirituality and its contribution to reframing Christian spirituality in general.

However, considering their contributions, I observed that questions still remain regarding the development of migrant spirituality. It seems that the answer may be found in reflections on the place and function of the experience of liminality in the development of migrant identity and faith.

The ability to engage liminality in the experience of migration seems important to achieve settlement and an integration of a migrant's double identity of emigrant and immigrant. Groody in his reflections on migrant spirituality emphasized the emigrant and the initial stages of the immigrant experience. He, however, did not explain how the spiritual development he describes contributes to their ability to settle and engage the experience of identities in transition. Cruz points to the importance of a spirituality rooted in daily life and explains how the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, and how prayer and joy sustain the migrants on their journeys and provide them with the ability to become agents of change. She points to experiences of uprootedness and of being in between, but does not expand on them nor

which a person seeks to “integrate” his or her life [...through] “self-transcendence,” directed toward “the ultimate value” as one “perceives” it.” Waaijman, *Spirituality*, 308.

¹⁴² Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, 146 & 149.

articulate them as experiences of liminality. Furthermore, she argues that spiritualities of ascent do not relate well to migration experiences, as they seem to disconnect the very concrete migrant experience of descent from the spiritual journey of ascent to God. The spirituality of John of the Cross would generally be considered as such a spirituality of ascent. If, however, migration experiences can be considered as a contemporary experience of liminality, then FitzGerald would claim that John's spirituality, especially the manner in which he explains the experience of the dark night, does relate and speak to this experience.

This raises the question whether the spirituality of John of the Cross could be a source for gaining understanding of the experience of liminality in migration and of the ability to engage this experience.

Furthermore, Groody and Cruz build their theological reflections primarily on the experiences of those migrating from Central and South America to the United States of America and of migrants who migrate within the Asian Continent or from Asia to other continents.¹⁴³ Although Cruz mentions migrants from Africa in her statistical overviews and refers to the growing number of African migrants in Asia, Europe, and the USA, she does not incorporate their experiences in her analysis.¹⁴⁴ The stories of migrants from Africa to the USA and their experiences still need to be heard. It seems that their stories are part of the "wealth of migration experiences that has been ignored or left untouched."¹⁴⁵ This observation raises the question not only of how the experiences of African migrants to the USA can contribute to the theological discourse on migration and spirituality, but also how a theological discourse that does not take their experiences into account might contribute to the lack of pastoral responses that may benefit African migrant experiences.

2.3 Presenting the Research Goal and Research Question

Exploring the field of migration theology and particularly its discourse on the relationship between migration and spirituality, I discovered that the

¹⁴³ Of course I am not ignoring Groody's extensive ethnographic work among Mexican migrants crossing the USA border, nor Cruz's in-depth study of sources that describe the experience of Filipino Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong. See: Groody, *Border of Death, Valley of Life* and Cruz, *Into the Deep*.

¹⁴⁴ Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, 53, 91, 102, 106. I am aware that Cruz has a book forthcoming in which she dedicates a chapter to "Christianity as Lived Religion Among African and Asian Migrants in the Global North:" Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Christianity Across Borders: Theology and Contemporary Issues in Global Migration*, (Routledge: Forthcoming, July 2021). This book could not be taken into account for this publication.

¹⁴⁵ Campese, "Theologies of Migration: Present and Future Perspectives," 182.

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experiences of African migrants to the USA have not been taken into account in this theological discourse. Furthermore, I observed that more reflection is needed on the experience of liminality in the process of identity development in migration and of its effect on a migrant's faith and understanding of God. If, therefore, liminality occurs in the experience of migration and if liminality as a core experience of spiritual development can effect a transformation of a person's faith and relationship with God, then the question arises whether gaining insight into the experience of liminality in the context of migration can provide insight into a migrant's experience of transformation of both identity and faith.

2.3.1 *The Research Goal and Research question*

These observations, and the questions they raise, lead to the formulation of the research goal of this study, namely to contribute to the field of migration theology and in particular to its discourse on the relationship between migration and spirituality. Furthermore, this research will include experiences of migrants from Africa to the USA in the hope that its results may enhance their presence in this theological discourse and elicit pastoral responses beneficial for their particular experiences.

In order to accomplish the research goal, I will consider the experiences of African migrants to the USA as contemporary experiences of liminality, in which they can experience a transformation of faith and identity. Furthermore, I will consider the spirituality of John of the Cross, in particular his poem and commentary *The Dark Night*, as a source from the theological-mystical tradition which addresses experiences of liminality "as experiences of God" and as experiences of spiritual development.¹⁴⁶ This leads to the following research question:

Does the correlation between migration narratives from African migrants to the USA and the narrative of the dark night in the spirituality of John of the Cross contribute to a deeper theological understanding of a transformation of identity and faith in the experience of migration?

¹⁴⁶ FitzGerald, "Impasse and Dark Night," 94. Gaining theological understanding of these experiences "as experiences of God," responds to Campese's concerns whether "theological reflection about migration [drives] us to think about God, to deepen and search God's mystery, to expand our concepts about God? In other words is it ultimately real theology, that is, a discourse about God?" Campese, "Theologies of Migration: Present and Future Perspectives," 181.

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Answers to the following sub-questions will lead to the answer to the research question:

- 1) How do migrants from Africa to the USA describe the process of transformation of identity and faith in their experiences of migration?
- 2) How does John of the Cross describe the process of transformation of identity and faith in the experience of the dark night?
- 3) Are there similarities and differences between the descriptions of transformation of identity and faith by African migrants to the USA and John of the Cross?
- 4) How does understanding and explaining these similarities and differences deepen the theological understanding of both experiences of transformation of identity and of faith?

2.3.2 *Definition of Concepts*

The central concepts in the research question are identity, faith, liminality, and transformation.

Identity

The concept of identity in this study is related to the observation that a migrant's journey is characterized by three phases in each of which the migrant experiences a change in identity: emigration, immigration and migration. The relationships that defined a migrant's identity before departure will change as they are left behind. The successes or struggles encountered and the resources available on the migration journey will affect the manner in which a migrant can or cannot remain connected to the former network of relationships and will determine the depth of the experience of uprootedness in the experiences of arrival and negotiating life in the destination country. These circumstances and experiences will contribute to changes in a migrant's identity.

In this context of the migration journey as an experience marked by transitions, a person's identity will be defined by how a person, amid these transitions, comes to experience and understand one's self and the world in which one lives and by how one acts upon these perceptions. According to Paul Ricoeur, the characteristic of human subjectivity is analogous to the manner in which in history and fiction (or other texts) a narrative is constructed around a plot: the narrative structure of self. In regard to attaining a more whole understanding of self, a human engages the ongoing hermeneutical task of constructing a narrative around a plot (emplotment) in which diverse and seemingly fragmented or unrelated events are interpreted,

connected, and appropriated as one's own. Ricoeur's theory on the narrative structure of self and its dialectic between *l'identité-mêmeté* (the self perceived as a permanent same-ness) and *l'identité-ipséité* (the self perceived as a subject continually re-interpreting one's life) allows for a refiguring of one's identity even in the face of discontinuity and instability.¹⁴⁷

Faith

A person's relationship with and understanding of God are a part of what constitutes a person's faith. The relationship with and understanding of God is imbedded and realized within a concrete faith tradition, and in the case of this study, in the Christian and Roman Catholic tradition.¹⁴⁸ At the core of this faith is the revelation of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. The content of this faith finds its expression in the celebration of its rituals and spiritual practice (liturgy and prayer) and in its tradition as revealed in the Scriptures, explained in the teachings, and their ensuing norms and values. However, according to Edward Schillebeeckx, the full meaning and truth of this faith can only be completed and mediated through human experience. The interrelation between the content of faith and concrete human experiences results in a lived faith recognized in a praxis, which reflects Jesus's preaching and is meaningful for the particular context in which this faith is expressed.¹⁴⁹ It is in the context of such a lived faith that a person develops understanding of and a relationship with God.

Schillebeeckx, addressing secularization of the European context, explains that, because this concrete faith and its praxis are formed by and lived in a particular socio-cultural context, any changes in conventions or categories of experience and understanding in this culture can effect an estrangement from

¹⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1990), 167-168. Here Ricoeur explains that "le modèle de connexion entre événements que constitue la mise en intrigue permet d'intégrer à la permanence dans le temps ce qui paraît en être le contraire sous le régime de l'identité-mêmeté, à savoir la diversité, la variabilité, la discontinuité, l'instabilité." See also: Mark I. Wallace, "Introduction," in: Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, Edited by Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 10-15. Wallace explains that "La mise en intrigue" is best translated with the word "emplotment" (11). Wallace also explains how in the works of Ricoeur the meaning of symbols, the metaphorical imagination, and the power of the text function in the hermeneutical work of coming to understand the self (2-10).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 396.

¹⁴⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Geloofsverstaan: interpretatie en kritiek. Theologische Peilingen Deel V* (Bloemendaal: Uitgeverij H. Nelissen, 1972), 57-60 and Mag. Dr. Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Theologisch geloofsverstaan anno 1983* (Bloemendaal: Uitgeverij H. Nelissen, 1983), 6-9.

one's faith if one is no longer able to recognize or relate to the manner in which faith is lived in the changed context.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, moving from one socio-cultural context to another socio-cultural context, can effect such an experience of estrangement or of anti-structure in regard to one's faith tradition and the imbedded relationship with and understanding of God. In the context of this study it means taking into account the original socio-cultural context of the migrants from Africa as they bring along the particular expression of their faith and to observe the effects of the encounter with the expression of their faith tradition in the socio-cultural context of their destination country, the USA.

Liminality

The transitions in identity experienced in the three phases of the migration journey are characterized by the process of negotiating between a migrant's original relationships to homeland, culture, family, friends, and accomplishments and the new relationships to these things in the destination country. This being in transition from one society to another is what constitutes the experience of liminality. Reintegration, then, will happen when migrants become incorporated in this new social structure and a healthy integration of the emigrant and immigrant identities develops.

This study will consider the concept of liminality from the perspective of spirituality. Waaijman applies the theories of Van Gennep and Turner, when he situates spiritual development in the context of counter-movements and considers them as anti-structures in which people or groups of people experience the three stages of separation, liminality, and reintegration. The liminal stage is the central stage and describes a transitional phase in which new forms of spirituality can arise on the societal level and in which on the individual level people can gain a new understanding of their faith and relationship with God. Waaijman explains that being in the liminal stage is an ambivalent experience. On the one hand this experience is marked by being nowhere, loss of possession and ability to act, by devaluation of being, darkness, nakedness, and even death. On the other hand this experience brings insight, imagination, creativity, wholeness, new possibilities and new life.¹⁵¹ This characterization of liminality reflects Turner's claim that experiences of liminality and liminal entities have the potential to effect change both in the

¹⁵⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch geloofsverstaan anno 1983*, 5.

¹⁵¹ Waaijman, *Spirituality*, 213-214.

subject undergoing the liminal stage and in the social structures they engage.¹⁵²

Transformation

The concept of transformation is defined from two perspectives. From the perspective of migration theology, the concept of transformation is defined by the process of identity development as experienced on a migration journey. This process in which migrants experience changes in their identity as they transition from one phase to the other on the journey is therefore considered as a process of identity transformation.

The concept of transformation will also be considered from the perspective of the study of spirituality for which the object of study is the relational process between the human and the divine. This object is studied by gaining understanding of the process of transformation in which, through moments of transition, both the human and divine realities take shape and a new understanding or consciousness of self and of the divine develop. These moments of transition are characterized by experiences of discontinuity.¹⁵³

The study of spirituality considers the human reality or human life to be constituted by all the necessities and choices, the routines and eventualities, people and the things entrusted to our care.¹⁵⁴ Human life, therefore, can be viewed as “a phased process marked by changes”¹⁵⁵ in which moments of transition not only affect the relationship between God and a human, but also “the transformation of that individual as an intersubjective being and, therefore, of all the relations in which that individual participates.”¹⁵⁶ In the case of this study, this means that moments of transition and experiences of discontinuity on the migration journey that affect a migrant’s life and relations can be considered as possible occurrences of transformation of identity and faith.

3. Correlating Narratives

Considering migration experiences as a sign of the times and a *locus theologicus* not only influences the manner in which to develop migration theology in general, but also how I develop my research project in particular. In this section I will first explain that I consider migration experience as a

¹⁵² Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 109 & 125-129.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 424 and 426.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 456.

context for theological reflection, which leads to the chosen research strategy of the principle of hermeneutical correlation. Next I will introduce the theory, which guides the data gathering and the analysis of the sources, after which I will introduce these sources and conclude with an overview of the remaining chapters of this book.

3.1 *Research Strategy: The Hermeneutical Principle of Correlation*

Both the Catholic Church and Catholic theologians have recognized the phenomenon of migration as a “sign of the times,” in which one can “decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose.”¹⁵⁷ This means, according to *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, that the phenomenon of migration offers “a challenge to be discovered and utilized in our work to renew humanity and proclaim the Gospel of Peace.”¹⁵⁸ As the church incorporates the phenomenon of migration in the history of salvation,¹⁵⁹ the phenomenon of migration, then, constitutes a *locus theologicus* in which the experiences of migration become a source for theological reflection and knowledge.

Below I will point out how considering migration as a *locus theologicus* has consequences for the methodological reflections which guide the choice for the research strategy applied in this study.

3.1.1 *Methodological Reflections*

Recognizing migration experiences as a “sign of the times” and therefore as a *locus theologicus* has an impact on the theological approach to the phenomenon of migration. Designating migration as a *locus theologicus* recognizes the experience of migration as a source of revelation that carries authority in the development of theological statements. According to theory of Melchior Cano, such theological statements develop in the interaction between the sources proper to theology (such as Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition, and the writings of the Tradition of the Universal Church) and the borrowed sources (such as natural reason, philosophy, and

¹⁵⁷ *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World – Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican: Holy See, 7 Dec. 1965), § 11 - http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

¹⁵⁸ Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care for Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, § 14.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, § 14-17.

human history, tradition and experience).¹⁶⁰ Regina Polak explains that perceiving migration as a source from human history and experience necessary to deepen theological understanding of revelation has good biblical grounds.¹⁶¹ She also warns that perceiving migration as *locus theologicus* does not mean that it is merely “an application area or an instance legitimizing theological tradition.”¹⁶² Nagy shares this concern when she critically reflects on positioning migration experiences as a *locus theologicus*, when it “comes from viewing migration as a sign of the times.”¹⁶³ She points to problems, which arise when migration experiences are translated in metaphoric language to articulate God’s presence and purpose while not acknowledging the power relations connected to the terminology used. She asks, for instance: if migration terminology becomes the framework for theology, are then the “longings and aspirations of the so-called migrants to become non-migrants illegitimate?”¹⁶⁴ This question relates, for instance, to the observations I made above in regard to Groody, where he emphasizes migrants as “people of the Cross,” who are in need of solidarity of non-migrants rather than reflecting on the migrants’ own agency to establish their new life.

In the discussions on the consequences of considering migration as a *locus theologicus* for the methodology of migration theology, Campese and Castillo Guerra acknowledge the complexity of the phenomenon of migration and, therefore, advocate for “a theology grounded in the reality of migration [...] a theology for which dialogue with other disciplines that study migration [...] is an imperative,” and for which “direct engagement with migrants is crucial.”¹⁶⁵ They seek to create a theoretical space in which the experiences of migrants are regarded as a “primary reality” and “the faith and wisdom present in the experience” as carrying their own theological meaning.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Regina Polak refers to the theory of Melchior Cano when she argues in favor of migration experiences as a *locus theologicus*. See: Regina Polak, “Migration als Ort der Theologie,” in *Migration als Ort der Theologie*, 102-105.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 106-108.

¹⁶² Polak, *Migration as a Sign of the Times*, 53.

¹⁶³ Nagy, “Minding Methodology,” 214.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁶⁵ Campese, “Present and Future Perspectives,” 175-176; Castillo Guerra, “Menschliche Mobilität und theologische Transformation,” 115-145; and Castillo Guerra, “Migration and Intercultural *Convivencia*,” 107-129.

¹⁶⁶ Castillo Guerra, “Migration and Intercultural *Convivencia*,” 115 & 123-125. Castillo Guerra remarks that seeking to create such a “theoretical space is not limited to the reflection on migrants” (125), nor, I would add, is seeking to engage with the narratives of subjects for theological reflection as a “primary reality”. I would like to point to a similar method of theology developed by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. See: Isabel

This study follows this approach. It positions migration experiences as a context for theology, rather than theologizing the context of migration.¹⁶⁷ I hope to avoid perceiving the experiences of migrants just as “a challenge to be discovered and utilized in our work to renew humanity and proclaim the Gospel of Peace”¹⁶⁸ or as experiences through which the larger society and faith communities can gain more insight into self and of God.¹⁶⁹ Instead I see the migration experiences of African migrants to the USA as a current human experience and a relevant and equally important source for theological reflection.

3.1.2 Presenting the Research Strategy

According to Schillebeeckx, expressions of Christian faith and beliefs do not happen in a contextual and historical vacuum. The Holy Scriptures and the many sources of the Christian tradition do not solely determine the expressions of faith and beliefs. The current human experiences in the world form an equally important contribution.¹⁷⁰

This is the first point of attention Schillebeeckx raises regarding the development of faith and understanding of faith, in which he emphasizes that the contemporary experience is not just the recipient of theological meaning, but is also theologically relevant and reveals theological meaning. A second point he addresses concerns the observation that each expression of faith is situated in and impacted by its socio-cultural and historical context. This concerns both the sources of the Christian tradition and the contemporary faith experiences. A third point Schillebeeckx raises is that it is the task of a theologian to actualize contemporary interpretations and expressions of faith through what he calls historical mediations. It is the task of a theologian to orchestrate the encounter between the sources of the Christian tradition and contemporary experiences.¹⁷¹

Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

¹⁶⁷ Nagy, “Minding Methodology,” 217-221.

¹⁶⁸ *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, § 14.

¹⁶⁹ Nagy, “Minding Methodology,” 219-220: Nagy raises this concern of an “egocentric understanding of the context” in which migrants are seen as a “benefit” for the host society as they can “enrich “us””.

¹⁷⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, “Erfahrung und Glaube”, in: *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft*, 25, (Freiburg/Basel/Vienna, Herder, 1980), 81-85.

¹⁷¹ Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Geloofsverstaan: Interpretatie en Kritiek*, 9-54 and Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Theologisch Geloofsverstaan Anno 1983*, 9-11.

What does that mean for a research project that brings together a sixteenth century Christian experience as expressed in the commentary *The Dark Night* and a contemporary Christian experience as expressed in the migration experiences of African migrants to the USA in the twenty-first century?

“Mutually critical correlation”

Hans-Georg Gadamer in his hermeneutical model of conversations claims that “understanding happens through dialogue.”¹⁷² His hermeneutical model acknowledges the finitude and historicity of all human understanding and asks for openness toward the other in the dialogue, in which one puts oneself at risk to allow the other to become itself a genuine other. This model supposes that in the dialogue between the meaning of the text and the understanding a reader brings to the text new meanings can be revealed: it points to the revelatory properties of a text. The meaning of a text does not only speak to the experience that occasioned the author to write the text, but a text lives on beyond this historical moment and is able to disclose new meaning when the world or the horizon of the text meets the world or the horizon of the contemporary experience. The result of this dialogue in Gadamer’s hermeneutical model is a fusion of these two horizons.¹⁷³ David Tracy argues against Gadamer’s notion that for a dialogue to be successful it has to “reach full fusion of horizons or mutual understanding.”¹⁷⁴ According to Tracy, a dialogue with a text can be successful, even if horizons do not fuse and a consensus on a unifying meaning in a text is not found.¹⁷⁵ Tracy’s critique allows for a more open and reciprocal dialogue between two sources, which, in the case of this research, are situated in vastly different socio-cultural and historical contexts.

Both Schillebeeckx and Tracy explain that it is the task of a theologian to mediate the encounter between such sources. This task, known as correlation, consists of two steps. The first step engages the interpretation of the source from the religious (i.e. Christian) tradition and the interpretation of the expression of this religious tradition in contemporary situations or

¹⁷² David Tracy, “Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, eds. Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 2. In this article Tracy explains Gadamer’s method, its characteristics, and provides a critique.

¹⁷³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2011 – Second. Revised Edition), 299-306 and 363-371.

¹⁷⁴ Tracy, “Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue,” 8.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

experiences. Both Tracy and Schillebeeckx insist on the need to make the methods of analysis used explicit while engaging in this process of interpretation. Tracy also refers to Ricoeur, who enriches this work of interpretation and understanding by arguing for adding the use of relevant methods of explanation. Ricoeur expands Gadamer's hermeneutical model of conversation when he integrates the dynamic between understanding and explanation along the "hermeneutical arc" of understanding-explanation-comprehension in which initial or naive understanding becomes informed or critical understanding.¹⁷⁶ In the case of this research this means applying the method of theory-driven content analysis, but also exploring secondary sources in search for knowledge and understanding to bridge the gap of time, place, and culture when interpreting the work of John of the Cross. The second step is engaging in some mode of correlation between the interpretations of the two sources. Schillebeeckx speaks of a "mutually critical correlation" and Tracy agrees that this model of correlation offers the best guarantee to address "the full spectrum of possibilities from identity, through analogy, to confrontation" in the encounter between the two sources.¹⁷⁷

This study will apply the hermeneutical process of "mutually critical correlation" as research strategy. In the process of correlation between the results of the analysis of the migration narratives of African migrants to the USA, as a current expression of a Christian experience, and the analysis of the narrative of the dark night, as a sixteenth century Christian experience from the theological-mystical tradition, relationships will emerge. These relationships, whether affirmed or questioned, will contribute to a theological understanding and articulation of how these experiences effect a transformation of identity and faith and can be understood as experiences of God and spiritual development.

On Narratives

In the process of correlation, I will consider both the experiences of the participants in this research and the poem and commentary to "The Dark Night" as narratives. In terms of Ricoeur, a narrative offers "an intelligible

¹⁷⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, edited and translated by John B. Thompson (Cambridge / Paris: Cambridge University press / Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981), 145-164. See also: Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Inter-religious Dialogue," 12.

¹⁷⁷ Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Theologisch Geloofsverstaan Anno 1983*, 9, Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Geloofsverstaan: Interpretatie en Kritiek*, 25, and David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, LTD, 1981), 58-61 and 88. Tracy gives a thorough explanation on correlation in footnote 44 on page 88.

story from a variety of events or incidents [...] and brings together heterogeneous features as circumstances, agents, interactions, ends, means, and unintended results” around a plot.¹⁷⁸ This “act of emplotment” enables the narrator to bring about meaning by configuring the temporal succession of these heterogeneous elements and interpreting them in relationship to the experience of past, present, and future. This allows for new experiences to bring a new understanding of past experiences and opens the possibility for re-imagining or re-figuring a possible future.¹⁷⁹ Ricoeur, furthermore, points out that not only does each narrative reveal shape, meaning, and understanding to its respective experiences, but it also receives shape, meaning, and understanding in dialogue with other narratives. It is in this encounter between narratives “that the capacity of the plot to transfigure experience is actualized.”¹⁸⁰ In the case of this research this means that the interpretation and explanation of the meaning present in the narratives of African migrants to the USA and John of the Cross’ narrative of *The Dark Night* happens both in the analysis of each experience respectively and in the correlation between them. It is hoped that this analysis and correlation will lead to perceiving how their shared horizons provide insight in the plot that explains the process of transformation of identity and faith.

On the process of correlation

In the process of correlation, I will listen for resonances and dissonances between the two narratives. I have chosen to speak about resonances and dissonances, because these terms allow for the different character of the two narratives, just as musical instruments that are different in character are able to create sounds that resonate or create dissonance. It allows me to pay attention to the particularity of characteristics discovered in the analysis of each narrative, while also discovering where these characteristics sound in unison and where they do not.¹⁸¹ This means, on the one hand, paying attention to instances where the results from the prior analysis of each of the

¹⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, Edited by Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 239.

¹⁷⁹ Kim Atkins, “Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005),” in *Internet Encyclopedia Philosophy: A Peer Reviewed Academic Resource*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ricoeur/>

¹⁸⁰ Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 240.

¹⁸¹ John of the Cross uses the characteristics of music as well to explain how diversity of expression can result in “a harmonious symphony of sublime music” even though each creature “endowed with a certain likeness of God and in its own way gives voice to what God is in it” and “...each one possesses God’s gift differently... sings God’s praises differently..., all of them together form a symphony of love, as of music.” C. 14 & 15. 25-26.

narratives show equivalence. As their meaning is equivalent or resonates, the meaning found in both narratives may be affirmed and the understanding of this meaning may deepen and become richer in quality. On the other hand, I will pay attention to dissonances, where the narratives show difference and questions might be raised in regard to this discord in meaning. In seeking answers to such questions both narratives may question or enlighten one another.

In the search for resonances and dissonances I will consider equivalences or differences in context, character response, and structure. Considering equivalences or differences in context means paying attention to instances where the narratives refer to circumstances and events or occurrences that describe the background or setting of the narratives. Considering equivalences of difference in character response refers to the emotions affected by aspects of the context and to the internal and external responses to these experiences as given by characters or actors in the narratives. Structure refers to the content and plot of the narratives or, in other words, to the themes and their relationships that are discovered in both narratives in the process of the theory-driven content analysis.

3.2 *Research Methods for Data Gathering and Data Analysis*

In this section I present the method of analysis that will drive both the data gathering and process of analysis. I will further introduce the two the main sources of this research and describe the implementation of this research method for each of them. This section will conclude with a short overview of the remaining chapters.

3.2.1 *Theory-driven Content Analysis*

Theory-driven content analysis is one of the methods used in the field of qualitative research. Hennie Boeije explains that

“The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. The research questions are studied through flexible methods enabling contact with the people involved to an extent that is necessary to grasp what is going on in the field. The methods produce rich, descriptive data that need to be interpreted through the identification and coding of themes and categories to findings that can contribute to theoretical knowledge and practical use.”¹⁸²

¹⁸² Hennie Boeije, *Analysis in Qualitative Research*, (Los Angeles/London: Sage, 2010), 11.

Juliet Corbin adds to that description that qualitative research in general and grounded theory in particular, not only allow “Researchers to get at the inner experience of participants,” but also locates “experience within the larger conditional frame or context in which it is embedded; and [analyzes] the process or the ongoing and changing forms of action/interaction/emotions that are taken in response to events and the problems that arise to inhibit action/interaction.”¹⁸³ These characteristics of qualitative research, with attention to context, responses evoked, and meaning attributed by those experiencing certain phenomena, relate to Ricoeur’s observation regarding the characteristics of narratives and support the choice of a method of analysis from the field of qualitative research.

The method of “grounded theory” typically uses an inductive method in which codes, categories, concepts, and theory emerge from the data. The method of theory-driven content analysis, however, uses a more deductive method and works with a theoretical framework, which is developed based on an existing body of knowledge and a research question.¹⁸⁴ The categories that form this theoretical framework and will guide the process of analysis are derived from the body of knowledge of migration theology and spirituality, the questions that were raised, and the concepts presented and defined above.

The theoretical framework

The first category that forms the theoretical framework for the analysis is defined by the transitional phases of the migration journey. As explained above, the migration journey can be characterized by three transitional phases: emigration, immigration, and migration. This category contains three sub-categories, which describe respectively the experiences of departure or becoming the emigrant, arrival or becoming the immigrant, and negotiation and settlement or becoming the migrant.¹⁸⁵ These experiences form the context in which migrants experience transitions in identity.

The next category is the experience of liminality, which is caused by the three transitional phases. The category liminality has two sub-categories: experiences of anti-structure and experiences of achieving participation. As explained above, liminality is defined as the experience of living with anti-structure in which prior categories and conventions no longer function, but where a new structure has yet to be formed. Experiencing liminality starts

¹⁸³ Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Third Edition*, (Los Angeles/London: Sage, 2008), 17.

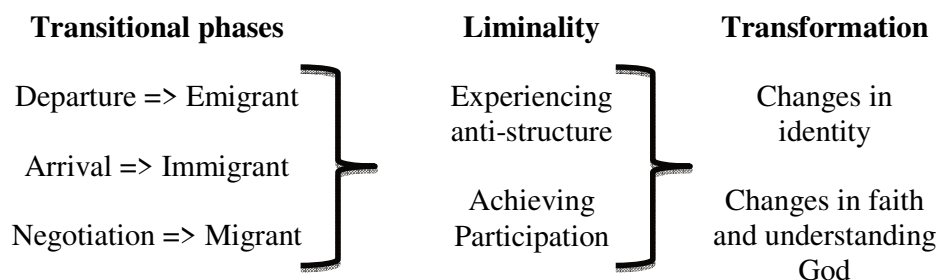
¹⁸⁴ Boeije, *Analysis in Qualitative Research*, 5-6.

¹⁸⁵ See 2.2.1.

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with the experience of departure but is particularly present in the third phase of the journey of becoming the migrant. Here the migrant has to negotiate the shift from experiencing anti-structure in living in between two worlds to participating in the new society and finding a healthy synthesis between the emigrant and immigrant identities.

The third category that forms the theoretical framework is the concept of transformation. As explained above, being in a liminal stage brings both experiences of loss and devaluation and experiences of new possibilities and wholeness: It has the potential to transform the person undergoing an experience of liminality. In spirituality studies liminality is considered to be a central stage in the process of spiritual transformation in which a person develops a new understanding of self and of a person's relationship with God: Transformation of identity and faith.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, experiences of change in identity and change in faith and understanding God are its two sub-categories. These three main categories and their respective sub-categories form the theoretical framework for analysis:



The process of analysis

In the process of analyzing the narratives of African migrants to the USA and John of the Cross' narrative of *The Dark Night* I will follow the phases of reading of Ricoeur's theory of interpretation based on the dialectic between understanding, explanation, and comprehension.¹⁸⁷ The first phase aims for an initial or naïve understanding of the narratives as a whole. It is an exploratory phase, which allows the reader or researcher to immerse oneself in the narrative, to see the richness of its variety of images, ideas, and meanings, and

¹⁸⁶ See 2.4.2.

¹⁸⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretative Theory: Discourse and the Surplus Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 73-88 and Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 209-220. Here I am indebted to Constance FitzGerald, O.C.D. who helped me become familiar with Ricoeur's levels of interpretative reading, particularly in regard to reading mystical texts. See 3.2.3.

to develop a guess about the meaning of the narrative as a whole. In my process of analysis this means that I will read and reflect on the narratives to gather a broad variety of fragments, label their meaning and the themes that arise from them, and develop an initial understanding or hunch of the answer these narratives may give to the research questions asked.

The second phase of reading engages the dynamic between understanding and explanation as the understanding of the narratives is now mediated by explanatory procedures. In the case of this research this means applying the theory-driven content analysis. In this process of analysis, initial ideas about the meaning of the narratives are further developed as the relationships between theoretical framework and the themes and their characteristics become more defined. The more elements in the narratives connect with the developing framework of relationships and the stronger it supports the relationships between these elements, the more probable the developing understanding of the meaning of the narratives.¹⁸⁸

In the next phase of reading, the horizons of the narratives of African migrants and of the narrative of *The Dark Night* will meet, which brings the process of correlation into the process of gaining comprehension of both narratives. As the key words and experiences can carry various meanings, it is in the process of correlation that they become de-contextualized from their own horizons to be re-contextualized in the correlation with each other to create new meaning or understanding. Here it is important to note that, although the analysis of the narratives of the African migrants, the analysis of the narrative of *The Dark Night*, and the process of correlation are presented in a linear fashion, the entire process of analysis and correlation was in fact more iterative.

The entire process will be supported by a continued validation through constant comparison, raising questions from the narratives respectively and in their encounter, and using literature in the field of both migration theology and spirituality for theoretical sampling. This completes the hermeneutical arc in which the interpreter moves from an initial or naïve understanding to an informed and critical comprehension of the narratives researched and the meaning of the encounter of their horizons.

3.2.2 *Migration Experiences: Narratives from African Migrants to the USA*

The first main source or data for this research are the narratives of migration experiences of migrants from Africa to the USA. These narratives were

¹⁸⁸ Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 171-181. On page 176 Ricoeur refers to two principles that need to be satisfied: "the principle of congruence and that of plentitude."

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gathered in first-hand interviews, as no theological studies regarding their experiences are available. First generation migrants from Africa to the United States and in particular to the Baltimore Metro area in the State of Maryland form the research population of this study.

The migrants from Africa who shared their experiences of migration for this research are members of or referred to by the leadership of a group of parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Maryland. One among these parishes offers an outreach program to immigrants and both this service and its lively spirit of welcome and storytelling has drawn migrants from all corners of the earth to its worshipping community. Among them is a large congregation of migrants from the African continent.

The interviews with the participants were conducted as unstructured interviews. During the interviews the participants were introduced to the purpose and the main question of the research, but they were invited to talk freely about their migration experience. The only direction given was by means of three questions, which designated three points of interest for the researcher and which are an operationalization of the research question:

1. How did your migration experience cause a change in who you are?
2. How would you describe this process?
3. How did your faith play a role in this change?

After this introduction, the participant was invited to talk freely about his or her migration experience. Where necessary the researcher implemented a new prompt. These prompts had been prepared in advance and are an operationalization of both the research question and the categories built upon the research question and the theoretical framework.¹⁸⁹ The prompts addressed three themes. The first theme considered their migration narrative in general with questions concerning reasons for departure; mode of entry; initial means to settle upon arrival; and the status of the migration journey at the moment of interview. The second theme asked questions regarding the challenges and obstacles encountered on the journey related to goals and dreams, accomplishments, experiences of success and settlement. The third theme focused on the narrative of transformation of identity and faith and raised questions about a change in identity, the process of this change, and the role of faith and their relationship with God therein.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ See 3.2.2.

¹⁹⁰ For a detailed description of the prompts see Appendix.

Data analysis

In the exploratory phase of reading and analyzing the interviews, the purpose is to accumulate a rich variety of descriptions, “to discover how meanings are formed, and to discover rather than test variables.”¹⁹¹ Each fragment or segment that describes a certain experience will be assigned descriptive labels. Next these labels will be related to the theoretical framework of categories, according to the manner in which they describe properties and dimensions of these particular categories. This initiates the process of analysis in which the different categories of the framework are connected to key themes or elements in the narratives of the African migrants. As the process continues, the evolving explanation of the relationships between the categories and their properties and dimension are tested by constant comparison, asking generative questions, and theoretical sampling. The more elements of the African migrants’ narratives connect with the theoretical framework and support the relationships between these elements and categories, the more probable the outcome of the analysis and explanation of how the experience of migration is an experience of transformation of faith and identity.

3.2.3 The Narrative of The Dark Night

The second main source of this research is the poem “The Dark Night” and its commentary *The Dark Night*. Both are part of the poetry and prose written by the sixteenth century mystic and discalced Carmelite John of the Cross. In his poetry and prose John describes and explains his doctrine of the journey of the spiritual life.¹⁹²

The narrative of the experience of the dark night in the spirituality of John of the Cross is readily available to me in the beautiful English translation of

¹⁹¹ Corbin and Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 12. I am indebted to the following authors, who helped me to understand the different procedures of qualitative analysis and how to properly apply them in my analysis: Hennie Boeijs, *Analysis in Qualitative Research*; Piet Verschuren en Hans Doorewaard, *Het ontwerpen van een onderzoek* (Den Haag: Boom Lemma Uitgevers, 2007, vierde druk); Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2006).

¹⁹² See for instance: Hein Blommenstijn, Jos Huls, and Kees Waaijman, *The Footprints of Love: John of the Cross as Guide in the Wilderness*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2000); Ross Collings, O.C.D., *John of the Cross*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, (1990); and Peter M. Tyler, *St. John of the Cross*, (New York, NY: Continuum, 2010).

John's collected works by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D.¹⁹³

The approach of Constance FitzGerald: correlation in contemplation

Constance FitzGerald, O.C.D., provided guidance to gain entrance to and understanding of the poem and the prose on the dark night. As I will show below, in following her method of interpretation I could not only apply the theory-driven content analysis, but also remain faithful to the text as a narrative in the perspective of Ricoeur.

FitzGerald, a well-known Carmelite sister and John of the Cross scholar, was one of the founding leaders of The Carmelite Forum in the USA. This forum was established in 1983 with the purpose of developing scholarship, research, and interpretation for the English-speaking world of the Carmelite tradition. The forum was active for over 25 years, with its work now being continued by the Carmelite Institute of North America.¹⁹⁴

FitzGerald's approach to and interpretation of John of the Cross, and other Carmelite mystics for that matter,¹⁹⁵ and her method of interpretation is building upon interpretation theories of Ricoeur, Gadamer, Tracy, and Neibuhr.¹⁹⁶ She too points to the revelatory properties of a text and in her work engages the correlation of contemporary experiences with the mystical texts from the Carmelite tradition, seeking to go beyond understanding where the text came from, to understanding the meaning it reveals now.¹⁹⁷

FitzGerald emphasizes the need to read and reread a mystical text as nothing can substitute for the careful reading and the actual encounter with the text that is necessary "to enter into the text and let it become the world of your perception."¹⁹⁸ She cannot emphasize enough that this prayerfully reading of

¹⁹³ John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Transl. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington D.C., ICS Publications, 1991). For references to the Spanish text, I used: S. Juan de la Cruz, *Obras Completas*, edited by Eulogio Pacho (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 1998 – sixth edition).

¹⁹⁴ Constance FitzGerald, O.C.D., Interview by T.J.M. van Gaal, November 2, 2018. See also: Carmelite Institute of North America: Tradition, Education, Evangelization, <https://carmeliteinstitute.net/origins/> - accessed 01/11/2019.

¹⁹⁵ For a list of FitzGerald's publications see: <https://www.baltimorecarmel.org/meet-our-community/our-writings/> - accessed 01/24/2019.

¹⁹⁶ FitzGerald, Interview. FitzGerald also allowed me access to the private text copies of her presentations for the Carmelite Forum sessions of 1984 and 1986. These oral presentations were also recorded and these audiocassette recordings are held at the Institute for Carmelite Studies in Washington, DC.

¹⁹⁷ FitzGerald, Interview and Carmelite Forum Presentation 1984 & 1986.

¹⁹⁸ FitzGerald, Carmelite Forum Presentation 1986.

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the text is “a creative process which cannot be rushed” and she illustrates this with a beautiful imaginative quote from Richard Neibuhr:

“...We do not so much have a text ‘before’ us as a ‘presence’ of voices, living symbols, around us. We do not scan lines seeking what may please us, for we are not attending to a two dimensional surface. Rather we are inside a voluminous space whose proportions we are attempting to gauge and whose twist and turns we are trying to discern. Reading of this kind is similar to living in a sprawling house, in which we climb up and down and explore adjoining rooms, halls and yard. For the deeper reading we do makes for as intimate a part of our lives as the houses in which we grow up and grow older. The text annexes our imagination to itself; conversely, our imagination annexes the text to us, and we wander in corridors and living spaces fabricated of both. In such reading we no longer only encounter the text. We dwell in it, and the text dwells in us.”¹⁹⁹

Referring to Ricoeur’s theory on the narrative structure of the self, FitzGerald points to the on-going self-interpretation a reader or interpreter brings into the process of interpretation.²⁰⁰ It is here where she explains why “deeper conscious reflection and meditation” are important for the process. As people seek to interpret experiences by developing a narrative in dialogue with others, they “tap the enormous potential for reinterpretation that lies buried in life, and,” FitzGerald says, “it may be above all in genuine prayer, we pass over into the perspective of God...” as it is in the “deeper conscious reflection and meditation” that experiences stored as memory become available and that insight can bring patterns or themes to the experiences so creating a narrative out of the initial un-thematic (self-) interpretation.²⁰¹ Therefore, for FitzGerald, it is important to engage the process of interpretation in the

¹⁹⁹ Richard E. Neibuhr, *The Strife of Interpreting: The Moral Burden of Imagination*, Parabola, 1985, 47.

²⁰⁰ FitzGerald, Interview and Carmelite Forum, 1986. See also 2.3.3 *Definition of Concepts* on page 36. Ricoeur sees a role for religious and cultural classic texts in the formation of human subjectivity. In their own narrative identity they reveal “another way of being in the world that liberates what is *essential* by suggesting what is *possible*.” In the context of religion and theology, for instance, Ricoeur refers to the work of Levinas and explains that Levinas shows how “the self is *summoned* by the other” to respond to the call for responsibility. See: Wallace, “Introduction,” in: Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 15 (italics by Wallace). I consider the poem “The Dark Night” and John’s commentary *The Dark Night* as such religious and cultural classic texts.

²⁰¹ FitzGerald, Interview and Carmelite Forum, 1986.

correlation of mystical texts and contemporary experience in the context of prayer and meditation: correlation in contemplation.²⁰²

Analysis of a sixteenth century mystical text

In my analysis of the poem “The Dark Night” and the commentary *The Dark Night*, I will follow Ricoeur’s phases of reading in the way FitzGerald suggests.

When engaging the first and exploratory phase of reading, Fitzgerald encourages the interpreter to open one’s heart to the text as whole, to accumulate the “rich variety of imagery, ideas, and meanings,” and to allow both parts that speak to one’s heart and parts that may be troubling their place and function in the text.²⁰³ FitzGerald explains that this will allow a reader or interpreter “to get a “feel” for the text, to hear it as a whole with your inner ear so that your own, often, unconscious affinity for the experience of God can sense, at least dimly, its larger meanings.”²⁰⁴ From this process the interpreter develops a hunch or guess about the meaning of the text as a whole, building both on a deep reading of the text and the human experiences the interpreter brings to the text. For Fitzgerald this forms the foundation for the ensuing phases of reading, as the interpreter engages the transformative power of the mystical text and its deeper meanings, and opens up to a reciprocal process of dispossession and appropriation to disclose new meaning and new perspectives on oneself, on the world, and on God. Such new meaning will be explored in the interaction between the “rich variety of imagery, ideas, and meanings” in the experience of the dark night and the theoretical framework developed above, as I apply the same method of analysis to the narrative of *The Dark Night*.

3.2.4 *The Remaining Chapters*

In the remainder of the thesis I will present the results of the process of analysis and correlation. As already mentioned above, even though the analysis of the narratives of the African migrants and of *The Dark Night* and

²⁰² FitzGerald, Interview. In this part of the interview FitzGerald explained how prayer and contemplation are central to her method. She then jokingly said: “but as a contemplative I can get away with prayer and contemplation as method...” Even though she understands the importance of methodology and method she nevertheless said as well: “In all seriousness, the fact that you really prayed over the text and lived into the text, really needs to be part of what you are saying you do, and then you have brought the migration stories to interface with your experience of the text...”

²⁰³ FitzGerald, Carmelite Forum Presentation 1986.

²⁰⁴ *Idem*.

the process of correlation are presented in a linear fashion, one has to bear in mind that the entire process of analysis and correlation is an iterative process. In Chapter Two, I will analyze the narratives of the participants in which they share their experiences of migration. I will first provide an overview of historical and current trends in African migration to the USA, after which I will present the participants in this research, followed by the results of the process of analysis. In this chapter I will answer the question how migrants from Africa to the USA describe their experience as a process of transformation of identity and faith.

Chapter Three will present the analysis of the narrative of the dark night as described in John's commentary to the poem "The Dark Night." In this chapter I will first introduce John of the Cross and his work. I will give a short overview of his life, his poetry and prose, characteristics of his theology, and will introduce the poem and commentary, in relation to John's other work. I will then proceed with the analysis of this text, which will answer the question how John of the Cross describes the experience of the dark night as a process of transformation of identity and faith.

In Chapter Four I will present the results of the process of correlation. This chapter addresses the question how the narratives of the African migrants and the dark night narrative are similar or different. To do so, I will correlate the African migrants' narratives with the John of the Cross' narrative of the dark night. I will look for resonances and dissonances between the two narratives as I consider equivalences or differences in context, character response, and structure.²⁰⁵

In the Fifth and final chapter I will gather the central findings. I will point out that abiding by the methodological reflections regarding the development of migration theology and responding to absence of African migrants' experiences in this theological discourse results in the creation of new data. I will answer the research question by exploring the meaning of the similarities and differences in the African migrants' narratives and in John's narrative of the dark night. I will explain how the horizons of the two narratives fuse and how this fusion provides a deeper theological understanding of transformation of identity and faith in both narratives. Finally, I will explain how the insights gained contribute to the field of migration theology and its discourse on the relationship between migration and spirituality.

²⁰⁵ See Chapter One, paragraph 3.1.2.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT HAPPENS BETWEEN DREAM AND REALITY? AFRICAN MIGRANTS AND THEIR MIGRATION TO THE USA

Introduction

Chapter Two presents the qualitative analysis of African migrants' narratives to answer the question how they describe their experience of migration to the USA as a process of transformation of identity and faith. As there are no theological studies regarding the migration experiences of Roman Catholic African migrants to the USA available, I first created the data necessary by gathering interviews. First-generation migrants from Africa were invited to share the personal narrative of their migration experience.

In the first part of this chapter, I begin with describing the history of and current trends in African migration to the USA. I then introduce the African migrants who participated in this research. This introduction paves the way for the next three parts of this chapter in which I analyze the personal narratives of the participants' experiences of migration.

1. Trends in African Migration to the USA

People from Africa or people with Black African roots constitute 14 percent of America's current population.¹ Africans have found their way to the Americas since the early 17th century and therefore have populated the continent for at least 400 years. Although this research focuses on current African migration to the United States, the history of the forced migration to the American continent during the time of slavery is part of the context to which this new stream of immigrants migrates. Therefore, I present a short history of African migration to the USA, with particular attention to the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the Chesapeake region and its ensuing impact on the city of Baltimore in the state Maryland, where this case study is located.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, "Data from 2010 US Census: Summary of Modified Race and Census 2010 Race Distributions for the United States (US-MR2010-01)," Release Date: July 2012, accessed July 3, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2010/demo/popest/modified-race-data-2010.html>.

1.1 *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its Consequences for Baltimore City*

African migration to Northern America started in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. The growing cultivation of tobacco raised the need for labor. The settlers themselves, mainly men, were not able to grow their own community and so contribute to a labor force.² Therefore, the English settlers had to consider other labor options: bring people from England, employ the indigenous people, or bring people from Africa. Initially, the English Protestants were against trading in people, as that was what the Spanish Catholics did³ and because people from Africa were different (non-English and non-Christians) and were an expensive investment, due to the long journey.⁴ So, initially the English settlers opted for bringing people from England to work at the plantations. These workers would usually come as indentured servants, which “meant that they agreed to serve their master for a certain number of years at the end of which they would be given their freedom...”⁵ When this stream of labor dried up, the settlers in the Mid-Atlantic region began to use labor forces from Africa and engage in the slave trade.

1.1.1 *Slavery in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the USA*

In 1619, a “Dutch” ship arrived at the port of Jamestown with “20 and odd Negroes”⁶ as reported by John Rolfe and John Smith.⁷ Although it is not

² Martha W. McCartney, *A Study of the Africans and African Americans on Jamestown Island and at Green Spring, 1619-1803* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2003), 16, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/african/african.pdf / <http://hdl.handle.net/2450/659> – accessed 07/03/2018; this study focuses on the development of slavery in the Chesapeake Region of the Atlantic Coast, which coincides with the locus of the case study. See also: Betty Wood, “The Implications of Tobacco on the Labor Needs in Virginia,” in *PBS: Africans in America*, 1998/1999 In this PBS program “American’s journey through slavery is presented in four eras. For each era, you’ll find a historical narrative, a resource bank of images, links to official documents, stories, biographies, and commentaries...” accessed July 3, 2018, www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1i3055.html.

³ Peter Wood, “English Protestantism,” in *PBS: Africans in America*, 1998/1999, accessed July 3, 2018, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1i3054.html>.

⁴ Mary Ann Clark, *Then We’ll Sing a New Song: African Influences on America’s Religious Landscape* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 6 and Peter Wood, *The Need for Labor in Jamestown*, in: *PBS, Africans in America*, 1998/1999, accessed July 3, 2018, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1i3053.html>

⁵ Wood, “The Implications of Tobacco,” and Clark, *Then We’ll Sing a New Song*, 6.

⁶ McCartney, *Africans and African Americans on Jamestown Island, 1619-1803*, 8.

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entirely clear, it seems that these first Africans may have been working as indentured servants in a society where slavery was not yet institutionalized. Initially, the English and non-English migrant servants worked side by side and even shared “dwelling spaces, and not infrequently socialized together, entered into voluntary interracial sexual relationships, and ran away in mixed groups.”⁸ It is not until the second half of the 17th century, when the immigration of white servants dried up, that the transformation from a “*society with slaves*” into a “*slave society*” happened.⁹ This transformation happened, first, due to the growing demands on the international market for commodities such as sugar, coffee, rice, or (in case of the Chesapeake region) tobacco. Secondly, the plantation and slave owners were enabled by society to consolidate

“...their political power, enacting comprehensive slave codes that gave them near-complete sovereignty over their slaves’ lives. Slaveholding elites then also erected impenetrable barriers between slavery and freedom, and elaborated racial ideologies to bolster their dominant position.”¹⁰

Initially slaves were defined as “all non-Christian servants brought to the colony ‘by shipping’.” Since these people were mostly Africans, “[non-] Christianity [in fact] served as an early stand-in for racial identification.”¹¹ From then on slavery and the slave trade grew exponentially:

“Aside from an occasional indentured artisan, by the 1690s larger Chesapeake planters had come to rely entirely on enslaved workers. Perhaps as many as 20,000 captive Africans were brought to the Chesapeake across the seventeenth century, and about 100,000 between 1700 and 1775. In the lower tidewater Chesapeake, most new Africans arrived between the mid-1680s and the mid-1730s. After 1745 most area planters could meet needs

⁷ Trivia for Dutch readers: John Rolfe who reported on the arrival of these first Africans, smartly reported it as being a Dutch war ship to avoid blame on the English for piracy. However, these Africans were robbed from a Portuguese ship by an English captain sailing with “letters of marque issued [...] by the Protestant Dutch Prince Maurice, son of William of Orange.” See: “African Americans at Jamestown,” Historic Jamestown, accessed July 3, 2018, www.nps.gov/jame/learn/historyculture/african-americans-at-jamestown.htm.

⁸ McCartney, *African and African Americans on Jamestown Island*, 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹ Martha McCartney, “Virginia’s First Africans,” in *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, 26 Jun. 2018, accessed July 3, 2018, https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Virginia_s_First_Africans#start_entry.

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for additional laborers from natural increase, and new imports trailed off quickly.”¹²

“By 1700 there were 27,817 enslaved Africans in British North America. By 1770, the number of slaves had grown to 462,000, about one-fifth of the total colonial population.”¹³

Currently, the Black population (Black alone and in combination with other races) in the United States numbers 42.75 million people, about 14 percent of the total population. The State of Maryland, which is part of the Chesapeake region and where Baltimore is a city, in contrast, has a Black population of 31.1 percent.¹⁴

1.1.2 *Baltimore: A City of Neighborhoods*

Slavery, the development of racist ideologies, segregation, and the struggle for civil rights for African American people resulted in the development of Black theology. Most famously known is the Black liberation theology developed by James H. Cone. The purpose of this theology is to “affirm the humanity of the Blacks” as well as to liberate whites from the notion that “being oppressive” is normal.¹⁵ Or in the words of the “National Committee of Black Church Men” [1969]:

“Black theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievements of black humanity. Black theology is a theology of “blackness.” It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says “No” to the encroachment of white oppression.”¹⁶

¹² McCartney, *Africans and African Americans on Jamestown Island, 1619-1803*, 17.

¹³ Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, *African Slavery in Colonial British North America*, Monticello, accessed July 3, 2018, www.monticello.org/slavery-at-monticello/african-slavery-british-north-america/africans-british-north-america.

¹⁴ United States Census Bureau Quick Facts: Maryland <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/BZA115218> - accessed 03/30/2021.

¹⁵ Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), <http://www.liberatingblacktheology.com/excerpts/liberatingexcerpt.pdf>.

¹⁶ As quoted by Bradley from: James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, Volume I: 1966–1979 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 101.

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Despite the continuing efforts to fight “the encroachment of white oppression”, the consequences of the history of slavery, racism, and segregation are still to be seen in U.S. society. The City of Baltimore, for instance, has its own ambiguous history with addressing these issues of slavery, racism, and segregation, a history that is still alive in the city, as was seen in the uprising following the death of Freddie Grey in 2015.¹⁷ It is in this city where the African immigrants of this case study found a home: a city characterized by neighborhoods, which have been part of its historic and demographic development.¹⁸

Baltimore: immigration, and segregation

Baltimore City was founded in 1729 as an independent city and has the second largest seaport in the Mid-Atlantic Region. This seaport became a port of entry for immigrants in 1780. In the 19th century Baltimore grew into the second largest port of entry for immigrants, second only to New York Harbor’s Ellis Island. Immigrants passing through Baltimore’s port of entry initially came mostly from Ireland and Germany, but later immigrants from Italy and a variety of Eastern European countries settled here as well.¹⁹ In the period “between 1790 and 1860, Baltimore’s population soared from 13,503 to 212,418.”²⁰ As the city’s immigrant population grew and new means of transportation developed, suburbanization started. The different immigrant groups established their own neighborhoods and developed their social, cultural, and religious lives. Many of these neighborhoods were “anchored by Roman Catholic parishes created for specific nationalities.”²¹ Apart from immigrants from the European continent, Baltimore saw an influx of immigrants from the African continent. In 1910 Baltimore’s population had grown to 558,485 residents of which 88,065 were African American.²² During

¹⁷ Heather Miller Rubens, Hodaya Ziad, and Benjamin E. Sax, “Toward an Interreligious City,” in *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies: Defining a New Field*, Eboo Patel, Jennifer Howe Peace, and Noah J. Silverman, eds. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press Books, 2018), 209-210. Another source is the personal experience of living across from the funeral home where the wake for Freddie Gray was held and of living in the vicinity of streets where looting erupted as well in the days following his funeral.

¹⁸ Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City*, (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2010).

¹⁹ Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood*, 5-9.

²⁰ William Connery, “Point of Entry: Baltimore, the Other Ellis Island,” in *Baltimore Maryland*, accessed November 26, 2018, <http://www.baltimoremd.com/charm/pointofentry.html>.

²¹ Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood*, 8.

²² *Ibid*, 9.

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the Great Migration, the city also drew an influx of African Americans from rural Maryland and rural communities in Virginia and the Carolinas.²³

Baltimore's relationship with these African Americans has been an ambiguous one. On the one hand Baltimore City played an important role in the abolition movement: in 1787 the "Baltimore Yearly Meeting, Society of Friends (Quakers), condemned slavery" and in 1789 the "Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Poor Negroes and Others Unlawfully Held in Bondage formed at Baltimore." Baltimore City welcomed freed slaves. In 1792 "African Americans formed Sharp Street Methodist Church."²⁴ On the other hand, "large numbers of Baltimoreans were pro-slavery and rioted when Union troops marched through the city on April 19, 1861, causing the Civil War's first bloodshed."²⁵

This ambiguity is also seen in the development of the city. Although "the United States Civil Right Acts of 1866, had decreed that Blacks enjoyed the same property rights as white Americans," on December 9, 1910 the Baltimore City Council approved a bill, which "very title suggested that African Americans undermined neighborhood stability: *Ordinance for preserving order, securing property values and promoting the great interests and insuring the good government of Baltimore City*."²⁶ With this bill Baltimore City achieved "systematic, citywide race separation," using government legislation.²⁷ The Supreme Court later nullified this law in 1917.²⁸ With racism ideologies, such as the eugenics movement, which claimed science to prove white supremacy, deeply engrained in the society, segregation continued to happen, only now with different tools, such as restrictive covenants held up by neighborhoods and block busting.²⁹

Later Baltimore stood at the front of the fight for equality and civil rights, but the city is still known for its characteristic neighborhoods that were formed by segregation and continues to show signs of segregation.³⁰ Neighborhood maps

²³ "The Great Migration, 1910-1970," United States Census Bureau, Last Modified, September 13, 2012, <https://www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/020/>.

²⁴ "Maryland: Historical Chronology," Baltimore City, accessed, November 26, 2018, <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/36loc/bcity/chron/html/bcitychron17.html>.

²⁵ "A Lasting Legacy: Baltimore's African American History," Baltimore National Heritage area, accessed November 26, 2018, <https://www.explorebaltimore.org/city-history/a-brief-overview-of-baltimores-african-american-history>.

²⁶ Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood*, 22. Italics by Pietila.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-31.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, xi, 32-46.

³⁰ Randy Yeip, "Baltimore's Demographic Divide," *Wall Street Journal Graphics*, published May 1, 2015. <http://graphics.wsj.com/baltimore-demographics/>.

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based on the 2010 census show the “L” and “butterfly” shape that forms the city, with the neighborhoods in the “L” being predominantly white and the neighborhoods in the “butterfly” wings predominantly black.³¹ Baltimore City’s population demographic currently consists of 63% Black, 27.7% White, 4.2% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian, 2% mixed, and 0.6% Other.³²

Catholic communities in Baltimore’s neighborhoods

The landscape in Baltimore “is marked by religious edifices built by immigrant communities from Northern, Southern, and Eastern Europe to honor their God and welcome their faithful.”³³ Between 1884 and 1927, these immigrants founded five of the seven parishes that are now part of the Northeast Catholic Community in Baltimore. The remaining two parishes in Northeast Baltimore were founded in 1949 and 1960, as the inner city started to expand and new neighborhoods developed to the Northeast from the Second World War onwards. What currently is Northeast Baltimore was in the early 1940s still “the country”: “you could walk from 25th Street to Towson along Loch Raven Boulevard and not see a house.”³⁴

In the early sixties these new neighborhoods, with a population of predominantly European descent, started welcoming another demographic of people: African Americans. This development met with ambivalence and brought along the infamous practice of blockbusting.³⁵ The communities in the young neighborhoods of Northeast Baltimore, however, organized themselves with “groups such as the Greater Northwood Community Council, the St. Matthew Social Action committee, and the Northeast Community Organization (NECO) [working together] to fight blockbusting and achieve

³¹ Lawrence Brown, “Two Baltimores: The White L vs. the Black Butterfly,” *City Paper*, June 28, 2016. As cited in Rubens, Ziad, and Sax, “Toward and Interreligious City,” 211-212.

³² “Baltimore City, Maryland (county),” United States Census Bureau Quick Facts, accessed November 27, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/baltimorecitymarylandcounty/AGE29521> and Yeip, “Baltimore’s Demographic Divide”.

³³ *The Community of St. Matthew: Rich in Tradition, United in Mission, Blessed with Diversity*, Jubilee Year 1999: 1949-1999 (Baltimore, MD Uptown Press, 1999), 18.

³⁴ *The Community of St. Matthew*, 2.

³⁵ Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood*, ix, 172-176 & 200-204. See also: “BlockBusting,” *The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed. An Online Reference Guide to African American History*, accessed November 26, 2018, <https://blackpast.org/aah/blockbusting>: “Blockbusting refers to the practice of introducing African American homeowners into previously all white neighborhoods in order to spark rapid white flight and housing price decline.” The houses left behind for sale were then offered at “artificially inflated prices” to the African American middle class.

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peaceful integration.”³⁶ This foreshadowed their later welcome of the most recent streams of immigrants who are settling in their midst, making the Northeast neighborhoods part of some of those pockets in Baltimore City that are known for their ethnic diversity.³⁷

During the last three decades the influx of immigrants and especially immigrants from diverse African countries has grown exponentially. The parishes’ responses to these newcomers have been diverse. They range from a welcome with the expectation that the newcomers will assimilate to a welcome with a warm and intentional embrace of the newcomers. In some parishes one sees immigrants coming for Mass, but they seem quiet and somewhat invisible.

One parish opened its doors to an Ethiopian Orthodox Community and a Nepalese Buddhist Community, and now welcomes a small but growing group of African parishioners. These immigrants are predominantly refugees and they find their first home in the apartments that surround the parish. Both the Ethiopian and Nepalese faith communities use the parish hall for their liturgies and social events. Another parish opened its doors to a Nigerian, predominantly Igbo, community who celebrate a monthly Igbo mass on Sunday afternoon. Although these communities and newcomers have found a spiritual home in these two parishes, it does not seem that these immigrant communities have had a significant impact on the identity of the receiving communities.

One out of the seven parishes in Northeast Baltimore, however, really has embraced all newcomers from its foundation in 1949 onward. It considers migration as part of its being: whether it is the founders of the parish who migrated from downtown Baltimore to Northeast Baltimore and who were descendants of European immigrants, the descendants of the Africans who arrived during the time of slavery and the Great Migration, or the new “immigrant groups – from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa [who bless their] community with new members, new faith expression, new traditions.”³⁸ The importance of their contributions is seen in the main characteristic of this community: storytelling. “Storytelling” is the very first word of the 50th anniversary Jubilee book.³⁹ Storytelling happens everywhere in this parish, even during Mass!

³⁶ *The Community of St. Matthew*, 8 and Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood*, 245-247.

³⁷ Yeip, “Baltimore’s Demographic Divide”.

³⁸ *The Community of St. Matthew*, 18.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1

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The history of Baltimore and its neighborhoods, the Catholic communities of Northeast Baltimore City and their diverse responses to immigrants are the interesting context in which the narratives of the participants in this research developed.

1.2 *Current Trends in Migration from the African Continent to the USA*

This section provides a short overview of facts, figures and trends in the more recent streams of African immigrants to the USA. This will provide an initial insight in their reception and potential ability to settle in the USA.

1.2.1 *African Migration to the USA from the Nineteenth to Twenty-First Century*

African migration to the USA has grown exponentially during the last five decades. In the one hundred years between 1861 and 1961, about 463 Africans on average arrived per year in the USA. But in just the five years between 2000 and 2005 about 60,000 African-born migrants came to the USA, an average 12,000 per year. In 2009 there were about 1.5 million African immigrants in the USA.⁴⁰

Once slave import was abolished in 1807, the arrival of Africans to the USA saw a sharp decline. The post slave-trade decline in the nineteenth century was followed by “pre-1965 U.S. immigration restrictions that significantly curtailed African emigration to the U.S. during the first half of the twentieth century.”⁴¹

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965⁴² reformed the national origin quotas and lifted the very low caps that were placed on migration from non-European countries. These reforms gave rise to a steady but still slow stream of African emigration to the USA.⁴³ It wasn’t until the 1980s that African emigration to the USA started to grow exponentially, “increasing by about 200 percent during the 1980s and 1990s and nearly 100 percent during the

⁴⁰ Kevin J.A. Thomas, “What Explains the Increasing Trend in African Emigration to the U.S.?” *International Migration Review*, Volume 45, Number 1(Spring 2011), 3-38 and Randy Capps, Kristen McCabe, and Michael Fix, *New Streams: Black African Migration to the United States* (Washington D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2011).

⁴¹ Thomas, “The Increasing Trend in African Emigration,” 5.

⁴² “The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act,” US Public Law 89-236, accessed July 7, 2018, <http://library.uwb.edu/guides/USimmigration/79%20stat%20911.pdf>.

⁴³ Thomas, “Increasing Trend in African Emigration,” 6.

2000s.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, in comparison with immigrants from other continents, the African immigrant population in the U.S. remains relatively small.⁴⁵ Currently the United States counts 2,475,118 African-born immigrants, of which approximately 2,000,000 are considered Black African immigrants (that means: not counting immigrants from North Africa). This number constitutes 4 percent of the total immigrant population and 0.6 percent of the total U.S. population.⁴⁶ As the number of African immigrants to the United States is increasing, so is their diversity. Historically, African immigrants came predominantly from West Africa and Anglophone countries. Currently, however, the countries of origins are more diverse and emigration from non-English speaking countries is showing a rising trend.⁴⁷

1.2.2 *Modes of Entry*

The majority of immigrants who came to the USA in the 1960s and 1970s came to acquire an American education. Their goal was to return home and to contribute to the development of their countries, which had recently gained independence from the colonial powers. It was a period of great hope and expectations. Therefore, the stay of these immigrants was intentionally temporary. The more recent stream of African immigrants, however, seek permanent residency. The developments in most African states has not (yet) resulted in economic and stable societies; people leave the African continent to flee poverty, unemployment, repressive and dictatorial regimes, and civil wars.⁴⁸

Most of the recent African immigrants arrive through diversity programs, refugee movements (such as refugee programs and asylum), and family reunification. A change from the earlier streams is that currently emigration happens less for reasons of education or through employment programs. The Immigration Act of 1990⁴⁹ created

⁴⁴ Capps, et al, *New Streams*, 1.

⁴⁵ Thomas, "The Increasing Trend in African Emigration," 6.

⁴⁶ Capps et al, *New Streams*, 4 and updated data from: "Regions of Birth for Immigrants in the United States, 1960-Present," Migration Policy Institute, Data Hub, accessed March 30, 2021, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends?gclid=Cj0KCQjwmIuDBhDXARIsAFITC_6i7a6ixhwtVuF76VVYjEU94wK2dR8EHsxq9xwSxI_49S9fnVKzSfoaAlsxEALw_wcB#source.

⁴⁷ Thomas, "The Increasing Trend in African Emigration," 8-19.

⁴⁸ Joseph Takougang, "Contemporary African Immigrants to the United States," accessed on January 28, 2013, http://www.africamigration.com/archive_02/j._takougang.htm.

⁴⁹ "Immigration Act of 1990, US Public Law 101-649," accessed July 7, 2018, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c101:S.358.ENG>.

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“the diversity visa program which aims to increase flows from under-represented countries by allowing immigration from these countries of individuals without a formal job offer or strong family ties in the United States.”⁵⁰

As a result, migration from the African continent becomes increasingly diverse both in modes of entry and in countries of origin. About a quarter of all Black African immigrants enter the United States as refugees or received asylum. Another quarter enters through the diversity program. About 40 percent enter through family reunification. Employment based preferences and family-sponsored preference each represent about 5 percent of the entries. A majority of African migrants enter the United States as documented immigrants.⁵¹

1.2.3 *Reception into the Country and Ability to Settle*

African immigrants who enter through family reunification programs find their reception is mostly friendly. Upon arrival they find already developed communities to support them. These communities will provide them with initial residence or shelter, guide them through the migration procedures, and support them in adjusting to the new environment.⁵² The reception is different for refugees or for immigrants from African countries with a smaller flow migrating to the United States.

Even though emigration from non-English speaking countries is rising, the majority of African immigrants still come from Anglophone countries. Their command of English is proficient to excellent. In Anglophone African countries, the English language serves as a second language (or sometimes third language), but it is usually acquired at a young age (from elementary education onward). Most Africans, whether from English or non-English speaking countries are raised (at least) bilingual and, therefore, have strong language skills. The majority of African immigrants are highly skilled and highly educated. About 38 percent of the Black African immigrants have obtained a college education compared to 27 percent among the total U.S. population. The immigrants who enter the United States as refugees, tend to be less educated due to the circumstances in the countries they come from.

⁵⁰ Capps et al, *New streams*, 1.

⁵¹ Capps et al, *New Streams*, 6-8 and Thomas, “The Increasing Trend in African Emigration,” 21-24.

⁵² Takougang, “Contemporary African Immigrants to the United States,” 4 and Moses O. Biney, *From Africa to America: Religion and Adaptation Among Ghanaian Immigrants in New York* (New York, NY/London: New York University Press, 2011).

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Both the language skills and the education of African immigrants result in high employment ratios among the African immigrants. It is interesting to note the especially high employment rate for Black immigrant women (over 50 percent for most origin countries). Even though the employment ratios are high for African immigrants, their earnings are surprisingly low, especially considering their education levels and language skills: "In 2009 over a third of recent immigrants (those with fewer than ten year of US residency) who had a college degree or higher earned abroad were working in unskilled jobs."⁵³ Factors that contribute to this underemployment could be their recent arrival, difficulties with the acceptance of their degrees and credentials, and racial discrimination in the labor market.⁵⁴

Black African immigrants to the United States are taken by surprise by the reality of racism and segregation. Upon entering the United States they become part of the minority Black population. They quickly come to realize that the entire Black population in the United States, whether descendants of the four-century-old African American population or the more recent arrived people from Africa, is met with the same prejudices and perceptions.⁵⁵ They will encounter stereotypes such as "lazy, criminals, drug dealers, and welfare cheats".⁵⁶ This results in a slower or less full acceptance in comparison with immigrants from other ethnic regions. It is interesting to note that the geographic settlement of African immigrants aligns with the geographical locations of the Black population in the United States. Exceptions are the states of Minnesota and Washington –where large numbers of African immigrants have settled, but where there is no significant U.S.-born Black population – and the states of Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and South Carolina – that have a large U.S.-born Black population, but an insignificant African immigrant population.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the relationship between the U.S.-born Black population and the Black African immigrants is an ambiguous one. African immigrants can encounter a lack of acceptance by the African American community as "African immigrants are perceived by some African Americans as responsible for the fact that their ancestors were sold in slavery" and there "is also the accusation that African immigrants see themselves as better, if not superior to their African American counterparts."⁵⁸

⁵³ Capps (et al), *New Streams*, 17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12-18.

⁵⁵ Florence Nyemba and Lisa Vaughn, "Exploring the Migration of Black Zimbabwean Women in the Greater Cincinnati Area," *Ìrìnkèrindò: a Journal of African Migration*, 9 (2017), 97-100.

⁵⁶ Takougang, "Contemporary African Immigrants to the United States," 5.

⁵⁷ Capps et al, *New Streams*, 9-10.

⁵⁸ Takougang, "Contemporary African Immigrants to the United States," 5.

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The intention of the current African immigrant is to make the United States their new homeland. The majority of the immigrants will apply for citizenship as soon as they are qualified to do so. This intention encourages these immigrants to build strong communities. They work to organize themselves to become a presence both politically and economically.⁵⁹ Religious and secular organizations such as Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York City⁶⁰ and the “African Immigrant Caucus” in Washington, D.C.⁶¹ “aim to help their members to become active in their communities and create a better understanding between Africans and Americans.”⁶²

Even though the political debate continues to eliminate the diversity programs in place since the 1990 immigration reform and to limit family-based migration (now referred to as “chain-migration”⁶³) it seems that African immigration to the U.S. under the current circumstances will continue to increase. African immigrants arrive in general as documented immigrants and the majority is highly skilled. Despite the racial problems they encounter, their legal arrival, language skills, and their level of education seem likely to enhance their settlement and acceptance into U.S. society in the long run.⁶⁴

1.3 *Introducing the Participants*

In this section, I introduce the participants who shared their migration experiences for this research project. The aim was to find the greatest possible ethnic variety among African migrants present in the Catholic communities of Northeast Baltimore. I also aimed for an equal representation of women and men. I did not restrict participation in regard to age, nationality, ethnicity, modes of arrival, immigrant status, or time lived in the United States.⁶⁵ Participants were solicited from parishes in the Northeast Catholic Community of Baltimore.

⁵⁹ Olupona and Gemignani, eds., *African Immigrant Religions in America*.

⁶⁰ Moses O. Biney, *From Africa to America*.

⁶¹ African Immigrant Caucus was founded in November 2013 with the purpose of representing the African immigrant population in the political arena. I attended the first convention held on Saturday, October 25, 2014: “African Immigrant Caucus,” accessed July 14, 2018, <http://www.africanimmigrantcaucus.org>. See also their facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/Africanimmigrantcaucus/> - Accessed 07/14/2018.

⁶² Takougang, *o.c.*, p. 5.

⁶³ Tom Gjetlten, “The Curious History of ‘Chain Migration’,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20/21, 2018.

⁶⁴ Capps (et al), *New Streams*, 18-19.

⁶⁵ Initially, I aimed for participants similar in age and time lived in the USA, but in course of the search for participants, those criteria were let go as well.

1.3.1 Building Relationships

The search for participants was initiated in the fall of 2013 through oral announcements at two Catholic churches in Northeast Baltimore. All but two of the participants have an affiliation with one of these two church communities. The majority of participants came from one of them. This is the community with the greatest variety in its immigrant community. Following the announcement at the churches, I sought contact and engagement with African communities present at these churches. Contact was made and sustained with the Swahili speaking (predominantly Kenyan) and the Nigerian (predominantly Igbo) communities. I also started attending the Kenyan Women's prayer group (a monthly meeting with rosary prayer and Bible study). Early on, I learned that a relationship of trust needed to develop. Although it was clear that the African migrants had a certain desire to share their stories, they were also very cautious. I came to understand that even though migrants had obtained a legal immigrant status there is still a fear of losing that status. This is especially so among the immigrants who have received asylum, but whose initial mode of arrival (be it legal) may not have disclosed the real reason for coming to the USA.

In 2014 I started working as a Director of Faith Formation to develop one faith formation program for several parishes in the Northeast of Baltimore. This position helped in building trust with parishioners and the African migrants among them.

In February 2015 one person from the Kenyan Women's Prayer group volunteered for the first interview. She suggested that her experience of the interview could help her to encourage others to share their stories as well. She and one other participant became a great help in encouraging others to share their stories. This explains the fairly large number of participants from Kenya. Five participants from Kenya (4 females and 1 male, and all Kikuyu) volunteered through the contact with the Kenyan Women's prayer group, a snowball effect. One other participant from Kenya (female and Kalenjin) volunteered for the interview through the immigrant support center of one of the churches. Seven participants came forward from the families who participate in the faith formation program. Once we became familiar with each other and they became interested in my research project, faith formation participants started volunteering for interviews. This group shows the largest national variety (Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone). One male from Nigeria came forward through another network of relations, but he has been a resident of Northeast Baltimore and used to be a member of one of the churches. The last participant (a woman from

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Rwanda) volunteered during one of those unexpected encounters at a church event and is a parishioner of one of the parishes mentioned. The majority of participants are Catholic (one converted to the Catholic faith). Two participants identified as Christian.

1.3.2 Demographics of Participants

MIGRANT SPIRITUALITY

<i>Participant Pseudonym & Date of Interview</i>	<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Year of Departure</i>	<i># Years in USA *</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Languages</i>	<i>Mode of Entry</i>
Hairi-na-thina 02/09/2015	Kenya	2004	11	Female	31	Kikuyu	Kikuyu, Swahili, English	Green Card Lottery
Fda 05/12/2015	Eritrea	1982/ 1998	17	Male	53	Blen	Blen, Teglina, Arabic, English	Via Sudan, sponsored by brother
Ustahimili 05/25/15	D.R. of Congo	2001	14	Female	54	Black (!)	French, English, Swahili, Lingala, Luba, Congo	Asylum
Kasala 05/27/2015	D.R. of Congo	2001 (08/11)	14	Male	58	Baluba-Kasai	French, Swahili, Lingala, English	Asylum
Okpara 05/30/2015	Nigeria	1992/ 2002	13	Male	52	Igbo	Igbo, English, Japanese	Via Japan & Philippines – Student - citizen

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<i>Participant Pseudonym & Date of Interview</i>	<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Year of Departure</i>	<i># Years in USA *</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Languages</i>	<i>Mode of Entry</i>
Kūohera 06/02/2015	Kenya	2008 (12/12)	6	Female	59	Kikuyu	Kikuyu, Swahili, English	Asylum
Wirigiro 06/02/2015	Kenya	2015 (03/07)	0.25	Male	43	Kikuyu	Kikuyu, English	Family Reunification
Kuriōka 06/02/2015	Kenya	2012 (December)	2.5	Female	45	Kikuyu	English, Kiswahili, Kikuyu	Green Card Lottery
Chi-bu-ike-m 06/12/2015	Nigeria	1998	28	Female	50	Africa (Igbo)	Igbo & English	Student & status adjustment (citizen?)
Unyenyekevu 04/16/2016	Kenya	2011	4.5	Female	55	Kalenjin	Kalenjin, Swahili, English	Asylum

MIGRANT SPIRITUALITY

<i>Participant Pseudonym & Date of Interview</i>	<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Year of Departure</i>	<i># Years in USA *</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Languages</i>	<i>Mode of Entry</i>
Serenity 05/05/16	Liberia	1980	36	Female	50	Americo-Liberian; African /America; Black	English	Sponsored by relatives (fleeing political unrest) - citizen
Isokan 05/06/2016	Nigeria	2015	0.8	Female	41	Yoruba & Black (US)	English & Yoruba	Family Reunification
Utana 09/26/2016	Kenya	2003	12	Female	42	Kikuyu	Kikuyu, English, Swahili	Student & status adjustment
Bahlhoi 10/18/2016	Sierra Leone	2003	13	Male	51	Limba	Krio, Limba, English, French	Green Card Lottery - citizen
Ekpere-di-ike 07/08/2017	Nigeria	1980	36	Male	60	Igbo	English, Igbo	Student & status adjustment – citizen
Myizero 01/29/2018	Rwanda	1981 /via various countries	30	Female	61	Watutsi	Kinyarwanda, French, English	Citizen through marriage

* At the time of the Interview

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1.3.3 Comparison with Data on National and State Level

It is interesting to note that even though the selection of participants was not restrictive, and developed through personal connections and the snowball effect, rather than through structured selection, the sample closely aligns with the numbers of African immigrants that represent the different regions in Africa, the exception being the larger representation of East Africa in the sample as explained above.

Region	USA #	USA %	MD #	MD %	Sample #	Sample %
Africa	2,141,197	100%	159,463	100%	16	100%
East Africa	636,165	30%	42,192	27%	7	44%
North Africa	357,574	17%	7,882	5%	0	0%
West Africa	787,894	37%	83,520	52%	6	37%
Middle & South Africa	254,195	11%	21,932	14%	3	18%
Other (not specified)	114,369	5%	3,973	2%	0	0%

Date Source: "State Demographic Data: Maryland," Migration Policy Institute, accessed July 7, 2018, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics//US/MD>. This comparison is based on the African born population in US and Maryland by region as known at the end of 2016. These numbers do not specify the period of entry into the USA.

The same can be said in regard to the modes of entry of the participants. Their modes of entry reflect the shift from the emphasis on education and family-oriented migration during the last three decades of the twentieth century to an

emphasis of migration on the basis of the diversity programs, family reunification and refugee movements in the twenty-first century.⁶⁶ Of the four participants who arrived before the year 2000, two arrived on student visas and two arrived through family connections. Of the 12 participants who arrived after the year 2000, three arrived through the Green Card lottery, which is part of the diversity program, three arrived through family connections, four asked for asylum upon arrival, and two arrived on student visas.

Evaluation

The presentation of the historical context into which the participants migrate and trends in the experience of African migration to the United States provide some points for consideration. When analyzing their narratives, the following questions should be taken into account: What are their language skills? What is their level of education and professional experience? Does the history of slavery and its ensuing impact on life, in the United States in general and in the Baltimore Metropolitan region in particular, feature in their narratives? Do they experience underemployment? Are they able to connect with supporting communities? Do the participants share other experiences beyond these trends described? Do all of these factors affect their ability to settle?

2. Between Dream and Reality

This second part of the chapter begins the analysis of the narratives shared by the African migrants who participated in this research. I begin with the results of my exploratory level of reading and then present the themes and their different elements that emerged in relation to the theoretical framework and its category “the transitional phases.”

2.1 The Hunch: Facing Loss in Faith

The African migrants’ narratives are rich in detail, each one different and personal. In this section I describe my initial understanding of their narratives and the questions this raised for the process of analysis.

Experiences described in their narratives become relevant as they occur often in a narrative or are found similarly in the narratives of other participants as well. Observations during the interviews and at the time of transcription indicate moments that deserve attention. Where participants showed emotions or put an emphasis on their remarks by vocal or physical expressions this was

⁶⁶ Thomas, “The Increasing Trend in African Emigration,” 3-38 and Capps et al, *New Streams*.

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recorded [in between square brackets] in the transcript. These observations allow for the participants themselves to become a factor in the search for meaningful and relevant fragments in their narratives.

This procedure results in a series of text fragments that create, as it were, a slideshow of a participant's narrative. Each of these text fragments is given a title and a short description or comment and is then assigned a descriptive label. For example, in the first interview the words "challenge", "coping", "God's participation", "identity" and "growth" are used to describe text fragments. As similar experiences also occur in following interviews, they become labels for apparent important elements in the narratives. Through the iterative process of a continuous comparison between the growing numbers of interviews, the list of labeled elements grows and the different dimensions of similar elements develop.

The comparison between the interviews also gave rise to initial ideas regarding the meaning and the relationships between different elements of their narratives. The first relationship I noticed is a connection between text fragments labeled with "Coping Strategy" and with "God's participation". Even though in the exploratory phase of the analysis I could not exactly describe this relationship, it seemed somehow clear that there is one. This resulted in a memo⁶⁷ with the title "Coping Strategies – God infused?"

"The participants display different coping strategies. A question that comes up today is: Do these coping strategies have a common ground? Are they religious in nature?

List of strategies thus far: Contemplation, prayer, hope, faith, and God's participation. Especially P01 and P06 make the connection between God's participation and their ability to cope explicit. Apparently there is a connection between "Coping Strategy" and "God's Participation" I am just not yet sure how exactly I should describe this relationship."⁶⁸

I also noticed that a change in "quality of life" seems to cause experiences of loss, which immigrants must address. In the narratives it seems that the participants naturally turn to their faith and God for support in addressing

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 117-141. Writing memos is a tool used in qualitative research to create a record of the process of analysis.

⁶⁸ This memo dates from December 3, 2015 and as the analysis continued this memo developed. For each participant a short paragraph was added which describes the coping strategies of that particular participant in relation to how the participants seemed to experience God's presence in their struggles. As these descriptions developed, so did the understanding of the relationship between the presence of God and the ability to cope in the narratives of the African migrants.

these experiences of loss. However, the more individualist and secularized society they encountered in the United States seems to impact their access to this resource: for some this becomes a struggle they experience in loneliness and even doubt, for others their faith seems to become more individual and intentional.

These observations lead to the following hunches: first, that the effect of their migration experiences on their sense of identity might be found in the exploration of experiences of loss, and second, that the ability to reach out to God and experience God in the challenges they encounter affects their ability to cope. I wonder therefore if “experiences of loss” and “God’s participation” can be plot elements in their narratives. I also wonder if I have formulated my research question correctly. In their narratives the African migrants show that faith as a resource comes naturally to them. Should I not speak of transformation in faith, rather than transformation of faith?

2.2 *Departure: Becoming the Emigrant*

In the narratives of the African migrants, I deduced two elements that are important for understanding their decision to leave their home country: first, the multiplicity of the factors that informed this decision and, second, their hopes and dreams regarding the destination country.

2.2.1 *Reasons for Departure*

How the African migrants experience the departure from their home country is determined by the reasons for that departure and whether these reasons are experienced as a positive choice or something that is forced upon them. Participants stated four things they were seeking: safety, a dream, education, or family life. These reasons for departure influence the type of legal entry or immigration status sought. On a first impression, it seems that only the departure of the participants who filed for asylum is forced. The departure of the participants who come through the Green Card lottery, for education, and to be reunited with their family appears to be a free choice. However, listening closely to their narratives, the reasons for their departure, or for not returning to their home country, appear to be more complex. “Reasons for departure” form one of narratives’ themes for the sub-category departure or becoming the emigrant.

Seeking safety

Ustahimili, her husband Kasala, Kūohera, and Unyenyekevu all arrived in the United States with visitor’s visas, but in their narratives it becomes very clear

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that their actual reason was to seek asylum. They were forced to leave due to being caught in the middle of political conflicts or life-threatening circumstances in their home country.

Ustahimili

“It came, the dog, it is so scared, it will come at the parents’ window, and the way he was... Yeah, not the normal barking, like crying [makes whimpering sound] ... and my husband said: Oh, did you hear it? Something is wrong. Normally he is not like this, but like [makes deep barking sound]. Something is going on. So my husband starts going out. And his younger brother, who was living with us and he said, [very low whisper]: “Don’t go outside, we have visitor, militaries. I saw them at my window. They are at the window. They are like three, four with guns. Don’t open the door. Go back all in your room. Nobody move. Go to tell the girls: nobody move!” So, he was trying to see, because sometime they can shoot in the door. So we stay only quiet. You see they are going to the main door; coming to my window. I saw them looking at the two cars that we have in front of the house. And then, they knock at the door, move the door, and they left. When they left, he come he say: “I saw them leaving, but don’t open the door. Stay.” [Pause...] I was so scared...”⁶⁹

Ustahimili refused to cooperate to falsify the financial papers of the international company she worked for, so the government could extract more tax money from the company. Upon her refusal she was taken into custody under strenuous circumstances (in the heat, without water or food, forced to stand all the time, etc.), her identification papers and passport were confiscated, and she and her husband received threatening night visits from the military at their house, as described above. Her company was able to retrieve her passport. The company arranged for her and her husband Kasala and their children to leave on a vacation abroad, with the message to not return.

Kūohera was threatened and attacked by the Mungiki, who did not appreciate her work fighting for women with HIV and against female circumcision.⁷⁰ She escaped a beheading (with a head wound and a lost finger). She was able

⁶⁹ Ustahimili, interview by TJM van Gaal, May 25, 2015, (Q5: 14).

⁷⁰ The Mungiki are an offshoot gang of a religious sect among the Kikuyu. They want to go back to the traditional tribal beliefs (among which female circumcision). They are a violent movement and will kill everyone opposing their ideas. Kūohera, as a women’s activist was a victim of their violence. Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-gang-mungiki-sb-idUSTRE52537620090306> - accessed 07/05/2017.

to receive a visitor's visa to the USA, when a friend invited her to come to her graduation ceremony.⁷¹

Ustahimili, Kasala, and Kūohera filed for asylum as soon as they were able.

Unyenyekevu's departure, however, was not planned at all. Rather she could not go home after attending a conference for women politicians in New York City. She came to the conference on a visitor's visa. While she was in the United States a case against the Kenyan government was brought to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Because she was out of the country and at a political congress when the indictments were made public in 2011, Kenyan government forces assumed that Unyenyekevu was going to be a witness and they started threatening her family. The government was trying to eliminate anybody who could incriminate them regarding the political killings that happened following the 2007 election.⁷² Unyenyekevu overstayed her visitor's visa and wandered undocumented and homeless for about two years before she was able to start the long journey toward a documented status in the USA through asylum.⁷³

Seeking the dream

Kuriōka

"Having come from Africa and especially from Kenya, America is taken as a land of opportunities; a land of milk and honey. Everybody back there in Africa wants to come to America. And especially coming through a Green Card, they always tell you, who are applying, that you want to leave work and stay in America, then apply for the Green Card. It's made kind of very easy... And people who go would say that coming here [in the USA], that a nurse could get a good job, so it was like, things was made kind of very easy."⁷⁴

The experiences of the participants who came to the USA through the diversity program and won, by lottery, the coveted Green Card, are not as straightforward as one would think. Listening closely to their narratives, it becomes clear that different pull and push factors determine the decision to leave. The decision to enter the lottery is prompted by the pull of the

⁷¹ Kūohera, Interview by TJM Gaal, June 2, 2015, (Q6: 16).

⁷² Unyenyekevu, Interview by TJM van Gaal, April 16, 2016, (Q10: 3).

⁷³ Some sources with background on the International Criminal Court's case against Kenya: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/kenya> and <http://www.coalitionfortheicc.org/country/kenya> - accessed 07/16/2018.

⁷⁴ Kuriōka, Interview by researcher, June 2, 2015, (Q8: 3).

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“American dream.” Friends, colleagues, or family members encouraged the narrators to participate in the diversity lottery. They spoke of America as a “land of opportunities.” Participants were reminded of the many stories that go around that a better life and “greener pastures” can be found in the USA. For Hatiri-na-thina it is the struggle to advance in education and acquiring good and stable jobs that pushes her to leave. The lack of economic growth in her home country inhibits the ability to “become the person that you want to be.”⁷⁵

Kuriōka also mentions education as a reason for departure. Her husband hoped for a better education for their children and that is how he convinced her to leave behind her work and life and come to the USA. Kuriōka was an established and happy professional, wife and mother. She was very taken aback when her husband told her that he had won a Green Card. She emphasizes multiple times during the interview that she did not want to come to the USA. But her husband kept saying to her: “This process is not about me, or it was not about him as my husband, it was about our children.”⁷⁶

Bahlohoi shares how he was encouraged to apply to the diversity lottery by his colleagues. When he learned he had won the lottery and could apply for the Green Card, Bahlohoi initially was hesitant to engage the process, which he describes as long and costly.⁷⁷ But both his and his wife’s families convinced him that this was an opportunity not to be missed.⁷⁸ Often, the family left behind hopes to share in the fortunes that may befall those who depart.

Seeking education

Ekpere-di-ike

“Initially when I came [it] was purely for educational purposes. I’d finish; I’ll go back and see where I can help... But unfortunately, while I am here, there was a coup in Nigeria. The military took over. So, I was kind of, eh, forced to uh, rearrange my thought about staying.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Hatiri-na-thina, Interview by TJM van Gaal, February 9, 2015, (Q1: 1 & 8).

⁷⁶ Kuriōka, (Q8: 13).

⁷⁷ Applicants for a Green Card through the diversity program must gather supporting papers (for which fees must be paid), schedule medical visits for health exams and vaccinations (with uninsured costs) in the same country as the embassy where the interview will take place (often in a different country, which adds travel costs), and pay the costs to submit forms to the embassy or the US government: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/diversity-visa-program-entry/diversity-visa-if-you-are-selected.html> - accessed 09/28/2018.

⁷⁸ Bahlohoi, Interview by TJM van Gaal, October 18, 2016, (Q14: 8-9).

⁷⁹ Ekpere-di-ike, Interview by TJM van Gaal, July 8, 2017, (Q15: 1).

The circumstances for coming to and settling in the USA are similarly complex for those participants who came to receive an education.

Okpara, for example, came to receive a pastoral counseling degree to advance his wish to become a lay minister. He never intended to stay or to bring his family to the USA. However, circumstances changed. He could no longer afford the costs of a family living on two continents, so he applied for his wife and children to join him on his student visa.⁸⁰ As their stay in the USA became more permanent in nature and their children grew up here, the wish to go back remained, but also became less of a reality.

Ūtana shares how a month of training at Cornell “opened me to a lot of, you know what, there’s endless [educational] opportunity in this place.”⁸¹ Upon her return she found out that her company was going to relocate and she was about to lose her job. So she took her chance, obtained another visitor’s visa to see if she could pursue further education here. She managed to enroll in college and to change her visa and immigrant status.

Ekpere-di-ike, who came in 1980, had to change his plan when a military coup in his home country prevented his return home.

Chi-bu-ike-m, experienced a pull to go study and to experience American life fresh from high school. She had become curious about life in America for two reasons. The first was what she had learned during a world history class: “From the inspiration they gave you just like, it’s a golden land, land of opportunity.”⁸² Second, she was encouraged by the change she noticed in family members who already lived in the USA. They seemed to be different when they visited: “Yes, different in a good way, in a positive way...”⁸³ Maybe Chi-bu-ike-m, is the one person for whom the reason to depart and stay was not as complex. Her experience upon arrival, however, would be anything but simple.

Seeking family life

Wirigiro

“But in me I was not comfortable with coming in US. But because our daughter was back there at home I had no choice. Because every day she was crying: “I want to go to you as to meet my mum and my brother who are in the US.” So... It was tough. So now a small child is back there to home. I’m in Dubai... That time you don’t... feel you have the freedom to go

⁸⁰ Okpara, Interview by TJM van Gaal, May 30, 2015, (Q4: 73-76).

⁸¹ Ūtana, Interview by TJM van Gaal, September 26, 2016, (Q13: 2).

⁸² Chi-bu-ike-m, Interview by TJM van Gaal, June 12, 2015, (Q9: 1).

⁸³ Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 3).

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somewhere and I was not feeling less I could go back now. That is the kid back there at home. So, I had no choice.”⁸⁴

Participants who were sponsored by family or came through the family reunification program also shared complex circumstances.

Wirigiro came to the USA with his daughter to join his wife and son. When his wife and son left Kenya for the USA, he was working in Dubai and their daughter was in boarding school in Kenya. Once all the paperwork was in order, his wife applied for him and their daughter to come as well. He expresses that he had no other choice and felt forced to come. He would have rather stayed in Dubai, where his socio-economic circumstances were more comfortable than either his home country or what he is experiencing in the USA.

Fda shares that he first left his home country to work in Sudan before his brother sponsored him and his other brother to come to the US. Fda and his brother moved to Sudan due to the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. As young men they could get caught in the middle of the conflict. The Ethiopian army or either of the two Eritrean parties could arrest young men and put them in jail if they did not want to fight. Even though his brother sponsored Fda to come to the USA on a family reunification visa, the real reason for his departure was the political and military conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. When the military conflict was resolved, he initially developed a transnational life. He met his wife during a vacation in Eritrea. They married, but she continues to live in Eritrea while he lives and works in the USA, as this is economically more profitable. Their first-born was born in Eritrea. His birth changed the dynamic. Pressured by his relatives, who believe that life in the USA must be better, he applied for family reunification for his wife and child. It is then that Fda's settlement in the USA became permanent.⁸⁵

Isokan came to the USA in 2015 to finally reunite her son with his father, who had left the country before they knew she was pregnant. She waited many years for him and when they finally married her husband applied for family reunification. Isokan said that, even though she really wanted her son to be connected to his father, she initially did not wish to settle permanently in the USA. Her sister, who lives in France, had warned her that life in Europe or the USA is not how it is usually pictured.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Wirigiro, Interview by TJM van Gaal, June 2, 2015, (Q7: 1-4).

⁸⁵ Fda, Interview by TJM van Gaal, May 12, 2015, (Q2: 1-2).

⁸⁶ Isokan, Interview by TJM van Gaal, May 6, 2016, (Q12: 15).

Serenity, as a teenager, did not have say in the matter. Her mother sent her and one of her brothers to family in the USA after a military coup in Liberia. Serenity's mother believed "the United States would be a safer place for her family."⁸⁷

2.2.2 *Goals, Hopes, and the American Dream*

The reasons for departure, as described above, give us some insight in the initial goals, but the reasons for departure and their goals do not entirely coincide. The central characteristic of the goals and hopes with which the African migrants set out on their migration journey is the dream that life in the USA will be better and will provide, with the words of Hatiri-na-thina and Kūohera, "greener pastures."

Chi-bu-ike-m

"And just like a lot is being said about America. You know, from the inspiration they gave you just like, it's a golden land, land of opportunity. So I said, I'd love to go there, I'd love to visit it. The way it was described is like, paradise, like Garden of Eden. And my country is beautiful, but after hearing the story about America, I said, it would be a nice thing to visit, to go there, and see what it is. You know, out of curiosity."⁸⁸

The initial goal for Ustahimili, her husband Kasala, and Kūohera was to seek asylum and to find safety and freedom to live in peace and according to their values. Their choice to seek asylum in the USA was influenced by the stories they heard about the USA as a country where dreams come true and where one can find "greener pastures." Kūohera, after experiencing a horrendous attack on her life, was grateful to know someone who had already settled in the USA. She was able to receive an invitation to visit. When this person did not pick her up from the airport, she became a true refugee. And after some initial despair and remembering where she came from, she told herself: "Why don't I look for green pastures?" and filed for asylum.⁸⁹

Ustahimili, her husband, and children upon departure were traveling places, as her work would usually allow her for vacation. They had to depart so unexpectedly, that they left unprepared and without any specific plans or intentions. Their initial idea was to go to Canada to file for asylum, as there at least they spoke French. On their way to Canada they made a stop in the USA

⁸⁷ Serenity, Interview by TJM van Gaal, May 5, 2016, (Q11: 1).

⁸⁸ Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 1).

⁸⁹ Kūohera, (Q6: 14).

to visit people they knew. They were told that jobs in Canada were hard to come by. Expectations were raised that with their work experience, the USA was the country with more opportunities.⁹⁰ To this prospective, Kasala then adds the hope that it would be easier to integrate in the USA, as he was thinking: "It's a melting pot."⁹¹

The initial goals and hopes of the majority of the participants are also connected to the expectation that the USA will offer them a better life. Hatirina-thina and her husband, Fda, Wirigiro, Kuriōka and her husband, Chi-bu-ike-m, Ūtana, Bahlohoi, and Ekpere-di-ike all connect their hopes for job stability, better economic status, and better education to the stories of the USA as "a land of milk and honey," a "paradise, like Garden of Eden," and as "a land of opportunities." For instance, Kuriōka, shares that she was told that with her senior nursing experience finding a good job in the USA would be easy. Her husband and Wirigiro have heard the same stories: "Many people want to go to America, and that's where, life is easy there. You go and get a good job..."⁹² As noted above Ustahimili and Kasala received a similar encouragement. Chi-bu-ike-m, Ūtana, and Ekpere-di-ike are drawn to the USA by the education opportunities that the country offers in the hope to receive a better education. Ekpere-di-ike shares how he was encouraged to come to the USA by Americans he had met at his job at the bank working the foreign exchange desk. When he shared with them that he wanted to pursue a degree in architecture they said to him: "Well, have you thought about going to America?"⁹³

Exceptions to these observations are Okpara, Unyenyekevu, Isokan, Myizero, and maybe even Kuriōka. Okpara claims that he never looked at the USA as land of opportunity,⁹⁴ a perspective he shares with Isokan, who had been warned by her sister that life in the USA isn't as ideal as it often is portrayed. Unyenyekevu never intended to come the USA, but could not return to her country. Her initial stay was marked by survival. Myizero followed her husband and initially does not voice any particular goals, but later on her journey she sets a goal to become educated.⁹⁵ Finally, Kuriōka's narrative is ambiguous. She shares how people convince her to go along with her husband's idea to migrate to the USA, because they believe life would be easy and so much better. However, in her narrative she repeats several times: "Soo,

⁹⁰ Ustahimili, (Q5: 4).

⁹¹ Kasala, Interview by TJM van Gaal, May 27, 2015, (Q3: 6).

⁹² Kuriōka, (Q8: 21).

⁹³ Ekpere-di-ike, (Q15: 4).

⁹⁴ Okpara, (Q4: 73).

⁹⁵ Myizero, (Q16: 6).

he convinced me, and when the time came, we just came, but... I didn't; personally, I didn't really have a goal that I was coming to achieve here. As I told you, it was never my idea."⁹⁶

2.3 *Arrival in the New Country: Becoming the Immigrant*

When describing their arrival in the USA one theme emerged in all participants' narratives: "it wasn't easy" or "it was a challenge". Even when they were received well by friends or family, their first experience of life in the USA was predominantly not positive or easy. Fda, and Ekpere-di-ike might be an exception as they were able to see some positives. They were young and did not immediately have a family to care for. Neither did Chi-bu-ike-m, who came to attend college in the USA, but the harsh realities of life in the USA (the amount of crime and murder in the city where she settled) scared the living daylights out of her.

In their narratives the African migrants explain that the challenges in their experience of arrival are caused by the immigration procedures and by the initial obstacles they encounter upon arrival. The encounter of their expectations of life with the reality of life in the USA forms the main theme for the sub-category arrival or becoming the emigrant.

2.3.1 *Immigration Procedures: Acquiring a Visa and Entering*

Bahlohoi

So, all issues related to immigrations were done in neighboring countries. The immigration visa was in La Côte d'Ivoire. [Pause] So I said, okay. So I had to pay the flight. Yeah, yeah, yeah, so it cost me, you know, a couple of thousand dollars. I mean hundreds of dollars. So, so we went. And, um, because I did not know the process, I didn't read nothing, I mean, there was not, not much information. So, I went there and they said that one of the requirements is that you have to fill out the form, consent form. You have to take the HIV test, and all this physical stuff, that I didn't even budget for. [Breath] You know, but we went through the process. You know, so, we went through the interview... So we were there for like, three days. So during those three days we did all the, the physical tests. So, the embassy had like, pre-selected medical doctors that you went to. So, so they took blood sample, dadada, [and] they sent the result directly to the embassy. So we showed up, they said fine, so they gave us... [breath] In fact, they didn't give the visa during those two days, but, I had to go back to Sierra Leone."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Kuriōka, (Q8: 25).

⁹⁷ Bahlohoi, (Q14: 8). In this quote Bahlohoi names almost all elements of attaining the Green Card, once eligible by winning the diversity lottery.

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All African migrants participating in the research (initially) entered the USA via a legally acknowledged route and received, in due time, the correct papers and visas. Nevertheless, the procedures are experienced as long, difficult, costly, and anxious at times. Kuriōka and Bahlohoi describe the whole process in detail, here above illustrated by Bahlohoi's account. Isokan gives insight in the experience of a visit to the embassy on her interview day. She explains that you cannot bring your phone, how anxious she was while waiting to be called for the interview, and the many questions she was asked. The whole experience made a big impression on her and she remembers the day: Holy Thursday, 2015.

Ustahimili, Kasala, and Kūohera share how they felt apprehensive and anxious upon their arrival. Even though they entered as visitors with legally correct papers, they arrived with a different underlying intention: seeking asylum. Ustahimili remembers that during the interview for the asylum procedure she was anxious to share her full story, but being too detailed in her story telling she was interrupted. During the interview itself she had to change something in herself. On the spot she had to adjust to (what she perceives as) the American way of being concise.⁹⁸ Ustahimili describes how they waited for the pre-approval of their Asylum and then later for an indefinite approval of their status. She then states: "So that is where the peace comes in," and reiterates how she learned to become more to the point. Even though she may not have conveyed all the threats she experienced in full detail during the asylum procedure, during the interview, she is very detailed and the tension, the fear she experienced is palpable. It is interesting to note that in the course of the interview she would indicate something important by saying: "The *pointe* is..." Consistently using the French word "*pointe*".

Kūohera shared her anxiety of being sent back, when the person who underwrote her visa application did not come to pick her up from the airport. She had been told, "If you are not careful in America, then they take you to back with the same flight that you used."⁹⁹ Luckily her friend was willing to talk to the security guard (by phone) and with the (not entirely true) promise that she would be picked up the next day, she was escorted to a nearby hotel.

Unyenyekevu and Ūtana both experienced a lapse in their legal status. Unyenyekevu could not return home due to political turmoil in her home country. She overstayed her visitor's visa and experienced a period of being undocumented and homeless before she was able to apply for asylum. Ūtana experienced some problems with her status transition from visitor's visa to a

⁹⁸ Ustahimili, (Q: 123).

⁹⁹ Kūohera, (Q6: 3).

student visa, but she did succeed and calls it one of the many miracles that happened in her life.

Exceptions to these experiences are Hatiri-na-thina, Fda, Okpara, Chi-bu-ike-m, Serenity, Ekpere-di-ike, and Myizero. They came as young adults, as a teenager, or arrived before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. They do not share how they obtained their visas. Hatiri-na-thina, however, expresses her gratitude that her transition was very smooth compared to other immigrants she knows:

“The one thing where I do not have any regret is, I was very fortunate to come to this country with Green Card. So I do not have challenges to worry about driving without a license, you know going to apply for a job, you know. That one I thank God, cause I’ve never experienced that kind of hardship, you know. So place that I go to apply the work. I go there confidently. Knowing that if I get a job, you know, it’s a blessing and if I don’t get a job, no one will follow me and ask me, you know, this or that.”¹⁰⁰

2.3.2 *Expectations versus Reality: Two Major Obstacles*

After the African migrants receive an immigrant status, the journey continues. They quickly run into two obstacles: learning to navigate the system that governs US society and the language barrier. This clash between their expectations of and the reality of life in the USA requires an adjustment of the migrants’ goals and dreams.

“The system”

Wirigiro

“But when I came things were not like the way I thought. I met things are different. Here you go by the system. If you don’t have a social security number, you cannot work. So it’s a bit challenging.”¹⁰¹

One of the biggest obstacles upon arrival is the lack of knowledge on how to access the “the system.” As Ustahimili repeats several times during the interview: “Nobody told us, nobody.”¹⁰² To be able to access and negotiate “the system” or USA society, one needs to acquire the correct identity (ID) papers,

¹⁰⁰ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 20).

¹⁰¹ Wirigiro, (Q7: 31).

¹⁰² Florence Nyemba and Lisa Vaughn confirm this experience when the women in their research address the topic of unfulfilled dreams. See: Nyemba and Vaughn, “Migration Experiences of Black Zimbabwean Women,” 89-92.

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starting with obtaining the social security number. This social security number gives you access to all kinds of other social systems: the much needed driver's license which does not only enable you to transport yourself, but also serves as a legal ID card; access to healthcare and the correct vaccinations as a requirement to attend school; access to housing, gas, electric, and a phone; access to education, but also welfare or social security support such as food stamps and certain health benefits.

Ustahimili and Unyenyekevu speak about the necessity of an ID card to obtain housing and the correct papers to obtain said ID card. Ustahimili shares how in the beginning her family was moved from place to place, staying in hotels or with people they did not even know. One of their hosts tried to help them to find them an apartment, initially in vain, as "they don't have identity over here."¹⁰³ Not having an ID card, to her, feels like not having an identity. In Unyenyekevu's case, at the time of the interview, her request for asylum is still in process, which means she did not have access to the much-needed social security number. She did receive a work permit and a tax ID number, but these documents no longer (due to a change in law) allow an applicant to receive a driver's license or state ID.¹⁰⁴

Ustahimili also speaks extensively about how the different systems are connected and how one can form a requirement for another. She shares the obstacles she ran into when trying to register her children for school. Schools are responsible for making sure that children's' health records and vaccinations are up to date. Ustahimili was not aware of this. The law says that children do have to attend school, but then they cannot attend if their health records are not up to date.¹⁰⁵

Participants share how important it is to know how things work in this country and how to find the correct information. Not knowing makes them feel bad, stupid, and ignorant. People would give them the impression how easy one could get the things needed, but nobody explained the details or pointed to possible complications. Kuriōka explains, even though it is not easy to obtain the much needed information, once one is able to gain access to system life does become easier:

"It's only that when you don't know the information, you look like a fool.
And some people they don't want to give you information. But when you

¹⁰³ Ustahimili, (Q5: 33).

¹⁰⁴ Unyenyekevu, Q13: 13).

¹⁰⁵ Ustahimili, (Q5: 42).

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know where to go and exact information, when you know what to do, life becomes kind of easier.”¹⁰⁶

The majority of the participants share this experience of having to learn to navigate the system of how society works in the USA.

The language barrier

Chi-bu-ike-m

“The language barrier... I couldn’t understand sometimes what they’re saying. And they couldn’t understand what I’m saying. So it was just so frustrating.”¹⁰⁷

The ability to address these issues is hampered by the language barrier. Even though most of the participants are multi-lingual and have a good command of the English language (apart from Ustahimili and Kasala who originate from a French speaking country and did not have much exposure to English – as Myizero did – before arriving in the US), their African and predominantly British-oriented accent is met with misunderstanding. It immediately causes them to be observed as strangers, foreigners, or aliens. All participants mention this experience as they highlight different aspects of this experience. First, there is the discovery that American English differs from the English they are used to. This can be both frustrating and exhausting, as both understanding and being understood asks an extra effort. Myizero, is surprised that most Americans only speak one language and explains how having to switch languages (speaking both French and English) can be exhausting.¹⁰⁸ The language barrier also causes the experience of being muted. The reactions to their different manner of speaking English or to their struggle in learning American English, causes some of the participants to become silent or hesitant to speak out. Ustahimili says about this: “Immigrants, they are shy... Because, when you talk, you try to make people understand what is not easy. You stay only quiet.”¹⁰⁹ Serenity, for instance, shows how as a teenager she coped with this experience by becoming a quiet teenager and how later she taught herself to adapt her speech to the people she was interacting with, switching between a Liberian or American accent.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Kuriōka, (Q8: 112).

¹⁰⁷ Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 27).

¹⁰⁸ Myizero, (Q16: 1).

¹⁰⁹ Ustahimili, (Q5: 38).

¹¹⁰ Serenity, (Q11: 3 & 11).

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Another aspect of the language barrier, which participants share is that it causes them to be perceived differently, even as inferior. Kūohera says the “when they know you are a foreigner, US people have an attitude.”¹¹¹ She illustrates this by sharing about the first time she was a lector in church and how one of the parishioners after mass came to her and asked her when she had learned to read. The experience that participants share is that as soon as Americans detect an accent in your speech you will be treated differently. In the case of Kūohera her education was not acknowledged: as if she could not read before. In the case of Bahlohoi, his expertise was not acknowledged. Back home he used to work for the same organization he has been working for in the USA. Back home he was a director for their program in his country, but here in the USA he has become more like an intern, whose knowledge does not matter, and even if he tried to point out they were wrong about certain topics, nobody would listen to him, because “they thought about, “oh, he has accent, he doesn’t know much...”¹¹²

Adjusting goals and dreams

Fda

“But now [if] it is between me and the children, the children have the priority. And I choose for the children this: The United States... That’s why I keep going [...] I had my chance... But now, in reality they are depending on me... From here on it should be their priority. Because mine is not going make a difference much, even though if I take it my way, my life is not going to make much. But theirs, they can do so much different.”¹¹³

In the course of their migration journey, all the African migrants in their narratives speak of the need to adjust their goals, their hopes and dreams when, upon arrival, they encounter the reality of life in the USA. Wirigiro describes this experience when he says: “Because the time I was coming I had my own goals. And the time you’ll reach the place and you see that things are different.”¹¹⁴

In whichever way each of the African migrants had to adjust her or his goals, there is one goal that develops in all the narratives: the ability to provide a safer home and better education for their children. In the quote above, Fda expresses this when he describes how he had to let go his initial goal of

¹¹¹ Kūohera, (Q5: 54).

¹¹² Bahlohoi, (Q14: 12).

¹¹³ Fda, (Q2: 13 & 15).

¹¹⁴ Wirigiro, (Q7: 25).

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migration (living as a transnational family with the goal to return to the home country) and how his goal shifts from his own dreams and wishes to a future for his children.

This is also true for Kūohera and Unyenyekēvu. Even though they had to leave their children and grandchildren behind they continue to care for them and, from their small earnings, they send them money to provide them with a good education and a better chance at life. Kūohera, who describes herself as the “father and the mother” of her family, is grateful that she is able to earn some money to send home to support her family:

“All the same time, I’m happy, because I’m able to help them. Continuing with, that they are living a good life: A better life, than before. [becomes more emotional] Because if I have 500 dollars [sniffles], and send to them, they will buy what they don’t have...”¹¹⁵

Unyenyekēvu explains how she wants her children and grandchildren to move upwards and that she sacrifices and works day and night so that if she “died today, I know my kids and my grandchildren would be somewhere. That is what I believe.”¹¹⁶

Whether or not the African migrants were drawn to the USA because of its epithet of being the “land of opportunity”, the majority of the participants have very high expectations in regards to these opportunities and the life that will await them in the USA. It is this portrayal of America as a land of opportunities, where people live an easy life, where Kasala expects it is easy to integrate, and where Wirigiro expects to easily attain a good socio-economic status that raises their expectations. Upon arrival however, they quickly discover that the reality of life in the USA is quite different from their high expectations. They are shocked by the amount of crime and violence they encounter in a country that they expect to be so perfect that everybody is supposed to be happy. The obstacles they encounter upon arrival are an unpleasant surprise and they have to face the need to adjust their goals and dreams. Addressing these challenges is “not easy” and “challenging” and their ability to overcome these obstacles will impact their ability to negotiate any other challenges they will face on their journey.

¹¹⁵ Kūohera, (Q6: 26).

¹¹⁶ Unyenyekēvu, (Q10: 36).

2.4 *Negotiating the Old and the New: Becoming the Migrant*

The African migrants who participated in the research generously share about their experiences of negotiating life in the new home country. From their narratives two themes emerge. On the one hand, their narratives speak about the many challenges they face on this journey. On the other hand, they speak of the opportunities they receive and the successes they achieve on this journey. These are the two main themes for the sub-category negotiation and settlement or becoming the emigrant.

2.4.1 *Challenges Faced*

Building a new life in the USA begins with learning to navigate a new society with its own system, ways of doing and being. In their narratives the African migrants share that building a new way of life in the USA is not without its challenges. It impacted their daily lives economically, culturally, socially, religiously, and personally.

Economic challenges

Kuriōka

“So you can imagine a whole nurse who has worked for 18 years, now you are being taking as you have never been to school. [Indignant] You are go and do being caregivers... Nobody will respect a certificate from another country... Until you go through their process. So, despite all that, I still had to look for that CNA [Certified Nurse Assistant] job, because nobody would even give me work as a nurse, ...because they ask me for the American experience, but what is it here that you have?”¹¹⁷

In the majority of the narratives African migrants speak about how they struggle economically. The USA society has developed a more complex economy, which adds more financial items onto a family's budget. Furthermore, those who arrived as adults realize that they have to start at the bottom of the career ladder. This affects their household income.

First, they need to adjust to the way in which U.S. society is organized economically. Wirigiro illustrates this nicely when he says: “By the end of the month bills are looking at you like this... You don't know where to start, where to begin.”¹¹⁸ This quote points to the multiple aspects to the cost of living in the USA, such as rent, gas, electric, television and the Internet, and

¹¹⁷ Kuriōka, (Q8: 145).

¹¹⁸ Wirigiro, (Q7: 18).

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insurances for liability, house, health, and car.¹¹⁹ Responding to all these unexpected expenses is not easy, although Isokan also sees the positive side of the way American society is organized, because as long as you pay your bills “all of the amenities are in place.”¹²⁰

Second, migrants have difficulty finding a job with sufficient income. This hampers their ability to address the multiple costs of living. The majority of participants have a hard time finding jobs, which recognize their education and professional experience. Most of the adult African migrants started out being unemployed or underemployed, working manual jobs that are physically challenging, or low-level caregiving jobs. Kasala explains how he and his wife started working “under the table.” When they received their asylum status, they found jobs in a hotel as housekeeper and kitchen steward. Both Kasala and Ustahimili were accountants back home. Kasala worked as an inspector for the government and Ustahimili worked as an accountant for an international company.¹²¹

Third, most of the participants had to invest time in obtaining proficiency in American English. Then, the majority of the participants who came as adults (but not for the purpose of education) discovered they had to redo their higher education, or obtain new certification for their professions. Ustahimili gives an extensive account about her long journey to receive the undergraduate and graduate education to be able to start working as an accountant again. Starting with English classes and attending community college, she later transferred to a private college, graduated and then applied for graduate school. She had to navigate meeting all the educational requirements, while also maintaining jobs on the side to keep the family financially afloat.¹²² But even when graduation is achieved or certificates are obtained, a job on their level of education or work experience is still not guaranteed, as their professional experience in their home country might not be accepted. Kuriōka shared how she managed to pass the board exam to become a Registered Nurse. Nevertheless, at the time of the interview she still worked as a Certified Nurse Assistant. Her 18 years of work as a senior nurse in her home country was not recognized.

¹¹⁹ Wirigiro, (Q7: 24).

¹²⁰ Isokan, (Q12: 18).

¹²¹ Kasala, (Q3: 13).

¹²² Ustahimili, (Q5: 50).

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Cultural challenges

Serenity

“I’m here [when] I’m in school but I when I go home I’m in my Liberian community. And so, that immigrant experience was: the food was different and at my high school in Minnesota the only thing I would eat every day was a cheeseburger every day for two years because I kind of recognized the bread and I kind of recognized the meat. I wouldn’t eat anything else because I was like, I don’t know what that is and it looks crazy, um, that corn dog I was like, I don’t understand what that is, right? So, because for me: my mom it was still rice and whatever stews or greens or whatever we eat, so for me for those two years I was like I’m a Liberian in America, but my home life is still very much a Liberian. There was a huge Liberian community in Minnesota, so I was IN [tone raises] there, you know, I mean. Now I think there’s about 10,000. But, there was always, there were always things going on and I was always immersed in that community.”¹²³

When the African migrants in their narratives address the cultural challenges they encounter five issues emerge: raising children, marriage dynamics, moral values, food, and community life.

Raising children in America is different. Hatiri-na-thina and Fda explain that their children are less independent compared to children in their home country. In the USA children do not have as much opportunity to play, learn by experience, and discover life on their own, as adult supervision is expected at all times.¹²⁴ The outdoors may not always be safe enough, but there are also rules and expectations in regard to children’s safety. Combining work and childcare is also a problem, as childcare is expensive and older siblings cannot watch over younger siblings until they have a certain age (according to Maryland law).¹²⁵

At the same time the marriage dynamic is challenged. First of all, it is easier to employ women, because housekeeping and caregiving are always necessary. Secondly, both spouses have to work to survive economically, so the dynamic of authority and dependency changes. Both realities are harder for the husbands to accept than for the wives. In the case of Ustahimili and Kasala this really has put a stress on their marriage. Ustahimili immerses herself in the demands of their new life, but her husband, who feels humiliated, cannot seem to engage this new life. Wirigiro expresses that it is

¹²³ Serenity, (Q11: 9).

¹²⁴ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 19) and Fda, (Q2: 21).

¹²⁵ Kuriōka, (Q8: 45).

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not good if a father cannot be the provider of the house,¹²⁶ and Kuriōka shares how her husband is upset when discovers that his children get around better and have more social and cultural knowledge than he does.¹²⁷

African migrants experience a cultural difference in moral values. For instance, Chi-bu-ike-m¹²⁸ and Isokan are shocked by the acceptance of gender diversity. Isokan is also shocked by the lack of respect for elderly, but even more by the pride some people show for having been in jail.¹²⁹

And last but not least there is the cultural difference in food and its connection with enjoying life. Serenity describes in the quote above, how she did not understand American food, and how she was happy that her mother would cook Liberian food. She also describes how she could immerse herself in the Liberian community. Not all African migrants, who participated in this research, had this opportunity, because there was no ethnic community present for them. Furthermore, the economic demands of life in the USA are an obstacle to attend to family, faith, and the other joys of living.

Social challenges

Ekpere-di-ike

“It [life] becomes impersonal. So, eh... your pain is not their pain. They don’t care about if you are suffering. Or even whether you are getting better or not. They don’t care about that. Just—It’s uh, well it’s horrible.”¹³⁰

In their narratives the African migrants point to two major social challenges they encounter: the individualistic society and the demographic division that characterizes USA society.

The realization that the USA society is an individualistic society creates a major challenge for the participants. It is an experience that seeps into all other experiences, such as lack of support, the loneliness experienced, but is most deeply felt in the loss of sense of community and a sense of belonging: One is no longer seen or known, as Ekpere-di-ike explains in the quote above. The other confronting social challenge is the demographic division that African migrants encounter in the USA. First, there is the racial division.

¹²⁶ Wirigiro, (Q7: 19-20).

¹²⁷ Kuriōka, (Q8: 105).

¹²⁸ Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 11).

¹²⁹ Isokan, (Q12: 12).

¹³⁰ Ekpere-di-ike, (Q15: 11).

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Isokan

“I’m like: Why are you people so... you know? What is the big deal with everybody in the room being white or the big deal with everybody in the room being Black? So (laughs a little) I think there’s now, even in the church, now, I’m like: Okay. How many of us are Black? How many are African American? (laughs) But, every time I just tell myself: No. That mentality is not coming to me. I am not going to accept that. It doesn’t matter if people in this room are Black or white.”¹³¹

All of a sudden they are perceived as “Black” and as a minority. In general, however, participants share that they try to distance themselves from looking at society with a racist lens, as Isokan shows in the quote above. In their narratives, it becomes clear that they have come understand the disadvantaged position of “Blacks” in American society. Serenity, who works with young African American students, discovers how her experiences as a child were different. In her home country everybody looked like her, even the president, so she had many successful role models. Working with these children she realizes that they did not always have such role models, which seems to make them less confident in their abilities. The African migrants in this research, however, do not identify with this disadvantage. They realize that African migrants seem better positioned in this society compared to African Americans. Ekpere-di-ike, who, is the participant most integrated within an African American community, shares how at one point he even takes advantage of this difference when applying for a job, by flaunting his African accent.¹³² The difference perceived between African Americans and African migrants also leads to social disappointments. Myizero shares how she was looking forward to “chatting and hanging out with Africans in America,” but she did not know how different they were, which was a huge disappointment. Now she understands, because, she says:

“If you were born and raised in a place, your parents were born and raised in a place, your grandparents, you are of that culture. So, African American from the U.S., they are American, and African Americans from Africa, they are African.”¹³³

¹³¹ Isokan, (12: 21).

¹³² Ekpere-di-ike, (Q15: 12).

¹³³ Myizero, (Q16: 2). That this is still a struggle for her is indicative of the problem. At the time of the interview Myizero had been in the USA for 30 years.

This is something she has to remind herself of in her social struggles even unto this day.

The other division in American society pointed out in the narratives is that of socio-economic class: the division between the “haves” and “haves-not.” One’s ability to participate in social life is determined by the amount of money you have to spend. Kuriōka relates it to the ability to make friends and that one’s finances determine whether or not someone wants to socialize with you.¹³⁴ Myizero affirms this when she explains that social life in the USA is tough. Without a network you will achieve nothing, for the American dream is only for those who have connections and for those who have money. The only thing that sometimes helps is if you have young children attending school. At least you can make some connection with mothers of their classmates. But even that is tough.¹³⁵

Religious challenges

Kuriōka

“It is a challenging country also, where you can meet in your faith. Because, many people are not believers. People have no time... even to pray, because of the nature of the work systems. So you must really, really plan to get time when you are driving and you have to do prayers, or, or you quiet time. But the challenges here are many. I never would thought in my life that Sunday can go without going to church.”¹³⁶

In their narratives the African migrants speak of two aspects that hamper their ability to nourish their faith: finding a welcoming faith community and finding the time to attend to one’s faith.

Upon arrival, they have to navigate the plurality of denominations and church communities present in the city. It is first a challenge to find their own denomination (most participants are Catholic) and then a challenge to find a community in which they feel at home and welcome. Kasala describes the congregants in the first Catholic church he attended as “*people de marbre*,”¹³⁷ meaning marble or stone-faced people. Bahlohoi shares how the pastor of the first church his family attended did not even know his name after three years. He emphasizes, when he speaks of this experience, that he had introduced his

¹³⁴ Kuriōka, (Q8: 110-111).

¹³⁵ Myizero, (Q16: 7).

¹³⁶ Kuriōka, Q8: 151.

¹³⁷ Kasala, (Q3: 18).

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family several times and that his family did stand out as they were the only African or Black family present.¹³⁸

Furthermore, the demands of daily life in the USA make it hard to make time for a life of faith. Their work schedules and hourly paid work do not allow them to take time off to attend church. This experience is strengthened by the observation that religion does not permeate all of life. Ekpere-di-ike observes that back home God and religion are mixed in with everything, whereas when you come to the USA “everything is separated.”¹³⁹ Kuriōka for instance share that one is not allowed to take about faith in the workplace or to pray with a patient who may be in need of spiritual comfort.¹⁴⁰

Personal challenges

Kūohera

“You know; what made me sometimes feel sometimes sad. Is that... I’m very far away from my children. The children that I never parted with, I at any time... And you know; the heart of a mother... is the children. I know you know that. That where your children are, that’s where your heart is. That is the only thing that makes me feel, you know... bad.”¹⁴¹

In regard to the effects of their migration experiences on the African migrants personally, two aspects emerge from their narratives: the experience of being uprooted and the manner in which they are received and perceived in the USA.

The participants speak of feeling homesick, missing family and friends they left behind and life as they knew it. Hatiri-na-thina and Chi-bu-ike-m share how homesick they feel. Chi-bu-ike-m said she cried for two years, wishing she could go home.¹⁴² This experience of uprootedness is worsened if compatriots disappoint them as when Kūohera and Ūtana were left stranded upon arrival, or when abused and isolated from the world by a host, as in Kuriōka’s narrative. Loneliness and fear compounded the experience of uprootedness in Unyenyekevu’s narrative of being undocumented and homeless for an extended period of time.

Another personal challenge is the confrontation with the way in which one is perceived by people and society in the USA. Those participants who were

¹³⁸ Bahlohoi, (Q14: 26).

¹³⁹ Ekpere-di-ike, (Q15: 7).

¹⁴⁰ Kuriōka, (Q8: 154).

¹⁴¹ Kūohera, (Q6: 26).

¹⁴² Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 24).

living a settled life before departure especially feel this confrontation. Ustahimili, Kasala, Kūohera, Wirigiro, Kuriōka, Unyenyekevu, Isokan, and Bahlohoi not only miss the good life at home that they left behind, or unexpectedly had to leave behind, they also have to navigate the experience of not being recognized or appreciated for who they are and what they can contribute. Furthermore, all African migrants have to negotiate not only the fact that they are being perceived as a stranger, or alien even, but that they are now part of a Black minority. These personal challenges affect their sense of dignity and cause hurt in their pride and self-esteem. This can feel, as Kasala says: “*Si le ciel te tombe sur ta tête!*”¹⁴³ (As if the heavens come down upon you!).

2.4.2 *Success and Settlement*

All the African migrants who participated in the research describe their migration experience as really “not easy” or as very “challenging”. However, they also express their experience as a positive one. There is a change in tone, a tone of excitement and gratitude, when they talk about their successes and accomplishment and about support received. Although they are still critical of many aspects of life in the USA and they still think many things are better in the home country, they also express that their life in the USA is good and better than it would have been at home. This is especially true for the African migrants who came to seek refuge and safety. Even though life is tough and still an economical struggle, Ustahimili, Kasala, Kūohera, are grateful to be able to live in peace and without anxiety and Unyenyekevu is looking forward to that moment, hoping that she will receive asylum status as well.

When speaking about their accomplishments and moments of success, three themes emerge from their narratives: the importance of support, becoming independent, and growth gained.

Support received

Fda

“There were a lot of Eritreans. The group of Eritreans they have a community here already when I got here. So it wasn’t lonely thing or anything. It was well established in so many migrants coming before us.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Kasala, (Q3: 22).

¹⁴⁴ Fda, (Q2: 6).

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Receiving support is an important contribution to the ability to settle. African migrants from Eritrea, Kenya, Nigeria, and Liberia (in Minnesota), were able to connect to ethnic communities. The Catholic Igbo community meets monthly at one of the local parishes, and the large Kenyan community is well organized in the Baltimore Metro and the Mid-Atlantic region. The majority of the Kenyan participants are in one way or another connected to this community. The exception is Unyenyekevu, who was caught up in Kenyan political conflict and avoided contact with other Kenyans as she was not sure who she could trust. Ūtana, however, shares how the Kenyan network helped her to find her aunt, who left her stranded at the airport in Delaware. In the course of nine hours, Kenyan fellow travelers solved her problem. By sharing names they knew, they came across the name of her aunt's neighbor. They discovered that her aunt had moved recently. The neighbor then consulted his network and was able to connect to her aunt.¹⁴⁵ There is also a regional Catholic Kenyan community, which has found a home in one of the participating parishes. The Kenyan women's prayer group (mentioned before) is part of this community. It is here that Kuriōka finds friends to pray with, because, she says:

“...I want to find identity. I want to belong to a certain community ...because this is a country that you also need to encourage you: ...you need people that you pray together, that you can encourage one another, you know?”¹⁴⁶

Apart from the ethnic communities they could connect to, participants also mention receiving support from the one faith community where they have found a warm welcome, where their lives and stories matter, and where they find practical support offered by the people in the community, the pastors, and the immigration outreach available.¹⁴⁷

Becoming independent

Ustahimili

“We went to Rite Aid. We enter, I say: “Come on, we need to know the buses, which bus we need to take. Even the map to know where we are, where we are to go.” Looking around, looking: “Look these things here.”

¹⁴⁵ Ūtana, (Q13: 4).

¹⁴⁶ Kuriōka, (Q8: 148).

¹⁴⁷ Hatiri-na-thina, Ustahimili, Kasala, Kuriōka, Unyenyekevu, Serenity, Ūtana, Bahlohoi, and Myizero mention this particular community and its immigrant outreach.

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The have some stuff like a card, but folded well. It looked like small thing like this, but it is folded, plasticized everything. We open it, I say: "Look Baltimore, the map!" And we start looking: they had the schedule for buses, like bus line 8, 36, all this. [becomes agitated] We took all of them! ...We went home with them. We started looking. Do you know the school is here, we are here, and everything! We started connecting the bus. Some show even the bus, the way, and the itinerary of places. That was the start point."¹⁴⁸

Accomplishments are achieved when challenges are overcome and new steps are taken in the process of settlement. Becoming independent contributes to the success of this process.

As the quote above shows, learning to navigate the city where they live and to figure out the public transportation system is an important aspect of becoming independent. It supports the ability to find the way to the schools for their children, to the places where they have to go to meet the requirements for healthcare and vaccinations, and to travel to and from jobs. Being able to buy a car and obtain a driver's license is the next step in gaining independence and a necessary accomplishment, as the public transportation is not great in the Baltimore region.

Another aspect of becoming independent is the ability to find independent housing. Ustahimili and Kasala traveled from hotel to hotel with their children and from host family to host family before they were able to find independent housing for their family. Kūohera was a roommate with a number of compatriots, but when this arrangement went awry she needed to find different housing. She was able to find another roommate to share the rent, but her hope is to at one point live on her own. Kuriōka was almost a hostage at her host family. She was very happy when she was supported in obtaining an apartment for her and her children. Even if they have no furniture or anything yet, being freed from the bonds her host had put on her is a tremendous accomplishment.

Independence is also accomplished when participants gain access to financial resources that enable them to provide for themselves and their families. In the case of Ustahimili and Kasala it was important that they figured out how to access their savings from their home country so they could pay for hotels and food during the period that they could not yet work.

¹⁴⁸ Ustahimili, (Q5: 41).

Growth gained

Hatiri-na-thina

“But one thing I can say, being here, I cannot regret, because everything has advantage and disadvantage, reason being: When you look back, what I knew is having relationship with my close friends and family, but when you come here you find different people, different diversity, you know... It is very interesting when you try to learn the culture: how people do things different and it has really made me grow in different ways. How I look at things, how I do things...”¹⁴⁹

The African migrants sound both grateful and excited when they share how they also have gained a lot. All participants with children in the USA are grateful for the opportunities their children will have. Kūohera and Unyenyekevu, who had to leave their families behind, are grateful that, even with the little they have, they can support and enhance the lives of their children and grandchildren back home. Apart from the ability to offer their children here, or their families overseas, a better life or future, all African migrants share how they gained growth as a person.

In all the narratives the African migrants speak about how they have to learn to navigate the education system, whether they came as students (such as Okpara, Chi-bu-ike-m, Ūtana, and Ekpere-di-ike), needed to find schools for their children, or whether they came as adults who needed to re-educate themselves to be able to find better jobs (such as Ustahimili, Kūohera, Kuriōka, Isokan, Bahlohoi, and Myizero). In engaging this challenge, they gain understanding of how the education system works, how to pass entrance exams and find scholarships. They learn how to balance school and work, resulting in obtaining degrees or passing board exams for professional certification.

Participants develop new (problem solving) skills, and become creative and resourceful in meeting needs with meager means. When Kuriōka is finally able to move into a place of her own with her children and husband, she is able to furnish her apartment and create a homey environment with furniture that other people threw away, found on the curb, at garage sales or recycle places. She is surprised how she was able to stoop down to this level poverty and enjoys her success at it.¹⁵⁰

Participants also share that they gain new knowledge and perspectives, and how their horizons are expanded. Hatiri-na-thina expresses this in the quote

¹⁴⁹ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 5).

¹⁵⁰ Kuriōka, (Q8: 100).

above when she speaks about how she has grown in understanding a new culture, but she also shares how she grew in spirituality and motherhood, and how she has learned to cope in different and difficult circumstances.¹⁵¹ Both Hatiri-na-thina and Kuriōka express this by saying that “the system or the country makes you learn.”¹⁵² The USA is a country with many challenges, but once you gain access to the necessary information (and that is what is not easy), you learn to navigate the systems and grow in unexpected ways.

Evaluation

From the analysis of the narratives of the African migrants who participated in this research, themes emerged. These themes provide the characteristics for the transitional phases of departure, arrival, and negotiation and settlement. Here I will first compare these characteristics to observations made earlier in regard to the phenomenon of migration in general and African migration to the USA in particular.¹⁵³ Second, I will develop initial reflections on identity transitions in the African migrants’ narratives and compare these to my initial understanding regarding the meaning of these narratives.

Comparing findings

Regarding the experience of departure, it has become clear that it is not possible to make a distinction between a forced departure and a departure from free choice. Even if their departure is a result of a deliberate choice, is well prepared, and follows one of the legal routes of entrance, the circumstances leading to this choice can be complex and show multiple factors that put pressure on the decision to leave. In all narratives, except for Chi-bu-ikem, who does not share any other reasons for her migration apart from education and discovering the USA, there is an element of being or feeling forced to make the decision to leave or to make one’s departure permanent. Castles, de Haas, and Miller consider a decision caused by seeking alternatives to oppression of women (such as Kūohera) and economic oppression (such as Hatiri-na-thina and Ūtana) as departures of free will. I, however, after listening to and analyzing the narratives of these African migrants, agree with Adogame. I would rather be cautious in such evaluation and take into consideration the diversity and complexity of reasons that motivate the decision to emigrate.¹⁵⁴ Regardless of their main reason for

¹⁵¹ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 5 & 41).

¹⁵² Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 22) and Kuriōka, (Q8: 112).

¹⁵³ See Chapter One, Part 1 & 2 and Chapter 2, Part 1.

¹⁵⁴ Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*, 18-19.

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departure, for their choice of destination country they all were drawn to the USA by the expectation that in the USA they would find a better life and more opportunities.

Regarding the analysis of the transitional phases of arrival and negotiating life in the USA, the African migrants' narratives align with the current trends in African migration to the USA and with the effects of US history of African immigration. The African migrants share in their narratives that they do have well-developed language skills, but they nevertheless experience a language barrier. Those who arrive as adults, are well educated, and do have professional experience upon arrival, still experience underemployment. Participants also mention how they experience living in a society that is organized around categories of race and class. This complicates their relationship with African Americans and affects their job search. Nevertheless, they predominantly do not wish to engage in thinking in racial categories.

In their research among Zimbabwean women in the greater Cincinnati Area Nyemba and Vaughn point to similar experiences.¹⁵⁵ They mention the experience of under employment and the need to start one's career with lower level entry jobs. The participants in their research describes the disappointments regarding their expectations of the USA as the land of opportunity and of easy living, the language barrier, and the experience of discrimination. In their research they mention how negotiating life in the USA can cause much stress: "The struggle to balance work, school, and family activities, cultural shock, fear, loneliness and anxiety were all cited as major sources of stress."¹⁵⁶ Similar experiences of African migrants to the USA are found in Biney's ethnographical study among African immigrant churches in the New York metropolitan area. Biney pays attention to the changing dynamics between women and men and changes in the marriage dynamic. He also mentions the effects of the downward mobility as African migrants lose their socio-economic status and affirms the effects of discrimination according to race.¹⁵⁷ With Biney, I agree that that which sets African migrants apart from any other group of migrants to the USA is the experience that they are indistinguishable from all other Blacks with whom they are lumped together according to legal and social categories. Although they face discrimination as most Black people do, they are not always received well by

¹⁵⁵ Nyemba and Vaughn, "Migration Experiences of Black Zimbabwean Women," 72-115.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁵⁷ Biney, *From Africa to America*, 9-10, 25-29, 125-130 and "Transnational Religious Networks: From Africa to America and Back to Africa," 281-298; both his monograph and article are based on an ethnographic study performed over the last decade (283).

the “native” African Americans. According to Biney, seeking refuge in their ethnic or religious communities is the only means to maintain their identity while adjusting to the new life in this country.¹⁵⁸

Apart from the challenges experienced while negotiating life and settlement in the USA, the African migrants in their narratives also reflect on their migration journey as an opportunity. Seeing their migration journey as an opportunity is sometimes part of the reason for departure, but it is also a perspective that develops on the journey as they achieve successes in their efforts to settle and build a new life. Finding a warm welcome in an ethnic community, a faith community, or both is extremely important. These communities offer support and guidance to navigate this new society. They also provide the African migrants with a sense of belonging and the confidence that obstacles and challenges can be overcome. Levitt, Adogame, and Biney affirm the important contributions of faith communities to migrants and their journeys. Biney discusses the importance of ethnic church communities as African migrants seek to find a balance between their ethnicity and cultural adaptation in the USA.¹⁵⁹ Adogame, however, explains that it is not easy to determine whether ethnic or religious identity takes preference in finding a supporting community.¹⁶⁰ The African migrants in this research are adamant about their Catholic identity and about seeking out a welcoming Catholic community. This aligns with Levitt’s observation that sometimes “ties to coreligionists outweighed their ties to co-ethnics or co-nationals.”¹⁶¹ Kasala and Kuriōka are an example of this, as they do not accept invitations to join ethnic gatherings within a different denomination. The Kenyan and Igbo participants show that there is an overlap: their gatherings are both ethnic and Catholic. But as their ethnic gatherings are (bi-) monthly, they too will attend liturgy at the “regular” Catholic parish.

Apart from the confidence gained through community support, African migrants confidence also grows as they achieve many accomplishments, gain

¹⁵⁸ Biney, *From Africa to America*, 26-28. See also: Dimitry M. Bondarenko, “Entangled in the Web of History: Collective Historical Memory and the Relations between African Americans and First-Generation African Immigrants,” in *The Omnipresent Past: Historical Anthropology of Africa and African Diaspora*, Dimitri M. Bondarenko and Marina L. Butovskaya, eds (Moscow: LRC Publishing House, 2019), 303-338. This article affirms these observations in the participants’ narratives regarding their ambiguous relationship with African Americans and their respective place in society. The article researches and reflects on this relationship from the perspective of anthropological studies, with a focus on their respective collective historical memories.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 159-178.

¹⁶⁰ Adogame, *o.c.*, 125-131.

¹⁶¹ Levitt, *God Needs No Passport*, 84.

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personal growth, and learn new skills and perspectives. This confirms the observations from Capps, McCabe and Fix. Despite the many obstacles and challenges the participants speak of in their narratives, their legal arrival, their language skills, and their level of education and professional experience enhance their ability to settle in the USA in the long run.¹⁶²

Identity transitions

The results of my analysis of the transitional phases on the migration journey in the African migrants' narratives align with the Castillo Guerra's observations regarding the dynamics and effects of identity transitions in the context of migration.¹⁶³

In the African migrants' narratives, the encounter of their expectations, hopes, and dreams with the reality of life in the USA emerges as a theme that is also connected to the changes in identity they experience. The African migrants realize that who they were at home, their emigrant identity does not seem to matter upon arrival in the USA. Initially, it seems that nothing of life, as they knew it, applies to where they are now. As immigrants they face the experience of being uprooted, while having to cope with how they are perceived by USA society as immigrant aliens and as Blacks. As the African migrants address the challenges they face and the opportunities they receive, their narratives point to the tension between their home identity and the new-to-develop identity in the USA. On the one hand, they struggle with an individualist society governed by racial categories. On the other hand, they gain independence, develop new knowledge and skills, and broaden their horizons.

It is in this tension between their home identity and the new-to-develop identity in the USA, that the African migrants experience a change in "quality of life," which seems to cause an experience of loss.¹⁶⁴ This affirms my initial hunch that understanding experiences of loss caused by the transitional phases is important for understanding transformation of identity and faith. Given that experiences of transition are related to liminality, the following question arises: how do experiences of loss feature in the experience of liminality?

¹⁶² Capps et. al., *New Streams*, p. 18-19. See Section 1.2.

¹⁶³ See Chapter One 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

¹⁶⁴ See Section 2.1.

3. The Experience of Liminality

Negotiating transition between the homeland left behind and settling in the new land is an experience of liminality.¹⁶⁵ Liminality or being in a liminal stage constitutes the second category in the theoretical framework that drives the analysis of the African migrant's narratives. In what follows below, I analyze how the African migrants in their narratives articulate and engage liminality.

3.1 *Experiencing Loss*

As my analysis of the experience of the three transitional phases indicates, the African migrants have a lot to navigate as they engage their new life in the USA. They must not only figure out the system and the practicalities of the USA way of life, but also address the emotions that these experiences evoke. Considering these emotional responses, I observed that, regardless of the specific characteristics or intensity of the experience of departure, arrival, and negotiation, all challenges and obstacles encountered carry experiences of loss. This insight was supported by comparing and defining relationships between fragments in the narratives in which participants reflected simultaneously on challenges encountered and the emotions they evoked. These emotions were often expressed as a sense of loss.¹⁶⁶ As the African migrants in their narratives addressed experiences of loss, I noticed a distinction, which I labeled as "experiences of external loss" (caused by circumstances and problems encountered) and "experiences of internal loss" (the emotional and spiritual responses as described by the participants).¹⁶⁷ These two forms of loss form the main themes for the sub-category of anti-structure.

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter One, 2.2.2 and 2.3.2.

¹⁶⁶ Integrating the different characteristic of experiences labeled as "Challenges" and those experiences labeled as "Loss" in one network vision (a feature of the computer program used for the qualitative analysis of the interviews) supported the insight that these experiences are related. The relationships between these experiences were generally indicated with "caused by" or "associated with."

¹⁶⁷ Here I am indebted to Hildegund Keul and her article "The Venture of Vulnerability: Christological Engravings on Disturbing Questions about Migration," in *Migration as a Sign of the Times: Towards a Theology of Migration*, Judith Gruber and Sigrid Rettenbacher, eds. (Leiden / Boston, Brill / Rodopi, 2015), 167-190. Keul's article helped me to develop the labels for the four characteristics of what I termed the "experience of external loss." Her reflections on vulnerability as a consequence of experiences of external loss guided me to develop the theme of "experiences of internal loss" as described by the participants.

3.1.1 *Experiences of External Loss*

Concrete circumstances or problems encountered cause an experience of external loss. In the analysis of the narratives I distinguish four characteristics of external loss: loss of social network, of socio-economic status, of previous way of life, and loss of previous protective tactics.

Loss of social network

Kasala

“...All things were very strange when we came to the US. We don’t, we don’t have, Congolese, us Congolese, in contrast to like Nigerian, the Ghanaian... It’s not really a strong community, active one. It’s a very passive one... But it is also, and always, the lack of information, because we don’t have enough ties around the country, to know all that is going on...”¹⁶⁸

Two elements characterize the loss of social network. It is first and foremost experienced in the loss of family and friends left behind in the home country, a loss that all participants experience. Myizero experiences this loss more deeply as she did not just leave her family behind. She lost her family in the Rwandan genocide, and later her son to gun violence.

Another element of the loss of social network is seen in the narratives of participants who were not able to connect to an ethnic community, as described by Kasala. They experience a lack of support and to some extent isolation, as nobody introduces them to the intricacies of life in the U.S. Some participants were left stranded upon arrival (Kūohera and Ūtana), experienced a period of being undocumented (Unyenyekvu and Ūtana) and even homelessness (Unyenyekvu), or were abused and isolated from society by their host (Kuriōka). For them, the experience of the loss of a social network is even more intense.

Loss of socio-economic status

Isokan

So I knew I can’t present a business studies certificate [to work] in the museum [in the USA]. And so museum was out of it for me. So I didn’t even bother looking for job there. I was looking for a job outside, sales retail. Retail outlet. And I don’t know I kept filling forms, and then filling forms, and filling forms. But, nothing was forthcoming. Even... There was, um, an

¹⁶⁸ Kasala, (Q3: 9 & 25).

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interview [and] I went for it. But at the end of the day... I was not called. So I got frustrated. But, I was just looking. What can I do?¹⁶⁹

The majority of the African migrants experience a loss of socio-economic status. This is generally expressed in their experience of not being able to find a job that recognizes their education and professional experience. Participants started out being underemployed or working manual jobs and low-level care-giving jobs. They need to invest time to obtain proficiency in American English, to redo their higher education, achieve new certification for their professions, and acquire professional experience in the USA. Ustahimili, Kasala, Kūohera, Wirigiro, Kuriōka, Unyenyekevu, Isokan, Bahlohoi, and Myizero all described challenges in establishing themselves in the working world. This long journey back, to achieve a similar level of professional achievement as left behind, causes a downward movement in their socio-economic status. Exceptions are Serenity, who arrived as a teenager, Chi-bu-ike-m, Ūtana, and Ekpere-di-ike who came as young adults with education goals, and Okpara who came to receive a particular education. They seem to suffer less from a loss of socio-economic status as they were educated and integrated in the American system early on.

Loss of previous way of life

Hatiri-na-thina

“Because in Kenya the way we were raised, the girl and the boys it is pretty much different. There are the things that the man was supposed to do and the lady was supposed to do. But when you come here, you find that you too need to work, you know... Now the duties of a husband and a wife have to be kind of no longer there. Because you have to go to work, you cannot be able to cook, to take care of the kids, to do a whole lot of things we do in Kenya and at the same time keep your marriage. So for a woman to make the husband understand that now it is going to be a real teamwork, it is a challenge. A lot of marriages break up when people come from Africa.”

Most, if not all, African migrants experience the loss of their previous way of life. It is characterized by four elements. First, they express a loss of culture when they talk about what they miss from home, such as food and moral values. Second, they also refer to loss of the good life they left behind, which includes both the established life they had and the loss of communal life in contrast to the more individual-oriented American society. Another loss of

¹⁶⁹ Isokan, (12: 9).

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their previous way of life is expressed in the changing family dynamics. Participants mention the very different way of raising children and the effects of life in the USA on their marriages. Raising children used to be more communal and children were less dependent in the home country. The usual marriage dynamics no longer work, as Hatiri-na-thina (and Kuriōka and Ustahimili) share. The challenge to create the change is usually on the women, although this is not always perceived as a negative aspect (as Hatiri-na-thina explains later in the interview). Lastly, some participants, such as Ustahimili, Wirigiro, Kuriōka, and Isokan, also mention the loss of (economic) independence, especially during the time where they heavily depend on others for their survival or initial settlement, such as obtaining housing, access to education, or even money.

Loss of previous tactics

Wirigiro

A life in Kenya is very simple. Although we don't rely on insurance and what and what and what, people there are survivors. If you get sick maybe go to chemist, you buy some medicine. You don't need an insurance card to go to hospital.... [People,] they rely on themselves.¹⁷⁰

Arriving in a new society that differs greatly from the society left behind results in a loss of previous tactics for negotiating life. This experience is more intense when immigrants arrive unexpected and, therefore, unprepared. Two elements characterize the loss of previous tactics: the loss of know-how and the loss of self-sustainability. The known ways of seeking housing, jobs, healthcare, and education for children or parents, do not apply. The African migrants express feeling ignorant, uncertain, out of place: the “world seems upside down.”¹⁷¹ Furthermore, they lose their ability to be self-sustaining as they find the higher cost of living cannot be alleviated by, for example, growing their own small crops.

3.1.2 Experiences of Internal Loss

The experiences of external loss, as described above, evoke emotional and spiritual responses, which I labeled as experiences of internal loss. In the narratives of the African migrants I distinguish three ways in which they express internal loss: loss of dignity, loss of hope, a loss of faith.

¹⁷⁰ Wirigiro, (Q7: 22).

¹⁷¹ Kūohera, (Q6: 13).

Loss of dignity

Kuriōka

“Then my daughter, she would come from school, and she would tell me: “Mom, I miss the working mom I used to see in Kenya.” ...Because now, by that time she would come from school I’m like an old woman with my scarf. I had no happiness. ...Because when you are not going anywhere... When you wake up, when you go someplace you even take a shower... But, they would get the woman they left in the morning with like; you’re not going anywhere... So I realized I was getting miserable, but I had no power, I had no money...”¹⁷²

Multiple elements characterize suffering a loss of dignity. First there is the experience of being as strangers or even, in some legal terminology, as aliens. Loss of dignity also happens when the African migrants’ life-story, education, and professional experience are not recognized or appreciated. This devaluation of being hinders the ability to become a contributing member to society or to move up the socio-economic ladder. The experience of rejection is another cause for loss of dignity, especially when, as some participants share, they face rejection or abuse by friends, relatives, or compatriots upon arrival. In the quote above, Kuriōka shares how she lost all dignity and self-esteem due to the power her host had over her. Another problem is the challenge to navigate the optimistic expectations of life in the USA, while the reality is more complex. Family at home expects gifts or remittances from their migrated family members and, as Hatiri-na-thina and Bahlohoi share, they cannot always live up to those expectations. As their relatives back home cannot believe life is tough in the USA, these experiences produce a sense of failure, which contributes to a loss of dignity. Male participants suffer an additional loss of dignity when their role as the head and provider of the family shifts and their wives and children become more independent or knowledgeable.

Loss of hope

Unyenyekevu

“One, (pause) you are scared; you don’t want people to know you don’t have papers. You don’t want people to know you are here illegally. And, whom-ever you talk to, you don’t know. So, it is also another way that sometime

¹⁷² Kuriōka, (Q8: 56).

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you know when your life is; you are in the last, like you want to, to go in a river. And you see if you go another one step, you will fall down...”¹⁷³

In their narratives, African migrant express a sense of despair or loss of hope when they experience many and dramatic challenges on their migration journey. They lose hope when they try to overcome these challenges and discover that when one problem is solved, there is new one waiting. This ongoing effort causes exhaustion and fatigue. They feel burdened, stressed, unhappy, and sometimes even despairing, as Unyenyekevu shares in the quote above. Kasala expresses this feeling as well when he says that their initial experience was “dark” and that “the outside is soo, so hard.”¹⁷⁴

Loss of faith

Bahlohoi

“So our Church was [Name of parish] very difficult. Very difficult place, I’ve ever been.

...You know, the way they come to the sign of the peace, it was, very difficult. Every Sunday, they had, like cookies, or something. Then you go there [and] everybody’s gone. People go [snap] and then they leave. People go [snap], they leave. So, that there was no connection... There is, a certain sense of community, that we lost, when you come here, you lose that completely. And, for us, in this situation, you have to belong to a community, ah, because, things might be fine today; but things are going to be difficult. So you need, people that you can lean on. People who can show you opportunities. You know, who can say—oh, there’s a job there. Oh, there’s information there. And, in these sort of churches, you go, you don’t talk to people, nobody knows you...”¹⁷⁵

In their narratives the African migrants share that it is a challenge to nurture one’s faith in this new country and they experience a loss of faith. Three aspects of their migration experience cause this loss of faith. First, upon arrival participants have to navigate the plurality of denominations and church communities, before finding their own denomination and then a community in which they feel at home and welcomed. In the quote above Bahlohoi shares the experience at the first Catholic parish he and his family attended. He adds that, even though his faith remained strong, this experience did diminish his faith. Secondly, the demands of daily life in the USA make it hard to find time

¹⁷³ Unyenyekevu, (Q10: 12).

¹⁷⁴ Kasala, (Q3: 15 & 37).

¹⁷⁵ Bahlohoi, (Q14: 27).

for a life of faith. In USA society, the participants experience that the wider community does not support your faith life. Being a person of faith is an individual choice and belongs to the private sphere rather than to the public sphere. Participants lose the community aspect of faith and, as Bahlohoi explains, even in parishes the community aspect of faith can be lacking. Thirdly, in the midst of trying to cope with all the challenges, there are moments of despair and doubt during which one loses or questions one's faith, as Kuriōka shares: "When you come, when I came, when I am new, when I was there in that situations... There actually is a time where you have no faith. The problems are too many..."¹⁷⁶

3.1.3 *The Loss of Quality of Life*

Ustahimili

"The joys, the joy of living. Actually, I don't feel like I'm living. It's like I'm only, eh, taking care... of other people. Before coming to the United States, I had a part of my life, only enjoy myself. Like clothing, or make-up, hair salon... You know, with friends, music, everything. Forget it. I'm surviving... Sometimes now my daughters will say: "Mom, do you know what, forget everything: go, go, go enjoy yourself. Go do your manicure, pedicure. Enjoy yourself." You know, and then I will say: "You will ask me, mam, I need this, mam, at school..." It's not me. It's not the way my father educated me. First the children, I need to make sure you have your food; I can transport you to school... You need a house. I have to make sure that we pay the house. We pay the insurance, everything. And then, if there is remaining a month, it will be I can use it. But, let me tell you, I can't even use it, because I don't know tomorrow."¹⁷⁷

In this quote Ustahimili addresses her loss of the joys of living. Ustahimili and Kasala voiced this experience most strongly with a French expression: they lost their *joie de vivre*, their "joy of living." This seems to be a shared experience among the African migrants' narratives. This experience of a loss of quality of life gathers and connects the different aspects of experiences of external and internal loss. The loss of family, friends and social network make the participants feel homesick and lonely. The socio-economic demands of USA society and the race to survive bring along exhaustion, fatigue, and feelings of being stressed. This deepens the feeling of the loss of the life at home (especially for those who were forced to leave). For some participants, their migrant journey has been long and stressful, making them feel burdened

¹⁷⁶ Kuriōka, (Q8: 115).

¹⁷⁷ Ustahimili, (Q5: 94).

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and old, such as Ustahimili, or even feeling not alive, such as Kuriōka. Participants mention feeling unhappy or describe some episodes of their experience as “dark.”¹⁷⁸

The loss of quality of life or *joie de vivre* amounts to the feeling that there is “no time to live,”¹⁷⁹ no time to attend to one’s spiritual needs, or to family needs. It emphasizes that accomplishing “a good life”¹⁸⁰ and nurturing one’s faith no longer happen in the comforting support of the community left behind, but rather depend on the individual.¹⁸¹

3.2 *Engaging Liminality: Developing Coping Strategies*

Liminality is an oscillation between experiencing anti-structure and achieving participation in a new social structure. In this section I analyze how the African migrants respond to their experiences of loss and how they engage the experience of liminality.

Engaging the experience of liminality requires figuring out the system of life in the USA, addressing all the emotions that these experiences evoke, and developing new skills.¹⁸² In my analysis of the narratives I distinguish three types of coping strategies: stress relief and healing, changing perspective and behavior, and depending on faith. They form the three main themes for the sub-category of achieving participation.

3.2.1 *Seeking Stress Relief and Healing*

Hatiri-na-thina

“Sometimes the way I manage, there is one thing that really helps me to manage. I call back home. When I pick up the phone... When I feel like I cannot handle it anymore, I pick up the phone, I call, Kenya, talk to my mom or somebody in Kenya. That really makes me feel better, that really makes

¹⁷⁸ Kasala, (Q3: 15).

¹⁷⁹ This theme originated in a comparison between interviews regarding loss of quality of life. It describes the loss of the ability to attend to balancing the important aspects of life (such as faith and family) with the demands of daily life in USA.

¹⁸⁰ Kuriōka, (Q8: 4).

¹⁸¹ Here I am indebted to Ter Haar. The references she makes to the concept of ‘the good life’ or ‘life in abundance’ have been helpful in developing my thoughts on the loss of *joie de vivre* and the role of faith therein: Ter Haar, “The religious dimension in migration and its relation to development: the case of Ghanaians in the Netherlands,” 325.

¹⁸² See 2.4.2.

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me feel better. Or I take a walk and listen to the music. That is another healing process for me.”¹⁸³

Seeking stress relief and healing is sought in two ways: connecting to home and creating a distance between oneself and stressful situation. As Hatiri-na-thina describes in the quote above, when managing life in the USA becomes too stressful, even to the point of getting headaches or becoming angry, then listening to music from home or calling home brings healing and relief. Being able to call home is important for most participants, but especially brings healing and joy to Kūohera and Unyenyekivu, who had to leave their children and extended family behind and are in the USA without any family members. Taking oneself out a stressful situation brings healing as well. Taking a walk or going on a drive helps to calm down, reflect on the situation, and “come back as a new person.” Hatiri-na-thina also said, with big laughter, that going on shopping spree helps as well. Withdrawing from a situation into one’s inner quiet, or contemplative mode, can also, as Kasala explains, de-escalate a difficult situation and create time to manage it at a later point.¹⁸⁴

3.2.2 *Changing Perspective and Behavior*

Chi-bu-ike-m

“I said, ...whatever that gives you joy in your life today. I said just think about it, because when you focus on that, you will not see, you know, that thing that will upset you... I say, see something positive in something. Don’t look for the negative. I say if you look for the negative, it will drag you down. If you look for the positive, it will take you a long way”¹⁸⁵

Another coping strategy is changing one’s perspective on the situation. Four aspects characterize this coping strategy: focusing on the positive, having a purpose, trusting the female perspective, and developing new attitudes. Chi-bu-ike-m shares, in the quote above, that focusing on the positive, rather than the negative “will take you a long way.” Focusing on the positive connects with the ability to “let go” of negative moments experienced, such as when Kūohera is put out of the house by her roommates and has to create new beginnings. Kuriōka, once she is freed from the bondage of her host, focuses on the happiness of having a place of her own, which enables her to start building a new life from nothing.

¹⁸³ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 13).

¹⁸⁴ Kasala, (Q3: 37-38).

¹⁸⁵ Chi-bu-ike-m, Q9: 75-76).

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Having a purpose and focusing on a goal, enables participants to continue on the journey, one step at the time. Ustahimili, Kuriōka, Ūtana, and Bahlohoi show this as they navigate the education system to obtain degrees or professional certificates.

Hatiri-na-thina and Unyenyekevu emphasize the importance of the female perspective and how they believe it enables them to cope better. Hatiri-na-thina explains that women look at the bigger picture, as they always have to take into account their families: it is never just about themselves. She believes that women do not lose hope as men do.¹⁸⁶ Unyenyekevu confirms this and adds that knowing their ability to care for families and the wider community empowers them and gives them strength.¹⁸⁷

As the African migrants change their perspective they develop new attitudes or qualities in their behavior. They develop patience and perseverance when they discover that the journey may be long, such as Wirigiro when he realizes that he needs to give himself “a duration of time to meet his goals” and so he “calms” his step.¹⁸⁸ Participants become resilient and resourceful. For example, Kuriōka, without money to spare, furnishes her new apartment with that what other people throw away.¹⁸⁹ They develop endurance when life feels like surviving from one day to the next, but also when accepting that certain circumstances will not change. For example, Fda explains that he will not be able to change his prospects and has come to accept that his focus is on his sons’ future.¹⁹⁰

3.2.3 Faith

Kūohera

“As I first came in America, I’ve never been to a foreign country. I had nobody I knew in the surrounding. But God was with me. My faith saved me. Because around that place... I, eh... When she, she told me that she cannot be able to pick me up [silence] I remembered praying. And I prayed with the... with the First King 20 in the Bible, First Kings 20 (I will check before you go, because I do not want to give you a wrong reference). And I remembered telling God: “God, if I have ever done a good thing, or not,

¹⁸⁶ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 24).

¹⁸⁷ Unyenyekevu, (10: 27).

¹⁸⁸ Wirigiro, (Q7: 31).

¹⁸⁹ Kuriōka, (Q8: 100): And from having visited her place I can tell it looks very nice and homey.

¹⁹⁰ Fda, (Q2: 36).

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remember me. This is the time to remember me.” (Strongly petitioning) And, eh, pray, do, saying that, there came a police...”¹⁹¹

Faith as a coping strategy has multiple aspects in the narratives of the African migrants. They speak about prayer, about the Bible and other tenets or teachings of their faith, and of the trust they put in God.

The quote from Kūohera shows her belief (and she will repeat it several times during the interview) that her faith saved her. It points to prayer as a coping strategy: petitioning God to come to her help. All participants speak of praying and petitioning God to help them when they are in need: whether it is for money to be able to afford school books,¹⁹² the ability to take off time from work to study for a board exam,¹⁹³ or strength to carry them through the day.¹⁹⁴

Prayer also functions as a ritual, which centers them on God and nurtures their faith. This is especially important for participants such as Kuriōka, Chi-bu-ike-m, and Unyenyekevu, who are usually unable to attend church due to their work schedules. But prayer is also the place where they show their gratitude for what God is accomplishing in their lives. “Prayer is powerful,” “I pray all the time,” and “in good times and bad times, give thanks” are expressions which participants use often to express the importance of prayer.

Another form of prayer that participants mention is contemplation. Kasala explains how the circumstances of his migration experience have caused him to adapt a contemplative mode in which he stays in his inner quiet. This quiet is not empty, but grace filled and allows him to weather the storms around him.¹⁹⁵ Chi-bu-ike-m meditates with the image of Christ on the Cross whenever life becomes overwhelming. She finds courage and calm in remembering Christ’s sacrifice for her and all humankind.¹⁹⁶ Hatiri-na-thina, Ūtana, and Myizero speak of the praying the rosary as a form of contemplation.

As Kūohera shows in the quote above, the Bible is an important tenet of her faith. This is recognized in other narratives as well. Knowledge of the Bible guides participants in the way they pray, but also in the way they cope with or respond to certain situations or circumstances. Hatiri-na-thina, for instance, gives a retelling of the Genesis story about how a man and a woman leave

¹⁹¹ Kūohera, (Q6: 3): the bible quote is from 2 Kings 20: 3.

¹⁹² Ustahimili, (Q5: 109).

¹⁹³ Kuriōka, (Q8: 136).

¹⁹⁴ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 25) and with Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 64).

¹⁹⁵ Kasala, (Q3: 35-36).

¹⁹⁶ Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 47).

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their parents to become one and how she now understands that it refers to becoming a team that works together to get things done, rather than following the male and female role models from home. Chi-bu-ike-m explains how her understanding of God's creation helps her to be positive and to see not only the goodness of life, but also the beauty in every person, created in God's image.

Kūohera's belief that her faith saved her can also be recognized in the narratives of other participants. For as Unyenyekevu and Kasala put it: "...for anything to happen in migration, you have to have faith"¹⁹⁷ and "It's true that God is the only other cause that you can have. In foreign lands, strange place, strange situations: if not God, if not your own faith..."¹⁹⁸ All African migrants in their narratives share in one way or another how they "put God first," how it is important to "seek for God's purpose," and to trust "that God is going to make a way."¹⁹⁹ Trusting in God's participation or in God's grace is what provides hope, courage and strength to endure and persevere, to find resilience and become resourceful. Nevertheless, trusting in God still means that the work of negotiating this new life is on them. Fda expresses it like this: "I know that God is with me on the journey. I'm doing my best, to be who I am and what I can do. And from there on its on God's hand," and Hatiri-na-thina says: "There's no green pasture, you have to water the grass that you are in... So, ...we managed."²⁰⁰

Evaluation

In this part of the chapter, I analyzed how the African migrants in their narratives articulate and engage the liminality they experience on their migration journey.

The sub-category of anti-structure is expressed in experiences of external and internal loss. Experiences of external loss are caused by the manner in which participants relate the circumstances left behind to the circumstances they now encounter. The experience of internal loss in particular relates to their identity and sense of self. This affirms my initial hunch regarding the meaning of and the relationships between different elements of the narratives. The obstacles and challenges, the African migrants face on their journey, indeed create

¹⁹⁷ Unyenyekevu, (Q10: 26).

¹⁹⁸ Kasala, (Q3: 40).

¹⁹⁹ These three expressions resulted in labels such as: "to put God first," "seek for God's purpose," "God will provide," and "by God's grace." These labels are found either individually or in combination in all interviews.

²⁰⁰ Hatiri-na-thina, (1: 6).

experiences of loss, which culminate in a loss of quality of life. Furthermore, the loss of family, friends, and a sense of community, as they encounter the more individualist society in the USA, lead to the impression that engaging liminality is an experience one faces alone.

The African migrants articulate the sub-category of achieving participation in the new home country when they speak about the coping strategies they develop. Depending on one's faith is a central coping strategy in all narratives of the African migrants. It becomes clear that their ability to cope rests on their ability to trust in God. When the African migrants address their ability to cope and their success and settlement, they express feelings of gratitude and confidence. The subject of their gratitude (even through the people who have helped them) is God. This can also be said of their sense of confidence. God is the one who accomplishes these things, who is the source of their strength. It seems therefore, that the African migrants in their narratives address the loss of quality of life and their experience of loneliness by turning to God. This affirms my initial observation that when in their narratives they speak about how they address the challenges encountered, they also speak about God and faith.

4. Experiences of Transformation

Transformation of identity and of faith constitutes the final category of the framework that drives the analysis of African migrants' narratives. In the final section of this chapter I answer the questions how engaging the experience of liminality and negotiating new life in the USA reveals a transformation of identity and of faith. In my analysis of this process of transformation, I will continue to pay attention to the relationships between the loss of quality of life, the experience of loneliness, and the role of faith in the ability to cope

4.1 *It takes time*

The narratives of the African migrants show variety in the pace and intensity of each migration journey. Nevertheless, upon comparing their narratives on the timeline of their length of stay, similarities emerge as well. In this first section I analyze the migration experience of each African migrant's individual narrative in light of length of stay at the time of the interview. I

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focus on their experience of liminality by looking at their core experience of loss, how they coped, and the role of faith therein.²⁰¹

4.1.1 *Newly Arrived: Wirigiro and Isokan*

Wirigiro and Isokan are newly arrived immigrants at the time of their interview. In their narratives they are clearly focused on processing all they are learning about American society. The identity they left behind is still very much present, even though some of their experiences are starting to infringe on this identity.

Wirigiro, who arrived three months before the interview, explains how he feels in the midst of his adjustment to this new life. He compares this new life and the life he has just left behind. His core experiences of loss are his loss of socio-economic status, as he is underemployed, a loss of dignity, due the change in his (authority) position in his family, and the loss of quality of life. He shares that this new life “is not easy” and that he often feels exhausted physically, mentally, and spiritually. He discovered that spiritually “things are a bit down” in the USA, which diminishes his opportunities for spiritual nourishment. Nevertheless, he is full of hope that God will bring revival to the USA and “that God is going to make a way: that things will change. And, that I’ll be able to reach my destination.”²⁰² In his stage of the journey, it is this hope that allows him to cope.

Isokan, who arrived eight months before the interview, says that she does not yet observe any changes in who she is. She explains that she is not yet settled and still adjusting “into the system.”²⁰³ Just as Wirigiro, she is mostly observing the differences between her home country and the USA. She is shocked by the new society around her, especially by the racism, violence, and disrespectful behavior she observes. Her core experiences are loss of socio-economic status as she has lost her financial independence and the loss of faith in that she lost the intensity of her faith life. She has yet to find a job

²⁰¹ Here I am indebted to the students of two sections of the course on “World Christianity” (TH*265D.01 and TH*265D.02), which I taught in the spring of 2018 at Loyola University of Maryland. During the course part on “Migration and Theology,” students learned about the analytical procedures of this research project and participated in its process of analysis. Each student individually journeyed with one participant’s narrative (anonymously), but was also placed in a group project in which the different narratives interacted with each other. The groups were created around a combination of similar and different variables in the narratives. Without their group presentations and individual contributions I could not have made certain observations.

²⁰² Wirigiro, (Q7: 28).

²⁰³ Isokan, (12: 12).

and is now financially dependent on her husband. She feels that faith in the USA is more a routine than a value. She cites the many distractions (such as TV) that take her away from prayer and Bible study. These distractions have triggered a process of secularization and individualization in her faith life. In this phase of her journey, her coping strategy is to hold fast to her faith values from home and to focus on being respectful.

4.1.2 *Learning to Negotiate: Kūohera, Unyenyekvu, and Kuriōka*

Kūohera, Unyenyekvu, and Kuriōka arrived respectively six, four and half, and two and a half years ago at the time of their interviews. Their narratives are similar in that all three of them were settled professionals back home and they all had a particularly difficult time upon arrival. Kūohera and Unyenyekvu, both seeking asylum, first faced many uncertainties before they could settle somewhere and start engaging their new life in the USA. Upon arrival, Kuriōka experienced a period of abuse from her host. It was not until she was able to free herself and her children from that situation that she could start engaging her immigrant life.

All three are starting to come to terms with the fact that their professional experience is not valued in the USA. They had initial difficulty connecting to a community and they have faced loneliness. Their core experiences of loss are the loss of family and social network, the loss of dignity, and, for Kuriōka, a loss of faith. At the time of their interviews, they have started to engage the process of creating themselves a new life in this society. In this phase of their journeys, they are learning to let go of the person they were in their home country and to open themselves to the person they may become, both socially and religiously. All three of them explain that they were able to cope because of the faith and the graces they have received from God.

Kūohera shares many instances where God came to rescue her. For instance, when rejected by her roommates she cries out to God: “Here I am. And this people don’t like me. And I belong to you” and “from nowhere” she comes across someone who is also looking for a roommate to be able to afford renting an apartment.²⁰⁴ Her faith helps her to cope, and her gratitude and humility toward God enables Kūohera to build positive relationships with the people around her, forgive those who rejected and hurt her, and to continue her journey.

²⁰⁴ Kūohera, (Q6: 44). “From nowhere” is an expression which Kūohera uses several times, and seems to indicate God’s presence or participation in solving difficult circumstances.

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In her situation of abuse Kuriōka experiences a deep crisis, powerlessness, and a loss of faith and hope. She finds strength in her renewed faith that God is with her on this journey and that God does have a purpose for her. This enables her to trust in her own abilities and to pick up the pieces of her life to build a new one. She becomes resilient and resourceful and grateful to God: “So through that I have seen God... The pains... I used to have... They’re getting lesser and lesser... [In] every situation I have come to ask God and I don’t, did not in any given time take anything for granted.”²⁰⁵

Unyenyekevu describes her migration experience as being in the mouth of a lion. There is no way out, except through faith. She experiences deep loneliness and despair but finds her faith in God when she finds shelter, encouragement, hope and joy in a welcoming faith community. Seeing God at work in these people humbles her and enables her to stoop down from being a national politician to becoming a hospital patient ambassador. She can pour her heart into this job, grateful that she is doing God’s work, becoming who God wants her to be.

4.1.3 *Skilled Negotiators: Fda, Ustahimili and Kasala, Bahlohoi, and Okpara*

Fda, Ustahimili, Kasala, and Bahlohoi have been in the USA between 13 and 17 years. They have become skilled in negotiating the different segments of American society. Ustahimili and Bahlohoi have successfully engaged in career education and in negotiating the job market. Fda and Kasala did not seek to re-educate themselves. Initially Fda felt economically comfortable as a taxi-driver. Once his family joined him in the USA, this was no longer the case, but he felt that it was too late to change. He accepted his place in society as taxi-driver. Kasala did not engage the demands of the American society regarding education and work experience. At the time of the interview, he was unemployed and had become a stay-at-home husband and father.

Fda, Ustahimili and Kasala, and Bahlohoi all have children ranging from middle school to college age. They all have become skilled in negotiating the two cultures present in their household, but they all realize that their children have become more American than African. Fda enjoyed the support of an ethnic community when he was younger, but Ustahimili, Kasala, and Bahlohoi were not able to connect to an ethnic community. After some searching, they all have found a home in a (the same) welcoming and multi-cultural parish community. Even though they seem more settled in their new

²⁰⁵ Kuriōka, (Q8: 147).

home country, in their narratives they continue to compare who they are now to the life they knew back home, with some hints of nostalgia.

Fda and Bahlohoi still cherish the thought to return home. Fda, however, is realistic and realizes that this will not happen. His core experience of loss is the loss of his previous life. He expresses that the biggest obstacle on his migration journey was that he kept on looking back, remaining stuck in his memory of what could have been. This prevented him from making choices that might have helped him to be more successful. He feels that he may have lost God's blessings: "Did I lie to my Creator?"²⁰⁶ Even though it seems that he also experiences a loss of faith, Fda nevertheless experiences that God is the one who sustains him on the journey: "I know that God is with me on the journey. I'm doing my best, to be who I am and what I can do. And from there on it's on God's hand."²⁰⁷ This experience enables him to accept his current circumstance and to sacrifice his cultural identity for the safety and happiness of his children.

Bahlohoi has not yet given up on the dream to return home. His core experience of loss is the loss of socio-economic status, experienced in the loss of power of having an executive position and the loss of the economic stability that enabled him to provide for his extended family. He explains that he kept a strong faith even though he does experience a loss of faith lived in community. He shares that his faith was diminished for a while by attending a parish that wasn't welcoming and engaging. At the time of the interview, he was an active parishioner in his current parish, received a master's degree in public health, and had acquired a good job, even though finances are still tight. Bahlohoi feels happy in the USA. The developing lives of his sons have priority now. He is postponing his own dreams, although he continues to hope that, once his children are grown up, he will be able to return to the African continent. He wishes to work with people and in countries that are less privileged and more in need of skilled professionals. This indicates that he still feels his full potential is not recognized.²⁰⁸

Ustahimili took on building a new life for her family in full force. She experienced the loss of socio-economic status, of dignity, and of quality of life. She swallowed her pride and started from scratch, juggling work and education. She became successful in this endeavor and now again has a job as

²⁰⁶ Fda, (Q2: 17).

²⁰⁷ Fda, (2:41).

²⁰⁸ As I am making the finishing touches to this thesis, Bahlohoi achieved his dream: he has returned to the African Continent to work for a NGO in public health. His older son continues his college education in the USA, whereas his younger children will attend an international school in their new country of residence.

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an accountant. At the time of the interview, she shared that she nevertheless was disappointed in her socio-economic status. On this journey she has gained many problem-solving skills but regrets the loss of the ability to be present to people, to take the time for sharing stories and enjoying life. She feels as if she has become old and tired. She shared that her ongoing prayer kept her going. She expressed gratitude to God who sustained her on this journey and provided for the family when they were in distress.

Kasala experienced a deep loss of dignity when he realized that this new society would not accept him for who he is, with his education, experience, and opinions. He expressed that he was not perceived as, and therefore could not become, an active member of society. This forced him to change. From a very vocal and active member of society and church, he has “become the quiet guy.”²⁰⁹ Through this experience he developed a contemplative personality. Initially this contemplative mode or this inner quiet allowed him to weather the storms outside, which he describes as circumstances “of the external: “les intempéries”.”²¹⁰ This contemplative way of being, however, has developed as a grace-filled quiet that enables him to cope with life in the USA and to be grateful for that which he and his family did receive from God.

Okpara’s story is a different kind of narrative. At the time of the interview, he has been in the USA for 13 years. He came to receive a degree in pastoral counseling and did not intend to stay permanently. Okpara’s migration experience is not the guiding theme of his narrative. Instead, it is a narrative of his search for his identity and vocation, of his struggles with the Catholic faith, and his search to discover whether his vocation is the celibate priesthood or married life. As Okpara states in the course of his narrative, his wanderings around the world (Japan, the Philippines) and his migration to the USA were not about economic improvement, but primarily about self-definition. He shares how on this journey he came to understand that for God it did not matter whether he became a celibate priest or a married man. It is this awareness of God’s unconditional presence that enabled Okpara to focus on becoming a truly loving presence to his wife and others. Although he does not describe how he negotiated his new life in USA society, Okpara’s narrative connects to the narrative of Bahlohoi. Okpara says that he has never perceived the USA as a land of opportunity. Even though he is well settled and has a good job as a counselor and social worker, he continues to feel the need to go back and to put his professional skills to work for his country. He describes himself as ethnically loyal and feels the importance of being the

²⁰⁹ Kasala, (Q3:33).

²¹⁰ Kasala, (Q3:37).

first-born son. Although he keeps the possibility of return open for himself, he realizes that his children are American, and he will allow them the freedom to choose. He is, nevertheless, more intent on handing down his culture and ethnicity to his own first-born son.

4.1.4 *Settling-in: Ekpere-di-ike, Serenity, Myizero, Chi-bu-ike-m, Hatiri-na-thina, and Ūtana*

At the time of their interview Hatiri-na-thina and Ūtana had been in the USA for respectively 11 and 12 years. Ekpere-di-ike, Serenity, Myizero, and Chi-bu-ike-m have been in the USA longer than 25 years at the time of their interview. Serenity arrived as a teenager, Myizero as an adult, and Ekpere-di-ike, Chi-bu-ike, Ūtana, and Hatiri-na-thina arrived as young adults. Even though Hatiri-na-thina and Ūtana's stay in the USA is shorter, their narratives are similar to the other participants in this group.

All the African migrants in this group received their education in the USA and, with the exception of Myizero, have been able to build a professional career. Their children (apart from Ūtana's oldest son) have been born and raised in the USA. They realize that their children are American citizens and have made the USA their new home. They continue to be proud of their national, ethnic, and cultural heritage, but they have found a way to bring these two identities to a certain synthesis.

Hatiri-na-thina and Ūtana reflected on their migration journey as a journey of personal growth. They reflected on the difference between their home country and the USA and on the challenges and obstacles they have faced and expected to face on their ongoing migration journey.

Hatiri-na-thina looked back to the young adult who arrived in the USA: a shy young woman, dependent on her parents, siblings, and friends who formed the community that carried her. Her core experience of loss is the loss of family and friends. Being confronted with the experience of being alone in new place in which she was perceived as an alien, her recourse is God. "Learning to put God first"²¹¹ has enabled her to open herself to the challenge of learning a new culture, meeting new people, and of appreciating diversity. It also allowed her to grow in many ways as a person, gaining a new understanding of motherhood, marriage, and faith. She enjoys participating in the Kenyan Catholic community and being a leader in their women's prayer group. She is not limited to this community, but is an active participant in her parish as well. She described how her understanding of biblical stories in relation to her

²¹¹ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 12).

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migration experience has changed. In her retelling of the Exodus story, she recognized that a change in memory is necessary, which will allow for openness to the future (however unpredictable or hard it may be) and for growth.²¹²

Ūtana's experience has taught her that in order to be successful as an immigrant in the USA, one has to "go above and beyond."²¹³ That is why she has become determined to excel and to "go above and beyond" in everything she does academically, professionally, and personally. Ūtana experienced the loss of family and friends. On her migration journey she experienced unkindness, loneliness, and rejections. She had a lapse in her migrant status, resulting in poverty and insufficient healthcare. Nevertheless, she did not voice the experience of loss of dignity. She shared how she finds strength in prayer and is grateful for all the miracles that have happened in her life. In turn she puts in every effort to go "above and beyond" in kindness, compassion and generosity in her personal, professional, and church life. She explains that this comes "from being an immigrant who has experience, who has seen and experienced... the good and the challenging life."²¹⁴ Even though she enjoys being an active member of the Kenyan Catholic community, in her narrative she displayed openness to diversity and to every human being that she encounters.

Serenity and Myizero are both proud of their ethnic heritage, respectively Americo-Liberian and Watutsi. For Serenity that has not always been so. Her core experience of loss was the loss of her previous life and culture. As a youth and young person, she immersed herself in a Liberian community. At the same time, she was embarrassed by her culture at school and in college. Initially she chose to cope with this becoming a quiet student. Later, she perfected her American accent, so she would not be perceived as different. In college she began the journey to find her identity as she oscillated between being Liberian and wanting to be American. Slowly she was able to reconcile both her Liberian and American identity. As this process developed, so did her faith. It seems both processes supported each other. It is interesting to note that God and faith were absent from her narrative until she no longer hides or mutes her Liberian identity.²¹⁵ She re-appreciated her Liberian identity. These roots rule her house and how she raises her children. But she is comfortable in

²¹² Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 27).

²¹³ Ūtana: to "go above and beyond" is reoccurring theme in her narrative.

²¹⁴ Ūtana, (Q13: 25).

²¹⁵ With thanks to an attentive student in the course on "World Christianity" mentioned earlier (section TH*256D.01) who noticed this dynamic in Serenity's narrative.

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her American identity in her work and social life. She recognizes that some Liberian characteristics just won't work in an American setting.²¹⁶ She discovers during the interview that the faith community she found in Baltimore gives her the same comfort and support as the Liberian community in Minnesota did. Having found this community seems to have contributed to her ability to reconcile both her Liberian and American identity.²¹⁷ It is interesting to note that on her demographic note card for ethnicity she puts: Americo-Liberian / African American / Black.

Myizero experienced the deep loss of family and friends, partly due to her departure, but also due to deaths in the Rwandan genocide and the loss of her son through gun violence. Myizero also experienced a loss of dignity. She has developed strong opinions on what could be called deficiencies in American society: speaking only one language, racism, and violence that is hidden but very present. These characteristics made her feel unwelcome. Her accent would declare her a stranger and she never really felt fully accepted. She felt rejected when she discovers that even after obtaining a master's degree in the USA she cannot find a job although she tried for three years, day and night. She blames her accent and not having a network or connections. She explained that she now uses her degree to coach immigrants from Eastern Congo, for free. She feels empowered by using her experiences of 30 years as a migrant to help others. She understands that the migration experience includes leaving a part of who you are behind. But rather than emphasizing this loss of identity, she thinks you are adding to it, and explains the need to reconfigure her identity depending on her circumstances.²¹⁸ She playfully negotiates both her identities and challenges the society around her to do the same. She is convinced that migrants with their diversity enrich rather than endanger a society. This conviction comes from her strong faith in the Trinity and how everybody is part of this relational community: a community through which, in prayer, she also feels the presence of those she has lost.

Chi-bu-ike-m came to the US as a college student and over the years grew from an insecure, fearful and isolated young adult into a prayerful strong woman of faith. Her core experience of loss is the loss of family and friends and of her culture and its values. She navigated the negativity and loneliness she experiences upon arrival with her faith in Christ and her gradual understanding of this new society. Currently, she is well educated and

²¹⁶ Serenity, (Q11: 15-16).

²¹⁷ Serenity, (Q11: 21).

²¹⁸ Myizero, (Q16: 10): In this text fragment she gives a beautiful example of the relationship between l'identité-mêmeté and l'identité-ipséité and how it develops.

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successful in her work. She matured in her faith: God is her everything. God is the one who gave her strength and endurance to cope, to carry all tribulations with grace, and to let go of negativity and focus on positive things. God also gave her the gift of gratitude for everything God has created and bestowed on her and her family. It is the beauty of creation that allows her to see the beauty of diversity, both in the world, in American society, and in her own household. Well settled in America, she knows that in her heart her home will always be in Nigeria, but she understands that America has become the home for her daughters.

After more than 25 years, Ekpere-di-ike is adjusted to his new life in the USA. He lives amidst an African American community and is married to an African American woman. He seems at ease with who he has become. He has developed a critical correlation between the two cultures he embodies. He remarks on the difference between his home country and the USA but is able to adapt to them to his advantage. He is aware of the racial injustices that mark USA society, but he will exploit his African identity if that helps him to obtain a job. He mentioned the difference between the community-oriented society back home and the individualism in the USA and the separation of religion and public life. He is critical of the fact that “nobody, nobody, nobody knows you are here [as] everybody’s worried about themselves”²¹⁹ and that, consequently, life becomes impersonal and there seems to be no value to human suffering. These traits of USA society, however, also allowed him to detach himself from some of the culturally assumed dependencies back home. As a first-born son he is supposed to provide for the members of his extended family. Having adapted to the more individualistic approach of the USA, he has changed his role from providing for his siblings to educating them on how to become self-sustaining. Similarly, he engaged in discussions about traditional beliefs and rituals, which he now perceives as unjust. For instance, by custom, his in-laws would have buried his sister anonymously, but he convinced the elders that she deserved a dignified burial. She is now buried on the property he owns back home. He expresses his awareness that all he has and is comes from his own prayers and the prayers of others, especially his extended family and community back home. He is comfortable with the idea that his children are Americans. Although he has a house in his home country (convenient when traveling home) he has no intention to return permanently. His life is now in the USA.

²¹⁹ Ekpere-di-ike, (Q15: 23).

4.1.5 *Observations*

In this section I provided a synopsis of each individual narrative regarding the experience of liminality, taking into consideration her or his length of stay in the USA. This perspective leads to the following observations.

The narratives of African migrants who had only recently arrived emphasize the transitional phases of departure and arrival: they feel more acutely the loss of the life left behind. The experience of departure is fresh in their mind and they are not quite fully immersed in the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement or in the experience of liminality. As the time of stay in the USA lengthens, the narratives of the African migrants emphasize the transitional phase of negotiating and settlement. The duration of this transitional phase seems to be quite long, although the narratives show that participants become more and more comfortable with their new life over time. The new identity is more prominent in the narratives of participants who have been in the USA two decades or more.

This synopsis of the African migrants' individual migration narratives also affirms that faith plays a central role in their ability to cope. Although each journey is different depending on the circumstances, all participants speak about how their faith in God's presence enhances their ability to develop a new life and way of being in this new homeland.

4.2 *The Concepts of Identity, Faith and Transformation in Africa*

In considering the transformation of identity and faith the analysis needs to take into account the African migrants' sense of identity and faith that had formed them before departure. Their emigrant identity and faith were imbedded in what Magesa terms the African Worldview.

According to Magesa, the African Worldview is "born in Africa, conditioned by the material and social environment there and lived by all the people of the continent even as they embrace and practice new faiths and religions."²²⁰ This raises the question whether elements of this worldview are recognized in the narratives of the African migrants and how this worldview impacts their identity and faith when they leave the African continent to settle on the American continent.²²¹ To take this question into account I will give a short

²²⁰ Laurent Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 20.

²²¹ Mbuy-Beya raises a similar question when she reflects on the compatibility of Christian spirituality and African spirituality. She observes that due to urbanization Africans have become uprooted with the effect that they are no longer able to remember "the meaning of

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explanation on how the concepts of identity and faith are perceived in an African worldview.

It is important to note that there is a vast cultural and ethnic diversity present on the African continent. Nevertheless, Magesa claims that “there exists an underlying basic similarity or sameness of spirit and intention in the different cultural-religious expressions” that justifies to use the qualification “African.”²²² Adogame also points to this vast diversity. In contrast to Magesa, he claims that the notion of an “African identity” is too simplistic and is considered differently by those who inhabit the African continent and by those who live in the African diaspora. Adogame explains that an “African identity” develops as a notion among migrants as they search for a common identity away from home and seek to form an answer when they are asked: “Who are you?”²²³ Adogame’s observation relates to the concept of how a narrative identity develops as life’s events ask for a reorientation on one’s self-perception. So, what, then, can be said about identity and faith from an “African” perspective?

Mosha distinguishes four characteristics of the African worldview, which can be recognized in the many diverse expressions of indigenous life in Africa:

“(1) Belief in and reverence of the eternal divine mystery; (2) acknowledgement of the intrinsic unity between individuals and communities; (3) viewing the universe as an interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent whole; and (4) embracing life as a process of spiritual and moral formation, reformation, and transformation.”²²⁴

In an African worldview, therefore, identity is seen as a relational or communal identity, which is immersed in the interdependence of all elements

important customs which stabilized the moral and spiritual life of the individual.” See: Bernadette Mbuy-Beya, “African Spirituality: A Cry for Life,” in *Spirituality of the Third World*, editors K.C. Abraham and Bernadette Mbuy-Beya (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 65.

²²² Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 4.

²²³ Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*, 125-126.

²²⁴ R. Sumbuli Mosha, *The Heartbeat of Indigenous Africa: A Study of the Chagga Educational System* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing / Taylor & Francis, 2000), 15. See also: Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred?*, 1-98; Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), x-xi & 8-11 & 18-25. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 2004) and *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), and John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann, 1969).

of reality, material or immaterial. "A human being is therefore never an individual being. Its being is constituted through being part of a community."²²⁵ Mbiti calls this the ontological priority of the community. He famously summarizes this as "the philosophical awareness of the individual that 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'."²²⁶ This community consists not only of the living human beings, but includes the yet to be born and the ancestors who have gone before them. This "community provides substance, guidance, and protection for each of its members."²²⁷

This communal or relational identity, due to its interconnectedness with the religious universe, is also a religious identity. Faith and spirituality are a corollary of being that concerns all reality, both visible and invisible. This way of being and behaving "involves the fostering of a harmonious relationship between humanity on the one hand and natural and supernatural forces such as God, the divinities, ancestors, and the environment on the other."²²⁸ The purpose for each individual and community is to build the "good life" or the "abundant life." This is not an abstract concept, but refers to a concrete life characterized by health, happiness, longevity, possessions, prosperity, and peace: a "life free of perturbation."²²⁹ Avoiding disharmony and integrating all forces of life "through constant interaction between faith, environment, and society" achieve this and ask for an ongoing formation of a person's moral and spiritual core.²³⁰ Mosha points out that the development of a person's inner being or spirit is essential for this ongoing process of formation, reformation, and transformation, which benefits not only the individual, but also the community and entire universe. According to Mosha, "interiority, thought, and intention are the foundations of exteriority and action."²³¹ He explains that in this interior process a person develops an

²²⁵ Dorris van Gaal, God Dey. *Surrendering to God's Grace: Resignation or Redemption?* Master Thesis, Nijmegen, 1994.

²²⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, London 1969, 144.

²²⁷ Biney, "Singing the Lord's Song," 271.

²²⁸ Moses Biney, "Singing the Lord's Song," 265. Hatiri-na-thina portrays this belief when she says: "In everything I do, I learned to put God first. Not my husband, not my children's, not my friends. Because, we are told, we have to believe with the things that we see and the things that we do not see. So, putting God first, has really made me grow..." (Q1: 12).

²²⁹ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, "The Nature of Continuity and Discontinuity of Ghanaian Pentecostal Concept of Salvation in African Cosmology," in: *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 10 (2001), <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/index.html> - accessed December 10, 2018.

²³⁰ Magesa, *What Is not Sacred?*, 32 and Mosha, *The Heartbeat of Indigenous Africa*, 9.

²³¹ Mosha, *o.c.*, 10.

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understanding of the science of the soul, which does not happen without experiencing transformation of one's personality or identity.²³²

4.3 *Characteristics of Transformation of Identity*

At the beginning of each interview the African migrants were invited to share in their narratives if and how their migration experience had caused a change in who they are. Even though only a handful of participants responded directly to this question, their narratives provided elements that indicated how their identities developed or changed in the course of their migration journey. Their reflections on the persons they were upon departure happened in retrospect. In some narratives this became clear in what they missed most, in other narratives, participants talk about their personal history or the history of their home country, so providing a context for understanding the characteristics of their emigrant identity. As the African migrants, in their narratives, continue to reflect on their migration journey, it is in their accounts of their encounter with society and life in the USA that the characteristics of their immigrant and migrant identities emerge. The characteristics of these identity transitions form the main themes of the sub-category of transformation of identity.

4.3.1 *Emigrant Identity: The Person Who Leaves*

From the African migrants' narratives three characteristics of their emigrant or "home" identity emerge: embedded in community, as persons of faith, and educated professionals.

Embedded in community

Ekpere-di-ike

"Because I mean everything revolved around your family. Your life, your whole life, revolves around your family, period. It has that—from the day you're born, to the day you die, you know, two things we celebrate: The day you are born, eh, people have a party, and celebrate, eh, the day you die people have a party, and celebrate your life."²³³

In all narratives it becomes clear that before departure, the participants lived a life embedded in community of parents, extended family, and friends. Fda, for

²³² Mosha, *o.c.*, 10. Here Mosha quotes Dominic Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1983), 54.

²³³ Ekpere-di-ike, (Q15: 24).

instance, reflects on how he misses the sense of belonging he felt in Eritrea. He shares that no matter where he traveled in the country people would know who he was and to whom he belonged. This strong sense of belonging rings through in all the narratives. It is also expressed in a dynamic of interdependency that most participants experience within their communities. This interdependency is characterized by the awareness of being dependent on and responsible for the community. Hatiri-na-thina explains how shy she was and how dependent on her parents, family, and friends before she came to the USA, while Bahlohoi and Ekpere-di-ike describe themselves as the providers for their extended families. Both characteristics of this interdependency can also be seen in the narratives of the four participants who came to the USA as single mothers. The two younger single moms, Isokan and Ūtana, although economically independent, continued to live with their extended families, whereas the two older single moms, Kūohera and Unyenyekevu, became a *mater familias* and providers for their extended families. Taking on responsibilities and caring for and participating in life of the wider community is expected and considered normal.

Persons of faith

Isokan

“Community in church in Nigeria, I think... the cathedral. So, we had a lot of people there. You know, after church, you get to see people, form groups, you know? You talk. You always see, after church, you [would still be] in church, like thirty minutes you are still in church. Just hang out... And, also I had societies at... I’m a member of some societies... You have this and that.”²³⁴

When speaking about the importance of belonging to a community, participants also refer to their faith communities. Belonging to a community is therefore, also an important aspect of their religious life. Apart from Wirigiro, Unyenyekevu, and Bahlohoi all participants were raised as Catholic. Wirigiro is a member of a Pentecostal church, Unyenyekevu became Catholic during her migration journey, and Bahlohoi became Catholic when attending high school. The majority of the participants share how foundational this faith has been for who they are. Kasala, for instance, shares how his parents were devoted Catholics, even though they lived in a period where many of their peers converted to Pentecostal or other charismatic movements. His family

²³⁴ Isokan, (Q12: 27).

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was well connected socially and religiously. Kasala remembers how he would engage in discussions with bishops and theologians. He is proud to have been part of the liturgical renewal following the Second Vatican council when he was young man. Serenity remembers that she attended Catholic school and celebrated the sacraments in Liberia; it was a part of her identity. Kuriōka, Chi-bu-ike-m, Isokan, Bahlohoi, and Ekpere-di-ike speak about their regular church attendance, their participation in Bible studies and church activities, and how staying connected to one's faith was easy back home, as it was supported by "the community system."²³⁵

Kūohera, Unyenyekvu, and Bahlohoi also share that in their religious background they encountered other faiths. Kūohera and Unyenyekvu had both been married to Muslims and Bahlohoi's parents were Muslim. (Both his parents have passed on at the time of the interview.) Bahlohoi shares that his extended family is mixed Muslim and Christian. Indigenous religion and its rituals are also part of his religious experience. His father had come from the village to find a job in the city. Up until then he had not encountered any other or organized form of religion. While becoming successful in business, his father learned about the Muslim faith from his colleagues and became Muslim. His mother, who also became Muslim, would continue to perform indigenous religious rituals: for instance, to prepare food to be put out as a libation for their ancestors.²³⁶ Bahlohoi chose to become Catholic while he was attending a Catholic high school with his parents' consent, who were very practical regarding how to live one's faith.

Therefore, one can say, regardless of whether, when, and how the participants became members of the Catholic Church, it is very clear that being religious is intrinsic to their emigrant identity and that this faith is lived in community.

Educated and professional

Bahlohoi

"...For me I was really happy in my country. And I grew up, hoping that, I would go to college, leave college, and get a work, and start working. And that was what happened to me." [...] "When I was back there, I was a big man. You know, I was the deputy director, you know, I had a huge office, I was supervising over 200 people..."²³⁷

²³⁵ Kuriōka, (Q8: 159).

²³⁶ Bahlohoi, (Q14: 28). He also shares an anecdote: If hungry during the night, Bahlohoi and his siblings would get up and eat some of it, while in the morning being surprised that the gods had indeed eaten the food.

²³⁷ Bahlohoi, (14: 1 & 12).

Nine out of the 16 African migrants who participated in the research were educated professionals. This aspect of their emigrant identity provided them with a good life and stable socio-economic status in their societies. They migrated to the USA as adults. They already had professional careers and were settled with a house and children attending schools. They were able to enjoy life and were active in their communities and churches. In their narratives they speak with pride of their achievements in their home country. The other seven participants either came as teenagers, as young adults with the purpose to study in the USA, or followed a different path.

4.3.2 *Immigrant Identity: The Person Who Negotiates a New World*

From the African migrants' narratives three characteristics of their immigrant identity emerge: becoming a stranger and a minority, sliding down the socio-economic ladder, and losing quality of life.

Becoming a stranger to oneself

Serenity

"...As a Liberian I spoke only English, but had a very strong accent, a very strong Liberian accent. So, for me, my coping mechanism was to be as quiet as possible and when I went to high school that is what I did. I was, I was a smart kid, I knew the work, but I NEVER spoke up more than I needed to, just because I didn't want to be teased..."

Yeah, I was like, I have to sound like the kids around me if I want to blend in... Because I remember having friends who came from Liberia who were also in my class who were very vocal [...] and I remember sitting in class and going: "oh my goodness, I can't believe they're really speaking up." Cause I always wanted to tell them, stop talking, they're laughing at you... [tone raises]. But that's not going to be me... because even though I was immersed in the Liberian community I think at some point in time I might have been embarrassed by it, because it made me different."²³⁸

One aspect of the African migrants' immigrant identity is that they become strangers to themselves. Their narratives explain that this happens in three different ways.

First, there is the encounter with a foreign country. Upon arrival, the African migrants express that they feel out of place, because "everything is very strange," new and different.²³⁹ Serenity even calls the middle school she starts

²³⁸ Serenity, (Q11: 3 & 11).

²³⁹ Kasala, (Q3: 9) and Isokan (Q: 12: 7).

attending “that crazy place” where kids even dared talking back to their teachers.

Secondly, the language barrier they experience strengthens this feeling of strangeness. Their English accent makes them stand out and triggers the standard reaction from Americans: “Ah, you have an accent. Where are you from?”²⁴⁰ This question is not experienced as a genuine interest in who you are. It rather makes you feel exotic, if not alien. Myizero explains: “It’s not a compliment when they ask you that. They don’t even realize that. It’s really making you feel like you are not one of them.”²⁴¹ Therefore, becoming the stranger is not just about feeling the foreigner in this foreign country, but also about the people around you making you feel foreign, different, not like them, alien even. “Alien” continues to be a legal and political term used to refer to immigrants. (A Green Card holder is termed a permanent alien and given an Alien-number).

The differences between recently arrived African immigrants and the resident African Americans effect the third manner of becoming a stranger to oneself. The first shock is the realization that there is a difference between them. Some participants hoped that they could easily connect with the African American community, but discover it is not that easy, as Myizero explains.²⁴² Even though the African migrants experience that they are distinct from African Americans, the society in general perceives them as similar, as one racial category. No distinction is made, whether you are Kikuyu, Yoruba, Blen, or Baluba-Kasaï, to name but a few ethnicities. Therefore, African migrants not only feel like strangers over against African Americans, but they also feel as if they become estranged from their own ethnic identities.

Sliding down the socio-economic ladder

Kasala

“Yeah, but not, I don’t see myself in first grade. Doing what? Tell me what, okay, they will tell you, take a test and they will tell you what have to do and so on. I find the challenges, even for [wife’s name], that my goodness. You did work 15 years for [name of International Company, where his wife worked as accountant] and they ask you to take accounting 1: Introduction to accounting, why?”²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Kūohera, (Q6: 64) and Myizero, (Q16: 8).

²⁴¹ Myizero, (Q16: 2).

²⁴² Myizero, (Q16: 8).

²⁴³ Kasala, (3: 22).

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Another aspect that affects their immigrant identity is the downward movement they experience in their socio-economic mobility.

Participants find they are not recognized for who they are as a person or for their experience and knowledge. Fda's colleagues, for instance, do not know him by name but by his taxi-number. After 17 years, he still feels more like a guest than a resident citizen. The long journey to achieve a similar level of professional accomplishment as left behind causes the participants to slide down the socio-economic ladder. As Kasala says: "When I compare myself, I say: "Oh, I think we are underneath, we are under order."²⁴⁴

These social and economic consequences of not being able to function and to contribute to one's full potential is especially felt deeply by the male participants. Ustahimili and Kuriōka pointed this out to me. Ustahimili insisted I should interview her husband, who would not have considered himself a good subject. Kuriōka insisted I interview one of her neighbors. The women both argued that the migration experience is even harder for men as they lose their traditional role of as head of the family and provider.

The African migrants' immigrant identity is characterized by becoming part of a racial minority: a minority with a complex history and complex position in society.²⁴⁵ Being perceived as a minority takes them by surprise, not only because they have never been a minority, but also because 67 percent of the Baltimore City population is Black or African American. Even though they are numerically in the majority, socially they are still perceived as a minority.

"No time to live"

Wirigiro

"Because I think also of the time is lacking. So if the time is lacking, it will take away the desire and the love. So people will just be churchgoers by the time they get, the time they go to church, as normal. It will be like a routine. But you know, to grow in the spiritually, you have to have that intimacy with God: that, that good relationship as a father and a son or a mother and a daughter. You can go to your father and say that I need this and this and this and this. But the time you have the gap between a son and a father, mother and daughter. Now their relationship will not be good. There will be, there is a problem somewhere. And I came to realize all these problems are caused

²⁴⁴ Kasala, (Q3: 30).

²⁴⁵ Please note that none of my participants came from South Africa. It is also interesting that the participants seem to take their post-colonial position for granted. Even though Kasala and Okpara reflect on the time of colonialization, they do not seem to connect this to the USA society and its racial consciousness.

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by the time factor. Because, people are running after time. Because here in US you miss one hour you maybe miss your dollar. That is the system of US. You miss one hour, you miss dollar. And nobody cares.”²⁴⁶

Amid all the challenges and obstacles, the African migrants feel that they have “no time to live” and that they are losing their *joie de vivre*. Myizero points out that to be able to experience *joie de vivre* one needs time and people. The lack thereof affects both the social and religious aspects of their immigrant identity. It creates an element of individualization and loneliness.

First, the need for a good income is important, as the cost of living in the USA is high. Unfortunately, most participants earn incomes on the lower end of the spectrum. They work many hours to make ends meet. There is no time to take a day off, because no work is no pay. Furthermore, asking for work hours that allow you to take care of your family or attend church might result in the loss of your job. Consequently, life becomes all about work and paying bills. There is no time to tend to “life,” meaning making time for family, friends, and faith.

The African migrants also discover that US society is more individualistic: people do not have time or do not take time to share both the joys and sorrows of life. Myizero explains that in the USA people seem to be running all the time “towards an endless goal or direction” without it being clear why.²⁴⁷ She blames the money culture for the lack of social time. Even in faith communities, gathered on Sunday to celebrate Mass, people do not have time to greet and welcome newcomers. It was not until they found their way to one of the more multi-cultural faith communities that they experienced a community of people which was welcoming, where the people would give of their time and show genuine interest in who they were.

The strong division between the secular and the sacred in American society strengthens their experience of loneliness in the religious aspect of their identity. Public showings of faith are not appreciated. For example, praying with a patient who needs some consolation is out of the question.

4.3.3 Migrant Identity: The Person Who Integrates Identities

The characteristics of migrant identity begin to emerge in the narratives of those participants who have been in the USA over 20 years.²⁴⁸ It is

²⁴⁶ Wirigiro, (Q7: 59).

²⁴⁷ Myizero, (Q16: 12).

²⁴⁸ Hatiri-na-thina and Ūtana form an exception to this observation. They have been in the USA respectively eleven and thirteen years at the time of their interview. See 4.1.4.

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characterized by openness for diversity among people, the ability to integrate the emigrant and immigrant identity, and the development of a critical and creative relationship with the two socio-cultural contexts that have formed their identity.

Accepting of diversity

Hatiri-na-thina

But one thing I can say, being here... I cannot regret, because everything has advantage and disadvantage, reason being: When you look back, what I knew is having relationship with my close friends and family, but when you come here you find different people, different diversity, you know. It is very interesting when you try to learn the culture: how people do things different and it has really made me grow in different ways. How I look at things, how I do things... without looking at my tribe, my culture, my ethnicity. Yes, it's been a, it's been a journey, which I cannot regret, yes.²⁴⁹

One of the effects of becoming more settled in their migrant identities is the acceptance of or openness to diversity. This openness is effected by both positive and negative encounters. Hatiri-na-thina relays how the opportunity to learn from another culture has enriched her, whereas Ūtana, Serenity, and Myizero explain how they come to appreciate diversity regardless of the adversity they themselves have encountered.

Integration of two identities

Serenity

I must have been 27 or 28 when I became citizen. I had to think really long and hard and so you know, what does this mean? And for me it meant that I, I had to embrace being an American but I couldn't lose sight of my, my identity as a Liberian. And before I did that I had to find out if I could be a dual citizen. And once I found out that um Liberia is okay with you taking another citizenship, and then I was okay with it. I was too afraid that I would lose all my identity as a Liberian if I, if I couldn't retain my Liberian citizenship... that, eh, was a transformation because I think, I came here as a kid and I've been, I was immersed so long in the American culture that, um, that I, I can identify as an American, but also as a Liberian.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 5).

²⁵⁰ Serenity, (Q11: 15).

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The African migrants who have been in the USA for quite a long time are able to embrace and reconcile their two cultural or national identities. Serenity reflects on the moment where she became aware that her identity is both American and Liberian. During the process of becoming a US citizen she realized that she could no longer not be American, but also that she could not stop being Liberian. Just like the other participants, she, however, realizes that not all aspects of her two identities are applicable to all situations or circumstances. She switches between her Liberian and American accent depending on the people she encounters. She raises her children Liberian style, but approaches her work with American style.

Critical and creative application

Myizero

You know. Lately, I make people laugh whenever they say, “you have an accent, where are you from?” I say, “before I answer your question, you have a pretty accent too, where is it from, where are you from?” [laughter] They say: “I do?” I say: “Yeah, to me you do.” I’m hoping, before they ask this question again, they will really think, what is an accent, to one? You know?²⁵¹

A third characteristic of the emerging migrant identity is the development of a critical and creative relationship to the socio-cultural contexts of both the home country and the USA. African migrants develop the ability to reflect on and the courage to address the strengths and weaknesses of both societies. Myizero tries to raise the awareness in the USA that English is spoken in different ways but that does not mean that there is one correct way and the other ways should be considered accents. Ekpere-di-ike addresses aspects of his home culture, which he critically evaluates from what he has learned from USA society. He is critical of the dynamics of interdependency in his extended family. He challenges the rules regarding a burial rite in which a female spouse married into another family would not be granted a respectful burial.

4.3.4 Observations

The African migrants’ perception of self develops as the migration journey moves from one transitional phase to the other. Myizero explains how she perceives this dynamic. Initially she says: “when people come here, I’m

²⁵¹ Myizero, (Q16: 11).

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talking about the recent immigrants, you really are losing your identity. You are leaving a part of it home.”²⁵² She, however continues to reflect on the loss of identity and explains that one has to understand the loss of identity in the bigger picture of a migration experience:

Myizero

But, um, when I say I'm who I am, it's every day, every day of my life I'm who I am. I'm not behaving or thinking the way I think because of America. It's because of my previous culture. As I grew up, what I was fed by my, my, my community, my upbringing is this person you see today: [it's] the core. But in the bigger picture you've got to assimilate, otherwise you would be lost. Yeah, so, you know, you lose some, in order to, cohabit with the people you are with... Your base is those core values you had from your country, from your culture, from your parents. [This is] who you are in your core system and then you have another package that goes along with you wherever you go, whichever country you are in, in order to cope with the system and the new culture.²⁵³

The characteristics of the African migrants' emigrant identity reflect elements characteristic of the African worldview. They are clearly immersed in the lives of their community. They show an awareness of the dynamic of interdependency between the individual and the community. This dynamic is also visible in their religiosity. Their faith is expressed in their community life. Being a person of faith is an unquestioned element of their lives. Their reflections on their emigrant identity do not specifically address God or point to the presences of an eternal divine mystery, but they do speak of how they express and live their faith as active members of their communities, whether this faith is Christian, Muslim, or indigenous.

The sense of community, interconnectedness, and interdependency as the foundations on which they had built their identity and faith in their homeland does not permeate USA society. In the encounter with life in the USA their immigrant identities emerge. African migrants perceive themselves as strangers and unable to care for those elements of life that contribute to their concept of a good life. The characteristics of this immigrant identity reflect the loss of quality of life, individualization, and loneliness: the core elements of the anti-structure experienced in the liminal phase of negotiation.

The duration of this transitional phase in which the African migrants negotiate between their emigrant and immigrant identities seems to be quite long. It

²⁵² Myizero, (Q16: 8).

²⁵³ Myizero, (Q16: 10).

lasts far beyond the geographical experiences of departure and arrival.²⁵⁴ The migrant identities emerge in the narratives of those African migrants who have been in the USA for two decades or longer at the time of their interview. The main characteristic of this identity is that they are able to navigate confidently and creatively both their emigrant and immigrant identities and the two socio-cultural contexts to which they belong. They feel comfortable in both identities, switch creatively between them depending on the circumstances, and are able to reflect on the strength and weaknesses of both societies.

4.4 *Characteristics of Transformation of Faith*

At the beginning of the interviews the African migrants were also asked if they could share in their narratives how their faith played a role in their change of identity. The African migrants offered many responses regarding the role of faith in relation to their struggles, ability to cope, and their means of success and settlement.

This brings to mind the question I raised when presenting my initial hunch at the beginning of part two of this chapter: Should I not rather speak of transformation in faith than of transformation of faith?

4.4.1 *Transformation in Faith*

When the African migrants in their narratives explain how they cope with challenges and loss, one plot element keeps returning: “It takes God...”²⁵⁵ In all narratives collectively the word “God” features 484 times, not counting implicit references to God when participants talk about prayer, reference the Bible, or speak about Jesus Christ. Regardless of the depth of their struggles, and even when participants experience moments of doubt, such as Fda and Kasala, or even loss of faith, such a Kuriōka, they express that their ultimate ability to cope and achieve settlement rests on their ability to trust in God as the source of all their actions. This experience of the presence of God has different elements. In their narratives the participants explain how their experience of God’s presence develops, how God provides, and how God’s presence changes their perspective on the challenges encountered. They also

²⁵⁴ Adogame, for instance, situates the experience of liminality or the liminal phase in the geographical space of the journey between departure and arrival: *The African Christian Diaspora*, 15 and 23-24.

²⁵⁵ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 36).

share how their awareness of God's presence in their migration experience affects them in their way of being and in their relationships with others.²⁵⁶

Awareness of God's presence

Kuriōka

So, it reached a time where now I said: "Now it's me to change. It's me to change the way I look at things. It has been so painful, but I don't have to be sitting there crying. I was in need of God's spirit for how would I going to wake up, because if I stay there, my children would have had nobody to look at. So I too sat through thinking about my own provision and I, I, I kind of starting thinking, looking in my faith: "Yes, God had a purpose for me to be here." And I also thought about the many millions of people who want to come to America, even the rich... And they never got a chance to be here. Though I didn't know what [to] expect here, I felt kind of I am somehow better off. So I started seeking for the purpose that God had for me to be here. And that was the time I started now, looking at life in a different angle. And I think that was the time that I started living.²⁵⁷

In this quote, Kuriōka explains how in the midst of her struggles, she experiences a moment in which it becomes clear that and how God is present with her. After experiencing a loss of faith she comes to realize that God does have a purpose for her. This allows her to take charge of her experience. Other participants share similar experiences. For instance, Kasala explains how his migration experience forces him to withdraw in his inner quiet. As he surrenders to this contemplative mode, initially a copying strategy of withdrawal, he starts to experience God's grace.²⁵⁸ And Hatiri-na-thina explains in the beginning of her narrative how leaving behind the comfort of her family and friends and the experience of being an alien without community support affected her faith and relationship with God: she has learned "to put God first."²⁵⁹ This new awareness of God's presence in their lives effects not only a change in their relationship with God, but also effects a change of perspec-

²⁵⁶ Here I am indebted to Trees Versteegen and her dissertation *Geleefde Genade: Een bijdrage aan de theologie van genade vanuit ervaringen van katholieke vrouwen*, (Gorinchem: Theologische Uitgeverij Narratio, 2013), 184-198. Versteegen describes the characteristics of the experience of God's Grace in the personal narratives of Dutch Catholic women. The characteristics and dimensions of these experiences helped me to distinguish the different characteristics and dimensions of God's presence in the narratives of my participants.

²⁵⁷ Kuriōka, (Q8: 121).

²⁵⁸ Kasala, (Q3: 33-38 & 41).

²⁵⁹ Hatiri-na-thina, (1: 40).

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tive in regard to their circumstances and in regard to their response to these circumstances.

Circumstances change

Ustahimili

“You know, sometimes I will cry and say [covers her face with her hands]: “I don’t know. My kid will not go to school, because we need to pay this.... I don’t know where I will get money. My account is a zero. I don’t know.” ...[pause] Maybe you do not believe me. I will come back home. The mail, you see I open the mail all the time: IRS. I say: “IRS? I don’t owe somebody, something!” We open it, it was a check for me [laughs]: \$386. I say: What is this? I had my husband look. I say: “Do you know what I was thinking? Where to find money?! God is there! God is doing something. It’s not the only one time. Nor is it the only one time. That thing I can tell you. And I am telling my children: “God is present, He’s present. He listens to us, He knows everything.” You look, I say: God, thank you, thank you, thank you, I didn’t know where to go. Thank you!”²⁶⁰

In this quote Ustahimili shares how God provides, turns a desperate situation around, and makes things possible. Participants share many instances in which God provides for them in such a concrete way. Kūohera, for instance, shares how “out of nowhere” she finds a new roommate, when an unforeseen need for new housing arises. Listening closely to her narrative, it becomes clear that “out of nowhere” is her way of expressing God’s presence. Apart from seeing God’s providence in concrete situations, participants express their faith that God will provide, even if the answer might not come immediately. As Chi-bu-ike-m shares: “because whatever I pray and ask God to help me. You know it may not come right away, but I will see it happen.”²⁶¹

Change of perspective

Fda

“To change that is nothing change that I can see that will bring better than that. So it’s just accept the way it is and go along and see what will happen. [voice cracks] ...So with faith it is just get up in the morning and you don’t know what you going to come home with. It’s just getting up, and you know, just hopeful it will be a better day... [Faith] helps you to, helps you to keep moving. You know, you will have it better at the end [of the day]; you will

²⁶⁰ Ustahimili, (Q5: 109).

²⁶¹ Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 45).

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be better at the end, if you keep moving. So, God is watching me. I'm trying my heart out. And I know it's not going to fail me."²⁶²

The awareness of God's presence gives participants the strength and courage to cope with difficult and complex circumstances that are or seem impossible to change. Fda expresses this in his ability to accept the current circumstances of his life, which he cannot change, but he finds strength in God to sacrifice his own dreams and to "work his heart out" to create better circumstances for his children. In their narratives the African migrants explain that their faith in God helps them to develop attitudes that strengthen their coping abilities, such as endurance, perseverance, and patience. As Ūtana explains: "I knew, this is going to be a steep hill to climb. But, I was also filled with a lot of calmness and courage."²⁶³

Change in way of being

Unyenyekevu

"So I'm happy. I am changing from something, to what really what God maybe want me to do. It is—the loneliness that I have... It's the loneliness gets me changed, because—. [Pause, sigh]. Four years, I told you, by July it'll be five years... without seeing my family, my children. I have three grandkids they have been born [and] I have not seen them. So. You need to change so that God can [snort] rescue you."²⁶⁴

In this quote Unyenyekevu explains that it is in the deep loneliness she experienced that God could reach out to her and rescue her. She further explains that God showed her that it is all about humility. She declares that she now works for God, not for the world. This allows her to put all her heart into her housekeeping job at the hospital, even though she could accomplish so much more given her background and experience as a national politician. This experience is an example of how African migrants in their narratives also describe a change in self. Their growing awareness of how God is present is in their lives gives them gratitude and humility and allows them to become, for instance, kind, generous and forgiving. Ūtana show her generosity towards her patients and shares that she prays "for humbleness" and for the ability to "show an act of kindness" so that people "will see God."²⁶⁵ Or, as Kūohera in

²⁶² Fda, (Q2: 35-39).

²⁶³ Ūtana, (Q13: 8).

²⁶⁴ Unyenyekevu, (Q10: 31).

²⁶⁵ Ūtana, (Q13: 25).

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her narratives shows, how humility in her relationship with God allows her to become forgiving, accepting, and generous, even to those who wrong her.

In sum

In the African migrants' response to the individualization, the loss of quality of life, and the loneliness they experience in the liminal phase of negotiating their emigrant and immigrant identities, their first source of strength is God and their own faith. The observation that faith is central to their ability to transition into their migrant identity and to settle into their new life in the USA points to the spiritual dimension of this experience of transformation. This implies that it is indeed in faith that a response to the experience of anti-structure and liminality takes shape and transformation happens.

4.4.2 Transformation of Faith

The insights gained regarding transformation in faith align with Mosha's remarks regarding the ongoing process of formation, reformation, and transformation, which contributes to the efforts of both individuals and communities to build harmony in the unity, interconnectedness, and interdependency of the entire universe. If disharmony occurs, then one important element for re-establishing harmony is tending to the soul and the spiritual, through a process of interiorization. Such a process of interiorization can be recognized in the narratives of the African migrants as they reach out to one particular spiritual resource available: their focus on the power of prayer or contemplation, especially when the ability to attend church or the resource of a nourishing faith environment is not available. This prayer-centered turn to their faith not only effects a transformation in how they perceive themselves, but it also impacts their faith.

The first characteristic of the sub-category of transformation of faith is that the African migrants make a shift from a communal faith to a more individual faith in which they focus on their personal relationship with God. This observation affirms my initial hunch that the African migrants' encounter with the more individualist and secularized society in the USA makes their faith more individual and intentional.

Another characteristic is the transformation of the understanding of their relationship with God. In the African migrants' growing awareness of how God is present to them and provides and cares for them, they come to understand their dependency on God and develop an attitude of gratitude and humility in their relationship with God.

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This transformation of faith affects not only who they are, but also how they are: it brings about a transformation of behavior. They develop virtues such as patience, perseverance, and kindness. The combination of the experience of their own struggles, their experience of individualization, and the experience of God's grace and generosity, in turn makes them humble and generous and allows them to put God and others first.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have set out to answer the question how African migrants to the USA describe the process of transformation of identity and faith in their experience of migration. In the process of analysis, I searched for central themes and their relationships to come to understand the plotlines of the African migrants' experience of transformation of identity and faith as expressed their narratives. This plotline can be illustrated as follows:

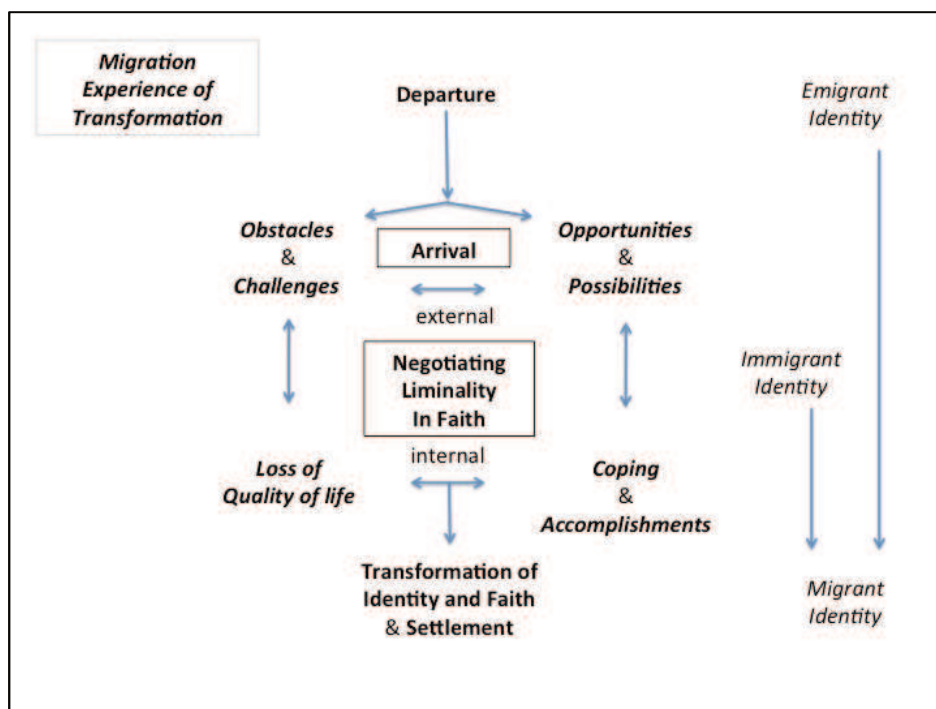


Diagram 1: Transformation of identity and faith in the experience of migration

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The migration journey of the African migrants starts with their **Departure** from home and life as they know it and the travel to their new destination (*Emigrant identity*), where they hope to build up a new life. Upon **Arrival** they encounter many *Obstacles and Challenges*, but they also learn that this new place offers *Opportunities and Possibilities* they did not have before (*Immigrant identity*). The experience effects the need for **Negotiating Liminality**. Externally, they engage the process of negotiation between, on the one hand, the need to address these *Challenges and Obstacles*, which causes experiences of *Loss of Quality of life*, and, on the other hand, the need to develop a response to new *Opportunities and Possibilities*, which effects experiences of *Coping and Accomplishments*. Internally, this experience of liminality translates to finding a response to the oscillation between the *Loss of Quality of life* as they knew it and of the person they used to be and the emerging ability to cope and to build a new life and a new identity (*Migrant identity*).

The foundation of the ability for **Negotiating Liminality** is their **Faith**. As they turn to their faith and to God for support the African migrants develop a growing awareness of how God is present in their lives and provides for them. God's response to their internal and external struggles and experience of loss not only effects hope and strength to **negotiate** the experience of **Liminality** it also effects a **Transformation of their Faith and Identity**: of who they are and how they are.

In this process of **Transformation**, the African migrants become aware of their *Migrant identity*. The main characteristic of this **Transformation of Identity** is the development of a critical correlation between the two socio-cultural contexts to which participants belong and their ability to navigate both identities confidently and creatively in different circumstances. Regarding a **Transformation of Faith**, I observed that the African migrants develop an attitude of humility in their relationship with God and with others.



CHAPTER 3

WHAT HAPPENS BETWEEN DUSK AND DAWN? THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF THE DARK NIGHT

Introduction

Chapter Three presents the qualitative analysis of John of the Cross' poem and commentary *The Dark Night* to answer the question how John describes the experience of a dark night as a process of transformation of identity and faith.

In the first part of this chapter, I provide a short overview of the life, works, and theology of John of the Cross. This introduction paves the way for next three parts in which I analyze how John describes the transitional phases of departure, arrival, and negotiation, and the experiences of liminality and transformation in *The Dark Night*.

1. Introducing John of the Cross and His Works

Although, I initially engaged the first level of exploratory reading as open as possible, for further analysis it is important to be aware of some of the main characteristics of John's life and theology.¹ Such knowledge not only offers insights into the context of the sixteenth-century text *The Dark Night*, but also provides insights in theological articulations, which have been instrumental in crossing the gap between a twentieth/twenty-first reader and a sixteenth century author.²

¹ Hein Blommesteijn, Jos Huls, and Kees Waaijman, *Footprints of Love: John of the Cross as Guide in the Wilderness*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 13-49; Ross Collings, O.C.D., *John of the Cross*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 9-25; FitzGerald, interview, November 2, 2018; Kieran Kavanaugh, "Glossary to Collected Works," in: John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991); Steven Payne, O.C.D., *John of the Cross and the Cognitive Value of Mysticism: An Analysis of Sanjuanist Teaching and its Philosophical Implications for Contemporary Discussions of Mystical Experience*, (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990); and Peter M. Tyler, *St. John of the Cross*, (London/New York, NY: Continuum, 2010), 39-50. These authors point to this importance as well and provide insight in these characteristics.

² An illustration of experiencing this gap is found in my reading log of the first round of reading and praying with *The Dark Night* (started in April 2014 – and without yet engaging secondary literature). It mentions my trouble relating to John's perception of the three enemies (flesh, world, and devil) and the need for the soul to be secured against and concealed from

1.1 *John of the Cross: His Life and Works*

This section provides some insights in the historical, personal, socio-political, theological, religious context in which John developed his theology and spirituality and wrote his poetry and prose. After a short biography, John's works will be presented chronologically and connected to where he lived at the time of writing. This section will conclude with four main characteristics of John's theology: original, mystical, Christ-centered, and based on human suffering.

1.1.1 *From Living in Poverty to Lived Poverty*

Through the poverty experienced in his early life and youth and his work in the plague hospital, John developed a compassionate and pastoral personality. These experiences and his attentiveness to people's struggles and suffering not only equipped John to live a life of poverty as a Carmelite friar, but they also became a starting point for his theology and spirituality.

Childhood and youth

John was born on the 24th of June in the year 1542, the youngest son of Gonzalo de Ypes and Catalina Alvarez, in Fontiveros on the central plateau of Old Castile, in Spain.³ The atmosphere of Spain in his time was marked by the history of Reconquista, the discovery of the "New World," and the Spanish Inquisition obsessed with possible heresies and concerns over "pure blood" Christians.⁴ His father's family had not agreed to the marriage, probably because of the difference in wealth and the stain of a possible Muslim heritage. Therefore, John's father was disinherited upon his marriage. When he passed on, John was not quite three years old and his widow and their sons were left behind, living in poverty.

As a young boy John attended "the Doctrina of Medina," a school for disadvantaged children to teach them a craft or trade. There he "was taught carpentry, tailoring, bricklaying and painting... [John] remained an

them. Especially regarding the devil as enemy, I could only relate to this by turning to the "Harry Potter" saga and Rowling's description of Voldemort's effort to possess Harry. She describes how, in the end, Voldemort does not succeed, because he cannot understand or reach the love Harry experiences in his heart. When Harry turns to these memories it actually hurts Voldemort and he has to terminate his attempt of possession. J. K. Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix*, (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury publishing, 2003), 719-720 and the rendering of this experience in the movie "Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix" (2007).

³ Kavanaugh, "General introduction," in: *Collected Works*, 9.

⁴ Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 7 and Tyler, *St. John*, 9-13.

accomplished builder and 'brickie' for the rest of his life and some of his structures still stand to this day."⁵

When he was 17, Don Alonso Alvarez employed him in "the Plague Hospital of *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*" in Medina, where he was said to tell stories and sing songs to the patients.⁶ This work may have kindled both his pastoral gifts and his love for song and poetry.

John and the Discalced Carmelite reform

John was ordained a Carmelite priest in 1567. Drawn to their ascetic way of life, John was considering joining the Carthusians. He, however, met with Teresa of Avila and she convinced him "to remain in the Carmelite order and work with her to reform it from within."⁷ Following Teresa's directions he started the first male house of the Discalced reform in Duruelo and on November 28 in 1568, together with three other friars, he renounced "the Mitigated Rule of the Carmelites and embrace[d] the Primitive Rule of Our Lady of Mount Carmel."⁸ On this day he also changed his religious name from Juan de Santo Matía to Juan de la Cruz.

The mitigated rule of the Carmelite order from 1247 combines three forms of religious life: the eremitic, coenobitic, and mendicant. These three forms of religious life embodied in this rule were the result of historical changes the order had to engage in the course of a mere century and caused tensions and contradictions in the order's communities. Teresa and John responded to these tensions. Their aim with the discalced reform was to re-emphasize the eremitic and coenobitic life of the order's origin. They wished to re-establish the importance of a life of recollection over the mendicant aspect of religious life.⁹ The years between 1571 and 1578 showed the order's struggle to negotiate the proposed reform. Interference and confusing, or the lack of, directions from the order's hierarchy, the hierarchy of the Spanish church, and from Rome caused a period of crisis in the development of the discalced reform, resulting in John's arrest on December second of 1577.¹⁰

During his time in prison, John experienced torture and humiliation. He was disciplined by whipping regularly and the conditions of his jail cell were

⁵ Tyler, *St. John*, 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15. Italics from Tyler.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹ Tyler, *St. John*, 20-21 and Kees Waaijman, *The Mystical Space of Carmel: a Commentary on the Carmelite Rule*, translated by J. Vriend (Leuven: Peters, 1999), 9.

¹⁰ Note that John was arrested and imprisoned by his own Carmelite confreres and not by the civil authorities. At that time, it was not uncommon for monasteries to have their own prisons.

grueling. Due to the kindness of one jailer, who occasionally let him out of his cell, John was able to become familiar with his surroundings and so “prepare for his spectacular escape one night during the Octave of the Assumption [of Mary] (the week following the fifteenth of August) in 1578.”¹¹ Initially, John found shelter in the Hospital of Santa Cruz, where he started his recuperation. Later he was able to escape from Toledo to Andalucía where he could fully recover, enjoy the beautiful nature, and work on the poetry he started in prison and the commentaries.

The discalced reform was approved and given independence by Pope Gregory XIII in 1580 and held its first official chapter in 1581. Nevertheless, the young order was still experiencing growing pains. John’s position was clear on “the need for balance between the eremitical, coenobitic, and mendicant lives”¹² and his emphasis on making time for a life of recollection. Two friars, Fray Francisco Crisóstomo and Padre Diego Evangelista, who “had been rebuked by John for spending too much time on the road preaching whilst he was Vicar General for Andalucía,”¹³ held positions of power in 1591. During the discalced Chapter that year, Diego Evangelista started a process against John. During this process John became ill and was hospitalized, practically as prisoner, in Ubeda where Francisco Crisóstomo was the prior. Here John passed on in the night of December 13, 1591.

1.1.2 *The Poetry and Prose*

It is generally assumed that John started writing his poetry while he was imprisoned in Toledo.¹⁴ His time in prison happens midpoint in his life as a Carmelite friar: 14 years after he entered the Carmelite life in Medina del Campo and 14 years before his death. It marks an important point in his spiritual life, during which, in a time of deprivation and rejection, John was challenged to concentrate on the Carmelite ideal of standing “in self-forgetfulness before the face of God.”¹⁵ As his life and its calling seemed to disintegrate during the nine months of his imprisonment, he found his coping strategy in his faith and his poetry, in which the imagery and symbols he

¹¹ Tyler, *St. John*, 31-32.

¹² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴ There is, however, some speculation that two poems, “I entered into unknowing” and “I live but not in myself,” may have been written before John’s imprisonment. Kieran Kavanaugh, “Introduction to the Poetry”, in *The Collected Works*, 41 and Antonio T. de Nicolás, *St. John of the Cross: Alchemist of the Soul, His Life, His Poetry, His Prose* (New York, Paragon House, 1989), 54.

¹⁵ Blommesteijn, Huls, and Waaijman, *The Footprints of Love*, 11.

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created helped him to “literally ‘hold together’ [his] fragmenting self.”¹⁶ Rather than being a hindrance, the walls of his cell “served to foster his receptivity to the transformative power of God’s love.”¹⁷ John continued writing during the last 14 years of his life, completing the poetry not yet finished in prison, writing more poetry and writing his prose works, the commentaries to three of his poems: “The Spiritual Cantic,” “The Dark Night,” and “The Living Flame of Love.” When John started writing “his intellectual and spiritual growth had come to full flower” and his works show a “doctrinal synthesis of the spiritual life.”¹⁸ What follows is a list of the works of John, presented in four time periods. It does not include some letters and minor prose works such as maxims and counsels.¹⁹

1578: Imprisoned in Toledo

While in prison, John wrote the following poems: “The Spiritual Cantic,” “For I Know Well the Spring,” “The Romances: On the Gospel text *In principio erat Verbum*,” and “On the Psalm *Super flumina Babylonis*.” There is some discussion about how much of “The Spiritual Cantic” was written in jail, but the general thought is that 31 stanzas were written in jail.

1578 – 1581: At Calvario, Beas, and Baeza

John wrote the poem “The Dark Night” shortly after he escaped from prison in 1578 or 1579. During this period, he made “The Sketch of the Mount,” wrote *The Sayings of Light and Love*, *The Precautions*, *Counsels to a Religious*, started writing the treatise *The Ascent to Mount Carmel* (written between 1581 and 1585), and wrote the additions to “The Spiritual Cantic.” Some scholars believe that the stanzas 32 and 34 of “The Spiritual Cantic” were written in 1578 and 1579, while others believe that the additions were written between 1582 and 1583. The last five stanzas were written while John was prior in Granada (approximately 1584).

1582 – 1588: Granada

In 1584 John wrote the first redaction of the commentary to “The Spiritual Cantic.” He did so upon request of the Carmelite Sisters of Beas (where he also wrote the last five stanzas, inspired by the manner of prayer of Madre

¹⁶ Tyler, *St. John*, 30.

¹⁷ Blommesteijn, Huls, and Waaijman, *Footprints of Love*, 11.

¹⁸ Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., “General Introduction,” 33.

¹⁹ The chronological presentation of the works of St. John of the Cross is based on the Kieran Kavanaugh’s introductions in: John of the Cross, *Collected Works* and De Nicolás, *Alchemist of the Soul*.

Francisca de la Madre de Dios). Recognizing the depth behind the words of this poem, “they begged the poet for some enlightenment.”²⁰ During this period John worked on the treatise *The Ascent to Mount Carmel* and also wrote the commentary *The Dark Night* (between 1584 and 1585), the poem “The Living Flame of Love” (1584), and his last few poems. One example is “The Divine Word,” a small poem that John improvised “on successive Christmas nights, between 1582 and 1585 while he was prior at Granada.”²¹ During this period, he also wrote the first redaction of the commentary to “The Living Flame of Love” and the second redaction of the commentary to “The Spiritual Canticle” (both between 1585 and 1586).

1591: La Peñuela

The last known work from John of the Cross is a second redaction of his commentary to “The Living Flame of Love.”

1.1.3 John's Theology

Don Alvarez, the owner of the plague hospital in Medina Del Campo, noticed that John was a bright young man and supported his studies at the Jesuit College of Medina. Through this education John became trained in scholastic theology, which is reflected in his work. Nevertheless, he developed his own style of theology.

Original

At the Jesuit College of Medina, John “studied metaphysics, rhetoric, grammar, and Greek, Latin and Spanish literature” and was “taught, amongst others, by the great Jesuit humanist scholar Juan Bonifacio.”²² Don Alvarez wished for John to become ordained, so he could become chaplain at the hospital. After joining the Carmelite monastery of Santa Ana in Medina in 1563 and taking his vows in 1564, John entered the Carmelite College of San Andrés and started his studies at the University of Salamanca the day of Epiphany: January 6, 1565. At this famous institution, John received a first class education in philosophy, theology, “ethics, astronomy, grammar, logic, and music.”²³ He most certainly would have studied Aristotle, Aquinas, and St. Augustine, as can be seen in the sources he uses in his writings. In Salamanca, John encountered lecturers with diverse views on theology and

²⁰ Kieran Kavanaugh, “Introduction to the Spiritual Canticle,” in *Collected Works*, 465.

²¹ de Nicolás, *Alchemist of the Soul*, 54.

²² Tyler, *St. John*, 15.

²³ *Ibid.*, 16.

philosophy, including “Thomist, and anti-Thomist, Scotist, Avicennian and Averroist views,”²⁴ which provided John with the resources and examples of critical thinking to develop his own original theological work.

Mystical

Although there are no exact details of his course work at Salamanca, it is known that, for his matriculation, John made “a special study ... of mystical writers, ‘in particular of St. Denis and St. Gregory’” in order to write a dissertation on mystical theology.²⁵ It is therefore assumed that he was familiar with the work of Dionysius the Areopagite and interpretations of this work developing from discovering (by the Victorine tradition) “a form of writing that allowed scholars to combine the intellect with the affect” to putting “an emphasis on [both] the affective and on the ‘ray of darkness’ and ‘cloud of unknowing’.”²⁶ Mystical theology is characterized by two mystical strategies. The union with the divine develops within the complementarity of these two strategies: deconstruction, or “the transcendentalisation of knowing into unknowing,” and embodied affectivity, or “yearning eros into ecstatic possession.”²⁷ In John’s theology, mystical knowledge arises out of the burning love of God, a love that can be enkindled to burn in one’s heart in the measure in which one reaches annihilation. Mystical theology is so much at the heart of John’s theology and spirituality that it forms his writing style in which he employs these mystical strategies. Although he emphasizes the ineffability of mystical theology, he also employs metaphors based on natural knowledge and biblical and poetic language to appeal to both heart and mind.²⁸

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17. See also: Crisógono de Jesus, *The Life of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kathleen Pond, (London/New York, NY: Longmans Green / Harpers & Brothers, 1958), 33.

²⁵ Crisógono de Jesus, *The Life of St. John of the Cross*, 38.

²⁶ Tyler, St. John, 61: Tyler indicates that John favors these terms. See for instance in F. 3. 49, A. 2. 8. 6, N. 2. 5. 3 and CB 14/15/16. In N. 2. 5. 3 John refers to St. Dionysius and the reason why he and “other mystical theologians call this infused contemplation a “ray of darkness.”

Note that for John mystical theology refers to the mystical experience of God and not to the theological reflection on this experience. Mystical theology and infused contemplation are synonymous for this mystical experience of God, which is pure gift and infused by God. See for instance: N. 2. 5. 1. And Kavanaugh, “Glossary,” 401. In this thesis, therefore, “contemplation” refers to this mystical experience of God. It does not refer to the contemporary use of the word, “contemplation,” which describes a broad range of quiet and non-discursive prayer or meditation that people practice on their own initiative.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 64. See also: Kavanaugh, “General Introduction,” in *Collected Works*, 35-36, where he explains how John employs his sources in his writings.

Christ-centered

As John sets out to explain how the spiritual journey towards God comes about, he writes from within the framework of the traditional Christology.²⁹ He speaks about “the mystery of the revelation of God, the nature and following of Christ, the overflow of God’s love into creation as the Holy Spirit, and the final call to participation in the life of the Triune God.”³⁰ In John’s theology, the Christian life centers around the human reality of being “created in the image of God” and desiring union with God; the human reality of sin; the free gift of grace in Christ; and the human ability to respond in faith, hope, and love.³¹ The “reality of God’s work in people’s lives as manifest in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” forms the framework in which John writes, thinks, and acts.³²

Based on human suffering

Although John writes within the traditional Christian framework known to him, the starting point of his theology is unusual: “It starts with a terrible cry of desolation, a wound.”³³ John writes his theology in the context of the poverty he experienced in his childhood and youth, the vulnerability of life he saw while he was working at the plague hospital, and the struggles he experienced within the Carmelite order, especially his imprisonment. It is this sense of abandonment or hiddenness of God, that John experienced himself in his own hardships and that he recognized in people who suffered poverty, illness, sadness, and depression, or in people who suffered spiritually. His heart went out to all of these, providing care, comfort, spiritual guidance, and hope where he could.³⁴ This makes his theology both unusual for his time and appealing to the modern reader as it is built on the daily life experiences of people rather than on doctrine.

²⁹ Tyler and FitzGerald (interview) remark that some scholars contest whether John’s theology is Christocentric. Interesting to note is that John only uses the word “Jesus” four times in his longer works. He does use Christ and Son more often, but still sporadically. (Tyler, *St. John*, 48) These scholars, according to Tyler and FitzGerald, miss, however, that John in his writing addresses an audience that lives in a context that is “completely immersed in the continual liturgy and devotion to Christ.” (*Ibid.*, 49) This Christocentric environment is assumed in John’s work. Furthermore, the Paschal Mystery and the Cross are central to John’s theology and it is through the relationship with Christ (featuring as the “Bridegroom” in “The Spiritual Canticle”) that people are invited “into the *Nada/Todo* relationship with God.” (*Ibid.*, 48).

³⁰ Tyler, *St. John*, 40.

³¹ Collings, O.C.D., *John of the Cross*, 21.

³² Tyler, *St. John*, 39.

³³ *Ibid.*, 40: Tyler refers to the commentary to *The Spiritual Canticle* (CB 1, 7, 9).

³⁴ Kavanaugh, “General Introduction”, 24-25.

1.2 Introducing the Poem and the Commentary to “The Dark Night”

In this section, I introduce the origin of the poem “The Dark Night” and the relationship between the commentary *The Dark Night* and the treatise *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. This relationship impacts the different ways in which one can approach the commentary *The Dark Night*. I conclude this section with indicating how my research relates to current interpretations of the works of John of the Cross and how the commentary to “The Dark Night” is placed in the theoretical framework.

1.2.1 *The Dark Night and The Ascent of Mount Carmel*

The poem

“Before embarking on an explanation of these stanzas, we should remember that the soul recites them when it has already reached the state of perfection – that is, union with God through love – and has now passed through severe trials and conflicts... along the constricted way... called a dark night... The soul, therefore, happy at having trod this narrow road from which it derived so much good, speaks in this manner.”³⁵

John wrote his poem “En Una Noche Oscura” or “The Dark Night” shortly after he had escaped from his imprisonment in Toledo. The poem seems to describe in retrospective his personal experience of this escape in the night,³⁶ but it also describes “the result of his spiritual journey and practice.”³⁷ The imagery and symbols of the poem originate in the deep impact of this experience of imprisonment and escape and in John’s love of the night. The clarity of the air of the high plateau in Castile created a sharp contrast between the brilliance of the light of day and the nighttime darkness with its “sharp black edge to shadow and night”.³⁸ John was known to often go out to pray in this warm Spanish night “More lovely than the dawn”³⁹ and “full of delicate smells, murmuring sounds,”⁴⁰ and of “touches of a hot land baked by sun

³⁵ N. prologue.

³⁶ N. Prologue: From what John says about his poem *The Dark Night* in “The prologue for the reader,” it can be said that the poem describes his experience of imprisonment and his spiritual transformation in retrospect. See also: Kavanaugh, “Introduction to The Dark Night,” in *Collected Works*, 354-355.

³⁷ De Nicolás, *Alchemist of the Soul*, 58.

³⁸ Collings, O.C.D., *John of the Cross*, 61.

³⁹ Poem *The Dark Night*, stanza 5.

⁴⁰ Tyler, *St. John*, 8.

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during the day, and now at peace and rest in itself.”⁴¹ This night, which was “the natural ambience of his communion with God,”⁴² was in stark contrast with the night John experienced in the dark small inner room, where he was hidden away while other Carmelites were trying to bring an end to the discalced reform. It is here that John experiences his own dark night and moment of transformation, and the poem helps us understand this.

The first two stanzas of the poem call forth the experience of the escape into the dark night, where love’s urgent longings symbolizes the longing for freedom from captivity as well as for the freedom of spirit (as John will explain). “My house being now all stilled” refers to the quiet of the house that is being left behind and to the (maybe anxious) inner quiet experienced as one tries to escape. That is how the prisoner escapes into the dark night: unseen and alone, hiding under the cover of this dark night, “secure,” concealed, and “disguised,” and climbing to freedom by the “secret ladder.”

The third stanza seems to speak to an experience of stealth and to the secrecy of the departure: not being noticed, nor noticing the surroundings. It describes a total darkness outside and inward, which evokes a feeling of being totally lost. The escapee, however, does not stumble nor seems to lose the way, following the light that burns in the heart with courage and determination.

As the poem progresses, the reader begins to receive an inkling that the poem symbolizes much more than the experience of imprisonment and escape: It symbolizes the escape of the soul from its attachments and desires, in and through darkness, to be united with and transformed into its Lover: Christ.⁴³

This experience of the spiritual journey is what John wishes to explain when he starts writing his commentary to this poem.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴² Collings, *o.c.*, 61.

⁴³ The remaining stanzas of the poem speak to the experience of this union. John does not expand on this experience in his commentary *The Dark Night*. His commentary stops after having just begun his explanation of the third stanza. See also: Kavanaugh, “Glossary to Collected Works,” 455 & 457.

⁴⁴ A. Prol. 4 & 9.

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<i>EN UNA NOCHE OSCURA</i>	<i>THE DARK NIGHT</i>
Canciones de el alma que se goza de haber llegado al alto estado de la perfección, que es la unión con Dios, por el camino de la negación espiritual. En una noche oscura, con ansias, en amores inflamada, ¡oh dichosa ventura! salí sin ser notada estando ya mi casa sosegada A oscuras y segura, por la secreta escala disfrazada, ¡Oh dichosa ventura! a oscuras en celada, estando ya mi casa sosegada. En la noche dichosa en secreto, que nadie me veía, ni yo miraba cosa, sin otra luz y guía sino la que en el corazón ardía. Aquésta me guiaba más cierto que la luz del mediodía adónde me esperaba quien yo bien me sabía, en parte donde nadie parecía. ¡Oh noche que guiaste! ¡Oh noche amable más que el alborada! ¡Oh noche que juntaste Amado con amada, amada en el Amado transformada! En mi pecho florido, que entero para él solo se guardaba, allí quedó dormido, y yo le regalaba, y el ventalle de cedros aire daba.	Songs of the soul that rejoiced in having reached the high state of perfection, which is union with God, by the path of spiritual negation. One dark night Fired with love's urgent longings - Ah, the sheer grace! - I went out unseen, My house now being all stilled. In darkness, and secure, by the secret ladder, disguised, - ah, the sheer grace! - in darkness and concealment, my house being now all stilled. On that glad night in secret, for no one saw me, nor did I look at anything with no other light or guide than the one that burned in my heart. This guided me more surely than the light of noon to where he was awaiting me him I know so well there in a place where no one appeared. O guiding night! O night more lovely than the dawn! O night that has united the Lover with his beloved, transforming the beloved in her Lover. Upon my flowering breast, which I kept wholly for him alone, there he lay a sleeping, and I caressing him there in a breeze from the fanning cedars.

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El aire de la almena, cuando yo sus cabellos esparcía, con su mano serena en mi cuello hería y todos mis sentidos suspendía. Quedéme y olvidéme, el rostro recliné sobre el Amado, cesó todo y dejéme, dejando mí cuidado entre las azucenas olvidado.	When the breeze blew from the turret, as I parted his hair, it wounded my neck with its gentle hand, suspending all my senses. I abandoned and forgot myself, laying my face on my Beloved, all things ceased: I went out from myself, leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies.
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The commentary The Dark Night and The Ascent of Mount Carmel

In the prologue to his treatise *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* John presents the project he plans to undertake to describe the spiritual journey of attaining the “high state of perfection” or “union of a soul with God.”⁴⁵ His intention is to do so by writing a commentary to the poem “The Dark Night” by using the stanzas and their verses as basis for all the doctrine he wishes to discuss.⁴⁶ John, however, moves away from the poem and *The Ascent* develops in to treatise on the spiritual journey, rather than a commentary to the poem. In the first chapter of book one of *The Ascent*, John presents his plan to write four sections. The first three sections concern the active night of purgation: one addressing the sensory part of the soul and two addressing the spiritual part of the soul. The fourth section will concern the passive night of purgation.⁴⁷ As the work developed, John wrote three books that form the treatise *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. The fourth section on the passive night of purgation becomes a work on its own: the commentary *The Dark Night*. John writes this commentary after adding more stanzas to “The Spiritual Canticle,” composing more poems, among them “The Living Flame of Love,” and after writing the first redaction of his commentary to the poem “The Spiritual Canticle.”

Reading The Dark Night

This changing development of the commentary on the poem “The Dark Night” in John’s project has given rise to discussion as to when and how to read *The Dark Night* in relation to his other works. There are scholars who

⁴⁵ A. Theme.

⁴⁶ A. Theme.

⁴⁷ A. 1. 1. 2.

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stand by John's initial project and propose that the commentary should be read as the fourth part to *The Ascent* and never separate from this treatise.⁴⁸ Other scholars argue that the commentary *The Dark Night* should be read after the first book of *The Ascent*. As the commentary gives insight in the passive night of both the sensory part of the soul (Dark Night book 1) and the spiritual part of the soul (Dark Night book 2) it will then provide a bridge and better understanding of the two books concerning the active night of the spirit.⁴⁹ These two orders of reading are what one typically finds in translations, commentaries, or compilations of John's works. *The Ascent* and *The Dark Night* are presented first, either one after the other, or with *The Dark Night* presented after the first book of *The Ascent*. Then the other commentaries on the poems "The Spiritual Canticle" and "The Living Flame of Love" will follow.

There are, however, scholars who argue that for a better understanding of the spiritual journey John proposes, one should first come to understand, or at least receive an inkling of, the end goal of the journey, "The union of a soul with God,"⁵⁰ and of John's deep reverence for the beauty of all that God created. These scholars may have tuned in to what John's urges his readers in the prologue to the *Ascent*:

"Readers should not be surprised if this doctrine on the dark night – through which a soul advances toward God – appears somewhat obscure. This, I believe, will be the case as they begin to read, but as they read on they will understand it better since the latter part will explain the former. Then, if they read this work a second time, the matter will seem clearer and the doctrine sounder..."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Kavanaugh, "Glossary," 449 and John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul: A Masterpiece in the Literature of Mysticism by St. John of the Cross*, Translated, Edited, and with an Introduction by E. Allison Peers, (New York / London: Doubleday, 1959), 13-14, and Collings, O.C.D., *John of the Cross*, 61-63: Although Collings posits that these works are written and should be read in this sequence, he acknowledges that it does not mean they are also "four consecutive phases in the soul's spiritual evolution." (63).

⁴⁹ de Nicolás, *Alchemist of the Soul*, 157-193. See comment on Collings' position in this discussion in the prior footnote: In his chapter "The shades of the night" he portrays his perspective on the "soul's spiritual evolution," as he first addresses the active night of the senses (*Ascent* 1) and then simultaneously speaks of the passive night of the senses and the active night of the spirit (*Dark Night* 1 & *Ascent* 2-3), before speaking of the passive night of the spirit. (*Dark Night* 2). Collings, O.C.D., *John of the Cross*, 61-84.

⁵⁰ A. Theme.

⁵¹ A. Prol. 8.

Therefore, these scholars suggest not to read John's works in chronological order or according to John's initial design of his project, but to engage in a reading process that starts with the first part of the poem and commentary to "The Spiritual Canticle,"⁵² then turns to *The Ascent*, with *The Dark Night* as an intermezzo between the first and the second (and third) book of *The Ascent*,⁵³ and finishes with the remainder of *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame of Love*. Reading John's work in this manner prevents misconceptions in regards to the active emptying of mind and memory⁵⁴ and creates a deeper understanding that John's proposed negation of creaturely things does not come from a depreciation of creation, but from a person's relationship to them.⁵⁵ It contributes to understanding how John's teaching on the spiritual journey is framed by the concepts of love and desire and "is intent on showing what kind of affective education is carried out by the Holy Spirit" on this journey.⁵⁶ This sequence helps readers understand, for instance, that for John the spiritual journey is about Jesus Christ, as the Beloved, and about desire. All humans are driven by desire, and the goal of the journey is to make the desire for Christ greater than any other desire.⁵⁷ This is accomplished by an immersion in the life of Jesus, therefore turning to the Gospels both in prayer and daily life, as John points out when he presents the first of his two counsels that will guide the journey:

⁵² FitzGerald says that in her earlier studies and teaching she would even start with the poem and commentary to "The Living Flame of Love," before reading the first stanzas of "The Spiritual Canticle," and then return to it again after completing reading "The Spiritual Canticle." FitzGerald, Interview, November 2, 2018.

⁵³ Steven Payne, O.C.D., *The Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 60. Payne, for instance presents the spiritual journey in the context of "traditional three stages or 'ways'" and offers an alternation of the active and passive nights. See also below in part two where I discuss the stages or phases of the night.

⁵⁴ Tyler, *St. John*, 50 and FitzGerald, Interview. FitzGerald says: "you only can understand that hard second and third book of the Ascent, if [emphasized] you have paralleled it with *The Dark Night*. Because, you don't empty the mind, you don't empty the understanding, you don't empty the memory, until your experience in the dark night calls for it. Too many people in the past were injured trying to empty their minds or destroy their memories. There is an experience that comes and it's our part to understand and give ourselves over to it, when our theology, philosophy, or psychology falls apart and doesn't hold meaning anymore."

⁵⁵ Collings, *John of the Cross*, 36.

⁵⁶ FitzGerald, O.C.D., "Impasse and Dark Night," 97.

⁵⁷ F. England, "An Architectonics of Desire: The Person on the Path to Nada in John of the Cross," in *Acta Theologica* 33, no. 1 (January 2013): 79, and FitzGerald, "Impasse and Dark Night," 97.

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“First, have habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with his. You must then study his life in order to know how to imitate him and behave in all events as he would.”⁵⁸

This sequence of reading also provides insight into John’s theological understanding of God’s radical transcendence, creation’s radical dependence on God the Creator, and John’s sense of creation’s “nothingness.” John sees the need for purification and negation while also praising the role of the senses in the human way of attaining knowledge and showing deep reverence for the beauty of creation.⁵⁹ He shows understanding of and compassion for the human condition in regard to this need of negation, when he writes: “People must empty themselves of all, insofar as they can.”⁶⁰ He urges the way of negation and doing away with created things only “insofar” as the soul is able. The soul’s limited ability, John explains, is due to the human condition, but God moves “gently, and according to the mode of the soul,”⁶¹ and through all the modes of human knowing.⁶² As John explains with an axiom that he attributes to Aristotle: “Whatever is received, is received according to the mode of the receiver.”⁶³

John explains another meaning of the words “insofar as” in his second counsel to readers: to “renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God” out of the love and desire for Christ.⁶⁴ Emptying oneself is necessary “insofar as” these satisfactions create an attitude of attachment and possession to the things of the world and thus take away one’s desire for Christ. For John says: “[T]he things of the world... are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it [the soul], it is the will and appetite dwelling within that cause the damage when set on these things.”⁶⁵ During the spiritual journey through the dark night, a “process of affective redemption”⁶⁶ is carried out. This process purges and transforms the soul’s desires and recollects them in the love of God and Christ.⁶⁷

⁵⁸ A. 1. 13. 3.

⁵⁹ Collings, *John of the Cross*, 26-49.

⁶⁰ A. 2. 4. 2.

⁶¹ A. 2. 17. 3.

⁶² A. 2. 17.4.

⁶³ N. 1. 4. 2 & N. 2. 16. 4 & F. 3. 34. See also: Kavanaugh, “Glossary,” 368.

⁶⁴ A. 1. 13. 4.

⁶⁵ A. 1. 3. 4.

⁶⁶ FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” 97.

⁶⁷ FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” 97, and F. England, “An Architectonics of Desire,” 79.

1.2.2 *Placing the Dark Night in the Theoretical Framework*

My research project relates particularly to the work of Constance FitzGerald. In her theological reflections on the spirituality of John of the Cross she has uncovered different themes and key concepts, which explain both the function and the potential of contemplation, not only in religious life, but also in societal life and the human experience in general. She contemplated concepts of darkness, the different experiences of night in the symbolism of John's work, and experiences of impasse. She discovered the role of desire, love, and wisdom on the spiritual journey, the function of the purification of memory, and the prophetic potential of theological hope.⁶⁸ It is FitzGerald's work on considering the experience of the dark night as an experience of impasse, which suggested the connection between experiences of liminality in migration and experiences of liminality in the dark night.

FitzGerald did not only inspire me. Her reflections on experiences of impasse and the dark night also inspired research recently undertaken by Heather Dubois. Dubois develops a theory of praxis of intentional and intrapersonal transformation, which "is live-giving, non-violent, and sustainable, even in the face of impasse."⁶⁹ Judith Butler and John of the Cross, respectively a late modern and an early or pre-modern scholar, who, according to Dubois, both reflect on a multi-faceted self, are the sources she consult to develop a theory regarding a transformed and transforming self. As Dubois reads and interprets John of the Cross, she focuses on the purgation of vice as well as the ordinary and theological virtues in the process of transformation which occurs on the spiritual journey. She explains how this process of transformation contributes to understanding John's perception of the self as "multi-faceted and mobile," "influenced relationally," "capable of radical change," and "in need of support to love well."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ See for instance: Constance FitzGerald, O.C.D., "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope," 21-24 and "Transformation in Wisdom: The Subversive Character and Educative Power of Sophia in Contemplation," in *Carmel and Contemplation*, Kevin Culligan, ed. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2000), 281-358. For her other works, please see the Bibliography. See also: Laurie Cassidy and M. Shawn Copeland, Editors, *Desire, Darkness and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impasse: Engaging the Thought of Constance FitzGerald, OCD* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, Forthcoming May 2021). The content of this anthology could not be taken into account for this research

⁶⁹ Dubois, *To Be More Fully Alive: John of the Cross and Judith Butler on Transformation of Self* (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, July 2018), 3, 5-6, 60-120. In her research Dubois responds to gaps she observed in the mystical-political school of theology represented by Johann Baptist Metz and the school of conflict transformation represented by John Paul Lederlach.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 231 and 200-237.

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Whereas FitzGerald focused on the concepts of darkness, night, desire, wisdom, memory, and hope, and Dubois focused on the transformative effects of purgation of vice and the virtues, I will focus on the experience of liminality in the transitional phases of departure, arrival, and negotiation and settlement as constitutive for the process of transformation. I will approach the spiritual journey as a process marked by these transitions, as I place the experience of the dark night in the theoretical framework, which drives the analysis.

John in his life and spirituality experienced the darkness of the night in different ways. There is the beautiful night of the high plateau in Castile, a night quiet and recollected compared to the experience of the day, but also a night full of life and the presence of God: the best place and time to pray.⁷¹ There is also the night of confinement, of abandonment, and loss of self, which the experience of his imprisonment brought to John. These experiences of night and their different shades of darkness provided John with the symbolism to explain the spiritual journey, which he compares with a journey through the darkness of night. John distinguishes three phases on this journey symbolized by the three phases of the natural night: twilight or dusk, midnight, and the time just before the dawn.⁷² In his description of these three parts of the night John speaks about departure, the means or road to travel, and the point of arrival.⁷³ The vocabulary John employs aligns with the transitional phases in the theoretical framework, namely: departure and arrival, and John's "means to travel" aligns closely with experiences of negotiation.

Below I analyze how John of the Cross describes these transitional phases and how they effect liminality and a transformation in identity and faith on the journey through the dark night. In other words, I will answer the question: what happens between dusk and dawn?

2. On Traveling "Unknown Roads"

Before answering the question of how the three transitional phases of departure, arrival, and negotiation and settlement are characterized in the narrative of the dark night, I will first provide a short report on the explorative level of reading the poem and commentary to "The Dark Night."

⁷¹ A. 3. 44. 4: here John indicates "solitary wilderness" and "the best and most quiet time of night" as (apart from one's inner room) the best place and time for prayer. He does so while explaining how Jesus prayed.

⁷² A. 1. 2. 1-4.

⁷³ N. 1. 8. 1 and A. 1. 2. 1.

2.1 *The Hunch: The Human-Divine Contrary*

Following FitzGerald's guidance, I engaged the work of John of the Cross without first consulting secondary sources: reading and reflecting on the poetry and prose in the context of prayer and contemplation.⁷⁴ In this direct encounter with the text I not only experienced the richness John offers in his work, but I also encountered the strangeness of reading a text from the 16th century.⁷⁵

John is famous for his creative use of language. His use of metaphors and symbols is an example of the richness his works offer. He applies his knowledge of Scripture and (scientific) understanding of natural phenomena whenever he needs another register of language (as in a pipe organ) to describe what he means. For instance, regarding the passive dark night John applies two famous metaphors. In the passive night of the senses, John compares the way God guides the soul to the careful manner in which "a loving mother" first nurses and then weans her child:

"[She] warms her child with the heat of her bosom, nurses it with good milk and tender food, and carries and caresses it in her arms. But as the child grows older, the mother withholds her caresses and hides her tender love; she rubs bitter aloes on her sweet breast and sets the child down from her arms, letting it walk on its own feet, so that it may put aside the habits of childhood and grow accustomed to greater and more important things."⁷⁶

In the passive night of the spirit,⁷⁷ John compares the effect of the divine contemplation in the soul to the effect of fire on a log of wood. The fire will first purge the log of anything that is contrary to fire (dampness for instance), before it can transform "the wood into itself and makes it as beautiful as it is

⁷⁴ I not only profited from FitzGerald's academic work, but she also provided me insight in how she introduces Carmelite novices to the spirituality of John of the Cross and advised me on how to approach reading John's work. Following FitzGerald's guidance, I first spent time reading, praying with, and reflecting on the poem and commentary *The Living Flame of Love* and the first 12 stanzas and their commentary of *The Spiritual Canticle* before starting to read, pray with, and reflect on the poem and commentary to *The Dark Night*. As explained in paragraph 1.2.1, this approach was later confirmed in a literature study. Once the analysis and process of correlation were complete, I started reading *The Ascent to Mount Carmel* and so on.

⁷⁵ These reading experiences were all logged and taken into account, when engaging in the consequent rounds of reading, interpreting, and analyzing the commentary *The Dark Night*, supported by secondary literature on John of the Cross and his works.

⁷⁶ N. 1. 1. 2.

⁷⁷ John explores this metaphor is even further in *The Living Flame of Love*.

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itself.”⁷⁸ In the same manner, the soul will be first purged and then transformed by the divine light and wisdom.⁷⁹

However, while reading the commentary *The Dark Night* with the perspective of a migration journey in the back of my mind another metaphor for the journey through the dark night lights up:

“To reach a new and unknown land and journey along unknown roads, travelers cannot be guided by their own knowledge; instead, they have doubts about their own knowledge and seek the guidance of others. Obviously they cannot reach new territory or attain this added knowledge if they do not take these new and unknown roads and abandon those familiar ones...”⁸⁰

This metaphor reflects the experience of a traveler and infers departure from familiar roads or territory. It speaks about the journey along the new and unknown roads, and the means necessary to reach or arrive at or settle into this new territory. The metaphor reflects the manner in which John describes three moments on the spiritual journey: the point of departure, the means to journey on the road, and the point of arrival.⁸¹ This order, however, seems to differ from the order in which the three phases on a migration journey are generally presented in migration theology, namely: departure, arrival, negotiation and settlement. This raised the question of which order I should apply while analyzing commentary *The Dark Night*.

Regarding the encounter with the strangeness of a 16th century text, I struggled, for instance, with the concept of the devil, with John’s perception of the world and flesh as enemies, with his perception of the lowliness of the human senses and faculties and their means of experiencing and understanding, and with the idea of the two contraries of the human and the divine, which, according to John, cannot co-exist in one subject.⁸² This sense of lowliness of the human and its seeming incompatibility with the divine confused me. These anthropological and theological views do not seem to pair up with what I have come to understand about John through his works: his compassionate nature, his love for creation, and the embodied language in both his poems and commentaries.

⁷⁸ N. 2. 10. 1.

⁷⁹ N. 2. 10. 1-2.

⁸⁰ N. 2. 16. 7.

⁸¹ A. 1. 2. 1.

⁸² See for instance: N. 2. 5. 4 and N. 2. 9. 2.

Regardless of my struggle with my initial comprehension of these concepts in John's narrative, it became clear that both the lowliness of the human and John's perception of the human and the divine as two contraries that cannot co-exist are recurring themes. It is, therefore, my hunch that this tension in the relationship between the human and the divine is central to understanding John's narrative of the spiritual journey through the dark night. This raises two questions. How does this tension between the human and the divine feature when analyzing the three transitional phases and the experience of liminality in the dark night? And, how will the contrary between the human and divine be bridged?

2.2 *Departure: Abandoning Familiar Ways*

Before analyzing how John speaks of departure in the context of the spiritual journey of the soul toward God, I will take a closer look at how John speaks about the different phases of the dark night.

Trying to decide in which order to analyze these phases is not an easy feat, because John himself can be the source of confusion or complication.⁸³ John lays out his plan to explain the spiritual journey of the soul⁸⁴ in the first chapter of book one of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. He seems to describe four phases: the active night of the senses, the active night of the spirit, the passive night of the senses and the passive night of spirit.⁸⁵ In the next chapter, however, John presents three phases of the night: twilight or dusk, midnight, and dawn. Furthermore, it is noted that John does not follow through on the plan he projected. Looking at the order in which he wrote his works, it seems that John might have been writing the commentary *The Dark Night*, which addresses the passive dark night, while he was also still working on the treatise of *The Ascent*. Given that John makes a distinction between an active and passive night, and that he speaks of the soul as one *suppositum* with an ongoing interaction between its sensory and spiritual parts, it seems that these phases (whether four or three in number) are not just meant to be understood chronologically, but can be understood as happening parallel to

⁸³ Payne, *The Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 55-61. Payne explains why John in his treatise and commentaries creates this confusion.

⁸⁴ In my analysis of the experience of the dark night I will use the word soul to indicate a person who experiences the journey through the dark night. Later in the chapter I will explain in more detail the full meaning of the term soul in John's thinking. I will refer to the soul with "it," as John does as well, although he also refers to the soul with "her" (especially in his poems and when he speaks of the divine espousal or spiritual betrothal or marriage). I have chosen to use "it" to avoid the emphasis of any gender.

⁸⁵ A. 1. 1. 2.

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one another. They can even show an iterative pattern.⁸⁶ Payne points out that making divisions into phases is just an instrument of interpretation, a way to consider the experiences of “only one night,” which can be characterized by such aspects.⁸⁷ These observations offer me the liberty to follow the sequence of the transitional phases as found in migration theology when analyzing the characteristics of these three phases in the experience of the dark night.

John mainly uses the word departure when speaking about that from which a soul departs.⁸⁸ He uses the time of dusk or twilight as a metaphor for the experience of departure. This experience can be compared to the experience of things fading. Ways of being and ways of operation from which the soul needs to depart fade into the darkness. The experience of departure therefore can be located at the beginning of the spiritual journey.

The soul’s departure from its ways of being and operation also has a reason or a cause. This cause can be found in the goal of the spiritual journey, which finds its source in the point of arrival of this journey: God. Therefore, I will first explain the reason or the cause for this departure and then provide the characteristics of the experience of departure in both the night of senses and the night of the spirit.

2.2.1 *The Reason of Departure: God’s Desire and Agency*

“Souls begin to enter this dark night when God, gradually drawing them out of the state of beginners (those who practice meditation on the spiritual road), begins to place them in the state of proficient (those who are already contemplatives), so that by passing through this state they might reach that of the perfect, which is the divine union of the soul with God.”⁸⁹

This quote provides a condensed summary of the spiritual journey of the soul toward God. It explains the progressive states which a soul can achieve on this journey and the goal of the journey, which is the divine union with God. It also explains that this experience of the passive dark night is God’s initiative.

⁸⁶ Collings, *John of the Cross*, 62-73. Collings, for instance, chooses to look at these phases of the night from the perspective of two pairs of concepts, which John applies: active and passive on the one hand and sense and spirit on the other. It leads him to present the phase of passive night of the senses simultaneously with the active night of the spirit, because he sees them as two aspects of one experience.

⁸⁷ Steven Payne, O.C.D., *The Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 60.

⁸⁸ N. 1. 1. 1, N. 1. 11. 3-4, N. 2. 14. 1, N. 2. 21. 10, and N. 2. 22. 1.

⁸⁹ N. 1. 1. 1.

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It is God who accomplishes the transition from beginner to proficient to perfect sojourner on the spiritual journey.⁹⁰

John, however, does speak of the intention of individuals to engage this journey. He mentions especially those in his order who have chosen the spiritual life and have asked him to explain this spiritual journey to them.⁹¹ In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* John focuses on explaining how their own efforts can contribute to this journey. Even when speaking of the passive night, John continues to encourage souls to actively strive for true mortification, to obtain a poverty of spirit, and to fix their eyes on God alone. However, they can only do this insofar as possible by their own means. Regardless of their own efforts, they will never be able accomplish this entirely, “until God accomplishes it in them passively by means of the purgation of this night.”⁹²

It is God’s desire to guide the soul away from its imperfections and to enkindle in the soul the fire of love that longs for the union with God. God desires to prepare souls for this union of love and to guide them there.⁹³ To prepare souls God causes them to depart from their former mode of operation by placing them in “pure dryness and interior darkness”⁹⁴ in the passive night of the senses and by instructing them through “infused contemplation or mystical theology” in the passive night of the spirit.⁹⁵

Below I will first describe the characteristics of this departure in the night of the senses, followed by the characteristics of this departure in the night of the spirit.

⁹⁰ There are many other instances where John mentions God’s agency. For instance: N. 1. 3. 3, N. 1. 10. 1-2, N. 1. 12. 4, N. 1. 13. 1 & 3 & 7, N. 1. 14. 4, N. 2. 1.1, and in places where John describes the inflow of God, which he also calls infused contemplation or mystical theology, for instance: N. 2. 5. 1 & N. 2. 12. 5. God’s agency is generally referred to by its effects in the soul and one could surmise that is it assumed to be present everywhere.

⁹¹ A. Prol. 9.

⁹² N. 1. 7. 5 & N. 1. 3. 1-3.

⁹³ See N. 2. 5. 4: The need for this preparation lies in the divide between the “extreme good properties” of the divine wisdom on the one hand and the human miseries and imperfections on the other and these “two contraries cannot co-exist in one subject.”

⁹⁴ N. 1. 7. 5.

⁹⁵ N. 2. 5. 1. See also: Kavanaugh, “Glossary,” 401: “John identifies infused contemplation with mystical theology, and both of them with the dark night from the viewpoint of the cause of the night, not its effects.” Hence one can say that the infused contemplation is the reason for the experience of departure.

2.2.2 *Departure from Subjection to the Senses*

“Those whom God begins to lead into these desert solitudes are like the children of Israel. When God began giving them the heavenly food, which contained in itself all savors and changed to whatever taste each one hungered after [Wis. 16: 20-21], as is there mentioned, they nonetheless felt a craving for the tastes of the fleshmeats and onions they had eaten in Egypt, for their palate was accustomed and attracted to them more than to the delicate sweetness of the angelic manna.”⁹⁶

The purpose of the dark night of the senses, the first night, is to prepare the sensual part of the soul for the second night: the passive night of the spirit.⁹⁷ In order to accomplish this, the soul has to depart from its subjection to the senses and from the imperfections caused by this subjection. John uses the seven cardinal vices to explain these imperfections and how they impede a soul.⁹⁸

Departure from subjection to the senses also means the soul departs from both the love of self and of created things, from the satisfactions and consolation found in its passions, appetites, and affections, and from the impediments caused by the world, the devil and the flesh, as they seek to distract the soul with gratifications.⁹⁹ As God leads souls into this dark night of the senses, they will no longer find satisfaction in their passions, appetites, and sensible affections. They will experience dryness and emptiness in their senses, which causes a departure from the consolation found in discursive meditation. They will experience emptiness and darkness in their efforts to meditate by means of discursive imaginings and will no longer be able to find satisfaction in their former spiritual exercises.¹⁰⁰

At the end of book one on the dark night of the senses John explains that not every person will experience the trials and temptations of this night in the same way or with the same intensity. Each soul will journey according to the amount of imperfections that need to be purged, according to God’s will, and the amount of “love to which God wishes to raise a soul.”¹⁰¹ Some souls will be able to enter consistently in a state of quiet idleness or the powerlessness to meditate and continue in the experience of the “dissatisfaction of the

⁹⁶ N. 1. 9. 5.

⁹⁷ N. 1. 11. 3.

⁹⁸ N. 1. 2-7.

⁹⁹ N. 1. Intro. 1 & N. 1. 11. 4 & N. 1. 13. 14.

¹⁰⁰ N. 1. 8. 3 & N. 1. 9. 1-4 & N. 1. 11. 4.

¹⁰¹ N. 1. 14. 5.

faculties.”¹⁰² Other people may need to return to discursive meditation and be “weaned” in a slower pace from need of sensory satisfaction. And yet other people are not destined to advance to the night of the spirit. They will only sometimes experience the deprivation of sensory satisfaction, for God wishes to guide them into humility and self-knowledge and to lead them away from any harmful attractions.¹⁰³

2.2.3 *Departing from Human Operation*

“This night withdraws the spirit from its customary manner of experience to bring it to the divine experience that is foreign to every human way. It seems to the soul in this night that it is being carried outside itself, by afflictions... Everything seems strange even though a person is the same as always. The reason is that the soul is being made a stranger to its usual knowledge and experience of things...”¹⁰⁴

In the passive night of the senses, God places the soul in dryness and darkness. This causes the soul to depart from its subjection to the senses, from the love of self and all creaturely things, and from the spiritual practice of discursive meditation. In the passive night of the spirit, the soul will, by means of infused contemplation, depart from its former mode of operation in the faculties of intellect, memory and will. However, John explains, since the soul is of “*one suppositum*”¹⁰⁵ the sensory part of the soul will also experience the effects of this infused contemplation and therefore will continue to experience the need for departure from all its sensory modes of operations as well.¹⁰⁶

Regarding the faculty of intellect, the soul will experience a departure from its habitual and natural or human way of understanding. As the infused contemplation or dark faith prepares the intellect to receive divine wisdom, the soul will experience darkness and emptiness in the intellect. It will no longer find comfort in its natural and habitual manner of understanding.¹⁰⁷

Regarding the faculty of memory, the soul will experience a departure from its former manner of experience and perception and from possessiveness in its memory, which provided the soul with consolation and peace. As the infused contemplation guides the soul in interior recollection, the soul will experience

¹⁰² N. 1. 9. 9.

¹⁰³ N. 1. 9. 9 and N. 1. 14. 5.

¹⁰⁴ N. 2. 9. 5.

¹⁰⁵ N. 1. 4. 2 & N. 2. 1. 1 & N. 2. 3. 1.

¹⁰⁶ N. 2. 3. 1 & N. 2. 14. 2.

¹⁰⁷ N. 2. 4. 1-2 & N. 2. 9. 3 & N. 2. 21. 11.

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forgetfulness, oblivion, and a lack of knowledge and will “feel interiorly alien to all things.”¹⁰⁸

In regard to the faculty of the will, the soul will experience a departure from its habitual and human or natural desires, affections, and appetites and from its “feeble way of loving.”¹⁰⁹ As the infused contemplation prepares the soul for the union of love in God, the soul is no longer able to experience satisfaction in “the love of self and of one’s own things”¹¹⁰ will experience aridity in its every feeling and affection.¹¹¹

As John explains, with the quote above, this departure from its “customary manner of experience” in the faculties of intellect, memory, and will in the spiritual part of the soul causes souls to experience a deep distress or crisis. Souls no longer recognize themselves as they depart from, even become estranged from, their “usual knowledge and experience of things.”¹¹²

2.2.4 *Observations*

John speaks about departure from the perspective of God and from the perspective of the soul or person experiencing the dark night. Although John would be the first to say that human knowledge about God is always imperfect, he is nevertheless quite outspoken about God’s role in the experience of the dark night: it is God’s desire to bring the soul into the union of love in God. This divine desire causes the beginning of the spiritual journey into the passive night.

From the perspective of the soul, this inflow of God causes an experience of departure. This departure is characterized by the experience that the habitual and natural or human modes of operation, both in the sensory and spiritual part of the soul, no longer function. Therefore, the experience of departure can indeed be located at the beginning of the spiritual journey through the passive dark night.

However, John also remarks that a soul may continue to experience the need for departure from all its sensory modes of operations as the soul transitions from the night of the senses into the night of the spirit. This observation indicates that experiences of departure can reoccur as the soul makes progress

¹⁰⁸ N. 2. 9. 5 & N. 2. 4. 1-2 & N. 2. 21. 11.

¹⁰⁹ N. 2. 4. 1.

¹¹⁰ N. 2. 21. 10.

¹¹¹ N. 2. 4. 1 & N. 2. 9. 3 & N. 2. 21. 11.

¹¹² N. 2. 9. 5.

on this journey.¹¹³ Gaining insight in the experiences of arrival and negotiation and settlement, may shed more light on this observation.

2.3 *Arrival: Toward Union with God*

Before presenting the characteristics of the transitional phase of arrival in the experience of the dark night, it is important to make a remark regarding the place of arrival in the journey of the dark night. John places the moment of arrival in God, which will not be fully achieved in this life.¹¹⁴ Arrival, therefore, is the end of the journey. It does not follow departure and does not indicate the beginning of the second leg of the journey.

If arrival is the end of the spiritual journey and does not happen in this life, how then can the experience of arrival be described? John compares the experience of arrival with the time of the very early dawn. At this time of the night, it is still dark, for God is dark to soul, but this darkness teems with the anticipation of the new day.¹¹⁵ It is this eschatological dimension of arrival, which allows John to provide characteristics of the experience of arrival. As the soul advances through this dark night, the soul will experience an enkindling of divine love. This divine love in itself cannot be known but can be recognized by its effects.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the characteristics of the experience of arrival can be found in the development of this love and its effects.

2.3.1 *Enkindled with Divine Love*

“God gathers together all the strength, faculties, and appetites of the soul, spiritual and sensory alike, so the energy and power of this whole harmonious composite may be employed in this love. The soul consequently arrives at the true fulfillment of the first commandment which, neither disdaining anything human nor excluding it from this love, states: *You shall love your God with your whole heart, and with your whole mind, and with your whole soul, and with all your strength* [Dt. 6: 5].”¹¹⁷

When in the poem the soul says that it is “Fired with love’s urgent longings,” it refers to the passion of divine love that is enkindled in the spirit. It is the divine love itself that stirs the soul and creates in the soul a longing for God.

¹¹³ N. 1. 14. 5 & N. 2. 11. 2 & N. 2. 13. 11.

¹¹⁴ A. 1. 2. 1 & N. 2. 20. 5-6.

¹¹⁵ A. 1. 2. 1-5.

¹¹⁶ N. 2. 13. 1 & N. 2. 17. 2-8 & N. 2. 18. 5.

¹¹⁷ N. 2. 11. 4: Italics by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *Collected Works*, 420.

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As the soul makes progress on its journey through the dark night it will experience different degrees of love.¹¹⁸

In the night of the senses this love can be recognized as feelings of fervor and enthusiasm, which develop into a feeling of longing for God, even though the soul does not yet understand where this feeling originates. The effect of this love is that the soul develops a dry solicitude about serving God. Its sensory appetites are directed away from seeking satisfaction in the sensory life to seeking satisfaction in the spiritual life.¹¹⁹ As the soul continues to grow in this love it is freed from the impediments of the senses and obtains, in regard to the things of God, more freedom of spirit. Its satisfaction becomes more interior and the soul finds contentment "simply with a loving and peaceful attentiveness to God."¹²⁰

In the night of the spirit, the soul moves from an esteeming love to an impassionate love. The effect of the esteeming love can be recognized in the soul's concern of feeling unworthy of and abandoned by God.¹²¹ This impassionate love is recognized by an anxious and impatient desire for the love of God. This love is authentic as it is founded on the esteeming love. It will give strength and courage as the soul goes out impatiently to seek the union of love in God.¹²² The enkindling of love is felt in different ways: sometimes it will be experienced in the will, sometimes in the intellect, and sometimes in both faculties, which results in a rich and delightful experience of God.¹²³ This ascent to God can only be known by its progressive effects in the soul. John describes this progression by means of ten steps on what he calls the secret ladder of love. First, the soul no longer finds satisfaction or support in anything but the things of God. It starts to anxiously search for God in all things. The next effect is that the soul performs good works and then experiences solicitude and humility in serving God. Then the soul seeks to give God pleasure and becomes filled with gratitude for all the favors and gifts received from God. The soul experiences an impatient longing for God and becomes daring and bold in the presence of God, while careful to preserve its humility. Finally, the soul is occasionally able to experience union with

¹¹⁸ N. 2. 11. 1 and Kavanaugh, "Glossary," 419: Kavanaugh points to this development and indicates where John explains these different degrees of the enkindling of love, which in the senses is both similar and different to the enkindling of love in the spirit.

¹¹⁹ N. 1. 1. 2 & N. 1. 11. 1-2.

¹²⁰ N. 1. 10. 4 & N. 2. 1. 1.

¹²¹ N. 2. 13. 5.

¹²² N. 2. 11. 4-7 & N. 2. 13. 5-9.

¹²³ N. 2. 12. 5-7.

God and on the ninth step receives a “gentle and delightful ardor”¹²⁴ from the Holy Spirit, until on the tenth step, which is not in this life, the soul fully rests in God.¹²⁵

In the measure in which the sensory and spiritual faculties and appetites become subjected and recollected to God and in the measure in which the soul is infused with the love of God, the soul will start to experience touches of the divine. It is then that the soul reaches this last part of the night, very early in the morning, right before the dawn. Here the soul starts to experience glimpses of the union with God.¹²⁶

2.3.2 *Union with God: An Eschatological Goal*

“...The soul ...will clearly recognize how on this road it suffers many ups and downs... until one arrives at the quiet state: The soul never remains in one state, but everything is ascent and descent.”¹²⁷

John is very clear that arriving at the perfect union of love in God, in which the soul is fully transformed in God, is not experienced in this life. The goal of this spiritual journey is, therefore, an eschatological goal.¹²⁸ Even though experiences of this union are possible in this life (be they ultimately ineffable¹²⁹), there will be always something lacking in this experience.

John explains the effects of the eschatological dimension of this experience when he examines the function of the steps on a ladder. Steps on a ladder can be used both for climbing up, but also for going down. On this ladder of love, the soul experiences both the movement of ascent and the movement of descent in three different ways.

First, there is the experience that the loving inflow of God both humbles and exalts the soul. In the departure from sense and self and from its former modes of operation the soul experiences descent as it is exercised in humility, which in turn will cause it to be exalted and to ascend toward God.¹³⁰

Secondly, the ascent does not happen uninterrupted. A soul may sometimes experience descent as it comes down a step, rather than moving upward. For instance, the seventh step of love makes the soul daring and bold before God,

¹²⁴ N. 2. 20. 4.

¹²⁵ N. 2. 19. 1-5 & N. 2. 20. 1-5.

¹²⁶ N. 2. 11. 2 & N. 2. 13. 11.

¹²⁷ N. 2. 18. 3.

¹²⁸ N. 2. 20. 5-6.

¹²⁹ N. 2. 20. 4. John, however, does expand on characteristics of this union in the *Spiritual Canticle*.

¹³⁰ N. 2. 18. 2 & 4.

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but if the soul is not careful to conserve its humility it may lose this progress and descend. And regarding the love experienced on the eighth step, the soul can only remain on this step of love for short periods of time.¹³¹

This journey therefore is a journey marked by ups and downs, which explains the third way a soul experiences ascent and descent. On this journey, the soul will experience trials, misery, and torment, alternated with experiences of prosperity, abundance, and tranquility.¹³² These experiences alternate: they cannot be experienced simultaneously, because the experience of affliction and darkness is of human origin and the experience of abundance and tranquility is of divine origin.¹³³

Nevertheless, this iterative experience of ascent and descent will cause the soul to go upward. It will climb this ladder of love until it reaches the top step, where God rests and where the soul “will become like God: ...God through participation.”¹³⁴ This final moment of arrival, however, is not experienced in this life.

2.3.3 *Observations*

The experience of arrival lies in God, when the soul is fully transformed in the love of God and becomes united with God through participation. This arrival is located at the end or even beyond the end of the journey and therefore carries an eschatological dimension,

On the journey toward this union with God the soul is enkindled with divine love. The soul's growth and perfection in this love can be recognized in its effects in the soul. These effects carry with them experiences of descent, as the soul gains humility, and of ascent, as the soul grows in love.

2.4 *Negotiation and Settlement: The Experience of Descent and Ascent*

In this section I will turn to the characteristics of the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement. Again, I will start with a remark regarding the place of this experience on the spiritual journey.

In the previous section I observed that on the journey toward arrival in the union of love in God, souls alternately experience descent and ascent. To reach this perfect union, the soul needs to negotiate the alternation of experiences of misery and torment on the one hand, and of abundance and

¹³¹ N. 2. 20. 2-3.

¹³² N. 2. 18. 3.

¹³³ N. 2. 6. 4 & N. 2. 7. 5.

¹³⁴ N. 2. 20. 5.

tranquility on the other hand. This places the phase of negotiation before arrival and raises the question where to locate experiences of settlement. In order to answer this question it is first necessary to take a closer look at the cause of the experiences of descent and ascent.

2.4.1 *The Effects of the Inflow of God: Purification & Illumination*

“For contemplation is nothing else than a secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God, which, *if not hampered*, fires the soul in the spirit of love...”¹³⁵

As the soul journeys toward the union with God, it is infused with the loving inflow of God. This infused contemplation prepares the soul for the union with God and causes two effects: it purges the soul and it illumines the soul. John explains that the soul experiences this loving inflow of God as darkness, because of the manner in which human imperfection is contrary to the divine: such contraries cannot co-exist.¹³⁶ For as long as the soul is still “hampered” by its human desires and by imperfections in its mode of operation in both the sensory and spiritual part of the soul, the soul will experience this loving inflow of God as affliction (in the purgation) and darkness (in the illumination).¹³⁷ John, therefore, also refers to this infused contemplation as dark contemplation.¹³⁸

In the effect of purgation, the soul experiences the departure from self and from all former modes of operation and understanding: the soul will be purged from all its human desires and imperfections.¹³⁹ In the effect of illumination, the soul experiences a growth in love, reflecting a new understanding of God, and of the self in relationship to God.¹⁴⁰ Connecting these experiences of purgation and illumination with the observations in regard to the experience of descent and ascent as the soul climbs the ladder of love, it seems that the experience of descent is caused by the effect of purgation and that the experience of ascent is caused by the effect of illumination. As the

¹³⁵ N. 1. 10. 6. Emphasis by researcher.

¹³⁶ N. 2. 5. 1-4 & N. 2. 6. 1 & N. 2. 9. 2.

¹³⁷ N. 2. 5. 2. John expands on the experiences of darkness and affliction in chapters five through nine of second book of *The Dark Night*. These experiences will be addressed in the context of the experience of liminality. See also Kavanaugh, “Glossary,” 401.

¹³⁸ See for instance: N. 1. 10. 6, N. 2. 1. 1, N. 2. 3. 3, N. 2. 6. 4, N. 2. 7. 4, N. 2. 8. 2, N. 2. 16. 11-14, N. 2. 17. 2, and N. 2. 23. 2.

¹³⁹ See for instance N. 2. 9. 1-11.

¹⁴⁰ See for instance N. 1. 12. 1-6.

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soul negotiates the alternating experiences of purgation and illumination¹⁴¹ it faces challenges and impediments in the effect of purgation and receives benefits and growth in the effect of illumination.

2.4.2 *Impediments on the Journey*

On the journey through the passive dark night, a soul has to negotiate the effects of the infused contemplation. The manner in which a soul experiences the purgation and illumination is determined by manner in which the loving inflow of God is hampered by the imperfections, on the account of the soul's human condition, present in both the sensory and spiritual part of the soul.¹⁴² This raises the question: Which impediments or challenges are encountered in the passive night of the senses and in the passive night of the spirit.

Impediments in the night of the senses

“And [God] desires to liberate them from the lowly exercise of the senses and of discursive meditation, by which they go in search of him so inadequately and with so many difficulties.”¹⁴³

The impediment that seems to be the foundation of other impediments and challenges is the soul's tendency to be centered on “love of pleasure and of self.”¹⁴⁴ It causes the soul to seek to fulfill its desire for consolation and satisfaction. When in the passive night of the senses the soul is invited to depart from this self-centeredness it faces other challenges.

First, there are the temptations or distractions caused by “the three enemies” the devil, the world, and the flesh.¹⁴⁵ The devil, for instance, easily tricks a soul by increasing its fervor to perform the spiritual exercises. Being diligent in spiritual exercises is not an impediment in itself, but when increased fervor causes satisfaction and presumption then the motivation is no longer centered in the goal of the spiritual exercises (which is God), but in the personal satisfaction found in them.¹⁴⁶ The distraction of the world lies in the attachment to worldly things and in finding satisfaction and consolation in

¹⁴¹ N. 2. 6. 4 & N. 2. 7. 5. See 4.2.2.2.

¹⁴² N. 1. 14. 5 & N. 2. 11. 2 & N. 2. 13. 11.

¹⁴³ N. 1. 8. 3.

¹⁴⁴ N. 1. 8. 3.

¹⁴⁵ N. 1. Intro. 2.

¹⁴⁶ N. 1. 2. 1-2. John also mentions this imperfect motivation in doing spiritual works in N. 1. 1. 3.

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them alone.¹⁴⁷ The temptation of the flesh is that a love which originates in sensuality stifles the love of others and of God, whereas a love which originates in the spirit allows the love for others and of God to grow as well.¹⁴⁸

Other challenges the soul faces are the imperfections caused by the cardinal vices. Pride can cause a soul to become presumptuous and complacent. Spiritual avarice can lead to attachment to spiritual objects and their ornamentations. Spiritual lust may be stirred in the sensory part by feelings of joy received in prayer, with the risk of creating a desire for this feeling. Anger, when directed toward others, can cause a lack of meekness and misjudgment, but when directed toward the disappointment regarding one's own imperfections, can lead to impatience. Seeking delight, satisfaction, and consolation in spiritual exercises, can lead to spiritual gluttony, in which souls can overtax themselves in their penances and fasts. Spiritual envy can cause the soul to be uncharitable toward others who have progressed on the spiritual journey. Spiritual sloth can lead to weariness and make a soul feel lukewarm regarding spiritual exercises.¹⁴⁹

As God leads the soul further into the passive night of the senses, the soul will no longer be able to find satisfaction in its former spiritual exercises and will experience emptiness and darkness in its efforts to meditate by means of discursive imaginings.¹⁵⁰ The challenge for the soul is to not try to return to discursive meditation. Instead the soul should remain idle in this emptiness, even if it feels that it is failing God and is concerned about the apparent loss of time. Trying to meditate by means of its senses would impede the progress made on this journey.¹⁵¹

Impediments in the night of the spirit

“Only one attachment or one particular object to which the spirit is actually or habitually bound is enough to hinder the experience or reception of the delicate and intimate delight of the spirit of love, that contains eminently in itself all delights.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ N. 1. 8. 3.

¹⁴⁸ N. 1. 4. 7.

¹⁴⁹ In chapters two through seven of the first book of *The Dark Night* John explains the imperfections caused by the cardinal vices.

¹⁵⁰ N. 1. 8. 3 & N. 1. 9. 1-4 & N. 1. 11. 4.

¹⁵¹ N. 1. 9. 7 & N. 1. 10. 1-4.

¹⁵² N. 2. 9. 1.

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In the passive night of the spirit, purgation becomes more interior. The soul continues to suffer many afflictions both in the sensory and spiritual part of the soul. Again, John explains that the soul needs to depart from all attachments to be able to experience the delight that the spirit of love can bring. As the darkness deepens, the soul faces the following challenges: actual or habitual attachments, memories of “past prosperity,” and resisting the experience of powerlessness.

As the quote above indicates, the soul can be hindered by any “actual or habitual attachments or [by] some particular knowledge or apprehensions.”¹⁵³ For instance, the soul can still be attached to the experience of peace caused by the manner in which it used to find consolation in its not yet purged sensory and spiritual faculties. This former experience of peace needs to be let go and purified in order for the soul to find true peace.¹⁵⁴

Another impediment the soul experiences is that it becomes painfully aware of the miseries caused by this dark night and this in sharp contrast with the memories of its “past prosperity.”¹⁵⁵ Seeking consolation in these memories will only bring deeper sorrow and despair in regards to hope for possible remedies in this situation, which makes the soul feel like a prisoner who is thrown in a “dark dungeon bound hands and feet.”¹⁵⁶ The challenge for the soul is to try not to search for this consolation.

In this passive night of the spirit, the soul will experience darkness in the intellect, void in the memory, and aridity in the will.¹⁵⁷ This causes an experience of powerlessness in the faculties, just as the soul experiences powerlessness in the night of the senses once it loses the ability to meditate by means of discursive imaginings. The challenge for the soul is to not resist this experience of powerlessness. For instance, when the soul feels troubled, because it is not able to reach out and pray to God, John advises the soul to remain quiet.¹⁵⁸

2.4.3 *Benefits and Fruits of the Journey*

Even though John in his narrative of the dark night emphasizes the challenges and impediments a soul has to face and negotiate on the spiritual journey, he also writes about the benefits this journey brings to the soul. These benefits

¹⁵³ N. 2. 9. 2.

¹⁵⁴ N. 2. 9. 6.

¹⁵⁵ N. 2. 7. 1.

¹⁵⁶ N. 2. 7. 3.

¹⁵⁷ N. 2. 6. 4. See also 2.2.3.

¹⁵⁸ N. 2. 8. 1.

are experienced in the effects of illumination. Even though the soul may not yet comprehend the full extent of this illumination, it will start to feel its benefits.

Benefits experienced in the night of the senses

“This night frees the soul from all these vices by quenching all its earthly and heavenly satisfactions, darkening its discursive meditations, and producing in it other innumerable goods through its acquiring of the virtues... for it will please and comfort one who treads this path to know that a way seemingly so rough and adverse and contrary to spiritual gratification engenders so many blessings.”¹⁵⁹

The first of these benefits, or “innumerable goods,” is that a soul acquires a new understanding of self and its relationship with God. The soul develops both “a habitual care and solicitude for God”¹⁶⁰ and a more authentic self-knowledge in regards to its humbleness in relation to God’s “grandeur and majesty.”¹⁶¹ The soul gains the insight that its former desires for satisfaction and consolation were caused by its many imperfections and ignorance. The soul develops an attitude of respect and courtesy when it communes or converses with God.¹⁶²

The second benefit of this dark night of the senses is that as the soul grows in virtue, it is liberated from imperfections caused by the seven capital vices. The virtue of spiritual humility liberates souls from the imperfections of spiritual pride. This benefit is seen in the development of compassion and meekness toward others.¹⁶³ A humble soul is no longer judgmental toward others but esteems them in their humanity. Such a soul humbly submits itself to the teaching of others and rejoices in the spiritual progress of others.¹⁶⁴ The soul is also freed from the imperfections caused by avarice, spiritual lust, and gluttony. It is no longer attached to spiritual objects nor finds delight and gratification in the spiritual exercises. Instead, it centers its spiritual works on God. It becomes the soul’s pleasure “to know how to live for love of God or neighbor.”¹⁶⁵ In this night of the senses, the soul is also purged from the vices

¹⁵⁹ N. 1. 11. 5.

¹⁶⁰ N. 1. 11. 2.

¹⁶¹ N. 1. 12. 4.

¹⁶² N. 1. 12. 2-3.

¹⁶³ N. 1. 12. 8.

¹⁶⁴ N. 1. 12. 8. See also: N. 1. 2. 6-7.

¹⁶⁵ N. 1. 3. 2. See also: N. 1. 13. 1-3.

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of anger, envy, and sloth. The aridities and hardships the soul experiences soften and humble the soul. It acquires meekness and patience, learns to practice self-denial, and develops “a holy envy that desires to imitate others.”¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the soul receives the great benefit of being enabled to exercise the virtues together: humility, patience, forbearance, perseverance, sobriety, temperance, and fortitude.¹⁶⁷

Thirdly, the soul obtains, regarding the things of God, more freedom of spirit. When the soul in the poem says: “My house now being all stilled,” it refers to the experience that the sensory appetites and passions are all calmed. This calming of the senses allows the soul to enjoy a quiet contentment and to experience spiritual peace and tranquility in God.¹⁶⁸

Benefits experienced in the night of the spirit

“And finally, all the strength and affections of the soul, by means of this night and purgation of the old self, are renewed with divine qualities and delight.”¹⁶⁹

A first benefit of this night is that the soul acquires poverty of spirit. The soul becomes humble, softened, and pure. It will no longer find satisfaction in any particular knowledge or affections. The blessing of such a poverty of spirit is that the soul is able to embrace everything without the desire to possess anything. It enables the soul to quietly dwell in the darkness and emptiness of the dark contemplation.¹⁷⁰

Secondly, the soul acquires the ability to center itself on God. As God continues to draw the soul away from its attachments in the faculties and appetites, both in the sensory and spiritual part of the soul, and recollects the faculties and appetites in God self, the soul receives strength, energy, and power to employ its entire being in the love of God.¹⁷¹

A third benefit is that the soul will grow in virtue through the suffering of this night and will become wiser and more careful. The soul will grow determined to avoid anything that may offend God and to be of service and pleasing to God in everything.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ N. 1. 13. 7-8. See also: N. 1. 6. 7 & N. 1. 7. 1.

¹⁶⁷ N. 1. 13. 5. See also: N. 1. 6. 7 & N. 1. 7. 1.

¹⁶⁸ N. 1. 13. 3 & N. 1. 14. 1 & N. 2. 1. 1.

¹⁶⁹ N. 2. 4. 2.

¹⁷⁰ N. 2. 7. 3 & N. 2. 8. 5.

¹⁷¹ N. 2. 11. 1-3. See also 2.2.1 where the effects of the divine love in the soul are discussed.

¹⁷² N. 2. 16. 9 & 14.

Finally, as the soul progresses through this night, the soul will experience the intellect operating by divine wisdom, the will by divine love, and the memory by hope of all things eternal. In this infusion of the faculties with divine wisdom and love, the soul will start to experience touches of divinity and of union with God.¹⁷³

2.4.4 Observations

In John's narrative of the dark night, the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement is characterized by the need to negotiate experiences of descent and ascent, which are caused by the effects of the infused contemplation, namely: purification and illumination. In the experience of purification, the soul is faced with its human imperfections, namely: the attachment to desires and to modes of seeking consolation and satisfaction in the apprehensions and faculties. They constitute the challenges and the impediments the soul needs to negotiate on the journey through the dark night.

In the experience of illumination, the soul experiences benefits, which support the soul on this journey as it negotiates the challenges and impediments. There are benefits one perceives on the exterior as the soul grows in virtue and love for God and neighbor. Then there are also benefits one perceives on the interior. In the night of the senses this is recognized by the soul's ability to enjoy a quiet contentment and to experience spiritual peace and tranquility in God.¹⁷⁴ In the night of the spirit this is recognized in the touches of divinity and moments of union with God, which the soul starts to experience.¹⁷⁵ These interior benefits constitute experiences of settlement in this transitional phase.

Evaluation

In the commentary *The Dark Night* John of the Cross describes how individuals experience the passive night of the senses and the passive night of the spirit. This passive dark night is part of the entire experience of spiritual journey toward the union of love in God. When John symbolizes this spiritual journey with the three phases of the natural night or with the experience of a traveler who abandons familiar roads to travel unknown roads, he speaks about the point of departure, the means to journey on the road, and the point of arrival.¹⁷⁶ This order differs from the order of departure, arrival, negotiation

¹⁷³ N. 2. 2. 4 & N. 2. 12. 2-6 & N. 2. 21. 11.

¹⁷⁴ N. 1. 13. 3 & N. 1. 14. 1 & N. 2. 1. 1.

¹⁷⁵ N. 2. 2. 4 & N. 2. 12. 2-6 & N. 2. 21. 11.

¹⁷⁶ A. 1. 2. 1.

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and settlement as designated in the theoretical framework. However, using the framework's sequence, while analyzing the characteristics of these three phases, resulted in the following insights.

The experience of departure is the starting point of the journey. God's desire and agency by means of infused contemplation leads the soul from the state of beginner, who is attached to discursive meditation, to the state of proficient, who is invited into contemplation. However, John speaks of an ongoing need for departure both in the sensory and spiritual parts of the soul as the soul transitions from the night of the senses into the night of the spirit. This indicates that experiences of departure reoccur as the soul makes progress on this journey.¹⁷⁷ This was confirmed in the observations regarding the transitional phases of arrival and of negotiation and settlement.

John defines arrival by the moment in which the soul is fully transformed in God. This final moment of arrival is not experienced in this life and therefore carries an eschatological dimension. Experiences of arrival in this life can only be known in a secondary manner, namely by the effects of the infused contemplation: purification and illumination. Purification and illumination are on the one hand characterized by affliction (in purgation) and darkness (in illumination), and on the other hand by experiences of abundance and tranquility (when purgation eases and the soul becomes aware of the benefits it receives). The alternation between purification and illumination defines the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement. As long as there are still attachments to former desires and to former modes of seeking consolation and satisfaction, there will be the need to let go of these impediments. The soul will continue to experience moments of departure. But as the soul progresses, it will start to experience the benefits of the spiritual journey, characterized by growth in virtue and love and by experiences of settlement as it dwells peacefully and content in the presence God. These experiences of settlement are a foretaste of the ultimate experience of arrival.

These experiences do not occur simultaneously. The reason being: experiences of affliction and darkness are of human origin, whereas experiences of abundance and tranquility are of divine origin. This affirms my hunch that the contrary experienced between the human and the divine plays a central role in the dynamic between experiences of descent in purification and experiences of ascent in illumination. The divide between these two contraries is not bridged until the final moment in which the soul reaches the perfect union with God. This union constitutes the final moment of arrival.

¹⁷⁷ N. 1. 14. 5 & N. 2. 11. 2 & N. 2. 13. 11.

Until this moment the soul will continue to experience an oscillation between reoccurring departure in the effect of purgation and reoccurring arrival in the effect of illumination. This means that, even though John attributes departure, negotiating the journey, and arrival to the three respective parts of the dark night, the experiences of departure, arrival, and negotiation and settlement can be discerned in the development of each of part of the night.

3. An Experience of Liminality

As the dark night develops, the soul, oscillating between the effects of purgation and illumination, has to negotiate the experience that the old way of being no longer functions, but the new life in God is not yet fully established. This oscillation, as experienced in the transitional phases of the dark night, constitutes the experience of liminality. In this third part of the chapter, I will analyze the characteristics of this experience of liminality in the dark night and how the soul engages this experience.

3.1 *Experiencing Aridity and Abandonment*

“As a result the soul must first be set in emptiness and poverty of spirit and purged of every natural support, consolation, and apprehension, earthly or heavenly. Thus empty, it is truly poor in spirit and stripped of the old self, and thereby able to live that new and blessed life, which is the state of union with God, attained by means of this night.”¹⁷⁸

In the dark night a soul is invited by God to enter the journey toward the perfect union with God. The goal of the journey is to join the human to the divine, by means of purification and illumination. On this journey, the soul gains a new knowledge of self and of God. This, however, calls for a departure from everything a soul knows, possesses, and loves.¹⁷⁹ As the soul departs from these former ways and as it is not yet fully joined in perfect union to God, the soul enters into an experience of liminality. As the quote above explains, this causes a deep crisis and loss of everything that used to uphold the soul. John emphasizes how profound this crisis is by repeatedly mentioning words such as: “a spirit in distress,”¹⁸⁰ “bitterness and anguish,”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ N. 2. 9. 9.

¹⁷⁹ FitzGerald describes it as a “progressive purification and transformation of the human person *through* what we cherish or desire and through what give us security and support.” FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” 97 – emphasis by FitzGerald.

¹⁸⁰ N. 1. 11. 1.

¹⁸¹ N. 2. 3. 3.

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“agony and pain,”¹⁸² and “solitude and desolation.”¹⁸³ Below, I will present the characteristics of this crisis and the loss that articulate the experience of liminality.

3.1.1 *Experience of Crisis and Loss in the Night of the Senses*

“...The aridities and voids of the faculties in relation to the abundance previously experienced and the difficulty encountered in the practice of virtue make the soul recognize its own lowliness and misery which was not apparent [to the soul] in the time of its prosperity.”¹⁸⁴

In the dark night of the senses, the soul experiences purgation of the sensory part of the soul. This causes the soul to depart from the way it used to exercise the senses and from the ability to seek God through discursive meditation. The soul experiences loss of satisfaction and consolation, powerlessness, and loss of communication with God.¹⁸⁵

Loss of satisfaction and consolation

As the soul enters this dark night it loses the ability to find satisfaction or consolation in the things of God and therefore does not find it in creatures either. God disables the soul “to find sweetness or delight in anything.”¹⁸⁶ This experience of dryness and distaste is completely void of any sense of satisfaction or indulgence. In this state of purgation of the sensory part of the soul feels “very cast down, slack, and feeble.”¹⁸⁷

John compares this experience of loss of satisfaction to the experience of the people of Israel as they dwelled in the desert: even though they were provided with angelic food on their journey to the promised land, they still longed for the satisfactions provided to them in their miserable state of slavery, as they could not yet grasp this foretaste of the “heavenly” good waiting ahead.¹⁸⁸ Remaining within the metaphor of a desert experience, John also quotes from Psalm 63: 1-2 drawing the image of “*a desert land, without water, dry, and*

¹⁸² N. 2. 5. 6.

¹⁸³ N. 2. 7. 3.

¹⁸⁴ N. 1. 12. 2.

¹⁸⁵ The reflections below are mainly based on Chapter Nine of Book One of *The Dark Night*. Here John describes these three signs, which indicate that the soul has entered the first darkness and purgation. John also mentions these signs and their effects in A. 2. 13. 2-4 & A. 2. 14. See also: FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” 99-103.

¹⁸⁶ N. 1. 9. 2.

¹⁸⁷ N. 1. 9. 3.

¹⁸⁸ N. 1. 9. 5.

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without a way” to describe this experience of loss in the night of the senses. The dry, desert land without water refers to the experience of detachment and aridity in the sensory part of the soul. The land without a way refers to the soul departed from its known ways of operation and spiritual practice.¹⁸⁹

Loss of support from the senses: experiencing powerlessness

As this experience deepens, the soul almost literally loses the ability to make sense of anything. The exterior and interior senses of the sensory part of the soul no longer function. Its “imaginative power and phantasy” are no longer of any support.¹⁹⁰ When God leads a soul into this darkness of the senses, this darkness is such that the soul does not know which way to turn. It feels as if “everything seems to be functioning in reverse.”¹⁹¹ This creates an intense experience of powerlessness in the sensory faculties and the soul feels a deep despair.¹⁹²

Loss of communication with God

In this dark night of the senses the soul experiences that God no longer communicates through the exterior and interior senses.¹⁹³ Therefore, the soul is no longer able dwell on any particular thought or to use imagination while meditating. Its prayer and meditation do not advance. The soul experiences dryness in the spiritual exercises. They become “distasteful and bitter” and fail to provide the soul “satisfaction and pleasure.”¹⁹⁴ In frustration, the soul becomes excessively diligent in its efforts to meditate, which results in feelings of fatigue and failure.¹⁹⁵ The soul experiences distress as it worries about its inability to meditate and fears that it is not serving God.¹⁹⁶

3.1.2 *Experience of Crisis and Loss in the Night of the Spirit*

“He has made my skin and flesh old; he has broken my bones. He has built a fence around me... He has set me in darkness, as those who are dead forever... He has shut out my prayer... He has closed up my exits... He has destroyed my paths... He has made me desolate... I have become the derision

¹⁸⁹ N. 1. 12. 6: italics from Kavanaugh & Rodriguez in John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, 388.

¹⁹⁰ N. 1. 9. 8.

¹⁹¹ N. 1. 8. 3.

¹⁹² N. 1. 9. 8.

¹⁹³ N. 1. 9. 8.

¹⁹⁴ N. 1. 8. 3.

¹⁹⁵ N. 1. 10. 2.

¹⁹⁶ N. 1. 11. 2.

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*to all people... My soul is far removed from peace. I have forgotten good things... My end, my aim and my hope from the Lord is frustrated and finished.”*¹⁹⁷

In the passive night of the spirit the soul departs, by means of infused contemplation, from its human way of operation and understanding. This causes the soul to experience darkness, distress, affliction and anguish in its spiritual faculties the intellect, the will, and memory.¹⁹⁸ John explains that any description of this experience of crisis and loss would fall short of what it really is, but he refers to Scripture as it contains many passages that could help to understand the numerous and burdensome pains of this night.¹⁹⁹ John quotes extensively from the experience of the prophet Jeremiah, who in his lamentations (Lam. 3: 1-20) conveys a deep sense of desolation as he describes how the darkness into which God has brought him afflicts him. Similar to Jeremiah, the soul in this night suffers intensely.²⁰⁰ The soul no longer finds satisfaction in abundance and prosperity as it used to, it experiences a disturbance of its peace, and feels abandoned by God.

Loss of satisfaction and previous abundance and prosperity

In this dark night the soul becomes extremely aware of its own imperfections and miseries. Everything that used to uphold the soul no longer functions or gives pleasure, satisfaction, or consolation. The soul continues to experience aridities in the sensory part of the soul and experiences voids in the faculties, causing feelings of agony.²⁰¹

The soul comes to understand its own limitations over against God and over against every creature to such an extent that it believes it is despised and abandoned by God, creatures, and friends. When in these miseries the soul remembers its past prosperity but is not able to see any remedies for its situation, it experiences an even deeper sorrow and despair.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ N. 2. 7. 2: italics from Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *Collected Works*, 407.

¹⁹⁸ N. 2. 4. 1-2.

¹⁹⁹ N. 2. 7. 2. See also: Collings, *John of the Cross*, 74, who points to the way John uses both poetry and Scripture to describe that which can never be fully expressed.

²⁰⁰ These experiences are so intense, because they are not just felt in the spiritual, but they are also felt in the sensory part of the spirit: N. 2. 1. 1. & N. 2. 3. 1-2.

²⁰¹ N. 2. 5. 6-7 & N. 2. 6. 3-4.

²⁰² N. 2. 6. 3-4 & N. 2. 7. 1-3.

Like Job, the soul feels as being wounded by God: once “*rich and wealthy*,” but now feeling “*undone and broken*” and “knowing that they are far from such good and can no longer enjoy it.”²⁰³

Loss of peace

In this night the soul also experiences a loss of peace. As the purgation in the night of the spirit continues to affect the sensory part of the soul as well, both its sensory and its spiritual peace will be disturbed.²⁰⁴ This twofold loss of peace brings along many fears and struggles for the soul and will bring about such spiritual anguish that John even speaks of the “moaning of their spirit” and of “vehement spiritual roars and clamoring.”²⁰⁵ This experience drains the soul of strength and power, and it is not even able to express this suffering, be it vocally or in tears.²⁰⁶

Feeling abandoned by God

The dark night of the spirit further impedes the souls’ faculties and afflictions so that they have trouble reaching out to God. And if these souls do try to pray then it seems as if God excludes their prayers. John explains that this is “not the time to speak with God” as God is the one who is at work in the soul and therefore “the soul can do nothing.”²⁰⁷

As the soul gains understanding of its own humanity over against God’s divinity, the soul becomes convinced that God abhors it and the soul deeply feels that God has abandoned it. Deep down the soul is still aware that it loves God, but it is not able to feel consolation or relief in this love, for it does not feel worthy of God’s love and sees its own miseries as a reason for God’s rejection.²⁰⁸

3.2 Engaging the Dark Night: Coping with Liminality

On the journey through the dark night, the soul articulates the experiences of purification as an experience of disintegration accompanied with a deep sense of “powerlessness to do anything about it.”²⁰⁹ Below, I will analyze how the soul copes with this experience of hopelessness.

²⁰³ N. 2. 7. 1: John refers to Job 16: 12-16 – Italics by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *Collected works*, p. 406.

²⁰⁴ N. 2. 9. 6.

²⁰⁵ N. 2. 9. 7.

²⁰⁶ N. 2. 9. 7.

²⁰⁷ N. 2. 8. 1.

²⁰⁸ N. 2. 5. 5. & N. 2. 6. 1-2 & N. 2. 7. 7.

²⁰⁹ FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” 99.

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3.2.1 “The Divine Ray of Contemplation”

John explains that in the experience of dispossession and powerlessness nothing else remains except surrender to this experience of powerlessness and to the idleness of dark contemplation. Remaining passive in this dark contemplation will render this contemplation active and provide the soul with the strength and protection to continue on this journey through the dark night.²¹⁰ Even though the soul will experience security and strength in this surrender, the nature of this dark contemplation is such that the experience is quite inexpressible.

Dark contemplation: secret and unknowable

“Since the wisdom of this contemplation is the language of God to the soul, of Pure Spirit to pure spirit, all that is less than spirit, such as the sensory, fails to perceive it. Consequently this wisdom is secret to the senses; they have neither the knowledge nor the ability to speak of it, not do they even desire to do so because it is beyond words.”²¹¹

The soul receives its ability to engage this dark night and its experience of liminality from the dark contemplation (referred as secret wisdom in the quote above), which God infuses into the soul. This dark contemplation is not acquired by the intellect or other faculties but infused by the Holy Spirit.²¹² “[T]he spiritual light is so bright and so transcendent that it blinds and darkens the natural intellect...”²¹³ John explains that this infused wisdom is not only dark and secret during the experience of purgation, but remains so in the experience of illumination. Comparing the effects of this divine illumination with the effects of natural light, John explains how persons are unaware of the divine light they possess until it finds an object on which to shine. Then souls will understand more clearly the object concerned (whether imperfection or perfection): “for the ray of [divine] light is dark and invisible until a hand or some other thing passes through it, and then both the object and the [divine] ray are recognized.”²¹⁴

²¹⁰ N. 1. 9. 6-9 & N. 1. 10 & N. 2. 8. 1. See also: FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” 96, 103-104.

²¹¹ N. 2. 17. 4.

²¹² N. 2. 17. 2. See also: N. 2. 4. 2.

²¹³ N. 2. 16. 11. See also: N. 2. 17. 3.

²¹⁴ N. 2. 8. 3-4.

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This infused contemplation is unknowable and secret to the soul as it cannot be known through the senses, nor captured through imagination.²¹⁵ Therefore, it is called dark contemplation or dark faith. However ungraspable, it is the means through which God leads the soul to the perfection of love in God and it is the soul's constant guide through the dark night both in its (from the perspective of the soul) negative and positive effects.²¹⁶

Dark contemplation: a place of safety and strength

“If those in whom this occurs know how to remain quiet, without care or solicitude about any interior or exterior work, they will soon in that unconcern and idleness delicately experience the interior nourishment... For, as I say, this contemplation is active while the soul is in idleness and unconcern.”²¹⁷

One of the positive effects the soul experiences is that it experiences safety and strength amidst the experiences of dispossession and powerlessness if it surrenders to this powerlessness caused by the dark contemplation.

As the soul experiences the transition from discursive meditation to contemplation, it will, in the midst of the aridities and voids experienced in purification, start to experience the “inclination to remain alone and in solitude.”²¹⁸ John encourages souls to engage this inclination and so surrender to the darkness caused by the experience that all senses and faculties are bound and have become useless.²¹⁹ For, as John explained early on in the first book of the Dark Night, it is not possible for a soul to completely purify itself from its imperfections nor perfect itself and become disposed for the perfect union of love in God. Therefore, God places the soul “in the passive purgation of the dark night” by means of the infused or dark contemplation.²²⁰ It is this dark contemplation that will guide the soul with the strength and security needed to continue on this journey through the dark night.

The density of this darkness grows deeper the closer the soul comes to God. John compares this darkness that hides and covers God's presence to clouds

²¹⁵ N. 2. 17. 3.

²¹⁶ N. 2. 25. 1-4: John beautifully explains this in his short reflection on the third stanza of the poem *The Dark Night*.

²¹⁷ N. 1. 9. 6.

²¹⁸ N. 1. 9. 6.

²¹⁹ N. 1. 9. 7 & N. 2. 16. 1.

²²⁰ N. 1. 3. 3 & N. 1. 7. 5. See also: Collings, *John of the Cross*, 85-90.

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of dark water that surround God's tabernacle.²²¹ In coming closer to God the soul is kept safe and secure by these dark waters. On the one hand, this darkness in the presence of God hides the soul from disturbances caused by others, offers the full darkness that weans the appetites and affections, and darkens the faculties, so that the soul "is freed from all imperfections contradictory to the spirit."²²² On the other hand, these clouds of dark water are indeed water, which "refreshes and fortifies the soul in what most suits it," bestowing upon the soul "a true determination and power."²²³

3.2.2 *Negotiating the Darkness: On Faith, Hope, and Love*

"...Left to darkness in pure faith ...I went out from myself. That is, I departed from my low manner of understanding, and my feeble way of loving, and my poor and limited method of finding satisfaction in God..."²²⁴

In the passive night of the senses and of the spirit, the soul departs from its human manner of being and of understanding. As it journeys toward union with God, the soul is "left to darkness in pure faith" and experiences "the annihilation and calming of [the] faculties, passions, appetites, and affections." The soul, however, also experiences illumination as its faculties of intellect, memory, and will are prepared for the union with God by means of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.²²⁵ John compares them to a disguise, which protects and secures the soul from its enemies. The effects of the theological virtues provide the soul with the ability to cope on this journey through the passive dark night.

The virtue of faith and the intellect

"Faith darkens and empties the intellect of all its natural understanding and thereby prepares it for union with the divine wisdom."²²⁶

Faith is the virtue that is the beginning and the foundation of all the other virtues. It is the "proper and adequate means to divine union."²²⁷ Faith instructs the soul in matters of divine truths. These truths cannot be known

²²¹ N. 2. 16. 11: John refers Psalm 17 [18:11].

²²² N. 2. 16. 13.

²²³ N. 2. 16. 14.

²²⁴ N. 2. 4. 1.

²²⁵ N. 2. 4. 2 and N. 2. 21. 11. See also, Collings, *John of the Cross*, 101-103.

²²⁶ N. 2. 21. 11.

²²⁷ N. 2. 2. 5. See also: N. 1. 11. 4 & N. 2. 21. 4-5 & 11.

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through the senses or the intellect. The soul can only come to know them by believing.²²⁸ Faith causes emptiness and darkness in the intellect's natural or human manner of understanding. Nevertheless, the soul was already clothed in faith while it started suffering this interior darkness. It is faith that gives the soul the strength to suffer the trial of the dark night with "constancy and perseverance... without growing discouraged or failing the beloved."²²⁹ Faith, therefore, not only supports the soul on this journey, but it also leads the soul to true knowledge of self, of the world, and of God.²³⁰

The virtue of hope and the memory

"Hope empties and withdraws the memory from all creature possession, for as St. Paul says, hope is for that which is not possessed [Rom 8: 24]. It withdraws the memory from what can be possessed and fixes it on what it hopes for."²³¹

The virtue of hope protects and frees the soul from the things of the world, and gives the soul "courage and valor."²³² The effect of hope is that once the soul is so focused on "the hope of eternal life," it not only sees the worldly things for what they "truly are, dry, withered, dead, worthless," but also becomes oblivious to them.²³³ Hope in God not only prevents the soul from becoming absorbed in the things of the world, but also prevents the soul from being wounded by them. With hope the soul is not hindered by any possessions and remains solely focused on God. Hope not only protects and supports the soul on this journey, but it also purifies the way in which the soul used to see things in the past. The memory will be withdrawn from its way of perception and the "soul will feel interiorly alien to all things," but, in hope, the soul will receive a new vision: "of all divine and human things."²³⁴

²²⁸ A. 3. 1-6.

²²⁹ N. 2. 21. 5.

²³⁰ N. 2. 9. 3 and N. 2. 21. 11. See also: Collings, *John of the Cross*, 103-105 & 117-122.

²³¹ N. 2. 21. 11.

²³² N. 2. 21. 6.

²³³ N. 2. 21. 6.

²³⁴ N. 2. 9. 5. See also: FitzGerald, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope," 23-24 & 31-35, and Collings, *John of the Cross*, 122-133.

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The virtue of charity and the will

“Charity also empties and annihilates the affections and appetites of the will of whatever is not God and centers them on him alone. Thus charity prepares the will and unites it with God through love.”²³⁵

The virtue of charity strengthens the soul as it endows the soul with pure love. The effect of true love is that all the appetites, apprehensions, and affections of the will are purified and its “actual and habitual obstacles” are expelled.²³⁶ The virtue of charity takes the soul away from its love of self and of things possessed, but grounds its love in God, making the soul “beautiful and pleasing to God.”²³⁷ The virtue of charity also brings strength, sincerity, and vigor to the virtues of faith and hope, because where faith is the foundation of all virtues, charity fortifies the virtues and the soul: “for without charity no virtue is pleasing to God.”²³⁸

In Sum

The experience of liminality in the dark night is defined by the effects of the process in which the contraries experienced between the human and the divine are joined. It causes in the soul a deep crisis and the experience of loss in both the sensory and spiritual part of the soul. Everything that used to uphold the soul no longer functions. This causes an experience of disintegration, dispossession, and powerlessness.²³⁹

In this experience, God leads the soul further into dark contemplation and invites the soul to surrender its experience of powerlessness to this contemplation. As the soul surrenders to this powerlessness, the dark contemplation is rendered active. This is what allows the soul to cope. The soul’s appetites, affections, and faculties may continue to experience further purgation, but the soul also experiences illumination. The soul experiences safety and strength in this dark faith. The soul is further empowered by the exercise of the theological virtues. The effects of the theological virtues on the faculties of intellect, memory, and will are twofold. They purge as they take the faculties away from all that is not God and they illumine as the faculties become

²³⁵ N. 2. 21. 11.

²³⁶ N. 2. 9. 3.

²³⁷ N. 2. 21. 10.

²³⁸ N. 2. 21. 10.

²³⁹ N. 1. 9. 1-9, N. 1. 11. 1-4, N. 2. 6-10. See also: FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” 99-103.

strengthened and oriented towards divine wisdom, on divine love, and on hope in all things eternal.²⁴⁰ This fulfills the mission of the theological virtues of bringing the soul closer to the union of love in God.

4. An Experience of Transformation

In the experience of liminality, dark contemplation or dark faith is both the cause for the experience of darkness and affliction and the means by which the soul is able to engage this experience. If one considers the experience of liminality as being in a transitional phase where transformation of identity and faith can happen, then the question arises how this dark contemplation or dark faith effects this transformation. In this last part of chapter I will analyze how the soul experiences a transformation of identity and faith in its journey through the dark night.

4.1 John on Identity, Faith, and Transformation

The question how a soul experiences a transformation of identity and faith on its journey through the passive night of the senses and the spirit, brings together the four sensitizing concepts of the theoretical framework of this research: identity, liminality, transformation, and faith. Before setting out to answer this question, I will first explain how the concepts of identity, faith, and transformation feature in John's writing.

4.1.1 John's Perspective on Identity: The Structure of the Soul

In his works, John speaks of the soul and its journey toward union with God. John, however, does not consider the soul as just a spiritual or ethereal part of a human being. Two observations will explain this.

First, John also uses the words "people" or "individuals" to describe the souls. The soul, therefore, indicates "a "biographical subject," which John perceives in the context of its life as a Christian.²⁴¹ When John refers to the soul, he does not refer to an abstract being, such as "the Christian person," but he refers to an actual person living this experience.²⁴² The soul in John's writing refers to an "I", as in John himself, but also his readers. His readers are invited to identify with the soul in order to discover the mode and manner of their spiritual journey. John is aware of the many concrete conditions and

²⁴⁰ N. 2. 21. 11.

²⁴¹ Collings, *o.c.*, 15.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

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experiences that form the contours of each individual journey. He allows for these unique experiences on this shared journey on the way to God.²⁴³

Second, John speaks about the soul as being of “one *suppositum*.”²⁴⁴ This concept gives insight in how John understands the dynamics of the human person. He sees the person as a being with a physical body and a soul.²⁴⁵

According to John, the sensory part and spiritual part of the soul “form one *suppositum* [and] each one usually shares according to its mode in what the other receives.”²⁴⁶ The sensory part of the soul is interconnected with the physical body, through which it receives its information. It is in the interaction between the sensing organs, such as ears and eyes, the nose, mouth, and fingers, the “exterior bodily senses,” and the imagination and fantasy, the “interior bodily senses,” that the soul “receive[s], process[es], and arrange[s] the sensed experiences in various ways, and then stabilize[s] them.”²⁴⁷ The spiritual part of the soul is interconnected with the sensual part of the soul. The spiritual part performs “a more rational, reflective, and exacting activity”²⁴⁸ based on the process of selection and ordering of the experiences provided by the senses. This process in the spiritual part of the soul is “carried out by the faculties of the memory, the intellect, and the will.”²⁴⁹

John speaks of three ways of knowing: knowledge acquired through the exterior and interior senses, knowledge acquired through the spiritual faculties, and knowledge received in faith. In this third way of knowing, it is God who informs the intellect, instead of the intellect being informed by knowledge gained through the senses.²⁵⁰ The human person in John’s understanding, therefore, should not be perceived as a trichotomy between body, mind, and soul, but rather as an interconnectedness between the “physical body, the senses, and the spirit.”²⁵¹ It is this “one *suppositum*” with its particular experiences and understanding of these experiences that constitutes the soul’s identity.

²⁴³ For John’s awareness of the particularity of an individual’s experience see: A. prol. 7 & N. 1. 9. 9 & N. 1. 14. 5 & N. 2. 12. 2. Collings, *o.c.*, 18-20.

²⁴⁴ N. 1. 4. 2 & N. 2. 1. 1 & N. 2. 3. 1.

²⁴⁵ I am indebted to Steven Payne, Edward Howells, and F. England for providing me with insight into the structure of the soul and the three ways of knowing.

²⁴⁶ N. 1. 4. 2.

²⁴⁷ England, *o.c.*, 84.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴⁹ England, *o.c.*, 82-85.

²⁵⁰ Payne, *The Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 24-30.

²⁵¹ England, *o.c.*, 83.

Therefore, regarding the question how a soul experiences transformation of identity in the dark night, the answer lies in the manner in which the journey through the dark night affects these aspects, which compose its identity.

4.1.2 John's Perspective on Faith: "The Proper Means to Divine Union"

Faith as John repeats many times throughout *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*, is not just the guide to divine union, but also "the proper and adequate means to divine union."²⁵² Faith is also the theological virtue that is the beginning and the foundation of all the other virtues. Infused with the virtue of faith, the soul is strengthened and supported as it experiences the affliction and darkness of the night of the spirit.²⁵³ John refers to this faith as dark and pure faith, and as "dark mystical [...] loving and obscure knowledge" infused in the soul.²⁵⁴ Faith, therefore, is equivalent to dark contemplation or mystical theology.²⁵⁵

This faith is foreign to all senses, causes the negation and calming of all spiritual faculties, and darkens and empties the intellect with respect to its natural or human manner of understanding.²⁵⁶ The truths revealed through this dark faith cannot be known through the senses or by the natural intellect. They can only be believed by hearing and by giving assent to the faith received through Christ, the Church, and its ministers.²⁵⁷ The only knowable aspects of faith are the propositions and articles of faith. John compares the articles of faith to "silvered-over faces" or to the silver layer of silver-plated gold. The gold symbolizes the final truth, which the soul will behold at the beatitude, when faith "terminates through the clear vision of God."²⁵⁸

Faith, therefore, is both the road to travel, the guide to follow, and the endpoint of the journey. These observations raise the questions whether it wouldn't be better to speak of a transformation in faith and whether it is possible to speak of a transformation of faith from the perspective of the soul.

²⁵² A. 2. 8. 1. See also: A. 1. 2. 1 & 5, A. 2. 3. 6, A. 2. 4. 2, A. 2. 9. 1, A. 2. 16, 12, A. 2. 24. 4, N. 1. 11. 4, N. 1. 12. 4, N. 2. 2. 5, N. 2. 9. 3, N. 2. 21. 11, and C. 12. 2. See also: Collings, *o.c.*, 103-105 & 117-122.

²⁵³ N. 2. 21. 4-5.

²⁵⁴ A. 2. 24. 4 and C. 12. 2-3.

²⁵⁵ A. 2. 3. 4, A. 2. 24. 4, and N. 2. 17. 3. See also: Kavanaugh, "Glossary," 158 and 242.

²⁵⁶ A. 2. 1. 2, A. 2. 3. 4-5, A. 2. 4. 2, A. 2. 9. 1, N. 1. 12. 4, and N. 2. 21. 11.

²⁵⁷ A. 2. 22. 7.

²⁵⁸ C. 12. 4. See also: Collings, *o.c.*, 103-117. Collings argues that this indicates that the empty and dark faith in John's spirituality is essentially Christian as "it hides and contains the image and beauty of her Beloved," which is Christ. (C. 12. 1 & 3).

4.1.3 *John's perspective on Transformation: A Union of Likeness*

In John's spirituality, the concept of transformation is defined in the context of a soul's spiritual journey toward union with God. Before defining transformation, John first clarifies the nature of this union. He distinguishes between the natural or substantial union and the supernatural union. The natural union exists always (even in the greatest sinner) and is essential to the soul's being. From its inception God dwells in the soul and sustains it. The supernatural union does not exist always. It is a union of likeness. This supernatural union of likeness only exists when there is also a likeness of love. The substantial union, in which God sustains the soul, is the foundation on which the soul can journey toward the union of likeness, in which the soul becomes God through participation.²⁵⁹ The journey toward this union of likeness is described by concepts such as "deformation, reformation, conformity and transformation."²⁶⁰

The concept of transformation connects all these words together. Looking at the occurrences of the word transformation, and especially paired with "in God" or "in him," affirms this.²⁶¹ John speaks of transformation in God as he explains how this transformation is accomplished. First, transformation in God is accomplished through love, to which John also refers to as illumination or as the infusion of the secret wisdom of love. It is the principal property involved in contemplation.²⁶² John also speaks of transformation in God when he explains which imperfections are impediments to reach this goal. He says these imperfections are in need of un-formation²⁶³ and

²⁵⁹ N. 2. 5. 3. See also Waaijman, *Spiritualiteit*, 452 and Kees Waaijman, "Conformity in Christ," *Acta Theologica, Supplementum* 8 (2006), 41-42.

²⁶⁰ Waaijman, "Conformity in Christ," 41 and Waaijman, *Spiritualiteit*, 452. Waaijman explains that the entire semantic field of these terms occurs in John's works 524 times. The term transformation in relationship to being transformed in God occurs according to Waaijman over 40 times. Based on Kavanaugh & Rodriguez' index in John of the Cross, *Collected Works* (804) I count close to 60 times, the majority of which feature in the commentaries *The Spiritual Canticle* and the *Living Flame of Love*. In *The Ascent to Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night* combined it features 24 times of which 21 in *The Ascent*. In *The Dark Night* John predominantly refers to transformation in God with "union of love in God."

²⁶¹ In the instances where John mentions transformed or transformation in God he often pairs it with the words union with God or divine union, which therefore can be considered equivalents. This allows for an extrapolation of observations in regards to "transformation in God" in *The Dark Night*, where John predominantly speaks about "union of love in God."

²⁶² A. 1. 3. 4, A. 1. 4. 3, N. 2. 10. 1 & 3, N. 2. 18. 5.

²⁶³ Waaijman, *Spirituality*, 463-469. Waaijman coins the word "unformation" to describe the experience of being divested or annihilated, within the semantic field of "to form" or "to be formed."

reformation, which is accomplished through the aforementioned, transforming love.²⁶⁴ While speaking of transformation in God, John explains that this transforming love accomplishes conformity, or likeness, or union with God, because of love's characteristic "to assimilate lovers to one another."²⁶⁵ Where reformation has happened and conformity is accomplished, it can be recognized in the soul's actions, works, and in the recollection of the faculties in God.²⁶⁶ This supernatural union with or transformation in God, however, does not always exist and is only realized when there is a "likeness of love."²⁶⁷ Therefore, this experience is transitory and only becomes permanent once the soul receives clear vision of God in the next life.²⁶⁸ Transformation, in sum, is the goal, the means, and the effect of the spiritual journey. In Chapter 10 of Book Two of *The Dark Night* John explains it as follows:

"First, we can understand that the very loving light and wisdom into which the soul will be transformed is what in the beginning purges and prepares it... for this transformation."²⁶⁹

The concept of transformation, therefore, encompasses the entire experience in which the soul, by means of the loving inflow of God comes to understand that which deforms a soul and, therefore, is in need of un-formation, reformation, and conformity, culminating in the transformation of the soul in God through participation. These observations lead to the question how this process effects a transformation of identity and faith.

4.2 *Characteristics of Transformation of Identity*

Retaking the transitional phases of departure, arrival, negotiation and settlement, I will analyze in this section how the soul experiences transformation of its identity as it advances through the passive night of the senses and of the spirit. Contrary to my analysis of the transitional phases, I will now re-align the order of these transitional phases with the sequence in which John

²⁶⁴ A. 1. 4. 3-4, A. 1.5. 2, A. 1. 11. 6, A. 2. 5. 4, A. 3. 3. 16, N. 2. 10. 1-3, and N. 2. 24. 2. See also: Waaijman, *Spiritualiteit*, 457 & 459 & 464-465.

²⁶⁵ A. 3. 13. 5 & N. 2. 21. 5 and in the 5th Stanza of the poem *The Dark Night*. See also: Waaijman, *Spiritualiteit*, 466-473.

²⁶⁶ A. 3. 2. 9 & 16, A. 3. 13. 5, N. 2. 4. 2, N. 2. 21. 10. See also: Waaijman, *Spiritualiteit*, 473-477.

²⁶⁷ A. 2. 5. 3-4.

²⁶⁸ A. 2. 5. 2 & A. 2. 17. 15.

²⁶⁹ N. 2. 10. 3.

mentions them: departure, negotiation and settlement, and arrival. For in John's narrative of the dark night the experience of transformation comes to fulfillment in the point of arrival.

4.2.1 *The Soul upon Departure: The Beginner*

John describes the soul who is invited into the passive night of the senses as a soul who practices discursive mediation and other spiritual exercises persistently and carefully and who profits greatly from these practices. However, the soul does so in an imperfect manner as its motivation is centered on the satisfaction and consolation it experiences in these exercises. These satisfactions create an attitude of attachment and possession regarding these satisfactions and to things of the world and they take away one's desire for Christ.²⁷⁰

The effect of the dark contemplation is that the soul is challenged to face this attitude of attachment and possession and to turn away from the love of self and of creaturely things. This initial experience of departure affects the sensory part of the soul and therefore the way it understood its experiences by means of its exterior senses and by means of the interior senses. The soul loses its known ways of operation and understanding and its communication with God by means of discursive imagining.²⁷¹

As the soul moves from the night of the senses into the night of the spirit, it experiences departure in the spiritual part of the soul. As the soul is still attached to its natural and habitual manner of understanding in the intellect and to the memories it cherishes and possesses, the soul's way of loving is still imperfect. As God brings the soul into the passive night of the spirit, the dark contemplation further challenges the soul to face these attachments and imperfect habits. The soul departs from its usual manner of experience and understanding: nothing makes sense anymore. The soul loses everything it knew, possessed, and loved.

This experience of departure becomes more interior. The crisis in the soul's being grows more intense. It is experienced both in the spiritual and sensory part of the soul. As nothing is what it had been before, the soul is no longer able to recognize itself and it feels like a stranger. In sum: the soul experiences a loss of identity.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ N. 1. 1. 3 & N. 1. 2. 1-2.

²⁷¹ N. 1. 8. 3 & N. 1. 9. 2 & 8. See also: FitzGerald, "Impasse and Dark Night," 98-99.

²⁷² N. 2. 3. 1, N. 2. 4. 1-2, N. 2. 9. 1-9, and N. 2. 21. 4-11. See also: FitzGerald, "Impasse and Dark Night," 98-103.

4.2.2 *Negotiating the Experience of Liminality: The Proficient*

As the soul continues to advance through the passive dark night, it is God's agency, by means of infused or dark contemplation, which causes the soul to experience a departure from self and all its former modes of operation and understanding. This experience of departure creates an experience of loss of identity: it is an experience of annihilation and abandonment, of disintegration, dispossession, and powerlessness.

However, infused contemplation not only effects purgation, but also illumination. The experience of illumination brings the soul benefits, which enable the soul to cope with the experiences of departure, loss of identity, and powerlessness. Although these benefits are perceived both exteriorly and interiorly, it is in the interior or spiritual part of the soul where the soul starts to experience change. In the experience of the dark contemplation, the soul is guided to surrender itself to this experience of powerlessness and to remain idle or passive in the experience of this dark contemplation.²⁷³ John describes this experience as being "imprisoned in a dark dungeon, bound hands and feet."²⁷⁴ However, John immediately states that remaining passive in this dark contemplation renders this contemplation active and humbles, softens, and purifies the soul's spirit.

In this passive surrender to the dark contemplation, the soul will start to experience the effect of illumination: a change of perspective. The soul will be able to not just depart from, but also to let go of, the attachments it experienced in its appetites and in its apprehension in the faculties. Its desires will become centered on God, and the soul will no longer find satisfaction in any particular knowledge or affections. In such a poverty of spirit, the soul's spirit can grow in likeness to God's spirit as it becomes "delicate, simple, and refined," attributes which John also uses to describe the spirit of God.²⁷⁵

In this experience of liminality the soul surrenders to its loss of identity in which the former way of being is let go and the new way of being has not yet emerged. In sum: the soul's sense of identity is on hold.

4.2.3 *Experiencing Arrival: The Perfect*

Insofar as a soul is able to surrender itself into this dark contemplation, its experiences of illumination will grow stronger, even if its appetites,

²⁷³ N. 1. 10. 5-6.

²⁷⁴ N. 2. 7. 3.

²⁷⁵ N. 2. 7. 3. See also: N. 1. 9. 6 & N. 2. 9. 3. In the latter John describes the Spirit of God with these attributes: "spiritual, subtle, delicate, and interior." Please note that John explains in N. 2. 7. 4 that this experience "to be truly effective" can last for some years.

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affections, and faculties continue to experience the need for further purgation. The effect of this experience of illumination is the transformation of the interior or spiritual part of the soul, which will become visible in the exterior or sensory part of the soul.

One aspect of the experience of illumination, which effects transformation, is the infusion of the three theological virtues. The theological virtues effect a transformation of the faculties of intellect, memory, and the will: they will depart from their human way of operation and will become oriented to God's way of operation.²⁷⁶ The soul will not only experience strength and courage, it will also be enabled to exercise all the virtues together²⁷⁷ and will acquire meekness and patience, learn to practice self-denial, and develop "a holy envy that desires to imitate others."²⁷⁸ The soul becomes compassionate, esteems others in their humanity, and rejoices in the graces others may receive.²⁷⁹ The soul comes to center its spiritual works on God. It becomes the soul's pleasure "to know how to live for love of God or neighbor."²⁸⁰

The soul will experience the effects of this process of transformation in both the sensory and spiritual parts of the soul: the emergence of a new identity or way of being. In sum: growth in virtue and reorienting all manner of operation and understanding on God are what characterizes the transformation of identity.

4.2.4 *Observations*

"...Insofar as these persons are purged of their sensory affections and appetites, they obtain freedom of spirit in which they acquire the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit [and are able to] walk with purity in the love of God. No longer are they moved to act by the delight and satisfaction they find in a work, as perhaps they were when they derived this from their deeds, but by the desire of pleasing God. They are neither presumptuous nor self-satisfied, as was their custom in the time of their prosperity, but fearful and disquieted about themselves and lacking in any self-satisfaction. This is the holy fear that preserves and gives increase to the virtues."²⁸¹

In this quote John not only summarizes the benefits of the night of senses, but he also indicates some of the characteristics of the process of transformation

²⁷⁶ N. 2. 4. 2 & N. 2. 21. 11.

²⁷⁷ N. 1. 13. 5. See also: N. 1. 6. 7 & N. 1. 7. 1.

²⁷⁸ N. 1. 13. 7-8. See also: N. 1. 6. 7 & N. 1. 7. 1.

²⁷⁹ N. 1. 12. 8. See also: N. 1. 2. 6-7.

²⁸⁰ N. 1. 3. 2. See also: N. 1. 13. 1-3.

²⁸¹ N. 1. 13. 12.

of identity. Through the experience of purgation, the soul departs from its former desires and needs for satisfaction and experiences a loss of identity. As the soul surrenders this loss of identity into the experience of dark contemplation, it acquires a poverty of spirit. The soul is freed from all things which impede its walking with a pure and simple spirit in the love of God. Once the soul receives this freedom and purity of spirit, the effects of this transformation are noticeable in the soul's behavior and its growth in virtue: a new way of being starts to emerge.

Connecting this experience to John's perspective on the structure of the soul, it seems that the experience of purgation (or departure, or un-formation) creates an inward movement from the sensory part of the soul to the spiritual part of the soul and that the experience of illumination (or settlement, or reformation) is an outward movement in which the transformation effected in the spiritual part of the soul shines through in the sensory part of the soul and so effects the emergence of the soul's transformed identity, namely conformity to God in love.²⁸²

4.3 *Characteristics of Transformation of Faith*

According to John, faith is the means by which God brings the soul to the divine union. If, therefore, faith is the road on which to travel on this spiritual journey, would it then not be better to speak of a transformation in faith? And, is it possible to speak of a transformation of faith from the perspective of the soul?

4.3.1 *Transformation in Faith*

As explained earlier, John refers to faith as "the proper and adequate means to divine union."²⁸³ Faith, therefore, is an agent, which effects the experience of transformation. For John, faith is not only one of the three theological virtues, be it is the foundational one. Faith is also synonymous with dark contemplation and the divine and secret wisdom of love. It is the infusion of this dark faith that effects in the soul the experiences of purgation and illumination. The Holy Spirit infuses this secret wisdom. It cannot be known through the senses, nor captured through imagination, nor understood in the intellect, and the soul will remain unaware of it until the soul is prepared to gain some under-

²⁸² See for instance: C. 36. 3-5. Edward Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avilla: Mystical Knowing and Selfhood*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 4 & 15-59 & 119-128.

²⁸³ A. 2. 8. 1. See also: A. 1. 2. 1 & 5, A. 2. 3. 6; A. 2. 4. 2, A. 2. 9. 1, A. 2. 16. 12, A. 2. 24. 4, N. 1. 11. 4, N. 1. 12. 4, N. 2. 2. 5, and C. 12. 2.

standing.²⁸⁴ However, even though the transforming agency of faith is secret and ineffable, it can be recognized through its effects in the soul. This was demonstrated when the transformation of identity was discussed: the interior transformation of the spiritual part of the soul, overflows in the exterior or sensory part of the soul, and is recognized in its growth in virtuous behavior. Another aspect of the experience of illumination is the inflow or the enkindling of divine wisdom of love, to which John refers as the “principal property involved in calling contemplation [...] a ladder of love.”²⁸⁵ This divine wisdom of love, cannot be understood naturally either, but it too can be known in by its effects. As it is by means of this “ladder of love” that the soul ascends to God, I surmise that the effects of this journey will provide insight in a possible transformation of faith on the spiritual journey through the dark night.

4.3.2 *Transformation of Faith*

John explains that the truths revealed through this dark faith cannot be known through the senses or by the natural intellect, they can only be believed by hearing and giving assent to the faith received through Christ, the Church, and its ministers.²⁸⁶ The only knowable aspects of faith are the propositions and articles of faith.²⁸⁷ Therefore, a transformation of faith will not concern the contents of faith; it will rather concern how a soul experiences faith and how it affects a soul’s relationship with God. In other words, it will not concern the “what” of faith, but the “how” of faith.²⁸⁸

The infusion of the divine wisdom of love can be recognized in the deepening degree of love for God the soul develops on this spiritual journey. The initial fervor and enthusiasm a soul experiences, develops into longing for God and into a dry solicitude about serving God. This transforms the soul’s spiritual practice, moving away from finding satisfaction in discursive meditation to finding contentment “simply with a loving and peaceful attentiveness to God.”²⁸⁹ The soul acquires a more authentic self-knowledge in regards to its humbleness in relation to God the Creator of all things. It develops an attitude of respect and courtesy when it communes or converses with God.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁴ See John’s comparison of this divine illumination to the effects of natural light: N. 2. 8. 3-4.

²⁸⁵ N. 2. 18. 5 & N. 2. 19. 1.

²⁸⁶ A. 2. 22. 7.

²⁸⁷ C. 12. 4.

²⁸⁸ Which of course resonates with St. Augustine’s adagio of *fides quae* (the faith which is believed) and *fides qua* (the faith by which it is believed).

²⁸⁹ N. 1. 10. 4.

²⁹⁰ N. 1. 12. 2-4.

As the soul sets out to seek this union with the Beloved and starts to climb the “mystical ladder of divine love”²⁹¹ the progression of the soul’s journey is known by the manner in which the soul’s love for God develops. The soul moves from an esteeming love, recognized in the soul’s concern for feeling unworthy of God, to an impassionate love, recognized in the strength and courage with which the soul goes out impatiently to seek the union of love in God.²⁹² Finally the soul will start to experience touches of the divine, which manifest some characteristics of the union with God.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I set out to analyze how John of the Cross in his narrative of the dark night describes the experience of transformation of identity and faith. John symbolizes the journey through the dark night by the three phases of the natural night: twilight or dusk, “when things begin to fade from sight;” midnight, when the night, just like faith, is completely dark; and third part of the night, “representing God, is like the very early dawn, just before the break of day.”²⁹³ Therefore, analyzing how the three transitional phases effect liminality and a transformation of identity and faith answers the question: what happens between dusk and dawn?

In the exploratory level of reading the poem and commentary to “The Dark Night” I struggled with some of John’s concepts. One of these concepts is John’s perception of the human and the divine as two contraries, which, according to John, cannot co-exist in one subject. Regardless of my struggle with my initial comprehension of this concept, I observed that this concept is a reoccurring theme and that the relationship between the human and the divine may be central to understanding John’s narrative about the spiritual journey through the dark night.

I connected my queries to John’s biography, particularly the poverty he suffered in his childhood and youth, his work at the plague hospital, and his own struggles within the Carmelite order, resulting in imprisonment. I also connected them to the characteristics of his theology and to his explanation of the spiritual journey. This provided me insight in two apparent contraries that seem to be at the center of John’s personality and spiritual life: John’s ability to suffer aridities on the one hand and his ability to love compassionately on

²⁹¹ N. 1. 19.

²⁹² N. 2. 11. 4-7 & N. 2. 13. 5-9.

²⁹³ A. 1. 2. 5.

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the other hand. His compassionate nature and beautiful poetry illustrate the latter and his austere practice of asceticism and his insistence on dispossession illustrates the former.²⁹⁴ These seemingly “paradoxical” attitudes, as Collings call them,²⁹⁵ can also be recognized in his theology. In his emphasis on God’s radical transcendence (and consequently creation’s utter dependence on God for its existence), John pairs the ineffability of all things concerning God with a deep reverence and love for God and God’s creation using poetic language to express this love. It is also recognized in how he speaks of mystical theology: pairing an experience of unknowing (or deconstruction of knowledge) with an experience of embodied affectivity.²⁹⁶ John’s perception of the human and divine as two contraries has its place in this paradox, which characterizes both John’s life and works. I came to understand that it is John’s purpose to show how these two contraries are joined in the desire and the burning passion for the love of God and Christ. John says:

“It remains to be said, then, that even though this happy night darkens the spirit, it does so only to impart light concerning all things; and even though it humbles individuals and reveals their miseries, it does so only to exalt them; and even though it impoverishes and empties them of all possessions and natural affection, it does so only that they may reach out divinely to the enjoyment of all earthly and heavenly things, with a general freedom of spirit in them all.”²⁹⁷

The results of the theory-driven content analysis of the narrative of the dark night explain how the human and the divine as two contraries feature in the dark night in the oscillation between purification and illumination and how the unifying factor, the “science of love” accomplishes the transformation of the soul and “unites and joins the soul to God.”²⁹⁸ The dynamics of this process of transformation can be illustrated with the following diagram:

²⁹⁴ Collings, *John of the Cross*, 9-11.

²⁹⁵ Collings, *John of the Cross*, 10.

²⁹⁶ Tyler, *St. John*, 78.

²⁹⁷ N. 2. 9. 1.

²⁹⁸ N. 2. 18. 5. See also: Collings, *John of the Cross*, 135.

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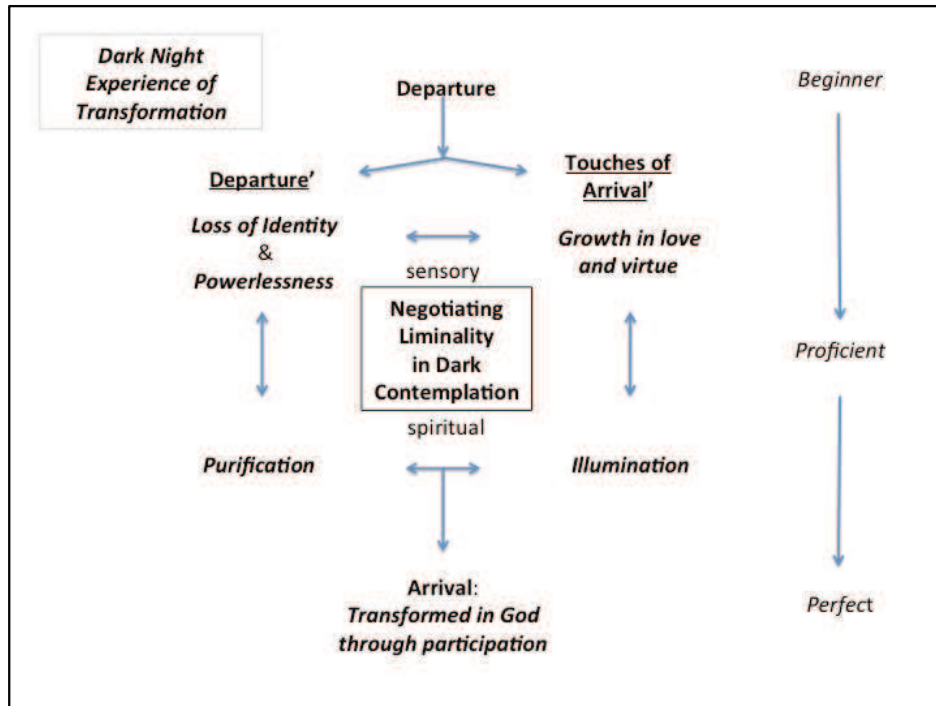


Diagram 2: Transformation of identity and faith in the experience of the dark night

In the experience of the dark night, the inflow of God causes the soul to experience a **Departure** from life, as it was known. In the oscillation between *purification* and *illumination*, the soul experiences a transformation of identity and faith. The spiritual experience of *purification* is characterized by reoccurring experiences of Departure', which effect a *loss of identity* and a sense of *powerlessness* as the soul leaves behind its former desires and needs for satisfaction. The spiritual experience of *illumination* is characterized by Touches of Arrival' or settlement in the touches of divine wisdom and love, which provide the soul with the strength for **negotiating liminality**. As the soul surrenders its loss of identity and powerlessness into the experience of the **dark contemplation**, the soul experiences a transition in which it is enabled to let go of its attachments to its former way of being. A new way of a soul's relationship with God and of understanding its faith begins to emerge. In this process of transformation, the soul grows in love and virtue until it arrives at the perfect union of love in God and becomes *transformed in God through participation*. This final experience of **Arrival** is however not of this life.

CHAPTER 4

WANDERING IN EACH OTHER'S FOOTSTEPS: CORRELATION OF NARRATIVES

Introduction

Chapter four marks the beginning of the third phase of reading: gaining comprehension in the process of correlation between the narratives of the African migrants and John's narrative of the dark night. It presents the answer to the question whether there are similarities and differences between their respective descriptions of transformation of identity and faith and starts the query into the meaning of these similarities and differences.

This chapter follows the structure of the theoretical framework as applied to the analysis of both narratives. In the course of the chapter, I will indicate where in the process of correlation I observe resonances and dissonances, as I consider equivalences or differences in context, character response, and structure.¹ Based on these observations questions will be raised and answered as insights are gained and taken into account from one section to the other.

1. Correlating Journeys "To a Place You Know Not"²

In this research, both migration and the dark night are considered as experiences of liminality effected by the transitional phases of departure, arrival, and of negotiation and settlement. In the migration narratives, these phases seem to follow the geographical and chronological order of their journey.³ In his narrative of the dark night, however, John speaks of a different order, namely: departure from one's former life, negotiation of the journey through the dark night, and arrival at the union of love in God. This indicates a dissonance in the context of the journey. Taking this observation into account, I will now bring the characteristics attributed to these transitional phases into correlation, according to their sequence on a migration journey. Each section will begin with a reflection on how stanzas from the poem *The Dark Night* relate to the experience of the transitional phase under scrutiny in the narrative of the dark night and the African migrants' narratives.

¹ See Chapter One, paragraph 3.1.2.

² N. 2. 16. 7.

³ Even though participants, in their narratives, did not always share these experiences in this chronological order.

1.1 Experiences of Departure in Correlation

*One dark night
Fired with love's urgent longings
- Ah, the sheer grace! –
I went out unseen,
My house now being all stilled.*

*In darkness, and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
- ah, the sheer grace! -
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.*

Reading the poem, but especially the first two stanzas from the perspective of the migration narratives, it becomes even clearer that the poem *The Dark Night*, apart from the spiritual journey of soul (as John indicates), also reflects John's escape or departure from his prison experience.⁴

Both narratives speak of departure as an experience that starts before the actual departure or even escape. First, there are the factors that influence the decision to engage in an actual departure. For the participants these factors could be a lack of opportunity in the homeland, reunification with family who had already migrated, or the need to leave the home country, because of political conflicts and actual threats on one's life. These factors cause one to reflect on one's life, causing a first movement of departure from life, as one knows it, which leads to the decision to prepare for departure. John in his life, experiences something similar. In joining the discalced reform, John encountered friction within the Carmelite order and had to face imprisonment twice (one short episode in January of 1576 and the nine month imprisonment in Toledo between December 1577 and August 1578).⁵ Engaging in the discalced reform caused the first movement of departure for John. His resolve to pursue the reform was strengthened by the ensuing experience of imprisonment and its spiritual effect.

⁴ Even though John does not say that the poem reflects on, or finds its origin in, his prison experience, he does compare experiences of the Dark Night to different aspects of a prison experience: A. 1 4. 3; A. 1. 7. 2; A. 1. 15. 1; N. 2. 1. 1; N. 2. 7. 3; and N. 2 14. 1.

⁵ Crisógono de Jesús, O.C.D., *The life of St. John of the Cross*, 87-117 and Blommesteijn, Huls, and Waaijman, *Footprints of Love*, 10.

Next follows the preparation for and the actual departure.⁶ This can be an arduous experience. The bureaucracy involved in obtaining the correct migration papers causes feelings of anxiety, frustration, and fear. For those participants who came to the USA to seek asylum, this departure had the character of an escape. When obtaining migration papers, they hid (or had to hide) their real reasons for departure.⁷ Therefore, they almost literally departed in darkness and concealment, and figuratively disguised themselves. Similarly, John must have felt anxiety and despair, while facing abuse, starvation, beatings, and intense efforts "to persuade him to repudiate Teresa of Avila and the Carmelite Reform" during his imprisonment.⁸ John, too, had to carefully plan and prepare his spectacular escape from his prison. He escapes unseen in the darkness and concealment of that one night. These concrete experiences of departure were the beginning of a journey to a place unknown. In what follows, these experiences of departure will be brought into correlation.

1.1.1 *Correlation in Process*

When correlating John's experience of escape from imprisonment, as recounted in the first two stanzas of the poem *The Dark Night*, with experiences of departure in migration, it seems that these experiences resonate well with each other. First, the circumstances that led to departure function in a similar dynamic. In addition, leaving behind life, as one knew it, has a similar effect in both narratives. In the process of correlating the experience of departure, therefore, I raise three questions. What are the reasons for departure? What, upon departure, is being left behind? And, what is the effect of the departure?

Reason for departure

An experience of departure is an experience of leaving from one place, usually with the goal to arrive at another place. Both the African migrants' narratives and the narrative of the dark night indicated that this goal or the

⁶ In the migration narratives, some of these experiences were presented under the experience of arrival as part of the immigration procedure (the movement into a country).

⁷ As shared by Ustahimili, Kasala, and Kūohera. Kūohera explains the need to conceal her real reason for departure when applying for a visa at the embassy (Q6: 16).

⁸ FitzGerald, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope," 27; Kavanaugh, "General Introduction," 18-19; and Tyler, *St. John*, 30. Although in general John is commended for his equanimity during this experience: Crisógono, *The life of St. John*, 100-115 and Blommesteijn, Huls, and Waaijman, *Footprints of Love*, 11.

hope and dreams are connected to the intended destination, which is reflected in the reasons for departure.⁹

In the narratives of the African migrants, many factors contribute to the decision to leave one's home country and to make this decision more permanent.¹⁰ Therefore, it is hard to make a clear distinction between a forced departure and a departure of free choice. In migration studies terminology, one could say that each decision to leave was guided by push factors related to circumstance in the homeland (be they economic, social, personal, or political) and by pull factors related to expectations in regard to the destination country and to the participants' goals, hopes, and dreams (a better education, a better job, and freedom and safety).

In the narrative of the dark night the reason for departure also consists of a combination of factors. John explains that one factor is the intention and hope to improve one's spiritual life and imitation of Christ. The other factor is the loving inflow of God, which causes the soul to depart from its former life and draws it "to go out to spiritual union of the perfect love of God."¹¹ Phrasing it in migration terminology, I would say that in John's narrative a soul's awareness of the imperfection of its spiritual life is a push factor connected to the reason for the journey: one wishes to arrive at the perfect imitation of Christ and union with God. God's desire to bring the soul into the perfect union of love connects to the goal for the journey. It can, therefore, be considered a pull factor in the experience of departure. It is God's desire which fuels the soul's hopes and dreams and pulls the soul away from its former life.

Furthermore, both in the experiences of migration and of the dark night, departure, or going out, can be experienced as a choice (such as entering religious life and seeking spiritual growth, or seeking opportunities in a better education and in better jobs) and as something that befalls them (such as the inflow of God, or life threatening circumstances in one's home country).

What is left behind?

The words of Serenity, "I was leaving behind everything that I knew,"¹² summarizes the experience of leaving or departing in both the migration experience and the experience of the dark night.

⁹ For migrant experiences see Chapter Two, section 2.1 and for dark night experience see Chapter Three, section 2.1.

¹⁰ I use the expression "more permanent" as most of the participants, who could have the opportunity to return, still show a longing to make a final return.

¹¹ N. 1. 14. 2.

¹² Serenity, (Q11: 02).

In the African migrants' narratives, departure is felt deeply in all aspects of life: it affects how one eats, how one cares for one's health, how one makes friends, how one obtains a job, and how one lives one's faith. In other words, life is affected on the personal, cultural, social, economic, and religious plains.¹³ Amidst all the ways that life is affected, the narratives of the African migrants pointed to three aspects, which had been formative for who they were upon departure.¹⁴ The first formative aspect was a life embedded in community, and its dynamic of interdependency that shaped many aspects of their lives. All participants share this aspect of interdependency, although their perception of it differed depending on their particular role.¹⁵ This community life provided safety and a sense of belonging. Secondly, religious life permeated the society they left behind. Everyone is a person of faith, no matter which religion or faith system one professes. Being part of a faith community was central to their identity. Living and practicing one's faith is, with the words of Kuriōka, supported by the "community system."¹⁶ When they leave, they also leave behind this particular sense of belonging and community support, and the nourishing environment it provided for their faith and relationship with God. Thirdly, more than half of the participants share in their narratives that they have left behind a well-settled life. They were educated professionals, with steady jobs, and had achieved a respectable socio-economic status. They enjoyed the stability of this life and the joys and luxuries such a life brings.¹⁷

In the narrative of the dark night, John explains as well that experiences of departure affects all aspects of one's being, as a person is affected in both the sensory and spiritual parts of the soul.¹⁸ In the passive night of the senses, a soul departs from the satisfactions and consolations found in passions, appetites, and affections, and from the love of self and of created things. As God leads a soul into this night of the senses, it will experience dryness and emptiness in the sensory part of the soul. One is no longer able to find

¹³ See Chapter Two, section 2.3.

¹⁴ See Chapter Two, section 4.1.

¹⁵ Hatiri-na-thina, Kūohera, Unyenyekevu, Bahlohoi, and Ekpere-di-ike speak of this. Be it that Ekpere-di-ike has developed a unique perspective on this in the course of his migration experience. See Chapter Two, section 4.3.

¹⁶ Kuriōka, (Q8: 159).

¹⁷ Ustahimili and Kuriōka mention how they miss the joy of being able to treat oneself to such luxuries. Kasala mentions their driver and cook, and Fda, Ustahimili, Kasala, Kuriōka, and Bahlohoi mention how it was easier to provide for their children in their homeland.

¹⁸ See Chapter Three, section 2.1.

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satisfaction in the things of the world or in their former spiritual exercises. In the passive night of the spirit, a soul will depart from its natural or habitual way of understanding, and from its habitual or human desires and way of loving. The experiences of departure in the passive night of the senses differ from those of the passive night of the spirit, but they are connected. John explains that the interrelatedness between the sensory and spiritual parts of the soul and the rootedness of the habitual imperfections in the spiritual part of the soul, indicate that a soul continues to experience departure from all its sensory modes of operations in the night of the spirit as well.

The experience of departure: becoming a stranger to one's self

<i>Resonance of the experience of becoming a stranger to one's self</i>	
<i>Migrant experience: several participants</i>	<i>Dark Night Experience: N. 2. 9. 5</i>
Hatiri-na-thina says: "Because it's like, <i>you are like an alien</i>."¹⁹ Kasala explains how afraid they were, because: "<i>All things [were] very strange when we came to the USA... and it looked very dark when we came.</i>"²⁰ Isokan confirms this experience that "<i>everything was like strange.</i>"²¹ Kuriōka in the midst of all her troubles upon arrival says: "I did become so tired and I would find myself crying, because [it was] <i>as if I was leading somebody else's life.</i>"²² And Serenity, who came to the USA as a teenager, said: "I didn't feel a connection with the kids at all, because <i>I still felt very much a foreigner.</i>"²³	As a soul is "placed in terrible anguish and distress by means of this purgative contemplation," the soul feels "<i>interiorly alien to all things</i> [and as] <i>all things are different than before</i>" the soul feels "that it is <i>being made a stranger to its usual knowledge and experience of things.</i>"²⁴

¹⁹ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 4).

²⁰ Kasala, (Q3: 9 & 15).

²¹ Isokan, (Q12: 7).

²² Kuriōka, (Q8: 41).

Both in the African migrants' narratives and in the narrative of the dark night, departure effects a feeling of being carried outside of oneself or of becoming a stranger. It is interesting to note that both the African migrants and John continue to express this effect following the initial departure, be it geographical or spiritual. In their narratives, the African migrants speak about these feelings when they speak about their moment of arrival, but it re-occurs in their experience of negotiating life in the new country. It is not until they are confronted with their new surroundings or new circumstances, that they are able to articulate how their departure has affected them. Similarly, John explains that once the soul experiences that its former modes of operation and understanding no longer function, it is able to express the effects of departure.²⁵ The soul feels "interiorly alien to all things [and as] all things are different than before" and feels "that it is being made a stranger to its usual knowledge and experience of things."²⁶

1.1.2 *Insights Gained*

Correlating the reasons for departure leads to the observation that the reasons and causes for departure in both narratives have a similar dynamic: there is the aspect of choice and the experience that this departure is something that befalls them. This second aspect expresses a spiritual or supernatural dimension. According to John, these experiences of departure are, therefore, also the beginning of a different journey: the spiritual journey toward God. This raises the question whether participants perceive a spiritual dimension in their departure as well. The African migrants in their narratives do express the presence of God on their migration journey²⁷ and Kūohera sums it all up as she exclaims at the end of the interview: "So everything happened [...] because God wanted me to glorify him. Yes."²⁸ She however makes this observation in retrospect: it is when she reflects back on her journey that she perceives God as both cause and goal on her migration journey.

John's perspective on the interconnectedness between the sensory part and the spiritual part of the soul, points out how concrete experiences of departure are connected to its spiritual dimension. The soul not only speaks of how different all things have become, as experienced through the sensory part of the soul,

²³ Serenity, (Q11: 2 & 9).

²⁴ N. 2. 9. 5.

²⁵ N. 2. 9. 3.

²⁶ N. 2. 9. 5.

²⁷ See Chapter Two, section 3.2 on "developing coping strategies" and "the role of faith."

²⁸ Kūohera, (Q6: 49).

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but also how it feels “interiorly alien to all things,”²⁹ in the spiritual part of the soul. In terms of the dark night, I could say that the departure as described by the African migrants, leaving a life lived in community on both the social and religious plain, is interiorly experienced as a departure from the consolations experienced in this life. They leave behind a place where they felt safe, experienced a sense of belonging, received support and experienced a natural connection with their faith and with God. Those participants who leave behind a well-settled life also experience a departure from the satisfactions they experienced in the luxuries of the socio-economic status they had achieved. In his narrative of the dark night, John speaks of the ongoing experience of departure on the journey through the dark night as a soul transitions from the night of the senses into the night of the spirit. This observation leads to the question whether departure in the experience of migration also continues beyond the geographical points of departure and arrival. The African migrants reflect on their experience of departure, and the life they miss and left behind, not only when they speak about their moments of departure and arrival, but also when they speak about how they negotiate life in the new country. This indicates that there is indeed an ongoing experience of departure from what was known along the journey, whether at the actual moment of departure, at the actual moment of arrival, or during the years of negotiation and settlement.

In sum, the African migrants and John speak about a departure from one's former life, which is the beginning of a journey along unknown roads to a place they know not. This effects the experience of becoming a stranger to one's self. On these unknown roads, nothing is familiar at all: be it socio-economical structures, family or faith community structures, or, in the case of John's narrative of the dark night, the structure of one's spiritual practice. These concrete experiences of departure seem to carry an interior and supernatural or spiritual dimension. According to John, God, as pull factor, initiates the journey in the desire to bring the soul into the spiritual union with God. African migrants in their narratives indicate, in retrospect, God's hand in the reason for their migration experiences.

²⁹ N. 2. 9. 5. When John uses the word “interior,” it usually is related to experiences in the spiritual part of the soul, although John also speaks of the interior senses in the sensory part of the soul. The more interior the soul's spiritual journey becomes, the more spiritual it becomes. It should be noted however, that it always involves the person as a whole, as “one *suppositum*.” See: Chapter Three, section 4.1 and section 4.2. See also: Payne, *The Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 17-18 & 41-44 and Howells, *John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila*, 55-59.

1.2 *Experiences of Arrival in correlation*

*This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he was awaiting me
him I know so well
there in a place where no one appeared.*

*O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with his beloved,
transforming the beloved in her Lover.*

In the fourth stanza of the poem *The Dark Night*, the soul finds her beloved, the one she knows so well, in the place where he was waiting. In the remaining stanzas the poem describes how the soul experiences this arrival at the Beloved. In the fifth stanza the soul expresses gratitude for this “night more lovely than the dawn... that has united the Lover with his beloved, transforming the beloved in her Lover.” The poem continues to sing of the beauty of this union: the breeze from the fanning cedars, the two lovers alone in each other’s company, all else forgotten, the lover’s cares left behind among the lilies.³⁰

In the African migrants’ narratives, such hopeful anticipation in regard to their arrival in the USA, their destination country, can be seen when they speak about the goals and dreams they hope to accomplish. From what they have been told, the USA is “the golden land” that is a “paradise like [the] garden of Eden.”³¹ It is “the promised land, the land of milk and honey.”³² However, contrary to the lyric description of the experience of arrival in the union with the Beloved, the experience of the participants is in general one of shock, and sometimes even trauma, as they are faced with the realities of life in this “golden land.” They cannot leave their “cares forgotten among the lilies.”³³ Instead, upon arrival in the USA their cares and concerns begin or worsen.

³⁰ In the commentary *The Dark Night*, John does not expand on the experience of this union. The commentary ends with the introductory notes for the third stanza and John gets ready for a commentary by verse but stops there. John comments on the experience of this union (and therefore the experience of arrival) in depth in *The Spiritual Canticle*. See also: Kavanaugh, “Glossary,” 455.

³¹ Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 1).

³² Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 29) and Kuriōka, (Q8: 3 & 109).

³³ Verse from eighth stanza of the poem *The Dark Night*.

1.2.1 *Correlation in Process*

The correlation of experiences of arrival indicates the presence of dissonances. From the observations above, it becomes clear that the experience of arrival is quite different if not opposite. For the African migrants, arrival in the USA causes a shock of disappointment and, sometimes, even darkness. For the soul in John's narrative, arrival in the dark night is an experience of a delicate beauty and serenity. In John's narrative, the hopes, dreams, and promises in regard to arrival at the union of love in God align with its reality (a mystical experience that is beautifully expressed in the poem). For the African migrants, however, their hopes and expectations do not align with the reality encountered in the USA. Furthermore, there is the difference in the order of the transitional phases on the journey. Arrival follows departure in the experience of migration; whereas in the experience of the dark night, arrival is the end point of the journey. The question arises how this difference in the position of arrival affects the experience of arrival in both narratives? In order to answer this question, I will reflect on three aspects of the experience of arrival. Does arrival effect a sense of welcome? Does arrival create obstacles? And, is arrival an ambivalent experience?

Feeling welcome... or not?

When the African migrants reflect on their experiences of arrival, they reflect on their sense of welcome. The immigration process, for instance, wasn't easy or easily accessible. Participants who won a Green Card or received a Green Card through family reunification still became frustrated by the process and felt anxious for the interview at the USA embassy. Participants who arrived on a visitor's visa, but were in fact asylum seekers, experienced a lot of anxiety upon arrival: Will their need for asylum be acknowledged or will they be sent back home, where it is no longer safe for them? The treatment they receive during these different immigration procedures does not provide a sense of welcome.³⁴ Those who are welcomed by relatives or find the support of an ethnic community fare better in their sense of welcome. Sometimes, however, the experience of arrival can turn out to be traumatic: when relatives or friends do not show up to pick you up from the airport, or when they experience abuse by their hosts, such as Kuriōka and Ūtana. In general, the arrival in the USA is not a positive experience and the African migrants do not experience the feeling of a warm welcome.

³⁴ Ustahimili, Kuriōka, Unyenyekevu, Serenity, Isokan, and Bahlohoi all describe this negative impact of the immigration procedures. Serenity reflects on this impact in the context of the procedures for becoming a U.S. citizen.

John, however, describes arrival as positively beautiful. Using the three phases of the natural night, John places arrival at the union of love in God in the breaking dawn, which culminates in the new day: that moment in which the soul experiences the final transformation of "the beloved in her Lover."³⁵ This moment is no longer of this life. In the narrative of the dark night, therefore, the experience of arrival does not immediately follow the experience of departure but indicates the end of the journey. In the commentary *The Dark Night*, John does not elaborate on the experience of arrival, but John speaks about it when he explains how the soul on the journey through the dark night will develop different degrees of love.³⁶ As both the spiritual and sensory parts of the soul become employed in this love,³⁷ the soul will be able to experience "the gentle and delightful ardor by reason of the perfect soul's union with God."³⁸ These experiences of union with God are precursors of the final experience of arrival. I surmise that they too are steeped in the same embrace of welcome as John describes in the last three stanzas of the poem *The Dark Night*.

Obstacles in the experience of arrival

For the African migrants, the moment of arrival in the USA does not immediately bring an experience of welcome or a relief from cares and concerns. On the contrary, upon arrival, they are faced with the socio-economic systems, which organize the USA society. Different aspects of these systems are interrelated. If one is not able to fulfill the requirements for one, then one might also not have access to another.³⁹ This is a major obstacle, made more difficult because people already in the USA seem to assume immigrants know how to figure it all out. Furthermore, the experience of a language barrier, which takes most participants by surprise, exacerbates this lack of support. Most of them were fluent in English, be it British English with an African accent, but people in USA were not forthcoming in trying to understand them and would, upon hearing their accent, immediately give them the epithet of strangers, foreigners, or even aliens. Some of the participants are affected deeply by this and experience becoming mute. Ustahimili sums it

³⁵ Verse from the fifth stanza of the poem *The Dark Night*.

³⁶ N. 2. 18-20.

³⁷ N. 2. 11. 4.

³⁸ N. 2. 20. 4.

³⁹ For instance, the acquiring a Social Security Number is necessary for obtaining an ID-card or a driver's license and having or obtaining the correct vaccinations is necessary before children can start to attend school.

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up when she says: “Because, when you talk, you try to make people understand what is not easy. You stay only quiet.”⁴⁰

Arrival in the narrative of the dark night has an eschatological dimension, as the ultimate experience of arrival at the union of love in God does not happen in this life. John explains that as the soul climbs the “secret ladder of love” it will experience both the movement of ascent and descent. In the experience of descent, the soul will experience trials, misery, and torment through which the soul gains humility. In the experiences of ascent, the soul grows in love and will experience prosperity, abundance, and tranquility.⁴¹ These moments of ascent are experienced in the measure in which its sensory and spiritual faculties and appetites become subjected and recollected in God, and in the measure in which the soul is infused with the love of God. However, as long as a soul still experiences attachments to former desires or modes of seeking consolation and satisfaction, it will continue to experience moments of descent. John explains that until a soul reaches its final transformation in God, something will always be lacking in this experience and the soul will continue to experience an alternation of experiences of descent and ascent.⁴²

Arrival: an ambivalent experience

<i>A resonance in the ambivalence of arrival: bound and unbound</i>	
<i>Migrant experience: Kuriōka</i>	<i>Dark Night Experience: N. 1. 7. 3-4</i>
Kuriōka compares how she felt, when being abused by her host upon arrival to how she felt when she was able to escape from that situation: <i>“And now that I did not have influence of someone that was binding every effort, [when I was] bound by my host before.... You know like when someone is controlling you. You have no power of anything.”</i> But when she settled in her own apartment she felt this:	In chapter seven, John uses a prison metaphor (which shows something of his own experience) to explain the contrary experiences of purgation and illumination. <i>“They resemble one who is imprisoned in a dark dungeon, bound hands and feet, and able neither to move nor see nor feel any favor from heaven or earth.”</i> (N. 2. 7. 3) John

⁴⁰ Ustahimili, (Q5: 38). Kasala, and Serenity also voice this experience. Kasala explains how he feels forced to become the quite guy and Serenity explains how her coping strategy in high school was remaining quiet. See also: Chapter Two, section 2.2.

⁴¹ N. 2. 18. 2-4.

⁴² N. 2. 20. 6.

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“Cause the minute we came here it was like, <i>we felt good</i>. We were sleeping on the carpet. We had no bed and we were happy... When we came there was nothing in this house. <i>We sat here, all of us, me my husband and my two children, and we were just happy</i>. [chuckles and laughter]. <i>We were just happy</i>.” She started this observation by saying: “<i>My faith now started growing in the sense that, yes, that where [there are] challenges, there is a way out</i>.”	continues to describe how the soul experiences intervals of love and illumination: “<i>like one who has been unshackled and released from a dungeon, and who can enjoy the benefit of spaciousness and freedom, experiences great sweetness of peace and loving friendship with God...</i>” (N. 2. 7. 4)
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Arrival in the African migrants' narratives is an ambivalent experience. On the one hand, the participants speak about the goals and dreams they hope to accomplish. They share their excitement of becoming part of this land of opportunities. This is particularly true of the participants who came as young adults. They looked forward to a good education, a stable job, and the opportunity to learn new things in a country so diverse. Others share their gratitude for the safety and peace they found here. This is especially true for those participants who came to seek asylum. Kūohera talks about being able to sleep in peace, without having to worry about who may knock at your door. She jokes: “The only person who can knock at your door is the leasing office: That you have not paid the rent. Nobody else.”⁴³ On the other hand, however, the participants also speak about the obstacles they encounter upon arrival. They feel ignorant regarding the socio-economic system, which they initially do not grasp. They experience exhaustion if yet another obstacle needs to be overcome. The disappointment of not being able to accomplish one's goals immediately, or even the need to sacrifice them, creates yet another experience of departure.

Arrival in the narrative of the dark night is also ambivalent and carries, as John terms it, the experience of contraries. Arriving at the perfect union in God in this life is never ultimately perfect. This is reflected in the alternating experiences of ascent and descent. According to John, these experiences do not occur simultaneously, as the experiences of affliction and darkness are of human origin, and the experiences of abundance and tranquility are of divine origin: two contraries which cannot co-exist.⁴⁴ However, as the soul

⁴³ Kūohera, (Q6: 32).

⁴⁴ N. 2. 6. 4 & N. 2. 7. 5.

progresses on through the dark night, experiences of ascent will grow stronger. As a soul attains higher degrees of love, it will experience moments of dwelling peacefully and with loving attentiveness in the presence of God. These experiences of ascent are experiences of arrival and are a foretaste of the ultimate and eschatological experience of arrival.

1.2.2 Insights Gained

Even though the immediate effects of arrival are quite opposite in both narratives and even though arrival is positioned differently on the migration journey compared to the journey through the dark night, the two narratives resonate in that arrival is an ambivalent experience. In the African migrants' narratives this ambivalence is caused by the contrast between expectations and reality, characterized by the obstacles they encounter upon arrival. This observation in the African migrants' narratives uncovered a resonance in the narrative of the dark night. The contrast between the human and the divine, which is the foundation of the eschatological dimension of arrival, causes the alternation of experiences of descent and ascent. It is in the experience of descent that a soul encounters obstacles. From the perspective of the African migrants' narratives, I would say that the contrary between the human and the divine makes the experience of arrival in the narrative of the dark night ambivalent as well. In this resonance of arrival as an ambivalent experience due to the encounter of obstacles, the difference is that in the narrative of the dark night, obstacles are encountered on the journey toward arrival, whereas in the narratives of the African migrants, obstacles are encountered upon or following arrival.

Exploring the contraries, which effect ambivalence in the experience of arrival in both narratives in connection to the eschatological dimension of arrival in the narrative of the dark night, I uncover a dissonance regarding the presence of positive and negative aspects in the experience of arrival. John speaks about alternating experiences of descent and ascent: they do not occur simultaneously. In the context of arrival, he emphasizes the positive aspect in the experiences of ascent as the soul draws closer to the ultimate arrival in God. The African migrants in their narratives address both negative and positive aspects when they describe their experience of arrival. They emphasize the negative aspect of arrival in the obstacles they encounter and the re-occurrence of departure they experience, but they simultaneously point to the positive aspects of the opportunities, of safety and peace, and of successes achieved.

These observations raise two questions: Can experiences of descent in the dark night be equivalent to the re-occurring experience of departure in the African migrants' narratives? Can the eschatological dimension of arrival and the experiences of ascent in the narrative of the dark night speak to experiences of arrival in migration?

1.3 *Experiences of Negotiation and Settlement in Correlation*

*In darkness, and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
- ah, the sheer grace! -
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.*

The second stanza of the poem *The Dark Night* reflects on the soul's journey out of its confinement. On this journey, the soul encounters challenges that need to be overcome. The soul experiences darkness, due to the things that bind the soul,⁴⁵ and the soul has to climb the secret ladder, while letting go of that which may pull it downward. On this journey, the soul, however, also receives many graces, which the soul expresses in both the first and second stanza when she says: "Ah, the sheer grace."⁴⁶ The darkness experienced is not just a burden. It also offers concealment and protection⁴⁷, just as being disguised offers the soul protection and support on this way out of its confinement.⁴⁸

Once arrived in the USA, the migration journey continues, and the African migrants share the many challenges they encounter while they try to negotiate life in their new home country. Apart from the need to learn all the ways in which USA society is organized, they also have to negotiate the life they knew and left behind with a way of life that is new to them. This experience affects them in all aspects of their life and is experienced as "not easy" and even as dark sometimes.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the African migrants' narratives also show excitement and gratitude, when they share their successes and accomplishments, however big or small. The African migrants who came to seek refuge and safety especially express gratitude that they found protection and are now living in peace and without anxiety.

⁴⁵ See for instance John's remarks on this experience of darkness in N. 2. 5. 2-6 and in N. 2. 6-9.

⁴⁶ Verse of stanzas one and two of the poem *The Dark Night*.

⁴⁷ John remarks on this experience of darkness in N. 2. 16.

⁴⁸ John remarks on the function and support of being disguised in N. 2. 21.

⁴⁹ Kasala, (Q3: 15).

1.3.1 *Correlation in Progress*

When correlating the experiences of the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement, then it seems that the African migrant's narratives and the narrative of the dark night resonate well with each other. Both narratives show equivalence in the themes they address: they speak of hardship and blessings encountered. The African migrants characterize these hardships by the challenges encountered and John speaks of the impediments that need to be overcome. The blessings are characterized by opportunities received and successes achieved in the narratives of the participants and by benefits and blessing in the narrative of the dark night. It raises the question: Do the two narratives also resonate in how these challenges or impediments and opportunities or benefits and blessings are experienced?

Hardships: challenges and impediments

In the African migrants' narratives, challenges arise in the encounter between the remembrances of the life left behind and the new life in the USA. As the familiar ways do not apply and the new ways are not yet quite understood, African migrants become frustrated, and feel powerless in their efforts to get around in the new country. When sharing these experiences in their narratives, African migrants often display feeling homesick as they reminisce how life in the home country was better.

In the narrative of the dark night, challenges arise because of the manner in which the divine and the human are different: They are so contrary to one another that they cannot co-exist.⁵⁰ The loving inflow of God results in purgation of attachments to human desires for consolation and satisfaction. This loving inflow also purges imperfections in human and habitual modes of operation in both the sensory and the spiritual parts of the soul.⁵¹ The soul experiences a sharp contrast between the afflictions experienced in this night and the memories of one's "past prosperity."⁵² These memories and the consolation they seem to bring, are impediments on the journey and only bring deeper sorrow, despair and a sense of powerlessness.

Blessings: Opportunities, success, and benefits

Even though the African migrants reflect on their migration journey as really "not easy" or as very "challenging," they also express excitement and gratitude when they talk about the support they received and when they share

⁵⁰ N. 2. 5. 1-4 & N. 2. 6. 1 & N. 2. 9. 2.

⁵¹ N. 1. 10. 6 & N. 2. 5. 2.

⁵² N. 2. 7. 1.

their accomplishments and successes. These experiences of success or moments of settlement carry a change of perspective: Even though they still critique many aspects of USA society, the African migrants also explain how life in the USA is good and, in some ways, better than life in the home country. They are grateful for the respective ethnic communities or faith communities that have received them with open arms and a warm welcome. Both experiences provide a sense of belonging. The African migrants share how excited and proud they are when they accomplish new feats, such as learning to navigate the transportation system, obtaining a driver's license, gaining access to resources, and finding jobs and housing. In their narratives they share how they develop new skills, knowledge, and perspectives, and how they have become creative and resourceful. Hatiri-na-thina and Kuriōka express this process when they say: "the system and country make you learn."⁵³ As the participants continue on this journey they grow more confident.

Even though John emphasizes the challenges a soul faces on the spiritual journey through the dark night, he also makes sure that his readers hear about the benefits one experiences in the effects of purgation and illumination. These benefits, or experiences of settlement, have two dimensions: benefits one perceives on the exterior and benefits one experiences more interiorly. The more exteriorly perceived benefits are already noticeable in the night of the senses as the soul gains self-knowledge in its relationship to God. Although the soul becomes more proficient in exercising all the cardinal virtues,⁵⁴ John emphasizes the virtue of humility. Humility causes the soul to grow in compassion and esteem for others, and in respect and courtesy in its communion with God.⁵⁵ In the passive night of the spirit, the exteriorly perceived benefits are recognized in the effects of the soul obtaining poverty of spirit and in the transformation of the spiritual faculties. Poverty of spirit is recognized in the ability to embrace everything without the desire to possess anything.⁵⁶ The transformation of the spiritual faculties is recognized in the soul's continuous growth in faith, hope and love. The interior benefits recognized in the night of the senses are the soul's ability to remain quiet and content in the absence of discursive meditation and the ability to experience spiritual peace and tranquility in God.⁵⁷ In the night of the spirit, these interior

⁵³ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1:22) and Kuriōka, (Q8: 112).

⁵⁴ N. 1. 13. 5-12. See also N. 1. 2-7: in these chapters John addresses the cardinal vices, but refers to the opposite virtues recognized in the proficient or perfect.

⁵⁵ N. 1. 11. 2 and N. 1. 12. 2-4.

⁵⁶ N. 2. 7. 3 and N. 2. 8. 5.

⁵⁷ N. 1. 13. 3 & N. 1. 14. 1 & N. 2. 1. 1.

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benefits are characterized by the experience of touches of divinity and moments of union of love in God.⁵⁸

The experience of negotiation and settlement: an experience of letting go

<i>Resonances of an experience of letting go</i>	
<i>Migrant experience: Hatiri-na-thina</i>	<i>Dark Night Experience: N. 1. 9. 5</i>
Coming from Kenya to America, is <i>like children of Israel</i> the way they came from Egypt to the Promised Land. And they were told: do not focus of the things you have left behind. <i>And sometimes when we are frustrated even the children of Israel said, would rather go back where we were eating garlic and olive, you know, even if we were slaves. But God, the Word of God always told them, you know, focus on what I have promised to you. So, I try very much, I think the thing that keeps me going is to focus on that, knowing that I came from Egypt and right now I am in the promised land, the land of milk and honey, and I have to live up to that. I may not have that today. I might have it, and maybe I don't see it, but I know I will get it, and I look forward to that. Every day, yes, every day.</i>	Those whom God begins to lead into these desert solitudes <i>are like the children of Israel</i> . When God began giving them the heavenly food, which contained in itself all savors and changed to whatever taste each one hungered after [Wis. 16:20-21] ... <i>they nonetheless felt a craving for the tastes of the fleshmeats and onions they had eaten in Egypt</i> , for their palate was accustomed and attracted to them more then to the delicate sweetness of the angelic manna. And in the midst of that heavenly food, they wept and sighed for fleshmeat [Nm. 11:4-6]. The baseness of our appetite is such that <i>it makes us long for our own miserable goods and feel aversion for the incommunicable heavenly good</i> .
<i>Migrant experience: Myizero</i>	<i>Dark Night Experience: N. 2. 4. 2 & N. 2. 21.11</i>
<i>God has a purpose, right? And I'm going that way and I know that there's going to be light at the end of the tunnel.</i>	<i>The memory, too, was changed into eternal apprehensions of glory.</i>

⁵⁸ N. 2. 2. 4 & N. 12. 2-6 & N. 2. 21. 11.

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Whatever the light is, if I will experience the light here or there. [It's] <i>Eternity</i>. Because, we live in a global world now. Even these issues I mentioned earlier of my childhood, they are changing as we speak, in every country because of globalization. So, if I will go back, let's say, I said everything I want to go back to any country in Africa, it may not be at the same extent, but I will have to adjust again. Ah, so, when I say the light at the end of the tunnel I feel to me it's... <i>eternity, but before eternity, it's acceptance</i>. You live in a place and you run into these, um, obstacles, to some extent you will have to struggle. You struggle with them. But then you do your best to, to assimilate on the way to the acceptance. <i>And through your faith and acceptance the end of the tunnel will be this acceptance toward your eternal life without pain [voice raises], I hope [laughs]. (Q16: 18)</i>	& <i>Hope empties and withdraws the memory from all creature possessions, for as St. Paul says, hope is for that which is not possessed [Rom. 8: 24]. It withdraws the memory for what can be possessed and fixes it on what it hopes for. Hence hope in God prepares the memory perfectly for union with him.</i>
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In both narratives, memories of the life left behind or memories of one's "past prosperity"⁵⁹ can be a challenge and effect other challenges. In the narrative of the dark night, such memories constitute the attachments and desires that form an impediment on the journey and cause experiences of affliction: The soul needs to let go of these experiences.

In the African migrants' narratives, memories have a similar effect. They cause participants to feel homesick and emphasize the differences between the life left behind and the new way of life in the USA. The measure in which participants are attached to these memories determines the measure of the culture shock they experience and their ability to negotiate the challenges encountered. Fda, for instance, shares how his attachment to his life in his homeland became an impediment to his settlement in the USA, because for a long time he was not able to engage his new life: "...but me, I kept looking back. That didn't work. Either I didn't go back, what I was looking for, or I

⁵⁹ N. 2. 7. 1.

didn't catch up with this [life]. So that would leave me behind" (in his efforts to establish a new life in the USA).⁶⁰ Hatiri-na-thina exemplifies the need to let go of these memories, when she reflects back on her migration experience. In her reflection, she applies, just as John does, the biblical paradigm of the experience of the people of Israel in the Exodus. She explains that one has to be able to let go of the "garlic and olive"⁶¹ in order to focus on and trust in God's promise for a future in a land of milk and honey, even if she does not yet see it or has not yet achieved it.⁶² Myizero explains that trusting in God's purpose and its "eternal apprehensions," as John calls it, she receives hope and the ability to accept the changes in her life both here in the USA and in her home country.

1.3.2 *Insights Gained*

The characteristics of negotiation and settlement in the African migrants' narratives and John's narrative of the dark night resonate well. In both narratives there is equivalence in dynamic, namely the oscillation between experiencing challenges and impediments on the one hand and experiences of success or settlement and benefits on the other.

There is a difference in the circumstances that effect the challenges encountered. In the narratives of the African migrants the challenges are caused in the encounter with society in the USA, and therefore, are more concrete or external. Nevertheless, there is also an internal aspect to this experience, which resonates with the challenges the soul experiences in the narrative of the dark night. In both narratives, one source for the challenges encountered is found in the attachment to a former way of life, of experiencing, and knowing. The memories of the life left behind constitute an impediment, which effects other challenges. A central theme that emerges in both narratives is the need to negotiate the experience that this former life no longer applies or functions while the new life and how it may develop is not yet fully comprehended or accomplished.

There is also equivalence in regard to moments of settlement. In both narratives these moments of settlement bring relief and hope for what is possible for the future. The African migrants in their narratives and the soul in

⁶⁰ Fda, (Q2: 13). The experience Fda describes here connects to what John describes in N. 2. 7. 1.

⁶¹ Hatiri-na-thina uses these words in her retelling of the Exodus story. John quotes Nm 11: 4-6, which speaks of "fleshmeats and onions." See: N. 1. 9. 5.

⁶² N. 1. 9. 5 and Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 29).

John's narrative of the dark night experience such moments of settlement as graces received and they express gratitude for these blessings and benefits. I do, however, observe a dissonance in regard to these moments of settlement. In the narrative of the dark night, I made a distinction between benefits perceived on the exterior and benefits experienced interiorly. In my analysis of the dark night I emphasized these interior benefits as moments of settlement, because they are precursors of the eschatological arrival at the union of love in God. These interior benefits reflect the supernatural or spiritual dimension of this experience. This distinction does not seem to be reflected in the moments of settlement in the narratives of the African migrants. Their moments of settlement mostly concern practical or exteriorly perceived achievements in their efforts to establish a new life in the USA. Interestingly however, it seems that this distinction between exterior and interior experiences is reflected in the African migrants' narratives when they speak about the challenges they encounter. Challenges which they experience interiorly are the memories of their "past prosperity" and the depreciation and powerlessness they experience. This resonates with the impediments a soul experiences interiorly: powerlessness in both the interior faculties of the sensory part of the soul and in the faculties of intellect, memory, and the will in the spiritual part of the soul. This dissonance in regard to settlement raises the question: How do the African migrants' narratives speak of interior benefits?

Evaluation

In regard to the correlation of the experiences of departure, arrival, and negotiation and settlement, there is one obvious dissonance between the narratives of the African migrants and the narrative of The Dark Night. This is the different position of arrival in the order of the transitional phases on the respective journeys. In the analysis of the two narratives and in the correlation between the two narratives thus far, I have followed the order of the transitional phases as they occur on a migration journey. For these evaluative remarks, however, I will start with the insights gained in regard to arrival, precisely because this dissonance in one of the elements of the narratives' structure affects the understanding of other dissonances and resonances.

In the process of correlation, I designated arrival as an ambivalent experience. First, because it reflects the ambivalent feelings African migrants experience upon arrival as they face obstacles. Secondly, this ambivalence also reflects the difference in the immediate effects of arrival in the African migrants' narratives compared to the effects of arrival in the narrative of the dark night.

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It was the ambivalence experienced by the African migrants upon their arrival in the USA that pointed my attention to obstacles in the narrative of the dark night and a possible experience of ambivalence in arrival. In the dark night, arrival is defined as the goal of the spiritual journey: the perfect union of love in God. It is on the journey toward this eschatological goal that the soul encounters obstacles in the form of experiences of descent. Furthermore, ambivalence in the experiences of arrival in both narratives is also characterized by the presence of both negative and positive aspects or experiences. In the narrative of the dark night this is defined by the alternating experiences of descent and ascent. In the African migrants' narratives it is seen when they simultaneously share of obstacles encountered, as well as peace and safety received and successes achieved.

As different as arrival is defined in the narratives of the African migrants and in the narrative of the dark night, regarding the transitional phases of departure and negotiation they resonate well. Departure is caused by the push to improve current circumstances and the pull of the hopes and promises connected to the intended destination. In both narratives, departure is defined by leaving behind the consolation and satisfactions found in one's former way of life and operation, and is expressed as becoming a stranger to one's self. This interiorly experienced effect of departure and the perception that God is connected to reasons (or push factors) and goals (or pull factors) alike opens the perspective to the spiritual dimension of departure. Furthermore, it was noted that both the African migrants and the soul in the narrative of the dark night discover more attachments to their former lives as they progress through the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement. This dynamic constitutes equivalence in the effect of reoccurring experiences of departure in both narratives. In both narratives the measure in which one is attached to one's former life determines the measure of the challenges and impediments experienced and the measure in which settlement can happen. As noted, experiences of settlement bring relief and hope for what is possible for the future. The transitional phase of negotiation and settlement in both narratives is thus defined by the oscillation between the challenges and impediments experienced on the one hand, and the experiences of settlement on the other.

Connecting these insights gained regarding the ambivalences in arrival and the re-occurring experiences of departure in the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement provides answers to questions raised earlier. One question asked whether experiences of descent in the narrative of the dark night and re-occurring experience of departure caused by obstacles and challenges in the African migrant's narrative could be equivalent. John defines experiences of descent as effected by attachments and desires that

form impediments on the journey toward the perfect union of love in God. I noted above that attachment to one's former life is a central and reoccurring challenge and obstacle in both narratives, which effects re-occurring experiences of departure in the transitional phase of negotiation. I conclude, therefore, that there is indeed equivalence between these experiences and that the reoccurring experiences of departure in the African migrants' narratives can be designated as experiences of descent.

A second question asked whether there is a possible connection between on the one hand experiences of ascent and arrival in the narrative of the dark night and experiences of success and settlement in narratives of the African migrants on the other hand. In the dark night, experiences of settlement are perceived as precursors of the ultimate arrival. In both narratives they effect a positive experience in that they give hope and a perspective on what is possible in the future. It seems, therefore, that the eschatological dimension of arrival in the dark night expands the perspective on arrival in the migration experience beyond the definition of arrival as a geographical or a one point in time moment of arrival. In terms of the dark night, moments of settlement and accomplishing goals in the African migrants' narratives can be perceived as moments of ascent. These moments of settlement, perceived as ascent, become precursors of that, perhaps eschatological, moment of arrival in which the two identities of being an emigrant (experiencing departure) and being an immigrant (experiencing negotiation) become integrated in their migrant identity (experiencing arrival).

There are, however, still differences to be noted. Regarding the oscillation between experiences of descent and ascent, John speaks of these experiences as alternating. He emphasizes that they cannot be experienced simultaneously on account of the contrary between the human and the divine. The African migrants in their narratives on the other hand seem to speak about these experiences simultaneously: in the midst of all their challenges they also speak of the blessings received and settlement achieved. Furthermore, the African migrants in their narratives display a more exterior and concrete experience of settlement and the question was raised how they speak of interior benefits? The observations regarding these two differences ask for a further exploration of the manner in which the African migrants in their narratives express these experiences: exteriorly or interiorly, sensory or spiritually, alternating or simultaneously, or both?

2. Experiences of Liminality in Correlation

The results of the correlation between the place and effect of departure, arrival, and negation and settlement in the first part of this chapter, show that both narratives speak about the need to negotiate the oscillation between the experience that one's old way of being no longer functions or applies (departure) and the experience that a new way of being has not yet fully formed (arrival). This oscillation constitutes the context for the experience of liminality. In what follows below, I present the correlation of the way in which both narratives speak about engaging this experience of liminality. I will continue to point out resonances and dissonances by paying attention to equivalences and differences in character response.

2.1 *Correlating Experiences of Loss*

The analysis of the each of the narratives pointed out that both African migrants and John articulate liminality in terms of loss and of coping. The African migrants in their narratives not only speak about negotiating the whole new system of life in the USA in which their customary ways no longer apply, but they also speak about negotiating this loss and all the feelings and emotions that this experience evokes.

John in his narrative of the dark night explains that the soul has to negotiate the experience that its former way of knowing, being, and loving no longer applies, while it is not yet fully joined in perfect union to God. Not only does the soul have to negotiate how its relationship to all creaturely things changes, but the soul also has to negotiate all the feelings and emotions this evokes. John describes this as the loss of everything that used to uphold the soul.⁶³

2.1.1 *Correlation of Experiences of Loss in Process*

In this paragraph, I present the correlation of these experiences of loss and the emotions they evoke.

Experiences of loss on the migration journey

In the analysis of the experiences of loss in the African migrants narratives I made a distinction between experiences of external loss and of internal loss. Experiences of external loss were gathered in four categories: Loss of social network, loss of socio-economic status, loss of previous life, loss of previous tactics. In these losses experienced, the African migrants articulate how they

⁶³ N. 2. 5. 7.

lost life, as they understood life to be, with its values, morality, and cultural traditions, and how this caused them to lose the ability to address problems and challenges as known tactics no longer applied. These experiences of external loss are caused by the encounter between the circumstances participants left behind and the circumstances they face in the new home country. Experiences of internal loss are caused by the manner in which the African migrants negotiated the relationship between their emigrant identity (the person they left behind) and their migrant identity (the new person they were becoming). This negotiation defines their immigrant identity. It affects their way of being and is recognized in their emotions. Participants speak of a loss of dignity, a loss of hope, a loss of faith and of faith lived in community, and they speak of a loss of quality of life. The loss of quality of life amounts to the experience that there is "no time to live,"⁶⁴ which means no time to attend to the need of one's family or community, no time to attend to one's spiritual needs, and no time to savor the "joys of living."⁶⁵ I observed that when participants speak about the loss of quality of life, they make a connection between the external and internal dimensions of the losses they experience.

Experiences of loss on the journey through the dark night

In his narrative of the dark night, John explains that the soul experiences loss both in the sensory and the spiritual part of the soul. In the sensory part of the soul, a soul experiences the loss of its ability to exercise the senses as it used to and of its ability to seek God through discursive meditation. The soul loses the ability to make sense of anything and the ability to find consolation and satisfaction. John explains that these experiences of loss effect an intense experience of powerlessness and despair.

In the spiritual part of the soul, the soul experiences the loss of its human way of operation and understanding. The soul loses the ability to find satisfaction and consolation in abundance and prosperity. In the spiritual faculties, the intellect experiences darkness, the memory void, and the will experiences aridity. John explains that in these experiences of loss, the soul suffers many afflictions and feelings of agony. The soul believes that God, creatures, and friends alike despise it. The soul also loses its ability to reach out to God. It feels as if God excludes its prayers and abandons it. The soul cannot by its own means cope with these experiences. This realization causes a deepening

⁶⁴ The theme "no time to live" originated in a comparison between interviews regarding loss of quality of life. This theme describes the loss of the ability to attend to balancing the important aspects of life (such as faith and family) with the demands of daily life in USA.

⁶⁵ This theme originates in the narrative of Ustahimili, (Q5: 94).

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sense of powerlessness and a loss of peace. John furthermore explains that even though the effects of the dark contemplation become more interior and spiritual, the effects of this purgation continue to be felt in the sensory part of the soul as well.⁶⁶

Liminality: an experience of desolation and abandonment

<i>Resonances of afflictions in the experience of liminality</i>	
<i>How participants describe the afflictions of a migration experience</i>	<i>How John describes the afflictions of the dark night - N. 2. 7. 2 (from: Lam 3: 1-20)</i>
Ustahimili says that her migration experience “it’s make me, eh, eh, becoming older soon. I have the burden on my shoulder.” She feels alone on this journey, as her husband seems not able to cope and be of support. (Q5: 77)	<i>He has made my skin and flesh old</i>
Kuriōka speaks about the abuse she experienced by her host and how this affected her: “I started kind of wondering if <i>this the real life I’m living, I felt like I was almost dead, you know like you feel you’re almost dead?</i> ” (Q8: 31) Her host practically kept her away from others and inside the house: “We used to go to church, their church, which was a Kenyan church, and when we go there, to church, <i>I wasn’t supposed to be talking to many people...</i> Anytime she would catch me talking to someone she would kind of, she would ask of me: “What were you talking with so and so?” So, I would, I would leave the church service and get into her car.” (Q8: 34) “So, she used to go to work. <i>She gets me in the house. So I used to do the house, the house help job.</i>	<i>He has built a fence around me...</i> <i>He has set me in darkness, as those who are dead forever...</i> <i>He has closed up my exits...</i> <i>He has destroyed my paths...</i> <i>He has made me desolate</i>

⁶⁶ The sensory and spiritual parts of the soul form “one suppositum” and imperfections experienced in the sensory part of the soul are rooted in the spiritual part. See: N. 2. 1. 1 & N. 2. 2.1 & N. 2. 3. 1-2.

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Not with any payment, but she never used to be telling me anything..." (Q8: 37) In the end she felt desolate: <i>"I felt like I was almost getting depressed... I felt so, so delicate. Q8: 74-76 & 85).</i>	
Unyenyekevu compares her migration experience to being stuck in the mouth of a lion: "Because—it's like you are in the mouth of a lion. When he opens the mouth like this, you cannot reverse, you cannot go back—you either go in, and the lion will eat you, or..." (Q10: 26)	<i>He is become to me like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding...</i>
Kasala feels that he has "become a derision to people" as he experiences that he is <i>not accepted for who he is and that his opinions or contributions he could make do not matter</i>: "I am forced to be a quiet guy. Je suis forcer d'être un tranquille monsieur ainsi: ...If you don't speak a language, <i>you better stay quiet and understand</i>, try to understand what they're saying. And, secondly, but unfortunately, I just felt like: <i>"I am not really from here."</i> (Q3: 33-34 & 59) This also speaks to the language barrier in general, as most participants feel that, because of their accent, they are not taken seriously.	<i>I have become the derision to all people...</i>
Ustahimili, Kasala, and Kūohera, speak about the peace they lost due to the threats made on their lives. That on their journey they felt far removed from peace becomes clear when they express the peace they experience once they received asylum. Wirigiro emphasizes multiple times that in the high demands of USA society he experiences <i>a loss of "peace of mind."</i> (Q7: 12)	<i>My soul is far removed from peace.</i>

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Ustahimili no longer knows the good life from home: “<i>The joys, the joy of living. Actually, I don’t feel like I’m living...</i> Before coming to the United States, I had a part of my life, only enjoy myself. Like clothing, or make-up, hair salon... You know, with friends, music, everything. Forget it. I’m surviving, correct. I’m surviving.” (Q5: 94)	<i>I have forgotten good things...</i>”
Fda shares that he believes that when he had to readjust his goals, he <i>lost the blessings of God</i> and he wonders: “<i>Did I lie to my Creator? ...Did I do wrong?</i> (Q2: 17) Kuriōka asks a similar question in those moments where she <i>had no faith: Why this God? Who has allowed me to go through all this suffering? ... Did you really mean for me that I should be here?</i> This was the wrong choice. (Q8: 115).	<i>My end, my aim and my hope from the Lord is frustrated and finished.</i>

In both narratives, experiences of loss have an external and internal dimension. John speaks about experiences of external loss, when, in the sensory part of the soul, the soul loses the way it used the senses to make sense of the world and its life. The African migrants speak about external loss in the challenges encountered as they try to navigate the way society works in the USA. They too experience that their senses no longer function to make sense of the world and of life: for life in the USA smells and tastes different, the way people see and perceive, hear and listen is different, and even the manner in which the sense of touch is exercised differs.⁶⁷ These experiences of external loss effect internal loss. Both John in the dark night and the African migrants in their narratives, speak about a loss of identity and of rejection and abandonment. The soul in the dark night comes to understand its human limitations over against God and feels rejected and abandoned by creatures, friends, and God.⁶⁸ The African migrants discover how their stories,

⁶⁷ In their narratives, participants provide ample examples of the difference in food culture and how it even creates health problems (For instance: Ustahimili, Serenity). The manner in which language and the race and class categories function, affects the manner in which one hears and sees, and the difference in how one physically relates to one another (Chi-bu-ike-m and Isokan) has an effect on social relationships and can even cause loneliness (Chi-bu-ike-m).

⁶⁸ N. 2. 6. 3-4 and N. 2. 7. 1-3.

their life, and professional skills do not matter and they generally speak about rejection and abandonment by other people. Fda, Kasala, and Kuriōka also voice feeling abandoned by God as they describe how difficult it is to keep their faith when they see no way out of or remedies for their despairing circumstances.

Both the African migrants and John share how profound these experiences of loss are and their narratives resonate well when both take great pain in trying to convey the depth of this experiences. John repeatedly uses words such as: “a spirit in distress,”⁶⁹ “bitterness and anguish,”⁷⁰ “agony and pain,”⁷¹ and “solitude and desolation.”⁷² In chapter seven of book two of *The Dark Night*, John quotes from the prophet Jeremiah (Lam 3: 1-20) to “further explain what this night causes in the soul.”⁷³ The African migrants in their narratives use rich and colorful language as well. They compare this experience to “having the heavens come down upon [them]”⁷⁴ or to being stuck in the mouth of lion.⁷⁵ John even shares that “all that we can possibly say would fall short to expressing what this night really is,”⁷⁶ but when John does try to describe this experience he amply uses biblical references, especially from the book of Job, the Psalms, and Lamentations. The table above illustrates that the narratives of the participants resonate with the biblical descriptions John uses as they both describe these experiences.

2.1.2 Insights Gained

When the African migrants and John speak about the loss experienced, their narratives produce a rich resonance as they emphasize the loss of the ability to make sense of their life and the world around them in the way they used to. Both narratives speak about the experience that the memories, which used to form who they were and how they made sense of the world they lived in, no longer work. Fitzgerald explains that in experiences such as these “the certainties on which we have built our lives are seriously undermined or taken away – not only in prayer, but also in and by life, and a profound dis-

⁶⁹ N. 1. 11. 1.

⁷⁰ N. 2. 3. 3.

⁷¹ N. 2. 5. 6.

⁷² N. 2. 7. 3.

⁷³ N. 2. 7. 2.

⁷⁴ Kasala, (Q3: 22).

⁷⁵ Unyenyekevu, (Q10: 26).

⁷⁶ N. 2. 7. 2.

orientation results.”⁷⁷ This indicates that the obstacles and challenges the African migrants encounter on their migration journey have the same effect as the experience of purgation in the dark night. Both the African migrants and John speak about experiencing disorientation, disintegration, dispossession, and deep sense powerlessness.⁷⁸ John expresses this experience as feeling abandoned and annihilated. The African migrants in their narratives use many words to express these experiences, but Kuriōka expresses this experience with a word that caught my attention and that seems to gather these experience together. She uses the word “delicate” to refer both to circumstances that “made life so, so delicate” and to explain how she felt internally:

So, by that time I was wondering: “Why am I here in this country? I could have better be going back? ...Because I felt like I was almost getting depressed ...cause every day I did ...to cry, because I didn’t know what I was supposed to do... I, I felt so, so delicate.”⁷⁹

In regard to the migration experience Hildegund Keul explains that migrants “increase their vulnerability [as] they leave social networks, are unprotected while traveling, [as] previous protective tactics no longer hold sway, [and] life situations become incalculable.”⁸⁰ The expressions of feeling delicate, desolate, annihilated, and abandoned are characteristics of experiences of vulnerability.⁸¹ Therefore, in these experiences of loss, with their ensuing sense of powerlessness in the disorientation, disintegration, and dispossession experienced, the African migrants in their narratives and the soul in John’s narrative of the dark night are rendered delicate or vulnerable. This raises the question whether their narratives speak similarly or differently about their

⁷⁷ FitzGerald, “From Impasse to Prophetic Hope,” 23. See also: Blommenstijn, Huls, and Waaijman, *Footprints of Love*, 73-74.

⁷⁸ Constance FitzGerald and her description of such experiences guided me in this analysis: FitzGerald, “Impasse and Dark Night,” 94-95 & 97-99 and FitzGerald, “From Impasse to Prophetic Hope,” 23-24.

⁷⁹ Kuriōka, (Q8: 76, see also Q8: 74, 77 & 85). I will explain why this word caught my eye, below in the correlation of the experiences of transformation. See Chapter Four, 3.2.1.

⁸⁰ Hildegund Keul, “The Venture of Vulnerability,” 182.

⁸¹ To designate the different expressions of these experiences used by participants and by John as an experience of vulnerability, I researched the definitions and synonyms for delicate and vulnerable and discovered an overlap in these expressions, definitions and synonyms. See: “Delicate,” and “Vulnerable,” Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2019), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/delicate> and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/vulnerable>.

responses to these experiences of loss and vulnerability and about how they regain the ability to make sense of who they are and of the world they live in.

2.2 *Correlating Coping Strategies*

In the prior section I pointed out that the two narratives resonate as they characterize liminality as an experience of anti-structure in which they lose of the ability to make sense of self and of the world (external loss) and in which they are rendered powerless and vulnerable (internal loss). The question how the African migrants and John speak about regaining the ability to make sense of self and the world brings to the fore the other element that defines the experience of liminality, namely negotiating the realization of living in the liminal phase where the new life with new structures is still developing. In this section I will bring into correlation how both narratives speak about coping with this experience of anti-structure and the emotions it evokes.

2.2.1 *Correlation of Coping Strategies in Process*

Engaging the experience of liminality consists of more than figuring out a way to transition from one way of living and being to a new way of living and being. Engaging also includes addressing all the feelings and emotions that the experience evokes. Figuring out the new way of living and being asks for developing new skills. Addressing the feelings and emotions evoked asks for coping strategies. Below I correlate the skills developed and the coping strategies applied by the African migrants and by the soul in the dark night, while paying attention to resonances and dissonances observed and exploring their meaning.

Developing skills

Engaging the transition from being in between two worlds to becoming more settled in their new home country is for African migrants first and foremost defined by figuring out the system and practicalities of life in the USA. Engaging the new society requires developing new skills. Participants explain how they learn to navigate the different social, economic, health and education systems that run the USA society. They discover how these systems are intertwined; obtaining access to one often requires having gained access to another. They learn to navigate the world of amenities and insurances. They engage in education, sometimes as a necessity to renew professional training. Although lost and without support or guidance at the beginning of their journey, they often become experts in navigating these systems by the time they get settled.

When engaging the transition from practicing discursive meditation to the practice of contemplation, the soul in the dark night is challenged to develop the skill to surrender into the quiet and emptiness of this dark contemplation. When the soul develops the ability to remain passive in this dark contemplation, the contemplation is rendered active as God does God's work in the soul. Attaining the skill to remain idle in the darkness of the infused contemplation (or of this dark faith) allows the soul to cope as it experiences security and strength and such delicate "interior nourishment" that its experience is inexpressible.⁸²

Developing coping strategies

To address the experiences of loss and the ensuing experience of vulnerability, the African migrants develop different coping strategies. They withdraw from situations when they seek stress relief and healing to deal with anger and physical signs of stress such as headache. They may withdraw into an inner quiet or create a physical distance to allow for a moment of reflection and letting go. When facing difficult circumstances, they cope by changing their perspective on the situation. Focusing on the positive side of things, rather than the negative, helps them to let go of difficulties, redirect their energy toward possibilities, and develop resilience. They develop patience and perseverance when they discover and accept that the journey may be long. They adjust their goals and learn to endure. They come to accept that certain prospects will not change for themselves and they transfer their hopes for the future to their children. Finally, the one coping strategy all African migrants depend on is faith. Their faith seems the foundation of all the other coping strategies. In the words of Unyenyekevu: "...for anything to happen in migration, you have to have faith..."⁸³

John speaks about two coping strategies the soul can apply to address the loss of the efficacy of its spiritual practice, of the ability to make sense of life and the world, and of the manner of believing. The first coping strategy is to surrender the experience of powerlessness to the idleness and quiet of the dark contemplation. In this state, the soul starts to experience the effects of illumination as the spiritual faculties of intellect, memory, and will are infused with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. The second coping

⁸² FitzGerald, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope," 24. FitzGerald points to the "intimately close presence of the divine," which cannot be understood and is even hidden from "spiritual intuition." In the accompanying footnote, she refers to the different terms John uses to indicate this intimate presence of the divine, among them "infused contemplation," "secret Wisdom," and "mystical theology."

⁸³ Unyenyekevu, (Q10: 26).

strategy is to both surrender to and to exercise the theological virtues. Faith, hope and love support the soul both in their purifying and illumining effect. On the one hand, they purify the faculties from all that is not God. As a result, the intellect experiences darkness, the memory emptiness, and the will dryness. On the other hand, the soul is strengthened through faith, hope, and love. Hope fixes the soul the on the glory of things eternal so that it remains focused solely on God. The virtue of charity endows the soul with pure love and purifies all the appetites, apprehensions, and affections of the will. Faith provides the soul with perseverance and prevents the soul from becoming discouraged or failing God

Faith, the foundation of all coping strategies

<i>Resonance in how faith is the foundation of the ability to cope</i>	
<i>How participants express the necessity of faith</i>	<i>How John describes the necessity of faith – N. 1. 12. 4 & N. 2. 21. 4</i>
Kasala says: “Some days the difference in emotions, that we should take care of, because it is part of the balance. Yeah, that is what I was asking. There are people to protect and it is hard. <i>Keep the faith</i>. No, but I’m not really killing. <i>It is true that God is the only other cause that you can have. In foreign lands, strange place, strange situations: if not God, if not your own faith...</i>” (Q3: 40) Unyenyekevu says: “Because eh, one—faith, and the migration, <i>for anything to happen in migration, you have to have faith. Because—it’s like you are in the mouth of a lion. When he open the mouth like this, you cannot reverse, you cannot go back—you either go in, and the lion will eat you, or—. So, when you are in migration, you don’t have nothing else remain. So it is a matter of faith. And that is where God come in. And that is where you, now, you get people that they assist</i>	In “the dark night of the sense [...] the soul is [...] <i>grounded in faith [...] that it may be capable of walking along the constricted road</i>, which is the night of the senses [...] so that it may journey to God in pure faith, <i>for pure faith is the means</i> whereby it is united by God.” “Faith is inner tunic of such pure whiteness that it blinds the sight of every intellect. <i>When the soul is clothed in faith the devil is ignorant of how to hinder her, neither is he successful in his efforts, for faith gives her strong protection.</i>”

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you. So—all those goes together. (Q10: 26) Ustahimili says: “[<i>God</i>] is with me, with my family, aaalll the time [soft whisper]. Sometimes, I will cry all the time. Do you know what... I don’t know even how to tell it. <i>He [God] is, I have evidence. He is showing me, I’m here with you.... He’s the man, the principal. My life is nothing. It is God that is doing everything for me.</i> My life is... You know, I’m here, you can see me, I don’t think I’m here. <i>It is Him who is [5:20 - protecting?? – she becomes emotional] me in life.</i> Even the kids. Now I start repeating to the kids: “You are now grown up, you need to know to pray, before entering in your car, before leaving the house, where you are.” You know? <i>It is Himself who can say, at that moment, at that time you should not be here. He will remove you from that place, before something bad happens. It’s Himself, not me, not you [...]</i> <i>It’s Himself acting. So He’s before everything, before everything.</i> (Q5: 118)	
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In their narratives the African migrants explain that faith supports them when nothing else remains: Fda explains that it is faith which keeps him moving and which gives him the strength to sacrifice his own dreams, but to work for a better future for his children. Faith in God’s love and care provides hope and courage to address problems that seemed insurmountable. They see God’s providence when “from nowhere”⁸⁴ they find the support needed to address a difficult situation and believe that God will answer their prayers, be it in

⁸⁴ This theme originates in the narrative of Kūohera. She seems to use this expression to indicate God’s agency. Another aspect of this experience of God’s participation is that Kūohera seems to have strong faith in the power of prayer. It keeps her in relationship with God and seems to open opportunities for God’s agency. Ūtana uses the expression: “just by luck” to indicate a similar experience. (From memo, created on July 5, 2017.)

God's own time and manner. In their narratives, the African migrants share that God is the one who accomplishes all this. In the combined experiences of loss and vulnerability and of God's grace and generosity, they have come to understand more deeply their dependence on God and the strength they find in their faith.

John in his narrative of the dark night explains that faith provides guidance as it instructs the soul in matters of divine truth. This divine truth cannot be known by human means, but only by believing what is received in the propositions and articles of faith and in assent to the faith received through Christ and the tradition of the church. Faith is the foundation of all virtues. Faith strengthens the virtues of hope and love and effects of the theological virtues are recognized in the soul's ability to exercise all virtues together: free from possessiveness in regard to things of the world and protected from being wounded by them, the soul moves away from its love of self and of things possessed and becomes grounded in divine love, enjoying the pleasure "to live for love of God or neighbor."⁸⁵

2.2.2 *Insights Gained*

The correlation of the manner in which both the African migrants in their narratives and the soul in the narrative of the dark night engage their respective experiences of liminality uncovers a dissonance in their responses. In the African migrants' narratives engaging the experience of liminality seems to ask for an active attitude. There are so many different aspects of life that need addressing that one of the main complaints from participants is that they do not have time to live, meaning that there is no time to attend to the things that really matter: family, friends, and faith. Apart from addressing the external matter of the need to develop new skills to be able to navigate this new life, they also need to invest in coping strategies, which allow them to address the experience of loss and feeling vulnerable in a more internal manner. This latter aspect asks for a lot of strength, energy, and flexibility as changing perspectives and attitudes are needed to be able to cope. John, however, explains that engaging the experience of liminality in the dark night asks for a passive attitude. In order for God to be able to prepare the soul for the perfect union of love in God, the soul has to surrender its own activity to the idleness of the dark contemplation. While the soul remains passive, the inflow of God or the secret wisdom can take effect and enable the soul to grow in virtue and love.

⁸⁵ N. 1. 3. 2.

This dissonance in coping strategies seems to point to a different emphasis when considering these experiences as exteriorly or sensory and interiorly or spiritually. Whereas in the narrative of the dark night the emphasis is on the interiority of the experience and the passive surrender to God, it seems that in the narratives of the African migrants the emphasis is on the exteriority of the experience and the actively engaging of the challenges. This raises these questions: How do the participants, in their efforts to cope, express their experience of vulnerability in their relationship with God? Do they, in their narratives, portray an element of interiority when they speak of the support received from God?

The role of the theological virtues

Taking a closer look at the resonance observed when correlating coping strategies might provide an answer. In both narratives, faith is foundational for the ability to engage the experience of liminality. The African migrants in their narratives explain that faith and their dependence on God is their only strength. John explains that faith is the proper means and guide to the union of love in God. Faith is also the foundation of the theological virtues, which play an important role in the soul's ability to cope. This raises other questions: Do the African migrants, in their narratives, also speak about the theological virtues? Do they say that the virtues contribute to their ability to cope?

In his narrative of the dark night, John speaks about the effects of all three theological virtues and points out the double-sided effect of these virtues: they both purify and illumine. Upon closer inspection, such an infusion or effect of the theological virtues is also recognized in the narratives of the participants. For instance, Chi-bu-ike-m portrays her awareness about the effect of faith on the intellect. She explains: "...the mind, that is where you should have strong faith in God. Because God is teaching us lesson[s] and showing us signs, that He is here for us..."⁸⁶ This understanding of God teaching her through the faculty of intellect, drives her actions: her prayer, her patience and ability to respond to negativity with grace, and to give her husband and daughters the freedom to choose their home and identity. It also seems that Chi-bu-ike-m experiences an illumination both in the faculty of intellect and the faculty of will.⁸⁷ As her mind is illumined with faith, her will is illumined with love for God and others: the effects of the virtue of charity. Serenity shares a similar experience when she explains that her growing understanding of faith, by

⁸⁶ Chi-bu-Ike-m, (Q9: 78).

⁸⁷ N. 2. 12. 6. John refers to such an experience in which both the intellect and the will are illumined simultaneously as "something immensely rich and delightful."

means of the examples of faith she encounters in her parish community and by understanding that God is of an entirely different level, has made her "kinder and gentler."⁸⁸ Other participants show the effects of the virtues of faith and charity as well. In their gratitude towards God, they become humble and generous in love, which is shown in their ability to forgive harm done to them, in becoming supportive of others, kind, and up-lifting. Ūtana, for instance, shares how both the hardships she experienced and the experience of God's love for her made her a big advocate for humility and kindness.⁸⁹

The effects of the theological virtue of hope can be recognized in the participants' narratives as well. Their focus on God gives them "courage and valor."⁹⁰ Kūohera, for instance, finds hope in the knowledge that she belongs to God. This enables her to respond to a situation in which she finds herself abandoned and rejected by her roommates (who are people from her home country) with "courage and valor" as she respects her roommates' dignity and responds without reproach.⁹¹ Fda's hope that "God is watching [him] and is not going to fail [him]," allows him to sacrifice his own dreams and to focus his hope and dreams on a better future for his children.⁹² Myizero explains that she finds hope in focusing on God's eternal purpose, which gives her the strength to struggle with the obstacles she encounters and to accept the changes she experiences in her life.⁹³ In general, participants share that their faith and hope in God make things happen and, with the words of John, that "they obtain from God all [they] hope for."⁹⁴

On the interior experience of God

The manner in which the theological virtues feature in African migrants' narratives does point to an interior experience of God: through faith they gain a deeper understanding of God, which strengthens their hope, as they courageously respond to their hardships, and endows them with charity, which allows them to do so with humility and kindness. Furthermore, the manner in which the theological virtues, and in particular faith and hope, feature in their narratives also provides the insight that in the midst of the active responses to the experiences of loss and vulnerability, there is an element of surrendering all activity on to God.

⁸⁸ Serenity, (Q11: 17).

⁸⁹ Ūtana, (Q13: 25).

⁹⁰ N. 2. 21. 6.

⁹¹ Kūohera, (Q6: 42-44).

⁹² Fda, (Q2: 36 & 39).

⁹³ Myizero, (Q16: 18).

⁹⁴ N. 2. 21. 8.

Hatiri-na-thina puts God first and asks God to take the lead. Fda surrenders to his dark faith and finds the strength to go on even if he sees no remedies. Kasala surrenders to the internal empty quietness of contemplation to weather the external storms in his migration experience. Ustahimili surrenders to God's providence and God's loving attentiveness to her trials. Okpara surrenders to God as he comes to understand that God is always with him, which enables him to find peace in his restless wanderings. Kūohera surrenders to God, who has saved her from death, and she puts her trust not in humans, but in God alone. Wirigiro fixes his hope on God, knowing that God will make a way. Kuriōka finds her purpose in God, as she discovers in her miseries that it is not about humans, but about God. Chi-bu-ike-m finds her strength in God as she fixes her eyes on Christ on the cross in her contemplation. Unyenyekevu surrenders to God, realizing that only God can save her from the mouth of the lion, which symbolizes her migration experience. Serenity comes to understand the truths of her faith, learning that God is "certainly not of her level," which enables her to find a balance in her two identities. Ūtana finds calm and courage as she surrenders to her faith, when engaging the steep climb of her migration experience. Bahlohoi, never doubts his faith and God, even when he can't find the spiritual nourishment, he seeks in parish life. Ekpere-di-ike, acknowledges the power of prayer, his own and those of his extended family. Myizero, in the hope of things eternal, surrenders to God and the life of the Trinity, the communion of love where she knows she is connected with all people, especially the relatives she lost in the Rwandan Genocide and her son lost in gun violence. Isokan seems to be the exception to the rule. She is a fairly new arrival and complains that the many distractions of life in the USA diminish her faith and she seems not (yet) able to access her faith as a resource for her efforts to cope in the way she was able in her home country.

These observations show that, in the midst of all activity necessary to cope with the experience of liminality, the African migrants in their narratives experience the inflow of the theological virtues and surrender their powerlessness and vulnerability to God. This means that they pair a passive and interior response to their active responses: it is in their surrender to their faith and in their experience of God's presence that they find the strength and security to cope.

2.3 *Engaging Liminality in Faith*

The correlation of the coping strategies as described in the African migrants' narratives and in John's narrative of the dark night points out that faith is

foundational for the ability to cope with the experience of liminality. Here I will pay separate attention to this role of faith and correlate its characteristics as described in the analysis of both narratives.

2.3.1 *Correlation of the Role of Faith in Process*

In this correlation of the role of faith, I will focus on the effect of faith and on the manner in which the African migrants and John of the Cross speak about the presence of God and how faith features in both narratives as part of the response to the challenges and opportunities encountered.

The effects of faith

The role of faith in the ability to address the challenges and losses experienced on their migration journey features in all the narratives of the African migrants who participated in the research. They engage in prayer, whether to invoke God's help, to thank God, or because it is part of their religious practice. The African migrants let themselves be guided by their biblical knowledge as they use it for prayer, for invoking God, or to interpret the circumstances they find themselves in. They are aware that they are dependent on God and that the ability to cope rests on their ability to trust in God. Such awareness of God's presence in their lives and of how God provides for them is shown in their choice to "put God first."⁹⁵ This awareness creates humility in their relationship with God and with others.

Faith in the narrative of the dark night is the means by which the soul will receive true knowledge of self, of the world, and of God. It is also the means by which the soul is prepared for the union of love in God.⁹⁶ John refers to faith as "dark loving knowledge" and equates it with infused or dark contemplation, secret wisdom, and mystical theology.⁹⁷ This faith is foreign to all senses and cannot be known through imagination or by the soul's natural or human manner of understanding.⁹⁸ When God leads the soul into this dark contemplation, the soul experiences the two effects of faith: it darkens and empties the intellect, and it provides the soul with strength and perseverance to endure the trials of the dark night. As faith calms the senses, passions, and faculties, the soul "is freed of all imperfections contrary to the spirit" and

⁹⁵ This expression is coined by Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1:40) and became a theme to indicate the priority participants give to God in their actions.

⁹⁶ N. 2. 9. 3 and N. 2. 21. 11. See also: Collings, *John of the Cross*, 103-105 and 117-122.

⁹⁷ A. 2. 3. 4, A. 2. 24. 4, N. 1. 10. 6, and N. 2. 17. 3. See also: Kavanaugh, "Glossary," 158, 242 and 382.

⁹⁸ N. 2. 1. 2, A. 2. 3. 4-5, A. 2. 4. 2, A. 2. 9. 1, N. 1. 12. 4, N. 2. 17. 3 and N. 2. 21. 11.

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becomes solicitous about pleasing and paying homage to God alone.⁹⁹ This faith is the soul's constant guide through the night, providing safety and strength.¹⁰⁰

Experiencing the presence of God

<i>The presence of God: purification or illumination - effable or ineffable?</i>	
<i>How participants express the presence of God</i>	<i>How John expresses the presence of God</i>
Kuriōka says: <i>"There is so much pain here, that when you go through those pains, you know that it is not about man, but it is about God. Because this is even where family, people, they can leave you. But God takes you through fire and then by the end of the day you see there is light."</i> (Q8: 130) Hatiri-na-thina says: You know, in everything I do, <i>I learned to put God first. Not my husband, not my children, not my friends. Because, we are told, we have to believe with the things that we see and the things that we do not see. So, putting God first, has really made me grow..."</i> (Q1: 40) Chi-bu-ike-m says: <i>"I wake up in the morning, I said: "God, you gave me this privilege again. Thank you Lord for giving me a new day, and listen please</i>	...this divine loving fire of contemplation... <i>Before transforming the soul, it purges it of all contrary qualities...</i> Although the soul is no worse than before, either in itself or in its relationship with God, it feels clearly that it is so bad as to not be not only unworthy that God see it but deserving of his abhorrence... ...the very loving light and wisdom into which the soul will be transformed is what in the beginning purges and prepares it, just as the fire that transforms the wood by incorporating it into itself is what first prepares it for his transformation. (N. 2. 10. 2-3) "...afterward in the illumination... it [the wisdom of love] is so secret that it is ineffable. Not only does a person feel unwilling to give expression to this wisdom, but one finds no adequate means or simile to signify so sublime an understanding and delicate spiritual feeling." (N. 2. 17. 3) "The soul goes about so solicitously

⁹⁹ N. 2. 16. 13.

¹⁰⁰ N. 2. 16. 13-14.

<i>bring peace to this day.” You know, I always say: “here I am. Do whatever you wish.” And then I settled my day. Then at the end and I said: “thank you Lord. You’ve done your will. And so I’m about to go to bed, do with me whatever you wish.” And I go to bed. That’s my prayer.”</i>¹⁰¹ (Q6: 63)	on this step that it looks for its Beloved in all things. <i>In all its thoughts it turns immediately to the Beloved; in all converse and business it at once speaks about the Beloved; when eating, sleeping, keeping vigil, or doing anything else, it centers all its care on the Beloved, as we pointed out in speaking of the anxious longings of love.”</i> (N. 2. 19.2)
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The African migrants in their narratives are outspoken about how they find strength in their faith and about God’s prominent role in their ability to engage all the challenges and loss they experience on their migration journey. They put their trust in God’s providence and grace and share how they are or become aware of God’s presence and how this presence and their faith enables them to cope. They generally emphasize God as the source of their success achieved and blessing received.

Fda, Kasala and Kuriōka, however, also voice a different experience of God. Fda indicates that he fears God has rejected and abandoned him, when he shares his deep concerns about having failed or even betrayed God, which finds a heart-wrenching expression in his cry: “Did I lie to my Creator?”¹⁰² It causes him to experience the absence of God and darkness and affliction in his daily struggles. Even though he does not quite see any remedies and his faith seems dark, faith is still what keeps him moving every day.¹⁰³ Kasala also shares how his migration experience has turned “dark” and that, for instance, he was not able to join his family in praising God when they were finally able to move into a more permanent place to live: “So, during all those experiences it was hard for me to say: Oh, Alleluia.”¹⁰⁴ He shares how life in the USA has forced him to become the quiet guy, as he as a person, his opinions, his education, and his professional experience were not recognized as valuable. His response to this darkness and emptiness is to withdraw into the quiet of a contemplative mode, which allows him to weather the storms

¹⁰¹ Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q6: 63).

¹⁰² Fda, (Q2: 17).

¹⁰³ Fda, (Q2: 36-39).

¹⁰⁴ Kasala, (Q3: 15 & 27).

outside.¹⁰⁵ Kuriōka experiences a deep crisis of faith in her situation of being held hostage by her host. She speaks about moments where there was no faith, where she could not pray, but only cry. It is in this situation of abandonment that she discovers “that is not about man, but it is about God.”

John, on account of his understanding of the contrary between the divine and the human, emphasizes that faith or infused or dark contemplation effects darkness and afflictions in the experiences of descent, before the soul is able to experience illumination on the journey through the dark night. However, John explains that God’s presence in this illumination, in the experiences of ascent, can only be known in its effect, namely the manner in which the soul develops conformity with God in love. Even though a soul in such a state of illumination might not be able to describe God’s presence in the inflow of the secret wisdom of love, this awareness of God is recognized in quiet contentment and in the “anxious longings of love” in which a soul centers its entire being on God.

2.3.2 *Insights Gained*

In the correlation of the role of faith in the African migrants’ narratives and in the narrative of the dark night, I observe two dissonances in the manner in which participants and John speak about the role of faith. I also observe a resonance in the effect of faith.

Locating the experience of God

The first dissonance concerns a difference in emphasis when connecting the experience of God to, in terms of the dark night, experiences of purification and experiences of illumination. John emphasizes the presence of God in the experience of purification. A soul afflicted by the effects of this purification experiences the absence of God or being abandoned by God. Furthermore, John is very cautious when expressing the presence of God in experiences of illumination. He emphasizes that this presence is known through its effects, rather than in efforts to vocalize or describe it.

The African migrants in their narratives, however, emphasize the presence of God in relation to the strength and blessings they have received in the midst of their challenges and their experiences of loss and liminality. Even though the latter could be referred to as effects of purification, it seems that the African migrants in their narratives nevertheless reflect on the presence of God as an experience of illumination, rather than as an experience of

¹⁰⁵ Kasala, (Q3: 35-41).

purification. Again, Fda, Kasala, and Kuriōka are the exception. They do speak about their experience of God in the midst of their afflictions and how this effects darkness in their faith in the experience of God's absence. In the case of Fda and Kasala, it seems that, at the time of the interview, they still dwelled in this experience of darkness. In the case of Kuriōka, however, at the time of the interview, she had been able to free herself of her bonds and the darkness she experienced. Loss of faith had turned to hope and she regained her faith in that God does have a purpose for her, even if not yet defined. From that moment on she was able to see all that God is doing for her. When Kuriōka¹⁰⁶ reflects back on this entire process, she resonates with John when he uses the metaphor of the effect of fire on a log of wood to explain the experience of the dark night. Although instead of "by the end of the day you see there is light," John would say: there is light at the end of the night, when the new day dawns.¹⁰⁷ In retrospect, Kuriōka is now able to speak of God, who was initially absent in her hardships, as a supporting presence even as hardships continue to happen. This raises the question, whether the narratives of Fda, Kasala, and Kuriōka are indeed an exception or whether they reflect a difference in progress on their journeys? If the latter, then Kuriōka's narrative seems to speak to a possible turning point, where the emphasis on experiences of God's absence in hardships shifts to an emphasis on experiencing God as supporting presence both in hardships and in success and settlement. This observation also raises the question how experiences of descent and ascent occur in the African migrants' narratives compared to how they occur in John's narrative of the dark night. In the narrative of the dark night, experiences of descent are an effect of purification, characterized by afflictions, obstacles, loss, and the experience being abandoned by God. Experiences of ascent are an effect of illumination, characterized by the soul's ability to persevere in the dark night and by the soul's growth in virtue and love. Conform the observations regarding the ambivalence of the experience of arrival, it seems that the manner in which God's presence features in the experiences of descent and ascent is equivalent in the African migrants' narratives. The difference with the narrative of the dark night, however, is that John explains that experiences of descent and ascent always occur alternately, whereas it seems that the African migrants in their narratives do speak of these experiences as occurring simultaneously.

¹⁰⁶ Kuriōka, (Q8: 130).

¹⁰⁷ N. 2. 10. 1-3.

The (in)effability of the experience of God

From John's cautiousness to express the presence of God in experiences of illumination follows the second dissonance I observe, which concerns the ability to express one's faith and experience of God. The African migrants in their narratives are very vocal when sharing their faith and experiences of God. Their faith is grounded in their day to day experiences and they describe God's presence in their lives often in material ways: for instance, when passing a difficult exam or when receiving an unexpected check in financially difficult times. According to John, however, the divine inflow is so spiritual, intimate, and delicate that it is hard to express and neither the senses nor the faculties are able to "form [any] idea or picture of it."¹⁰⁸ Regarding John's emphasis on the ineffability of faith or of the infused or dark contemplation, it seems that the African migrants have more to say than John holds possible. There is, therefore, a dissonance in how the African migrants and John perceive the possibility of understanding and expressing one's experience of God. Nevertheless, both narratives also show elements of the opposite manner of speaking about God. For even though African migrants speak amply about the role of faith and God's presence in their narratives, they do seem to share an understanding of the ineffability of the experience. For instance, Kūohera, when asked about faith in her migration experience, starts her answer by saying: "You know, faith is something which is precious and it is hard to explain..."¹⁰⁹ Other participants attribute their ability to cope with or overcome a situation to God, while adding that they don't know how, the only thing they do know is that it is God.¹¹⁰ And even though John emphasizes the ineffability of the divine inflow, he explains that there are moments where the soul in its anxious longings of love does express its concern for and focus on God in all aspects of life.¹¹¹ Furthermore, John connects the experience of God to the entirety of life's experiences when he explains that the enkindling of God's love employs the whole person, as a harmonious composite of the sensory and the spiritual, "neither disdaining anything human nor excluding it from this love."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ N. 2. 17. 3. Note that John uses the word "delicate" to describe the experience of the inflow of the divine. I will expand on the use of the word "delicate" in the correlation of the experience of transformation.

¹⁰⁹ Kūohera, (Q6: 42).

¹¹⁰ See for instance: Ustahimili, (Q5: 109), Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 56), Ūtana, (Q13: 22).

¹¹¹ N. 2. 19. 2.

¹¹² N. 2. 11. 4.

Resonance: Oriented on God

Regardless of these dissonances the two narratives resonate in the effect of the role of faith. Hatiri-na-thina, for instance, explains that the effect of her migration experience in regard to her faith is that she has learned "to put God first." Chi-bu-ike-m shares how she prays at the beginning and the end of the day and that she has "no end to anything, only God." Unyenyekevu explains how she no longer wishes to work for the world, but how she wishes to do God's work. She used to be a national politician in her home country, but now she works as a patient ambassador in a hospital and she is happy and grateful that she is able to provide hospitality to the sick and to volunteer at the migration support center at her church. She says: "I assist people; I do His work! So I'm happy. I am changing from something, to what really, what God maybe wants me to do."¹¹³

In the narrative of the dark night, the soul becomes filled with the desire to please God, to pay God homage, and to live for God and neighbor alone.¹¹⁴ John illustrates this when he speaks about the "the anxious longings of love" in which the soul turns all its thoughts and actions to the Beloved. Therefore, both narratives resonate regarding the effect of the role of faith in that both the participants in their migration narratives and the soul in the narrative of the dark night exhibit a focus on God in all the aspects of their lives.

Evaluation

The insights gained in the correlation of the experience of liminality in the African migrants' narratives and in the narrative of the dark night provide answers to questions raised when correlating the experiences of departure, arrival, negotiation and settlement: Do participants experience their migration journey as a spiritual journey? If so, how do they describe this journey: as exterior or interior, sensory or spiritual, alternating or simultaneous, or both? First, in their narratives, the African migrants do speak about their migration journey as a spiritual experience in that they attribute their ability to cope and their experiences of settlement to their faith and the presence and participation of God. Second, they generally express the presence of God as supportive, both in their experiences of descent and of ascent. Third, their expressions of faith and of their experience of God are interconnected with their daily life experiences. In the midst of their active responses to the experiences of loss and vulnerability, they describe an element of surrender of all this activity on

¹¹³ Unyenyekevu, (Q10; 01).

¹¹⁴ N. 1. 3. 2, N. 1. 13. 12, N. 2. 19. 2-3.

to God. Fourth, the African migrants' narratives also point to an interior and transcendent, or inexpressible, experience of God. Pairing their experiences of vulnerability with an awareness of their dependence on God points to an interior experience of God's presence. It adds a spiritual dimension to the experience of purification caused by the concrete experiences. Therefore, I would now say that the African migrants express and appreciate God's presence and agency in their lives simultaneously exteriorly and interiorly, sensory and spiritually.

In sum, in the experience of liminality both the African migrants in their narratives and the John in the narrative of the dark night speak about experiences of loss, abandonment, and vulnerability or, in the words of Kuriōka: they speak about becoming delicate. In these experiences, faith is the foundation for all coping strategies. Although differences are observed, the African migrants and John speak about entrusting the experience of vulnerability to God and how in faith they receive the strength and security they need to be able to cope. Both narratives also explain how the effects of faith can be recognized in the manifestation of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. In conclusion, it can be said that in this experience of liminality, of being in transition from anti-structure to new structure, the following plotline emerges from the African migrants' narrative and John's narrative of the dark night: Faith and the participation of God enable coping with the loss of one's old way of being and taking on the journey toward a new way of being.

3. Experiences of Transformation in Correlation

In the third part of this chapter, I present the correlation of the characteristics of the transformation of identity and faith caused by the liminality experienced in the transitional phases on the respective journeys of migration or the dark night. I will point out resonances and dissonances as I look for equivalences or differences of structure, with a focus on the relationships between central concepts in both narratives.

3.1 *Transformation of Faith and Identity in Correlation*

Both the African migrants in their narratives and John in his narrative of the dark night, point to the central role of faith as they engage the transitions they experience on their respective journeys. Therefore, I raised the question in the analysis of both narratives whether I should not rather speak of a trans-

formation in faith? I will continue to bear this question in mind, but as I have already correlated the role of faith in the experience of liminality, I will now focus on the correlation between the characteristics of a transformation of faith and of identity in the African migrants narratives and in John's narrative of the dark night.

3.1.1 *Correlation in Process*

When considering the characteristics of transformation of faith and identity in the African migrants' narratives and in the narrative of the dark night, it seems that both narratives resonate well with each other.

Transformation of faith

Both the African migrants and John perceive faith as a precious gift, which should be received with care, humility, and gratitude. Ūtana, for instance, explains that God is the one who gives her faith when she says:

"I couldn't do anything without faith. So, I desire, and I pray for faith, that [the] Lord may increase my faith, because, I'm a big believer, faith can move mountains. I've seen them moved in my life. In many ways, situations... Only, only faith could do that."¹¹⁵

And Kūohera has come to understand that even though faith is "hard to explain" as it is so "precious" (or delicate!), she can still say this: "God is always with us... God always reaches for us and we need to come to God..." However, she continues: "[People] don't always know that, but I grabbed it..."¹¹⁶ In the African migrants' narratives it becomes clear that it is by this gift of faith that they are able to respond to the liminality and anti-structure they experience. Confronted with a process of individualization, a loss of quality of life, and vulnerability, they focus on their relationship with God. Their relationship with God becomes more intentional. They develop a growing or renewed awareness of God's presence and participation in their lives. This awareness causes a change of perspective in regard to their circumstances and in regard to their responses to these circumstances. Furthermore, they experience a transformation of the understanding of their relationship with God. The African migrants deepen their understanding of

¹¹⁵ Ūtana, (Q13: 20).

¹¹⁶ Kūohera, (6: 42, 49, 53), and observation notes from the interview: and while saying this she is very expressive with her hands, grabbing something from midair and closing her hands and move them toward her heart.

their dependency on God, center all their being and reality on God, and become humble and grateful in their relationship with God. This re-orientation on God impacts the way they live their faith. Their faith transforms from a more communal to a more individual faith.

In John's narrative of the dark night, the gift of faith (or the inflow of dark faith, or of the divine wisdom of love) enables the soul to engage the liminality and anti-structure. Confronted with the inability to experience God's presence (either in discursive meditation or in the dark contemplation), the soul becomes aware of its vulnerability and powerlessness. Once the soul surrenders this vulnerability and powerlessness to this dark contemplation, the soul starts to experience the effects of the inflow of the dark faith or of the divine wisdom of love. The soul grows in love for God, develops solicitude about centering its life and spiritual practice on God, and the soul receives strength and courage on the journey. This relationship with God is characterized by humility and gratitude toward God. As John emphasizes: this transformation of faith does not concern the contents of faith, but rather concerns the soul's relationship with God and how a soul believes.

This is exemplified when the African migrants in their narratives emphasize the importance of putting an effort in growing and nourishing their faith, both individually and communally. They are disappointed, and sometimes discouraged, when they discover that this is not always easy in USA society. It nevertheless does not stop them from trying as they develop creative ways to grow their faith, such as making a red light stop into a prayer moment. John is of the same mind. He encourages his readers in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* to center their lives on imitating Christ and to study his life. In *The Spiritual Canticle* he situates faith in the life of the community, which lives out the propositions and articles of the faith.¹¹⁷ In the commentary *The Dark Night*, however, John emphasizes that a passive dwelling in dark faith or contemplation renders faith active and strong. Prayer and contemplation are therefore ways to grow one's faith.

Transformation of identity

Regarding transformation of identity, the African migrants' narratives point to a transformation of the perception of self and to a transformation of behavior. As the African migrants experience the different transitional phases along the migration journey their perception of self changes. Their emigrant identity is characterized by a communal identity both socio-economically, culturally, and religiously in which they are aware of the role they play in the dynamic of

¹¹⁷ A. 1. 13. 1-3 and C. 12. 4. See also: Collings, *John of the Cross*, 106-111.

interdependency that determines the life of their communities. Upon arrival in the USA, their immigrant identities emerge. African migrants start to perceive themselves as strangers as their former way of being and understanding no longer applies in this new society. They feel unable to maintain their socio-economic position and to tend to those aspects of life that are important to their concept of a good life. They experience individualization and a devaluation of being. The transitional phase in which the African migrants negotiate their emigrant and immigrant identities can be quite long. Once African migrants achieve a new perception of self, then it is characterized by the ability to confidently and creatively navigate both identities and the socio-cultural contexts to which they belong. Furthermore, the narratives showed that their migration experiences also effected a transformation of behavior. The combination of their struggles, their experiences of vulnerability, and of God's generosity, makes them grow in virtues and they become humble and generous as they put God and others first.

John explains that as the soul journeys through the dark night it experiences transitions in how it perceives itself. As a beginner on the journey, the soul is characterized by its spiritual practice of discursive meditation and imperfect habits. Once the soul departs from its usual manner of being and understanding it starts perceiving itself as a stranger and it experiences a loss of identity. Transitioning into the state of proficient, the soul is enabled to dwell passively in this transitional phase where its former identity is let go, while the new identity has yet to emerge. As a proficient on the journey the soul also receives the ability to actively let go its former way of being and understanding: it attains poverty of spirit. As the soul reorients its entire way of being on God and grows in virtue, in love, and in likeness to God's spirit, it becomes "delicate, simple, and refined" in the state of perfection.¹¹⁸ This experience also effects a transformation in behavior as the soul not only grows in virtue, but also attains spiritual humility, freedom of spirit, and lives for the love of God and for neighbor.

3.1.2 *Insights Gained*

In the correlation of the transformation of faith and of identity, the narratives of African migrants and John's narrative of the dark night resonate when considering the dynamic of the transforming relationship with God and the effects of this transformation. Both narratives explain how the identity transitions experienced on the journey are part of the dynamic that brings

¹¹⁸ N. 2. 7. 3.

about the development of a more intentional focus on God and faith. The African migrants in their narratives and the soul in John's narrative of the dark night experience a loss of identity. They both dwell for a period of time in a transitional phase in which their former identities and manner of being and relating to the world around them no longer applies, while a new identity is in the process of emerging. The African migrants explain that they can no longer depend on the community aspect of their faith and the ways in which they used to nourish their faith. Similarly, John explains that the soul can no longer depend on its former ways spiritual practice and understanding of God. It is out of these experiences of loss and vulnerability that both the African migrants and John speak about gaining awareness of their dependency in their relationship with God. This effects an interiorization of this relationship and of the manner in which they express their faith.

The effect of this transforming relationship is a reorientation of their being and reality toward God. Both the African migrants in their narratives and John in his narrative of the dark night speak about attaining humility, about becoming more virtuous and generous, and about putting God and others first. This new perception of self and of the world around them explains that the identity transitions experienced by the African migrants on their migration journey and by the soul in the journey through the dark night are not only experienced exteriorly and in relation to the different transitional phases. They are also experienced interiorly and effect a spiritual transformation of identity. This resonance in the transformation of faith and identity confirms the dynamic observed in the transformation of identity in the analysis of John's narrative of the dark night: The exterior identity transitions cause an inward movement and an interiorly or spiritually experienced transformation of identity and faith, which in turn is recognized exteriorly in a transformed perception of self and behavior.¹¹⁹

Even though the two narratives resonate in the dynamic and effects of the transformation of faith and identity, there is a dissonance of context that needs to be taken into account, namely a difference in the circumstances in which the identity transitions that effect the transformation are experienced. In the African migrants' narratives their experience of identity transformation is centered in their migration experience, caused by socio-economic or political circumstances. They transition from being an emigrant, to becoming an immigrant and, finally, a migrant who is able to navigate and integrate both the emigrant and immigrant identities and the different socio-cultural contexts to which they now belong. In John's narrative of the dark night, the identity

¹¹⁹ See Chapter Three, 4.2.4.

transformation is centered in the spiritual journey initiated by God in which the soul transitions from being a beginner to becoming proficient and, finally, perfect in its relationship with God. This raises the need to further explore the dynamics and effects of this process of transformation in order to comprehend how two narratives that differ in context and circumstances can be so similar in their expressions of the dynamics and effects their respective journeys bring. It seems that the answer may be found in three key concepts voiced in both narratives as they speak of the transformation experienced, namely: the experience of vulnerability, the agency or participation of God, and attaining humility. In what follows I will first ask the question: How do the concepts of vulnerability and of God's agency function in both narratives? I then ask: How do these concepts relate to the experience of attaining humility?

3.2 *Correlating the Experience of Vulnerability, Humility, and God's Agency*

In regard to migration experiences, Keul observes vulnerability as a key concept. In her reflections she points to a connection between vulnerability and God's participation.¹²⁰ Keul posits the concept of "vulnerability" as strength in the experience of migration when she relates the experience of vulnerability to the Christological event of the incarnation: God becoming human is God becoming vulnerable. Her reflections happen in the context of arrival and the manner of reception migrants experience in big cities. She explores the responses evoked by migrants' vulnerability and correlates their experiences of vulnerability to the vulnerability experienced by and the responses it evokes in the actors in the nativity narratives. Keul concludes that the strength of vulnerability lies in a self-giving for others, which "undermines and subverts exclusion" and invites others to overcome "their 'Herod strategies' and build bridges" instead.¹²¹ Keul also points to a connection between Christ becoming fully human and humane in his vulnerability and the highest calling of a human, namely: "the human being's participation in the nature of God. (Ad Gentes § 3; Dei Verbum § 2)." She surmises that the "power that stems from vulnerability" stems from "divine grace."¹²² Although Keul does not expand on nor explain these observations, her reflections support a further exploration of the question how the concepts of vulnerability and the agency of God function in the experience of transformation of faith

¹²⁰ Keul, "The Venture of Vulnerability," 167-190.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 178 & 181.

and identity in the African migrant's narratives and John's narrative of the dark night.

In order to do so, I will focus on insights gained pertaining to experiences of vulnerability and pertaining to the difference observed in the experience of arrival, while correlating the word "delicate" as used in the African migrant's narratives and in John's narrative of the dark night.

3.2.1 *Correlating the Experience of Becoming Delicate and God's Agency*

The use of the word "delicate" by Kuriōka to describe the experience of becoming vulnerable caught my eye, because John also uses the word delicate frequently.¹²³ Although both Kuriōka and John use the word "delicate" in the context of arrival, a dissonance can be observed, which relates to the different experience of arrival noted above.¹²⁴ In Kuriōka's narrative, the word "delicate" expresses the experience of loss and powerlessness as a result of arrival. John uses the word in the context of the soul's experiences of the union of love with God, the defining experience of arrival in the dark night.

Becoming delicate in the experience of migration

In the correlation of the experiences of loss, I concluded that in both narratives vulnerability is effected by the experience of losing the ability to make sense of one's life and the world around in the way one used to. This experience causes disorientation, disintegration, dispossession, and powerlessness. As mentioned above, John uses many words to describe this experience, but in general sums it up as an experience of abandonment and annihilation.¹²⁵ The African migrants in their narratives use many different words or metaphors to describe this experience as well, but Kuriōka describes these experiences as becoming delicate:

...because I felt like I was almost getting depressed..., cause every day I did ... to cry, because I didn't know what I was supposed to do. My nursing, I had to through some English classes. I, I felt so, so delicate.¹²⁶

¹²³ John uses the word delicate 10 times in *The Dark Night*: 4 times in book 1 and 6 times in book 2: N. 1. 9. 6 (twice), N. 1. 9. 7, N. 1. 13. 10, N. 2. 7. 3, N. 2. 9. 1, N. 2. 9. 3, N. 2. 12. 5, N. 2. 13. 1, and N. 2. 17. 3. The English use of the word delicate (and its derivations) in the translation of Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, was confirmed in: S. Juan de la Cruz, *Obras Completas*, ed., Eulogio Pacho (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 1998, sixth edition).

¹²⁴ See Chapter Four, 1.2.

¹²⁵ See: Chapter Four, section 2.1.

¹²⁶ Kuriōka, (Q8: 76).

Even though the experiences of vulnerability are particular for each of the African migrants participating in this research, in each of their narratives there is that one moment where one just feels how vulnerable and delicate they have become.¹²⁷ And, although Kuriōka is the only participant who uses the word “delicate” to express how vulnerable she has become, the word “delicate” nevertheless gathers together and is representative of the experiences of vulnerability described in the African migrants’ narratives and the in narrative of the dark night.¹²⁸

Becoming delicate in the experience of the dark night

John, however, uses the word “delicate” in the context of the union of love with God. In this context the word “delicate” is an attribute of the Spirit of God. The divine inflow of love in the soul is “very spiritual, subtle, delicate, and interior,”¹²⁹ and all divine touches of love bring about “knowledge and light so delightfully and delicately.”¹³⁰ In chapter seven of book two, John points to God’s Spirit as delicate in the context of the transformation effected in the soul in the experience of the dark night. In this chapter John describes the many afflictions the soul suffers in this night, the experience of powerlessness this effects, and the need to remain in this experience passively to enable God to bring about the union of love with God. John then says:

“They [the souls in their afflictions] resemble one who is imprisoned in a dark dungeon, bound hands and feet, and able neither to move nor see nor feel any favor from heaven or earth. They remain in this condition until their spirit is humbled, softened, and purified, until it becomes so delicate, simple, and refined that it can become one with the Spirit of God.”¹³¹

On the spiritual journey the experience of arrival is defined by the transformation of the soul in God through participation. Here John explains that this means that the spirit of the soul becomes one with the Spirit of God once it has become “delicate, simple, and refined.”¹³²

¹²⁷ As interviewer, transcriber, and analyst, I have dubbed this moment the “emotion moment,” for each interview has this one point where I am deeply touched and become emotional every time I work with a particular interview.

¹²⁸ See: Chapter Four, section 2.1 & section 2.4.

¹²⁹ N. 2. 9. 3.

¹³⁰ N. 2. 12. 5.

¹³¹ N. 2. 7. 3. Note: the use of delicate here marks the center of all places where John mentions the word delicate in the Dark Night.

¹³² N. 2. 7. 3. See also Chapter Three, section 2.2.

3.2.2 *Insights Gained: From Delicate Fragility to Delicate Delight in God*

Kuriōka and John use the word “delicate” to describe, respectively, the experience of becoming vulnerable, and the experience of arrival in the union of love with God. In Kuriōka’s narrative, the word delicate describes how vulnerable and fragile she has become in her distress. In John’s narrative, delicate describes how simple, subtle and refined the Spirit of God is. The Merriam-Webster dictionary confirms that the word delicate carries both meanings: it defines delicate as feeling weak, sick, or fragile, but also defines delicate with words such as fine and subtle, and with being delicate in spirit as in having a “keen sensitivity or fine discrimination.”¹³³ The manner in which Kuriōka and John apply the meaning of the word delicate points to a connection between the two opposing experiences of arrival, namely: becoming vulnerable in the African migrants’ narratives and arriving at the union of love with God in the narrative of the dark night. In this connection the word delicate seems to create a hinge between these two experiences.

In the quote cited above, John puts the experience of vulnerability and the arrival at the union of God side by side. It describes an experience of vulnerability, which almost literally reflects the circumstances (being bound and imprisoned by her host) that effect Kuriōka’s experience of becoming delicate.¹³⁴ The quote then continues to explain that such experiences of vulnerability, or of becoming delicate, prepare the soul for union with God’s Spirit. The experience of vulnerability will humble, soften and purify the soul’s spirit until “it becomes so delicate, simple, and refined that it can become one with the Spirit of God.”¹³⁵ Kuriōka’s narrative reflects a similar process. She explains how her host controlled her and how this made her powerless. Once she is able to escape this situation, she reflects back and says:

“There is so much pain here, that when you go through those pains, you know that it is not about man, but it’s about God... Because this is even where family, people, they can leave you. But God takes you through fire and then by the end of the day you see there is light. So... after realizing that, I have seen God doing many things for me now... [And] my faith now

¹³³ Merriam Webster further mentions: “being marked by care, skill, tact” or “great precision or sensitivity.” See: “delicate,” Def. 1 through 5, Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2019) (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/delicate?src=search-dict-box>).

¹³⁴ An Experience well known to John as well!

¹³⁵ N. 2. 7. 3.

started growing in the sense that, yes, that where [there are] challenges, there is a way out.”¹³⁶

In this quote, Kuriōka explains that her experiences of vulnerability and powerlessness, of becoming delicate, take her through fire, and effect a new understanding of God and of her circumstances. In terms of the dark night, Kuriōka points to the purifying effect of the experience of vulnerability, but also to the illumining effect as she gains a new understanding of God and faith: Kuriōka points to God's presence and agency in this process, as it is God who “takes you through fire.”

Correlating the different ways in which the word “delicate” functions in both narratives and perceiving them as two parts of a hinge explains how experiences of vulnerability and God's agency effect a process of transformation. The experiences of vulnerability cause the African migrants and the soul in the narrative of dark night to feel delicate in the sense of feeling fragile as they experience loss and abandonment, which prepares both the soul and the African migrants to experience how God's Spirit effects transformation. The central pin that holds the two experiences of becoming delicate together is God, who takes both the African migrants and the soul in the dark night through the purifying and illumining fire. The experience of being vulnerable transforms into feeling strengthened to engage the journey as they experience, or even become one with, the delicate and delightful Spirit of God: delicate fragility transforms into delicate delight.

3.2.3 *Correlating Attaining Humility in the Context of Vulnerability*

When in their narratives the African migrants and John describe the transformation of identity and faith they speak about a transformation from being vulnerable to feeling strengthened. Apart from the concepts of vulnerability and the concept of God's agency, they also speak about attaining humility. Below I will correlate the manner in which humility features in both narratives and explore how the insights gained relate to the dynamic between vulnerability and God's agency.

Characteristics of humility

In the narrative of the dark night John explains that experiences of departure from one's former life or from one's former knowledge, needs, and desires create a void and emptiness, which renders a person humble. He terms this

¹³⁶ Kuriōka, (Q8: 130).

attaining spiritual humility. Although he describes this experience predominantly as an interior or spiritual experience, the attainment of this spiritual humility can be recognized by its effects: a soul grows in the love of neighbor (displaying compassion and suspending judgment), regards one's self less than others, and develops a solicitude about serving God.¹³⁷

Although, in the African migrant's narratives experiences of vulnerability or becoming delicate are mainly experienced by means of external circumstances, they also effect an internal experience characterized by experiences of internal loss. In these experiences they too speak about attaining humility. Although they do not term it spiritual humility, the characteristics John describes can be recognized in the African migrants' narratives as well. Fda and Kasala, for instance, regard themselves less than others and feel that others are better or more advanced. They wonder if they tried hard enough to achieve success in their settlement. Fda compares himself to his brother who did not look back and persevered in re-educating himself, secured himself a good job, and now lives a financially stable life.¹³⁸ Kasala compares himself to his wife who took on the task of building a new life in the USA and expresses feeling guilty for not having made enough effort.¹³⁹ Love of neighbor is recognized in kindness and compassion for others, whether it is in support of colleagues (such as Chi-bu-ike-m),¹⁴⁰ in the understanding of predicaments people find themselves in (such as Serenity in her work with predominantly African American High School students¹⁴¹ or Myizero as she counsels – for free – newly arrived migrant families¹⁴²), or in the care and concern they have for their patients (such as Unyenyekevu and Ūtana). Ūtana shares a story in which she takes the time to massage the legs of a patient, even though it is not on the chart and she is not supposed to do this. Her kind attention meant so much to the patient and the patient's family. Talking about this story and the remark that random acts of kindness are not always allowed at work brings tears to her eyes.¹⁴³ Kūohera in her narratives shows how she is able to postpone judgment on her roommates. Even as they turn against her and ask her to leave, she seeks reconciliation.¹⁴⁴ In all their narratives, the

¹³⁷ N. 1. 12. 7-8, N. 1. 13. 4-6, and N. 2. 19. 3.

¹³⁸ Fda, (Q2: 12).

¹³⁹ Kasala, (Q3: 26).

¹⁴⁰ Chi-bu-ike-m, (Q9: 75).

¹⁴¹ Serenity, (Q11: 13).

¹⁴² Myizero, (Q16: 6).

¹⁴³ Ūtana, (Q13: 23). Ūtana shared the story during the Kenyan Women's prayer meeting on April 5, 2016 (from observation notes), which was recalled during the interview.

¹⁴⁴ Kūohera, (Q6: 47).

African migrants express their concern of not being able to pay homage to God as their work schedules or other demands of life in USA society get in the way of their prayer time and church attendance.

Spiritual humility: attaining "poverty of spirit"

In their narratives, both John and the African migrants show that experiences of vulnerability effect a growth in humility and a deeper awareness of the presence of God. As explained above, Kuriōka expresses this in her experience of God as the one who takes her through fire, but who also brings light to the situation, which effects insight in God's agency or, in terms of the dark night: illumination. John explains that in such experiences of humility and illumination the soul is enabled to not just depart from, but also to let go of its attachments to former knowledge and needs. As God enables the soul to embrace the experience of becoming delicate and abandon all attachment, the soul's desires will become centered on God. John calls this attaining "poverty of spirit."¹⁴⁵

African migrants in their narratives display such poverty of spirit. They not only learn to live in material poverty, they also develop an attitude of spiritual poverty. Although Okpara, Chi-bu-ike-m, Serenity, and Myizero do not speak about financial struggles, all other African migrants, participating in the research, either have known periods where things were financially tight, or they were still tight at the time of the interview. Hatiri-na-thina, for instance, shares how she sometimes struggles to provide for her siblings back home. She explains:

"I believe, the life that we've lived in America, we've gone through deserts, and we've gone through green pastures. I can stand up and say: If I am left in the desert today, I can survive."¹⁴⁶

She has learned to live like she doesn't have, when she doesn't have, but still she experiences this as being able to live like she has plenty. Life is always a green pasture as she is aware that "God is still on the throne and he is the one

¹⁴⁵ N. 1. 3. 1, N. 2. 4. 1, N. 2. 6. 4, N. 2. 8. 5, N. 2. 9. 1 & 4: here John mentions the concept of "poverty of spirit" and explains that the soul attains poverty of spirit through purification and annihilation, Kavanaugh points to "poverty of spirit" as a key idea in John's understanding of the process of transformation. Kavanaugh, "Glossary," 414.

¹⁴⁶ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 41). See also: Keul, "The Venture of Vulnerability, 181-182, where she refers to "a form of power that stems from vulnerability," which increases "a person's resilience." Keul then states: "No human can create this power – it is divine grace" (182).

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who is providing. Yes. Yes.”¹⁴⁷ Kuriōka experiences something similar, when she accepts the poverty she experiences, but is nevertheless able to create a homely environment for her family with furniture found in dumpsters, on streets, and at yard sales. She exclaims that she felt like a woman who was living on an ashram.¹⁴⁸ In the words of Keul, the African migrants have come to the USA

“In the hope of improving their own lives and even more the lives of their children. Every day they accept austere deprivations, and through inventiveness, great energy, and perseverance they become survival artists. They return a major part of their earnings to their families “at home” in their places of origin. They take risks and open themselves to vulnerability. Those who have very little themselves create a generous culture of sharing.”¹⁴⁹

This experience of poverty, however, does not keep them from sharing what they do have with their families overseas, with friends in need, with their church communities and making sure that their children receive what they need to become successful in USA society.

Spiritual humility: attaining “freedom of spirit”

In their narratives, the African migrants explain that the strength they display in their vulnerability comes from God’s grace. It is their awareness of God’s presence that allows the African migrants to let go or detach themselves from those things that may hamper their journey and to go, as Ūtana expresses it, “above and beyond.”¹⁵⁰

Ūtana first explains that her migration experience has taught her to go “above and beyond,” because that is necessary to succeed in USA society. It has also taught her to learn from the tough times and to focus on what is accomplished. She explains that the unkindness and other things she suffered on her journey on the one hand, and God working miracles in her life on the other, have made her faith grow in “ripples and bundles.” When asked whether this going “above and beyond” was more materially or spiritually oriented, Ūtana answers:

“It’s interesting, because it’s never been about: I’m going to get this much, in terms of wealth. I just feel like there’s some nobleness to it. Truthfully, it’s

¹⁴⁷ Hatiri-na-thina, (Q1: 41).

¹⁴⁸ Kuriōka, (Q8: 102).

¹⁴⁹ Keul, “The Venture of Vulnerability,” 186.

¹⁵⁰ Ūtana, (Q13: 21).

not like I would hate to be a millionaire. No. But, [slams table] it just feels like He is.... It's more of a noble thing, which, I, really, seriously, I don't know exactly what God wants me to be. But I know, no doubt, there is something He has put in me that is meant for me to use it, to share with others, that I know and that I don't know out there. So... I don't know what it is. Really, like, whether it's a calling, or... But I feel there's something that... and I pray, and I hope that I can one day be able to reach that: that calling, that noble thing that God implanted in me. For the good of others, not necessarily for my good, because I think that's what his intentions are. For me..."¹⁵¹

Ūtana's poverty of spirit is characterized by a departure from love of self, expressed in her awareness that God's plan for her is for "the good of others, not necessarily for my good." Apart from expressing this attitude of spiritual poverty, Ūtana speaks about her eagerness to reach for God's calling, which illustrates how her humility leads her toward growing in likeness to that what God intends her to be. Other participants reflect similar experiences of self-awareness in their relationship with God. Serenity, for instance, is enabled to reconcile her Liberian and American identities, as she comes to understand God. Serenity reconnects with her faith and the contents of her faith when she finds a new spiritual home in one of the Northeast Baltimore parishes. As she sees how faith comes to life in this community, she is humbled and learns to see God anew:

"And I think now, my God is a benevolent God, that He is forgiving, um, that He embraces all, you know, whoever they are, your background, whatever you do and He pushes me to be like that and sometimes that's not easy."¹⁵²

She explains that "this new me", who has been able to reconcile her two cultural identities, could not have been "without this spirituality."¹⁵³ John refers to attaining such a new perspective as to gaining a "freedom of spirit,"¹⁵⁴ which allows the soul to dwell content and peaceful in God and to grow in likeness to God's Spirit as it becomes "delicate, simple, and

¹⁵¹ Ūtana, (Q13: 22).

¹⁵² Serenity, (Q11: 23).

¹⁵³ Serenity, (Q11: 18).

¹⁵⁴ N. 1 10. 5, N. 1 13. 3 & 11, N. 1. 14. 1, N. 2. 1. 1, N. 2. 1. 2, N. 2. 9. 1, N. 2. 14. 3, N. 2. 22. 1, and N. 2. 23. 3 & 12. Here John refers to the concept of "freedom of spirit," and the benefits it brings the soul.

refined.”¹⁵⁵ Individuals, who have suffered the afflictions of the dark night, who have experienced this vulnerability, and who in humility have attained the poverty of spirit, “may reach out divinely to the enjoyment of all earthly and heavenly things, with a general freedom of spirit in them all.”¹⁵⁶

3.2.4 *Insights Gained: From “Poverty of Spirit” to “Freedom of Spirit”*

The African migrants’ narratives and John’s narrative of the dark night both show that in the experience of vulnerability a spiritual humility develops in which one gains a deeper insight of one’s dependence on God. They speak about the development of a poverty of spirit, which not only allows them to face the departure from their former way of being, understanding, and living life. It also allows them to let go of the attachments to this former way of life and become centered on God. In this new understanding of themselves and of God, both the African migrants and the soul in John’s narrative of the dark night find the strength to engage their journey with energy, resourcefulness, and new perspectives: they attain a freedom of spirit.

The manner in which humility features in both narratives, explains how the concept of humility relates to the dynamic between the concepts of vulnerability and God’s agency. Humility is attained in the experience of vulnerability and is characterized by two attitudes: a poverty of spirit and freedom of spirit.¹⁵⁷ These two concepts originate in the narrative of the dark night, but they respectively describe attitudes related to the two meanings of the word “delicate.” Poverty of spirit relates to the meaning of delicate as termed by Kuriōka in the experience of vulnerability and freedom of spirit relates to the meaning of delicate as termed by John in the experience of gaining likeness to the Spirit of God. The experience of vulnerability or of becoming delicate effects the attitude of “poverty of spirit” and together they constitute one part of the hinge. The “freedom of spirit” is gained as a person is able to let go of former attachments and so grows toward union with the delicate Spirit of God: they form the other part of the hinge. Therefore, the concepts of “poverty of spirit” and “freedom of spirit,” just as the two meanings of the word “delicate,” function as two parts of a hinge in the

¹⁵⁵ N. 2. 7. 3. See also my remarks in Chapter 3, section 4.2.

¹⁵⁶ N. 2. 9. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Although Kavanaugh points to poverty of spirit as one of the key ideas in a comment to N. 2. 9. 4. Reading N. 2. 8. 5 and N. 2. 9. 1-4 together and in connection to my prior reflections I believe freedom of spirit is the accompanying key idea to poverty of spirit. Kavanaugh, “Glossary,” 414.

process of transformation. God is the central pin who creates the movement in which the one attitude transforms into the other.

In Summary

In this chapter I presented the results of the process of correlation I mediated between the narratives of the African migrants who participated in this research and John's narrative of the dark night. The purpose of this chapter was to answer the question whether there are similarities and differences in the analysis of how each of the narratives describes the experience of transformation of identity and faith. In order to do so, I observed where the two narratives resonated and where there were dissonances, by considering equivalences or differences in context, in character response, and in structure. Regarding resonances or dissonances in context, I looked for equivalences and difference in the circumstances and events that describe the background or the setting of the narratives. The research assumed that both the migrant journey and the journey through the dark night are marked by three transitional phases defined as experiences of departure, arrival, and negotiation and settlement. Although all three transitional phases are recognized in the two narratives, they differ in the sequence of these phases and in the circumstances that affect and define them. Exploring these two differences uncovered not only other differences but also equivalences in context. This research also assumed that transitional phases effect experiences of liminality. The correlation of liminality, as defined by the African migrants' narratives and by John in the narrative of the dark night, pointed out that the two narratives clearly resonate in the effects of the three transitional phases, but they differ in their responses to these effects. Despite this dissonance, the two narratives resonate in that faith and the experience of God's presence form the foundation of all their coping strategies. They, however, are quite different again in the manner in which they speak about faith and their experience of God's presence. Not disregarding these differences in both narratives, their respective responses resonate regarding the manner in which the concepts of vulnerability, humility, and the agency of God function together in the process of transformation.

The next and final chapter further explores the meaning of the resonances and dissonances observed in the process of correlation. I will answer the question how understanding and explaining these similarities and differences deepens the comprehension of the experience of transformation of identity and faith in the African migrants' narratives and in John of the Cross' narrative of the

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dark night. The answers to this question will present the building blocks for the answer to the research question.

CHAPTER 5

FOOTPRINTS FROM THE JOURNEY: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter I will gather the central findings of this research in order to answer the research question and to accomplish the goal of this research: to contribute to the field of migration theology and in particular to its discourse on the relationship between migration and spirituality. In order to accomplish this goal I have mediated the correlation between narratives of migrants from Africa to the USA and the poem and commentary *The Dark Night* of John of the Cross to provide the answer to the research question: Does the correlation between these two narratives contribute to a deeper theological understanding of a transformation of identity and faith in the experience of migration?

In the sections that follow below, I present the central findings of process of analysis of and correlation between these two narratives and how these results answer the research question and accomplish the research goal.

1. Narratives of African Migrants to the USA: Contribution to Methodology

The choice to solicit narratives from African migrants to the USA responds to considerations regarding the manner in which to develop theological reflections in the context of the phenomenon of migration. It also responds to the observation that the experiences of African migrants to the USA are absent in the theological discourse on migration.

In Chapter One, I pointed out that the particular experiences of African migrants are rendered invisible in the USA because the racial category “Black” does not distinguish recent African-born migrants from USA-born African Americans.

Furthermore, I reflected on the consequences of considering migration as “a sign of the times” and migrants’ experiences as a *locus theologicus*. I pointed to the methodological reflections of Castillo Guerra and Campese, who stress the need to create a theoretical space that regards the experiences of migrants as a “primary reality” and “the faith and wisdom present in these experiences, as carrying their own theological meaning.”¹ The consequence of these

¹ Castillo Guerra, “Migration and Intercultural *Convivencia*,” 115 & 123-125; Campese, “Present and Future Perspectives,” 175-176.

methodological reflections is that the endeavor to develop theological reflections in the context of migration asks for a two-step approach.² The first step is to listen to migrants and to pay attention to the manner in which they reflect on their experiences. It means exploring the connections between the daily life realities of migrants and the religious meaning they give to these realities.³ The second step is to consider the manner in which the migrants interpret their faith in their narratives as a starting point of theological reflection⁴ and, therefore, as a relevant and equally important source for the academic discourse on migration theology.

This research implemented this two-step approach by combining empirical research with theological analysis and reflection. The purpose of the empirical research was to create that theoretical space in which the voices of African migrants to the USA can be heard and understood for the theological meaning they carry. This meant spending time gathering raw data by interviewing African migrants to the USA and applying a method of qualitative analysis (theory-driven content analysis) to disclose how they in their narratives reflect on their migration experiences as an experience of transformation of identity and faith.

To come to a deeper comprehension of the theological meaning carried by the African migrants' narratives, I opted for the research strategy of hermeneutical correlation in which I mediated the encounter between the narratives of the African migrants and John of the Cross' narrative of the dark night. In order to disclose the manner in which John reflects on the experience of the dark night as an experience of transformation of identity and faith, I also analyzed his poem and commentary *The Dark Night* by means of the same theory-driven content analysis. This ensures that both sources are approached in a similar manner and emphasizes their equality in relevance and importance.

² *o.c.*, 114-122. Here Castillo Guerra explains such two-step approach as moving from a "theological approach" to a "theological approach."

³ *o.c.*, 116. This means paying attention to their "lived religion" and relates to the field of religious studies and to the manner in which it has been employed in, for instance, feminist theology, liberation theology, and black theology. In Chapter One, I referred to the method of narrative theology developed by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. The importance of listening to migrants and to take their narratives into account was also recognized in a recent article regarding the "lived religion" of Eritrean newcomers in the Netherlands. The authors remark "when it comes to narratives on immigration, the voices of immigrants themselves are often unheard." Freija Derks and Srdjan Sremac, "Negotiating the sacred: the lived religion of Eritrean newcomers and their process of integration in the Netherlands," in *Practical Theology* (2020), 4. DOI: 10.1080/1756073X.2020.1792638.

⁴ *o.c.*, 120.

In sum: this research makes the experiences of African migrants visible and it appreciates their narratives as a source for theological reflection. This presents the first contribution of this research: the creation of new data.

2. Attaining Comprehension: Insights from the Process of Correlation

As said before, this research brings together two very different narratives: one the migration narrative as shared by twentieth and twenty-first century migrants from Africa to the USA and the other a sixteenth century mystical text narrating the experience of the dark night in the spirituality of John of the Cross. I posited in Chapter One that these two narratives have something in common and something to learn from each other as they both speak about experiences of liminality and experiences of transformation.

In order to gain comprehension of how the African migrants' narratives and John's narrative of the dark night, with their different horizons, speak to each other it is important to pay attention to the full spectrum of possibilities in the encounter between the two narratives. Therefore I explored not only the instances where these narratives resonate and affirm each other, but also the instances where they are in dissonance when they differ and question each other.

2.1 *Instances of Affirmation*

The process of correlation uncovered that both narratives affirm each other on several aspects regarding the transitional phases, the experience of liminality, and the experience of transformation.

Although their points of departure differ contextually, both narratives affirm each other in how they experience departure. First, both the African migrants and John perceive the departure from their place or state as the beginning of a journey that seeks improvement from the circumstances left behind and is led by the promise of the intended destination. Secondly, the two narratives affirm each other in that God is experienced both in the causes of the departure and the goal they seek to achieve. Thirdly, they both describe departure not only as leaving behind one's previous life, but also as becoming a stranger to one's self.

In the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement both narratives affirm each other in how they define experiences of descent. There is an equivalence between experiences of obstacles and challenges in the African migrants' narratives and experiences of impediments in the effect of purification as

described in the dark night. In both narratives memories of and attachments to one's former life and its prosperities form the central obstacle or impediment for advancement on the journey. New impediments or obstacles they encounter along their respective journeys create an ongoing need to leave aspects of one's former life behind. This results in reoccurring experiences of departure and of descent. Both narratives also affirm each other in how they define experiences of ascent. There is an equivalence between aspects of success and settlement the African migrants' narratives and the benefits experienced in the effect of illumination in the dark night. In both narratives they represent precursors of the experience of arrival, when defined as the endpoint of the journey. This latter equivalence, however, was only uncovered after gaining insight in the manner in which both narratives questioned and enlightened each other regarding the experience of arrival, as I will reiterate below.

The importance of these affirmations in the transitional phases is that they explain equivalence in dynamic, namely that from the point of departure onward both narratives display an oscillation between experiences of departure and experiences of arrival. In the African migrants' narratives this dynamic is recognized in the oscillation between their emigrant and immigrant identities. In the narrative of the dark night it is recognized in the oscillation between experiences of purification and illumination both in the sensory and spiritual part of the soul. It is this dynamic between experiences of departure and of arrival that characterizes the experience of being in transition and effects the experience of liminality.

In the correlation of the experience of liminality both narratives affirm each other in the effects of the departure from the known structures of one's former way of life. Both narratives define this experience of anti-structure by speaking of external and internal loss, of abandonment, and of powerlessness. The narratives are equivalent in what it means to become a liminal being or to be in a liminal stage: both the African migrants and John speak of loss of the ability of making sense of self, of life, and of the surrounding world. Their narratives are equivalent in the effect caused by this experience: becoming vulnerable.

Correlating the respective responses to becoming vulnerable uncovered differences in their respective coping strategies. Nevertheless, both narratives affirm each other in that faith is the foundation of all coping strategies employed. And even though the manner in which faith manifests itself differs, both in the manner that it is spoken of and in the manner it is employed, the

two narratives show an equivalence in the effects of faith: growth in the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love and a heightened focus on God. The importance of the equivalence in both narratives regarding the experience of vulnerability and the growing focus on or intentionality in their relationship with God becomes clear when a similar equivalence in effect occurs in the experience of transformation. The experience of becoming vulnerable results in the attainment of spiritual humility, particularly in relationship with God, which in turn reveals God's agency or participation. Becoming vulnerable, attaining spiritual humility, and the agency or participation of God in this process have become the key concepts for understanding how, regardless of their differences, both narratives affirm each other: they are equivalent in the dynamic of the process of transformation of identity and faith.

2.2 *Instances of Difference and Dissonance*

In the several instances where the two narratives are different and question each other, I distinguished two themes that seem to connect and explain these differences, namely: the place and function of the transitional phase of arrival and the relationship between the human and the divine. Below I will discuss how in these two dissonances in the two narratives question and enlighten each other.

2.2.1 *On the Place and Function of Arrival*

Regarding the experiences of departure, arrival, and negotiation and settlement, I have pointed out that in John's explanation of the journey through the dark night he employs a different sequence of these transitional phases than is usual for explaining them in the context of migration. In regard to migration the sequence of these experiences typically follows the geographical and chronological order of the journey. John, however, compares these experiences to the three phases of the natural night in which dusk represents the experience of departure, midnight represents negotiating the darkness encountered on the journey, and the dawn represents the arrival at the perfect union of love in God. Furthermore, it becomes clear that the African migrants in their narratives define arrival by the obstacles and disappointments they encounter, as they discover that their expectations do not match the reality of life in the USA. John, however, defines arrival by the perfect union of love in God through participation. This experience is not of this life, but as the soul journeys through the night, it experiences touches of God, which are precursors of this ultimate or eschatological arrival in God.

In these dissonances regarding the experience of arrival both narratives question and enlighten each other. First, the connection of arrival with obstacles and challenges in the African migrants' narratives raised a question regarding the existence of obstacles in the narrative of the dark night. Taking a closer look at the place and function of arrival in the dark night leads to the observation that just as in the African migrants' narratives obstacles arise because of the contraries in the encounter between expectations and reality, so too in the dark night obstacles arise because of a contrary, namely that between the human and the divine. Overcoming this contrary in the union of love with God is the goal and eschatological point of arrival of the journey through the dark night.

Second, the eschatological dimension of arrival in the narrative of the dark night raised the question: Can such an eschatological dimension be observed in the African migrant's narratives as well? Exploring the connection between moments of arrival and the benefits experienced through illumination in the narrative of the dark night uncovered a similar function for the experiences of achieving goals and moments of settlement in the African migrants' narratives: They both are precursors of a hoped for future in the ultimate experience of arrival. The eschatological dimension of arrival in the narrative of the dark night, then, expands the perspective on arrival in migration narratives beyond the geographical and temporal point of arrival. Experiences of success and settlement become precursors of such a moment of ultimate arrival, which is defined by finding a healthy integration between the emigrant and immigrant identities and by the ability to fully participate in the destination country. These precursors of arrival are in both narratives a source of hope and strength.

2.2.2 *On the Relationship Between the Human and the Divine*

Apart from the dissonances regarding the point of arrival, I observed several dissonances that are connected to the manner in which the African migrants and John each perceive the relationship between the human and the divine.

There is a difference in the way each of them express the experiences of benefits or settlement. Whereas John makes a distinction between exteriorly and interiorly perceived benefits of the inflow of God in the dark night, the African migrants speak about their experiences of God in a predominantly exterior fashion. Their experiences of God's presence are embedded in practical matters or exteriorly perceived moments of settlement in their efforts to establish a new life in the USA.

FOOTPRINTS FROM THE JOURNEY: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Another dissonance was noticed in the manner in which participants engage and the manner in which John advises his readers to engage the experience of liminality. In their narratives, the African migrants pair an active or external response, in which they navigate their new life and develop new skills and coping strategies, with an interior or passive response, in which they address the experience of vulnerability. John on the other hand advises his readers a passive response in surrendering to the experience of vulnerability in the dark contemplation. John explains that while the soul remains passive the contemplation is rendered active.

These dissonances between a predominantly exterior and active response in the African migrants' narratives and a predominantly interior and passive response in the narrative of the dark night are also recognized in the manner in which participants and John speak about faith. The African migrants in their narratives are very outspoken about the role of faith and the presence of God, both when they encounter obstacles and challenges and in their ability to cope and attain settlement. They generally speak about the illuminative effect of God's presence and do so simultaneously in their experiences of descent and of ascent. John, however, emphasizes the ineffability of the experience of faith. He explains that faith effects darkness and unknowing, both in the experience of purgation and illumination. For John, experiences of descent and ascent do not occur simultaneously.

The dissonance explored

I will further explore these dissonances by taking a closer look at the different manner in which the African migrants and John in their respective narratives perceive the relationship between the human and the divine and between the sensory and the spiritual.

According to John, the human and divine are so contrary to one another that they cannot co-exist.⁵ In his theology John emphasizes God's radical transcendence (and consequently creation's utter dependence on God) and pairs this with the ineffability of all things concerning God. This relates to the three levels of knowing John distinguishes: 1) knowledge gained by means of the exterior senses and formed and stored in the interior senses of the sensory part of the soul; 2) this knowledge is received in the spiritual faculty of the intellect, which creates the second level of knowledge in the form of universal concepts by means of abstraction; and 3) the supernatural knowledge

⁵ N. 2. 5. 1-4, N. 2. 6. 1, and N. 2. 9. 2. For examples on how this affects the experience of the soul, see also: N. 2. 6. 1-4 and N. 2. 7. 4-5.

bestowed in the intellect by God.⁶ The first two levels of knowing are natural knowledge, which is acquired through the senses and expressed in distinctive forms and figures. The third level of knowledge, however, is immaterial and without boundaries, forms and figures, and therefore “ineffable.”⁷ This is reflected in John’s appreciation of the sensory and of the spiritual parts of the soul, and their two opposing orientations: the sensory part of the soul is the lower part, which orients the soul toward the satisfaction of sense and self, and the spiritual part is the higher part, which orients the soul toward God. It is however important to note that John sees the sensory part and the spiritual part of the soul as “one suppositum” and that, even though the essential experience of God is ineffable, a remote knowledge of God can be attained, by means of the senses, through the created world.⁸

The African migrants in their narratives, however, are more vocal in expressing the presence of God, which is grounded in their day-to-day experiences and often expressed in a material manner. When they speak of their ability to cope and of their accomplishments, they refer to God as the one providing for them materially and by giving them the strength, hope, and courage to address the obstacles and challenges they encounter. In general, the African migrants’ narratives are more vocal about the presence of God and faith in the relation to the strength and blessings they have received in comparison to when they speak about their experiences of loss and vulnerability. Only Fda, Kasala, and Kuriōka try to put into words their experience of feeling abandoned by God. And even though the African migrants speak about their dependence on God, in their coping they pair such a receptive or passive attitude with an active attitude as they concretely and practically engage the new life they are trying to build. The African migrants in their narratives emphasize God’s participation in transforming their lives and achieving the good life in the here and now.⁹

⁶ See Chapter Three, section 4.1.1 and Steven Payne, O.C.D., *The Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 16-49.

⁷ F. 2. 10-11. John offers here three reasons: language will not be able to convey such a delicate experience, he is reluctant to speak of it for fear of doing the experience injustice, and the difficulty to describe something, which has no form or figure. See also: Payne, *The Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 32-33 and 99-104.

⁸ C. 5. 1-3; C. 14 & 15. 12-16; C. 39. 11-12. Crisógono de Jesús, *The Life of St. John of the Cross*, 312. Crisógono refers to the exuberance and oriental colors and richness with which John in the *Spiritual Canticle* “gathers together all the beauties of visible creation.”

⁹ Ter Haar, “The Religious Dimension in Migration,” 325 and Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, “The Nature of Continuity and Discontinuity of Ghanaian Pentecostal Concept of Salvation in African Cosmology,” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 10 (2001), <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/index.html> - accessed December 10, 2018.

FOOTPRINTS FROM THE JOURNEY: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this dissonance between John's narrative and the African migrants' narratives, John places the experience of God predominantly in the spiritual part of the soul and emphasizes that the final experience of transformation happens in the next life, whereas the African migrants express the experience of God predominantly in a sensory manner and emphasize that the experience of transformation happens in this life.

Nuances in the dissonance: the interconnectedness of the sensory and the spiritual

However, there are nuances in both narratives, when considering the apparent opposite emphasis in their respective perspectives on the relationship between the human and the divine.

In my conclusions regarding the process of transformation of identity in the narrative of the dark night, I observed an inward movement in the effects of purgation and an outward movement in the effects of illumination. The experience of purification creates an inward movement from the sensory part of the soul to the spiritual part of the soul. The experience of illumination creates an outward movement in which the transformation effected in the spiritual part of the soul shines through in the sensory part of the soul: in the love of neighbor and of God and in exercising the virtues.¹⁰ This dynamic reflects John's notion that the sensory and spiritual part of the soul form "one suppositum."¹¹ Even though the final union in God through transformation happens in the next life, some of its effects can be experienced now, both spiritually and sensory.¹²

Regarding the African migrants, I observed their awareness of their dependence on God. In their material and sensory manner of speaking about God, they also show an awareness of their limited knowledge about God and God's agency. They do know that God helps them, but they do not know how God helps them. Kūohera, for instance, explains that faith is "precious" and "hard to explain." Furthermore, they surrender all their activity and experiences of vulnerability onto God. This surrender points to an interconnectedness between their exterior and interior experiences and an appreciation of God's presence and agency both sensory and spiritually. Therefore, both narratives speak about interconnectedness between the sensory and the spiritual and between exterior and interior experiences of God.

¹⁰ C. 18. 5-6 and C. 36. 4. See also: Chapter Three, section 4.2.4.

¹¹ N. 1. 4. 2, N. 2. 1. 1, and N. 2. 3. 1. See also: Payne, *the Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 18.

¹² See for instance: C. 36. 4 and Kavanaugh, "Glossary," 611.

How the African migrants' narratives enlighten the narrative of the dark night
 Even though John in his perspective on the structure of the soul and the African migrants in their expression of God's presence display interconnectedness between the sensory and the spiritual, their emphasis is nevertheless opposite to one another. This insight raises the question how in the correlation of this dissonance the narratives question and enlighten each other.

The difference in emphasis regarding the manner in which the African migrants and in which John each perceive God's presence, places their narratives on opposite sides in the spectrum of congruent Christian God-talk. The purpose of congruent Christian God-talk is to safeguard both God's transcendence and involvement in the world as well as the relationship between God's creative agency and a creature's efficacy.¹³ John structures his theological narrative around the emphasis on God's transcendence and the primacy of God's creative agency. This reflects his concern to safeguard God's total otherness in relation to the human and to the entire created world. The African migrants' narratives emphasize God's involvement in creation and in their own efficacy. This reflects the aspects of an African spirituality in which the nature of being is perceived as immersed in the interdependence of all elements of reality, the religious universe, and the divine. The African migrants in their narratives perceive God as the transcendent agent who is not only intrinsically connected to all realities, but who is also the source of all their created activity. God provides them with the capacity to act, which Hatiri-na-thina expresses when she says: "It takes God".¹⁴

John's perspective and the African migrants' perspective manifest the diversity possible in the spectrum of congruent Christian God-talk, a diversity that is caused by many variables be they theological, philosophical, or, temporal and cultural.¹⁵ I am correlating the narrative of a sixteenth century Spanish mystic and theologian with the narratives of twentieth and twenty-first century Catholic migrants from Africa to the United States of America.

¹³ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 37-45 and 81-92. See also: Dorris van Gaal, *God Dey - Surrendering to God's Grace: Resignation or Redemption?* (Master thesis, Nijmegen, 28 November, 1994), 46.

¹⁴ Hatiri-na-thina (Q1: 7 & 22).

¹⁵ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 104-118 and van Gaal, *God Dey - Surrendering to God's Grace*, 48. For an example on philosophical, temporal, and socio-political variables affecting the discourse on the transcendence of God see: Mayra Rivera, "Glory: The First Passion of Theology?" In: *Polydomy: Theologies of the Manifold*, editors Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider (New York, NY: Routledge 2010), 167-181.

In this dissonance regarding the relationship between the human and the divine and between the sensory and the spiritual it is the narratives of the African migrants that question and enlighten the manner in which John perceives the sensory and the spiritual parts of the soul in its relationship with God. Not only do their narratives point to the interconnectedness between the sensory and the spiritual, as John acknowledges as well, but they also point to the possibility of a simultaneous exterior and interior experience and understanding of God.¹⁶ The African migrants correct John's appreciation of the sensory as "lower" and the spiritual as "higher," by appreciating them as equal. In their narratives they bring to the fore a possibility, which John does mention, but seems hesitant to emphasize, namely: to appreciate God's transcendent presence and agency both sensory and spiritually and in the here and now. The African migrants in their narratives actually and equally employ, in the words of John, "the energy and power of this whole harmonious composite"¹⁷ as they experience and celebrate the goodness and delicate delight of the inflow of God here and now and in the life to come.

2.3 *Fusing Horizons*

In this exploration of these instances of resonance and dissonance I not only gained insight in how the two narratives affirm, question, and enlighten each other, but I also gained comprehension of how their respective horizons are fusing in this encounter. The contours of their fused horizons are illustrated in the following diagram, which will be explained in further detail below:

¹⁶ I am aware that John in his life and poems manifests a more immanent and sensory experience of the divine and that his works center around the effort to navigate the two contraries that define the opposite sites of the spectrum of Christian God-talk. Nevertheless is its John's concern to safeguard the radical otherness of the divine.

¹⁷ N. 2. 11. 4. Here John points to "how remarkable and how strong this enkindling of love in the spirit can be" and to the possibility that in this harmonious composite "all the strength, faculties, and appetites of the soul, spiritual and sensory alike" can be employed by this love, "neither disdaining anything human, nor excluding it."

MIGRANT SPIRITUALITY

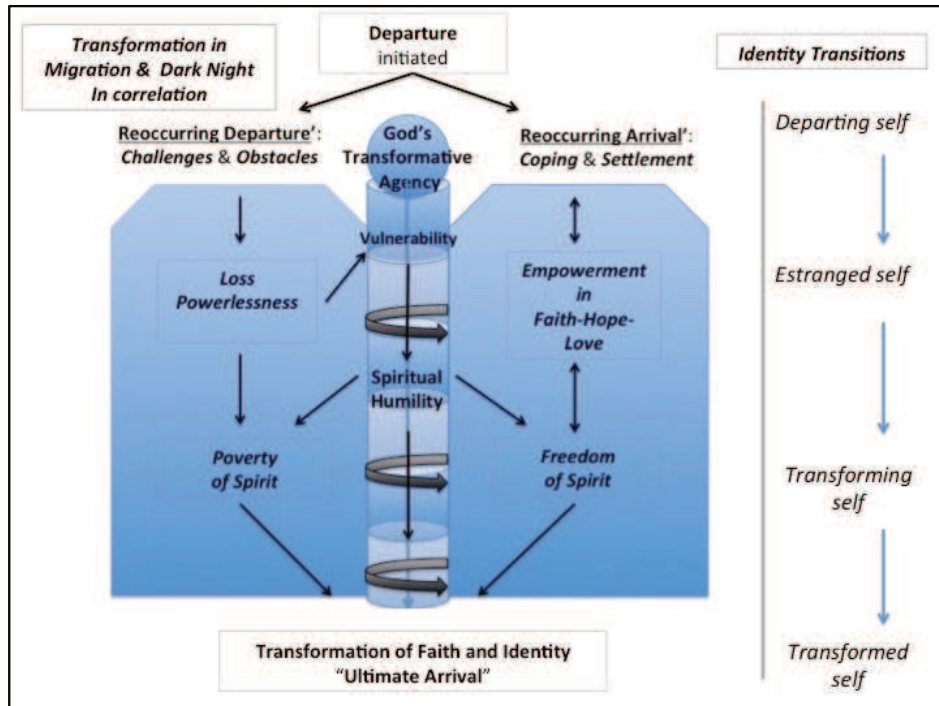


Diagram 3: Transformation in Migration & Dark Night in Correlation

Liminality and the transitional phases

In both narratives, initiating **Departure** means leaving behind one's familiar ways of living, knowing, and praying. The African migrants in their narratives and the soul in John's narrative of the dark night set out on journey to an unfamiliar place (*Departing self*). Whereas arrival follows departure in the migration narratives, in John's narrative of the dark night arrival is the endpoint of the journey. This dissonance in context interrogates the place and function of the experiences of departure and arrival in both narratives in relation to their experiences of negotiation and settlement. It uncovers arrival as an ambivalent experience: on the one hand it effects **Challenges and Obstacles** and on the other hand it effects experiences of **Coping and Settlement**. Although the African migrants and John speak about experiences of settlement, they both emphasize the transitional phase of negotiation. As they continue to encounter new **challenges and obstacles**, they discover the ongoing need to adjust (or even to let go of) the manners and memories of their former lives. This oscillation between the need of abandoning familiar ways (**Reoccurring Departure**) on the one hand and settling in to new ways

(**Reoccurring Arrival**) on the other hand defines the experience of liminality.

Liminality Effects Vulnerability

The African migrants in their narratives and John in the narrative of the dark night speak of becoming a stranger to one's self (*Estranged self*). John resonates with the African migrants' narratives when he uses the metaphor of reaching "a new and unknown land" to describe how the soul is "getting lost to what it knew and what it tasted," which effects both the experience of abandonment and the need to abandon familiar ways to be able to travel along "these new and unknown roads."¹⁸ In this experience of anti-structure and liminality both the African migrants and John speak about experiencing **Loss** of identity and quality of life. This experience of **Loss** has an external component, which is expressed in the **Loss** of the ability to make sense of the life and the world around them. The internal component of this **Loss** is expressed in feelings of **Powerlessness**. These experiences of loss and powerlessness define the concept of **Vulnerability** in their narratives.

On Vulnerability and Spiritual Humility

The experience of **Vulnerability** becomes the key to understanding how transformation unfolds in the African migrants' narratives and in John's narrative of the dark night. **Vulnerability** has a twofold effect. First, both narratives show that the acknowledgement of **Vulnerability** effects an attitude of **Poverty of Spirit** in which both the African migrants in their narratives and the soul in John's narrative of dark night come to understand their dependence on God. Second, this deepening awareness of God's agency in their lives effects an attitude of **Freedom of Spirit** in which they receive the strength for engaging the journey and experience moments of **coping and settlement**. These two attitudes of **Poverty of Spirit** and **Freedom of Spirit** constitute the characteristics of **Spiritual Humility**.

Spiritual Humility and God's Agency

Even though the African migrants' narratives and John's narrative of the dark night display dissonances in their responses to **Vulnerability**, they both indicate that **Faith** is the foundation for the ability to cope and that it is God who effects the transformation from being vulnerable to feeling strengthened. This understanding of their dependence on God is recognized in attaining **Spiritual Humility**. This transformational moment is explained in the manner

¹⁸ N. 2. 16. 8.

in which the two meanings of the word “delicate” function as a hinge in this process of transformation: from becoming delicate in the experience of **Vulnerability** and attaining *Poverty of Spirit* on the one hand to experiencing delicate delight in settlement and attaining *Freedom of Spirit* on the other. God’s presence is symbolized by the central pin in this hinge and effects this transformation: **God’s Transformative Agency**.

God’s Transformative Agency and Transformation of Faith

God effects this process of transformation through the gift of **Faith**. Both the African migrants in their narratives and John in his narrative of the dark explain how attaining **Spiritual Humility** effects the awareness that on the one hand **Faith** provides strength on the journey and that on the other hand **Faith** is a precious gift, which they cannot obtain on their own. It is a gift that should be received with care, humility, and gratitude. A **Transformation of Faith** does not concern the gift and contents of faith itself, but it concerns the manner in which faith is believed and lived. The African migrants in their narratives emphasize the importance of putting an effort in growing and nourishing their faith, if not communally, then individually. John too encourages his readers to center their lives on imitating Christ and he situates faith in the life of the community, which lives out the propositions and articles of the faith.¹⁹ Prayer and contemplation are other ways to grow one’s faith. Prayer features in both narratives. It functions to keep the virtues of **Faith, Hope, and Love** strong and to focus on the teachings and tenets of their **Faith**. Prayer also functions as a way to reach out to God with more concrete requests for God to provide for needs they experience. Their **Faith**, which encourages them to entrust their needs to God, is characterized by **Spiritual humility**. This can be illustrated by John’s explanation of the seventh step of love. On this seventh step of love the soul displays an “ardent boldness” in its relationship with God and does not hesitate to ask God for favors, which God typically grants with pleasure. However, John cautions that the soul should not forget to remain humble and to acknowledge “the divine favor” in the gifts received.²⁰ The African migrants in their narratives portray such boldness accompanied by humility and gratitude for the favors granted. When Ustahimili, Kuriōka, and Ūtana boldly put their trust in God to take a leap of faith by leaving their jobs to study for an important exam or to make a major change of course, they make sure to share that they have God to thank for the accomplishment of this task. Kuriōka, for instance, says: “[In] every situation

¹⁹ A. 1. 13. 1-3 and C. 12. 4. See also: Collings, *John of the Cross*, 106-111.

²⁰ N. 2. 20. 2.

I have come to ask God, and I don't, did not in any given time take anything for granted."²¹

Gods' Transformative Agency and the Transformation of Identity

In this humble awareness of their dependence on God both the African migrants and John speak about gaining a renewed understanding of self in relationship with God (*Transforming self*). In John's narrative of the dark night, this new understanding finds expression in the recollection of the exterior and interior senses and the spiritual faculties in God. The soul becomes meek and compassionate and grows in virtue and love as it reorients all manners of operation and understanding on God and only lives "for love of God or neighbor."²² The African migrants in their narratives express this new understanding of their relationship with God, when they explain that they learn to "put God first." This is recognized in their gratitude toward God and their kindness and generosity toward others. They share of what they have with their families back home, with their faith communities, and with people in need.

Attaining **Spiritual Humility** with the attitudes of *Poverty of Spirit* and *Freedom Spirit*, effects a transformation of perspective. The ensuing growth in the virtues of *Faith, Hope, and Love* brings about the second effect of this transformation, namely a transformation of attitude.²³ Together they constitute the components of a **Transformation of Identity**.

Transformation of perspective

In both narratives **Transformation** of perspective happens by means of the inflow of wisdom or *Faith*. John equates this inflow of secret wisdom or *Faith* with infused contemplation, dark contemplation, and dark faith.²⁴ The soul is enabled to see its attachments, appetites, and apprehensions for what they really are and the soul will no longer find satisfaction or consolation in them. In this experience, the soul receives the ability to center its desires on

²¹ Kuriōka, (Q8: 147).

²² N. 1. 3. 2.

²³ Here I am indebted to Trees Versteegen, who in her dissertation researches the experience of God's grace in the daily life of Dutch Catholic women. She explains that the experience of God's grace is uncovered by instances of transformation. She distinguishes two types of transformation: instances of external transformation of concrete circumstances, which the participants in my research speak of as well, and instances of internal transformation in which Versteegen distinguishes four dimensions. These four dimensions helped me recognize and fine-tune the two components of a transformation of identity. See: Trees Versteegen, *Geleefde Genade*, 184-198.

²⁴ See: A. 2. 24. 4 and N. 2. 17. 2-3. See also: Kavanaugh, "Glossary," 242 and 382.

God instead. The African migrants also speak of *Transformation* of perspective through moments of insight and gaining wisdom. Kūohera, for instance, portrays how the experience of insight, or of a sudden inspired idea, “from nowhere,”²⁵ helps her to address difficult situations. She shares multiple instances of such experiences in her interview and they all follow the same pattern. One instance is when she was left stranded in a hotel near the airport and did not know what to do, being very afraid she would be sent back. She first describes her inability to act: “When you are in trouble, when you are trembling... You don’t remember some things.”²⁶ However, while praying, “from nowhere,” she remembered that she had been given contact information for people in the USA: children of an old acquaintance back home. From being fearful, she becomes hopeful and acts upon the opportunity to change her circumstances. While *Transformation* of perspective through insight effects small and short-term change, *Transformation* of perspective through gaining wisdom effects a more durable change, in which the perspective is gained that things will be all right.²⁷ Kuriōka, for instance, portrays *Transformation* through gaining wisdom as an inflow of *Faith* when she begins to realize that God does have a purpose for her. Even though this purpose is not yet defined, it gives her strength and resilience. She learns to embrace the poverty she finds herself in, begins to engage the loss of her socio-economic status and becomes very resourceful in building a new home and life with little means. Wirigiro finds wisdom in the hope that God will make a way, however long it will take, and comes to accept that he must adjust his goals and calm his steps. When Serenity comes to understand that God accepts everyone, no matter their background and circumstances, and challenges her to do the same, she is enabled to reconcile her Liberian and American identities.

Transformation of attitude

This *Transformation* of perspective by means of wisdom and insight strengthens one’s *Faith and Hope*, and effects attitudes of endurance, perseverance, patience, acceptance, trust, and surrender. These inner abilities to cope also provide strength and courage to develop *Coping* strategies for

²⁵ Kūohera, (Q6: 3 & 9). “From nowhere” became a code to indicate God’s presence not otherwise specified. Later it became specified as inspired insights or understanding of God’s agency.

²⁶ Kūohera, (Q6: 9).

²⁷ Versteegen, *Geleefde Genade*, 187-189.

overcoming difficult and complex circumstances that are or seem impossible to change.²⁸

In John's narrative of the dark night such *Transformation* of attitude is experienced in the inflow of the theological virtues of *Faith, Hope, and Love* in which the soul gains the inner ability to exercise all cardinal virtues of humility, patience, forbearance, perseverance, sobriety, temperance, and fortitude together.

The African migrants' narratives portray a transformation of attitude when they speak of their coping strategies and of their accomplishments and as they receive strength in *Faith, Hope, and Love*. Fda, Kasala, and Myizero, in particular, portray such a transformation of attitude and inner abilities to cope as they face difficult and complex circumstances that are or seem impossible to change. Fda comes to accept the current circumstances of his life and sacrifices the attachment to his own dream of returning home. He finds strength in God's presence to labor hard: He not only works his heart out, but puts his whole heart in the endeavor to create better circumstances for his children.²⁹ Kasala develops a contemplative way of being, which enables him to cope with life in the USA and to accept his current position as a stay-at-home-dad, who is not able to contribute to society as much as he would like to. In his contemplation he experiences contentment and is able to be grateful for that which he and his family received from God.³⁰ Myizero portrays this transformation in an extreme manner, as she will never be able to change the circumstance of the loss of her family during the Rwandan genocide or the loss of her son to gun violence. Her understanding of the concept of eternity and the manifestation of the communion of love in the life of the Trinity, allows her to cope with this loss and to remain connected with her dear ones in prayer.³¹

Transformation of identity and 'Ultimate Arrival'

Furthermore, when the African migrants attain Poverty *of Spirit* and *Freedom of Spirit* in the process of transformation, they also develop a new attitude toward their emigrant and immigrant identities. They and acquire the ability to join the different socio-cultural contexts to which they belong both confidently, critically, and creatively (*Transforming self*). In this **Transformation of Identity**, they are able to reach out divinely, which means

²⁸ Versteegen, *Geleefde Genade*, 189-192.

²⁹ Fda, (Q2: 7 & 39).

³⁰ Kasala, (Q3: 44).

³¹ Myizero, (Q16: 8 & 15).

without impeding attachments, to both identities. They and enjoy their earthly and heavenly components with *Freedom of Spirit*.³² Such a process of transformation, however, differs for each individual both in circumstances and in time, as both John and the individual narratives of the African migrants point out.³³ As long as new *Challenges and Obstacles* arise, the journey continues, experiences of *Departure* and *Arrival* will reoccur, and the process of transformation deepens. The accomplishment of full transformation happens in the moment of **Ultimate Arrival**. John defines this moment as achieving union of love with God through participation (*Transformed self*). He explains that this **Ultimate Arrival** always happens in the next life. In the African migrants' narratives, this moment is defined as the integration of their emigrant and immigrant identities (*Transformed self*). They explain that it can happen in this life. Among the African migrants' narratives, those participants who have been in the USA more than two decades speak of such moments of arrival. For those participants who have not yet reached this state of arrival, the eschatological dimension of the experience of arrival brings insight to the manner in which they cope when the actualization of their hopes and dreams shifts from themselves to their children, in whom the journey continues.

2.4 Uncovering the Plot in Stories of Transformation

In this research I considered both the stories the African migrants shared in their interviews and the poem and commentary to "The Dark Night" as narratives, in which the "authors" of these narratives construct a plot (emplotment) to bring meaning to their narratives. This "emplotment" allows them to integrate the diverse and sometimes fragmented events they encountered on their journeys and to refigure their understanding of who they are, even in the face of discontinuity and instability.³⁴

Both the interviews of the African migrants and John's poem and commentary *The Dark Night* are stories in retrospect. In the prologue to the commentary *The Dark Night* John explains how he composed his poem *The Dark Night*. The poem reflects on the spiritual journey of a soul who looks back on this journey, while already having reached its goal: "the state of perfection." The soul is aware of all the trials and hardships it suffered on this road, but it is also aware of all the blessings this road has brought. In the poem the soul looks at its spiritual journey in retrospect "happy at having trod this narrow

³² See: N. 2. 9. 1.

³³ N. 1. 14. 5 N. & 2. 7. 3-4 and Chapter Two, part 4.1.

³⁴ See Chapter One, 2.3.2 and 3.1.2.

road from which it derived so much good.”³⁵ The interviews of the participants are also stories in retrospect. The three main questions asked during the interviews triggered moments of reflection in which participants would reflect back on their arduous migration journeys, but in which they also express gratitude about the graces and gains they experienced. The correlation of these retrospective reflections in both narratives provides insight into the core elements of the plot that structures their narratives.

In their narratives, both John and the African migrants explain that God is the main character of their narratives. God is the agent who accomplishes the transformation from feeling vulnerable to feeling blessed and strengthened. Challenges, hardships and the experience of vulnerability take up the larger share of the narratives. Even so, when they try to fully convey the meaning of what has been experienced both the African migrants and John, in humility, never lose sight of that which has been gained and that these blessings are received from God.

In the commentary to the poem *The Dark Night*, John’s reflections center around the first two stanzas in which the central theme is that of the darkness experienced on the journey. John, however, does not lose sight of the love and delight received in faith and by divine grace. He describes this love, which guides the soul through the dark night, and the union of the Lover with the Beloved in the remainder of the stanzas of the poem.³⁶ Similarly, the African migrants in their narratives express gratitude to God and the gift of faith when they speak about the skills they gained and opportunities and blessings they received. One example is Kūohera, who at the end of her narrative, full of loss and many challenges, exclaims:

“So, this is my verse; that whatever happened; whoever did not come for me at the airport; whoever chased me from the house; that was all because God was there for me. Because if He was not there for me; I could not be here. So, everything happened because God wanted me to glorify him. Yes.”³⁷

This statement presents a beautiful example of how in reaching such understanding of the presence of God Kūohera reconstructs the meaning of her personal migration narrative. It aligns with the plot, which structures the Africa migrants’ narratives and John’s narrative of the dark night. Both narratives explain how the experience of vulnerability effects growth in

³⁵ N. Prol.

³⁶ John elaborates on this experience in his commentaries *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame of Love*.

³⁷ Kūohera, (Q6: 49).

spiritual humility and how in attaining the attitudes of poverty of spirit and freedom of spirit, they come to understand how vulner-ability, through the agency of God, transforms into cope-ability.³⁸ This understanding of God's transformative agency also effects a transformation of the understanding of one's self and of one's relationship with God. It is in this understanding of God's presence and agency that John and the African migrants refigure their understanding of, respectively, the experience of the dark night and the experience of migration

Therefore, I conclude that applying the hermeneutical strategy of correlation indeed contributes to a deeper theological understanding of the experience of transformation of identity and faith in the experience of migration. Not only did I uncover how the narratives of African migrants and John's poem and commentary *The Dark Night* affirm, question and enlighten each other, but in this process of correlation I also have uncovered how the horizons of their narratives fuse in the plot that structures their narratives. Through the process of correlation, I have come to comprehend how the relationships between the concepts of vulnerability, humility, and God's agency explain the experience transformation of identity and faith.

3. Stories of Transformation: Comprehending Migrant Spirituality

In Chapter One I surmised that gaining understanding of liminality caused by the experience of being in transition between departure, arrival, and settlement would provide more insight in the spiritual or interior dimension of the transformation of identity and faith that occurs in the experience of migration. In this final section of the concluding chapter, I connect back to the theoretical framework developed in the first chapter and explain how the central findings of my research deepen the understanding of the spiritual dimension of the transitional phases, of liminality, and of a transformation of faith and identity in the experience of migration.

³⁸ I use the hyphenated vulner-ability to express the transformation to the cope-ability. Doing so refers to the origins of the word "vulnerable," which "is ultimately derived from the Latin noun vulnus ("wound"). "Vulnus" led to the Latin verb vulnerare, which means "to wound," and then to the Late Latin adjective vulnerabilis, which became "vulnerable" in English in the early 1600s. "Vulnerable" originally meant "capable of being physically wounded," but since the late 1600s, it has also been used figuratively to suggest defenselessness against non-physical attacks. See "Vulnerable," Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2019), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/delicate> and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/vulnerable>.

3.1 *The Spiritual Dimension of Transitioning and Liminality*

From the perspective of migration theology, transformation is defined by the process of identity development effected by the transitional phases of departure, arrival, and negotiation and settlement. From the perspective of spirituality, transformation is defined by gaining a new understanding of self and of the divine through moments of transition. Combining these two perspectives raised the question whether migration experiences not only effect a transformation of identity, but also a transformation of faith.³⁹ In his article on how migrants invite communities to create a “coexistence of pluralities,” Castillo Guerra makes this connection as well. He writes that there is “a process of inner transformation related to the process of identity transformation that is inaugurated when [migrants] cross international borders.” He then notes that it is “in their transformed faith” that they find the support “to face the crises provoked by different barriers interposed during their journey.”⁴⁰ In what follows, I present the characteristics of such inner transformation.

3.1.1 *Comprehension in Contrast: The Spiritual Dimension of Transformation*

Even though the different horizons of the African migrants’ narratives and of John’s narrative of the dark night meet and fuse in the manner in which they speak about transformation of identity and faith, some of the dissonances remain. These dissonances are part of their respective horizons, which differ in, among others, historical, cultural, and religious contexts. These dissonances, however, do not interfere with the discovered plot that structures their narratives in their fused horizons. On the contrary, the exploration of the dissonances uncovered the central finding that I gained this process of correlation: namely the interior or spiritual dimensions of the process of transformation. Below, I will explain how the dissonances reveal this interior or spiritual dimension.

A contrast in the experience of the human-divine relationship

In the correlation between the two narratives it became clear that there is a dissonance regarding their respective experiences of their relationship with God. John of the Cross characterizes the relationship between the human and the divine as two contraries that cannot co-exist. Consequently, John

³⁹ See Chapter One, 2.3 & 3.2.1.

⁴⁰ Castillo Guerra, “Coexistence of Pluralities,” 167.

perceives the concepts that articulate the human-divine relationship as mutually exclusive. This seems to create a dichotomy in John's perception of the relationship between the pairs of theological concepts, such as: the sensory and spiritual, exterior and interior, active and passive, descent and ascent, and God as immanent and effable and as transcendent and ineffable. In such an assumed dichotomy one of the two concepts may receive an emphasis or become monopolized depending on context, theological or ecclesial concerns, and social, cultural, or political power relationships, which can result in qualitative judgments.⁴¹ I observed this in John's narrative, where his concern to safeguard God's transcendence affects his perception of the sensory or exterior as lower and of the spiritual or interior as higher in the context of spiritual development.

The narratives of the African migrants, however, do not portray such a contradistinction; rather their narratives portray interconnectedness between the theological concepts that articulate the human-divine relationship. In their narratives, the relationships between these paradoxical concepts are relationships of interdependency: They need each other and are therefore mutually inclusive. For instance, the African migrants in their narratives pair a passive and interior surrender of their vulnerability to God with the exteriorly expressed experience that God is present in their active responses to the obstacles and challenges they encounter in their new life in the USA. They speak of an experience of God that is simultaneously transcendent and immanent.

In the exploration of this dissonance it initially seemed that the two narratives exemplified a dichotomy. The narratives of the African migrants emphasize the sensory, the exterior, the active, and the perception of God as immanent, whereas John's narrative of the dark night emphasizes the spiritual, the interior, the passive, and the perception of God as transcendent. Nevertheless, I explained that this dissonance should not be perceived as an affirmation of a dichotomy between these theological concepts. I pointed out instead that this dissonance uncovers a different emphasis in the interconnectedness between these concepts.⁴² The African migrants' narratives do indeed interrogate, for

⁴¹ Isasi-Díaz, for instance, explains how over time the discourse on spirituality "has been a key tool of dualistic understandings" carrying the risk of creating a juxtaposition between body and spirit and claiming that holiness is found in the spirit and not in the body, so passing a qualitative judgment on certain religious experiences and practices. Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continúa*, 25-26. See also: Rivera, "Glory: The First Passion of Theology?," 167-181 and Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 104-118.

⁴² This difference in emphasis reflects the different perception of the relationship between the human and the divine. See Chapter Five, 2.2.2.

instance, John's appreciation of the sensory and the spiritual by appreciating them as equal, but this interrogation also highlights places in John's narrative where he does speak of an interconnectedness in which the sensory and spiritual are equally engaged in experiencing God's presence as both transcendent and immanent. Taking note of this interconnectedness in both narratives proves central for comprehending the spiritual dimension of the transformation experienced both in the dark night and in migration.

On interiority in the process of transformation

One of the central findings I gained in the process of correlation is that the transformational moment in the process of spiritual transformation is defined by the interconnectedness of the exterior and interior elements. It is in the dynamic between the exterior, or sensory, and the interior, or spiritual, experiences that spiritual development happens and transformation occurs.

The very concrete (exterior) experiences of vulnerability effect both external and internal losses. As uncovered in the exploration of the two contrasting meanings of the word "delicate,"⁴³ it is in the experience of internal loss, and the powerlessness it effects, that the interior transformation happens. Central to understanding the interior or spiritual dimension of the process of transformation is that the transformational moment calls for 1) the surrender of one's vulnerability to God and 2) for abandonment of those attachments, which, be they material or immaterial, are impediments to the process of transformation. The interior surrender to God defines the spiritual dimension of the very concrete or exterior experiences of descent, in which God's agency can become effective. In this transformational moment, the interior experience of God effects poverty of spirit and the ability to abandon impeding attachments. Letting go of these impediments in turn effects the attainment of freedom of spirit, which defines the spiritual dimension of ascent and is imbedded in the very concrete or exterior experiences of coping and success.

As I pointed out above, the African migrants in their narratives portray simultaneity in their experiences of descent and ascent, whereas John in his narrative speaks about an alternating experience of descent and ascent. Nevertheless, the dynamic between these experiences of descent and ascent, both in their sensory and spiritual dimensions, remains the same in the process of spiritual transformation.⁴⁴ This simultaneity observed in the African migrants' narratives emphasizes that the experiences of descent and ascent

⁴³ See Chapter Four, 3.2.2 & 3.2.3.

⁴⁴ See Chapter Four, 1.4; 2.3.2; and 4 and Chapter 5, 2.2.2 and 2.3.

should not be perceived independently. Nor should their exterior and interior aspects, and the attitudes of poverty and freedom spirit they effect, be perceived as separate or independent from each other in relation to spiritual transformation. Only in their interconnectedness can the process of spiritual transformation be fully understood. The import of this insight will be explained below when I discuss how the findings of my research contribute to the discourse on migration and spirituality in the field of migration theology.

3.1.2 Transitional Phases & Liminality: Experiences of Spiritual Descent and Ascent

Migration journeys and the journey through the dark night are both characterized by three transitional phases, even though their alignment differs. From the perspective of migration theology, these transitional phases are typically defined by their relationship with a territory or territories. Departure is defined by leaving a territory, sometimes by transiting through multiples territories, by arriving at a territory, and by the need to negotiate a new relationship to these territories in achieving settlement in the final destination. The process of correlation, however, revealed that experiences of departure and arrival go beyond their territorial and temporal definition. They continue to occur in a more existential manner in the experience of negotiation and settlement and constitute the experience of liminality.⁴⁵ In what follows, I will define the spiritual dimension of these transitional phases and explain how their interconnectedness constitutes the spiritual dimension of liminality.

The spiritual dimension of departure

In Chapter Four, I pointed out that in both narratives departure is described by the experience of becoming a stranger to one's self, which is defined by the reoccurring need to depart from memories and attachments of one's former life, as they become impediments to addressing challenges encountered on the journey. The sensory faculties and the faculty of memory seem impaired. This impairment impedes the ability to intuitively understand and act upon the sensory experience in the changed circumstances. This loss of the ability to make sense of one's life defines the exteriority of the experience of descent. This loss also effects the interiority of the experience of descent, which can be described as the need to surrender to the vulnerability caused by the experience of becoming a stranger to one's self.

⁴⁵ See Chapter Four, part 1 & 2.

This interior aspect of this experience of descent points out that departure in the context of migration theology is not just defined by the exteriority of the changing relationship to the territory left behind in becoming an emigrant. Departure also carries a spiritual dimension, which is defined by the experience of spiritual descent in the interior surrender to God of the vulnerability and powerlessness caused by the exterior descent into the experiences of loss of sense and self. Therefore, comprehending departure as an experience of descent, not only reveals the spiritual dimension of departure, it also reveals the interconnectedness of and dynamic between the exterior, or sensory, and interior, or spiritual, dimensions of spiritual descent.

The spiritual dimension of arrival

Exploring the dissonance in the order of the transitional phases between the African migrants' narratives and John's narrative of the dark night, I uncovered that the arrival is both an ambivalent experience and carries an eschatological dimension. The eschatological dimension of arrival is characterized by the tension between the "already" of actualized moments of arrival in success and settlement and the "not yet" of the realization that full arrival has yet to happen. This tension creates the ambivalent character of arrival. In the encounter of obstacles and challenges arrival is experienced negatively and effects recurring experiences of departure. Arrival is experienced positively, however, when success and settlement are actualized and the ability to cope grows. This ability to cope is characterized by a response to the experience of spiritual descent that is contemplative and passive on the one hand and practical and active on the other hand. The active development of coping strategies is embedded in surrendering vulnerability to God in the experience of spiritual descent and in becoming aware that God is the source for the ability to cope in the experience of spiritual ascent.

The interior aspects of the experiences of spiritual descent and ascent point out that arrival in the context of migration theology is not just defined by the exteriority of the relationship with the destination territory in encountering obstacles and challenges or the ability to cope. The experience of arrival also carries a spiritual dimension, which is defined by the experience of spiritual ascent in the awareness of God presence and agency. This spiritual ascent effects the exterior experience of ascent in the ability to cope and in the experience of actualized arrival. Therefore, comprehending arrival as an experience of spiritual ascent reveals not only the spiritual dimension of arrival, but also reveals the interconnectedness of and the dynamic between the interior, or spiritual, and exterior, or sensory, dimension of spiritual ascent.

The spiritual dimension of Liminality: between negotiation & settlement

In the process of correlation, I pointed out that liminality is experienced in the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement and is defined by the need to negotiate the loss of the ability to make sense of one's life in the experience of departure on the one hand and the development of coping strategies in the experience of arrival on the other hand. Taking into account my findings regarding the spiritual dimension of the transitional phases of departure and arrival consequently uncovers the spiritual dimension of the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement and of the experience of liminality.

From the perspective of these findings, the spiritual dimension of negotiation is defined by the oscillation between the experience of spiritual ascent, which effects coping and actualized arrival, on the one hand, and the reoccurring need for departure, which causes spiritual descent, on the other hand. Perceiving settlement in the context of the eschatological dimension of arrival, in which arrival is defined as the endpoint of the journey (as John of the Cross does), then experiences of settlement can be perceived both as precursors of the ultimate moment of arrival and as the ultimate moment of arrival in which arrival and settlement become one. If the first, then settlement contributes to the ongoing experience of liminality. If the latter, then settlement contributes to the surmounting of the experience of liminality. The spiritual dimension of settlement, then, is defined by experiences of spiritual ascent in which the awareness of God's grace and generosity effects both hope in "things eternal" and settlement within the possibilities of the here and now.

This means that in the context of migration theology, liminality is not just defined by being in transition from one territory to another,⁴⁶ but also by being in betwixt and between, oscillating between feeling nowhere and seeking participation and settlement. Taking into account the spiritual dimensions of the three transitional phases consequently means that the experience of liminality also carries a spiritual dimension. That spiritual dimension is defined by the oscillation between experiences of spiritual descent and ascent in the recurring and more existential experiences of departure and arrival. This spiritual dimension of liminality explains not only the dynamic between these experiences of descent and ascent, both in their sensory and spiritual dimensions, but also explains the transformational moment in the process of spiritual transformation: surrendering into vulnerability and letting go of those memories and attachments that impede progress on the journey (purification of memory) renders God's

⁴⁶ As, for instance, Afe Adogame does. See: Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*, 23.

transformative agency active and effects the ability to move beyond the experience of liminality in the establishment of a new life in the territory of destination.

3.2 *The Spiritual Dimension of Transformation of Faith and Identity*

Migration theologians in general agree that faith is central to migrants' ability to cope with all the hardships encountered and with the identity transitions they experience on their migration journeys. Faith itself is also affected by this journey. When addressing transformation of faith, migration theologians speak about how in the experience of migration the meaning of religious practices and the character of faith communities are transformed. Migration theologians, therefore, generally describe transformation of faith by its effects. John of the Cross would say that it is indeed by its effects that transformation of faith is recognized: Faith itself remains dark and unfathomable. Even if the central truth of faith remains unchanged and ineffable, I nevertheless posit that in the process of correlation I have gained some understanding of the interior or spiritual aspect of this transformation of faith. Faith and its transformation not only "enables [migrants] to face the crises provoked by different barriers interposed during their journey and to face the pain of nostalgia and the experience of realizing that they are uprooted,"⁴⁷ but it is precisely these crises and this pain and uprootedness that effect the spiritual dimension of a transformation of faith and of identity.

3.2.1 *Faith: Object and Agent of Transformation*

In developing the categories and concepts that feature in the theoretical framework, I followed Schillebeeckx and Waaijman in their definitions of faith as lived and experienced in the interrelation between a concrete faith tradition, with its rituals, doctrinal content, norms, and values, and the different socio-cultural contexts and languages in which this faith is expressed. Such a lived faith is the context in which persons of faith develop their relationship with and understanding of God.⁴⁸ In the process of correlation, I pointed out that in both narratives the known context for experiencing and expressing one's faith is disrupted. This disruption causes the experience of loss of faith. Nevertheless in both narratives, faith is also expressed as the foundation of the ability to cope with this disruption. Below I will explain that faith, therefore, is both object and agent of transformation.

⁴⁷ Castillo Guerra, "Coexistence of Pluralities," 167.

⁴⁸ See Chapter One, 2.3.2.

Faith: object of transformation

The experience of loss of faith contributes to transformation of faith. Whether it is the loss of faith rooted and lived in community, as in the narratives of the African migrants, or the loss of faith rooted in the satisfaction of one's spiritual practices, as in John's narrative of the dark night, both experiences set in motion a process in which the experience and expression of faith are refigured.

In the process of correlation, I pointed out that both narratives speak about the experience of a diminished faith or the loss of faith altogether. This loss of faith adds to the experience of becoming vulnerable when not even faith, the most intimate and interior part of one's being, can provide meaning or make sense of life. The loss of faith deepens the experience of spiritual descent: When nothing else is left, the person surrenders vulnerability and powerlessness into the void experienced in one's faith. In this transformational moment of surrender, faith is the object of transformation.

Regarding the dynamic between the context and the manner in which one's faith is lived and expressed, a change in context due to migration not only causes estrangement from one's faith,⁴⁹ but also causes a disruption of faith itself and of the relationship with God. This dynamic reveals the spiritual dimension of this change of context. The exterior change in context and in the manner of living one's faith effects the interior or spiritual dimension of this experience, which causes a transformation of faith. The interior, or spiritual, dimension of this transformation of faith is defined by the descent into the void of faith. The descent into the void causes the transformation of one's understanding of faith and of one's relationship with God.

Faith: agent of transformation

It is in the context of this transformation of one's understanding of faith and one's relationship with God that both the African migrants and John also speak about the realization that faith is still the one means that grounds all abilities to cope. Faith, therefore, is also the agent of transformation.

As I pointed out above, the transformational moment of surrendering one's vulnerability and powerlessness into the void of faith effects a new awareness of dependency on God and of the transforming agency of God, characterized in attaining spiritual humility. The transformation is recognized in the experience of spiritual ascent. A simultaneous awareness of God's transcendence and ineffability, on the one hand, and an awareness of God as

⁴⁹ See Chapter One, 2.3.2 and Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch Geloofsverstaan Anno 1983*, 5.

immanently present in all achievements and blessings received, on the other hand, are characteristics of this experience of spiritual ascent.

Both narratives not only understand faith as the foundation for the ability to cope, but they also share how they nourish their faith by a more intentional focus on God. This is recognized in the importance of prayer and the attitudes of humility and gratitude when both the African migrants and John speak about God. In regard to the dynamic between the manner in which faith is lived and the context in which this lived faith is expressed, my findings reveal that this new awareness of the relationship with God not only effects a new understanding of faith, but also contributes to restoring the relationship with the disrupted context in which faith was expressed. This does not mean that tending to the content of faith, through Scripture and the tenets of faith, and celebrating faith in community have become less important. It does mean, however, that in a context where these aspects of faith can no longer be realized as before, God becomes the center of faith. This new awareness of a relationship with God effects courage, strength, and the ability to cope and to create a new life of faith in a new context.

3.2.2 The Spiritual Dimension of Identity Transition and Transformation

As I pointed out in Chapter One, migration theologians generally perceive identity transition and transformation in relation to the territorial aspect of the transitional phases of departure, arrival, negotiation and settlement. Upon departure, a migrant becomes an emigrant, someone who leaves behind the familiar life in the home country to achieve a better life in the destination country. Upon arrival, a migrant becomes an immigrant. The immigrant identity becomes defined in exclusive terms. The identity is shaped by the experience of being different in relationship to the new society. During the transitional phase of negotiation and settlement a migrant develops a new identity while integrating the diverse and transnational elements of one's emigrant and immigrant identity.⁵⁰ However, these identity transitions and transformations are not only experienced exteriorly in the territorial aspects of the transitional phases. This means that in order to fully understand the "process of inner transformation" that Castillo Guerra surmises in relation to migrants' identity transitions and transformation,⁵¹ it is important to take into account that the transitional phases are experienced beyond their territorial aspects and carry a spiritual dimension. The findings regarding the spiritual

⁵⁰ See Chapter One, 2.1.6 and 2.2.1.

⁵¹ Castillo Guerra, "Coexistence of Pluralities," 167.

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dimension of the transitional phases also apply to the understanding of identity transitions and transformation: They too are experienced interiorly and carry a spiritual dimension.

The interior aspect of identity transitions

The characteristics of the interior experience of identity transitions, as uncovered in the process of correlation, align with the three types of identity migrants develop in the transitional phases. The interior aspect of becoming an emigrant is characterized by leaving behind what was known and traveling along unknown roads (*the departing self*). Upon arrival, the experiences of uprootedness and estrangement in becoming a stranger to themselves effect the interior aspect of becoming an immigrant, namely becoming vulnerable (*the estranged self*). In the effort to achieve settlement, the interior aspect of becoming a migrant is characterized by the oscillation between becoming vulnerable in the experience of loss and developing a new awareness of self in the ability to cope (*the transforming self*). Settlement is complete when the migrants develop a new identity in which they both integrate and transcend their emigrant and immigrant identities (*the transformed self*).

As I explained above, the process of spiritual transformation is defined by the interconnectedness of the exterior or sensory and interior or spiritual elements of this process of transformation. This means that in order to understand the spiritual dimension of identity transitions and transformation both the exterior and interior experiences of the transitional phases need to be taken into account.

The spiritual dimension of transformation of identity

Parallel to the explanation of the spiritual dimension of the transitional phases presented above, I will now point out how the dynamic between the exterior and interior aspects of identity transitions contribute to understanding the spiritual dimension of transformation of identity in the context of migration.

Both the exterior and interior aspects of the transitional phases of emigration and immigration effect the experience of becoming vulnerable in the loss of ability of migrants to make sense of life by means of their sensory intuitions. This effects the experience of spiritual descent in which migrants recognize the need to surrender to this vulnerability, become aware of their dependence on God, and attain spiritual humility with its attitudes of poverty of spirit and freedom of spirit. Poverty of spirit effects the ability to let go of elements of one's identity that form an impediment to the process of settlement. In this transformational moment of surrender, poverty of spirit transforms in freedom of spirit effecting the experience of spiritual ascent and of self-transcendence

in which migrants develop a transformed perception of self and of their relationships with God, with others, and the world around them.

The effect of this spiritual dimension of transformation of identity is recognized interiorly by attitudes of humility, gratitude, kindness, and generosity. It is recognized exteriorly in migrants' ability to incorporate new elements in their identity, and to develop a critical and creative relationship between the diverse and transnational elements of their migrant identity.

In sum: Taking into account both the exterior or territorial dimensions and the interior or spiritual dimensions of the transitional phases reveals the spiritual dimension of transformation of identity in the context of migration. It also affirms the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness between the exterior, or sensory, and interior, or spiritual, aspects of the migration experience. The dynamic between these exterior and interior dimensions define the inner transformation Castillo Guerra surmises when he reflects on identity transitions and transformation: It provides a deeper theological understanding of the process of spiritual transformation as experienced by the African migrants on their migration journey.

3.3 Contributions to Migration Theology and its Discourse on Migration and Spirituality

In the analysis of and correlation between the migration narratives of African migrants to the USA and John of the Cross' poem and Commentary *The Dark Night* I have gained comprehension of two core characteristics of the process of transformation of faith and identity in the experience of migration and the experience of the dark night. The first insight I have gained is that transformation of faith and identity happens in the dynamic between the exterior, or sensory, and the interior, or spiritual, aspects that define the experiences of the African migrants. The second insight I have gained is that the interior or spiritual dimension of the experience of transformation of faith and identity is characterized by the dynamic between experiences of spiritual descent and spiritual ascent. In this last and final section of this thesis, I will explain how the comprehension of these two core characteristics of transformation of faith and identity in the context of migration contributes to migration theology and to furthering its discourse on migration and spirituality.

First, I will explain how the African migrants' perspective contributes to expanding the different perspectives that affect theological reflection on migration. And finally, I will explain how the central findings of my research

can further the discourse on migration and spirituality, by responding to Groody and Cruz contributions on migrant spirituality.

3.3.1 Contributions of the Perspective of African Migrants to the USA

The process of analysis and correlation has highlighted aspects particular to the migration experiences of African-born migrants to the USA. These aspects offer new perspectives to be taken into account in migration theology and in its discourse on migration and spirituality. First, their experience as people of color in a society framed by racial categories intensifies the interior aspect of their experience of transformation. Second, the insights gained regarding the spiritual dimension of transformation of identity and faith not only resonate with main characteristics of an African religious worldview, but also emphasize the aspect of interdependency in the dynamic between the exterior and interior aspects of the process of transformation.

The theological import of African migrant's Blackness in the context of the USA

There is one aspect of the identity of African-born migrants to the USA that deserves special attention: namely their Blackness. Let me briefly explain how migration theology can benefit from understanding how their Blackness affects their migration experience. First, an African migrant's transformed identity has the potential to function critically and creatively in addressing racism. Secondly, their Blackness contributes to the invisibility of their particular experiences as migrants, which impacts the interiority and spiritual dimension of their migration experience.

Upon arrival, being considered a minority surprises the African migrants. They did not live that experience on the African continent. In addition, in the area where the participants in this research settled Black people are numerically in the majority. Furthermore, they do not always understand what the fuss with racism is about. Even though they experience racist attitudes toward them (even in church), they prefer not to engage them and wish they could go beyond. Participants who interact with or settle within an African American community, however, develop a better sense of the racial issues and of different ways in which they, African-born people, and African Americans are perceived. Whether or not they like it or want to engage it, African migrants on their journey to settlement in the USA have to gain understanding

of Black consciousness and how it affects their migrant identity.⁵² As their identities transform, they develop the ability to creatively and critically employ this aspect of their emigrant and immigrant identities. Their ability to transcend this division between people with different shades of Black in their migrant identities challenges migration theologians to address aspects of racism and to take into account other social, economic, or political categories that can affect the migration experiences of migrants.

Furthermore, it is precisely their Blackness that effects their invisibility in the discourse of migration theology in the USA context. The same can be said about the Catholic Church in the USA. The USCCB and its Black clergy organizations and university initiatives such as the Institute for Black Catholic Studies are developing a Black Catholic ministry and theology in which they acknowledge the presence of African-born migrants among the many different shades of Black that make up the Black faithful.⁵³ Nevertheless, they also acknowledge their “invisibility in civil and ecclesial records” and that this “lack of official statistics and awareness” hinders taking into account their experiences.⁵⁴ The African migrants in their narratives mention the consequences of such invisibility when they share that it is not always easy to find a welcoming Catholic faith community in which they can feel at home and where their African identity and culture is appreciated. Apart from the occasional faith community that does welcome and embrace them, the wider Catholic Church in the USA still has to acknowledge them and develop a constructive pastoral response to the presence of African-born migrants among their faithful.

⁵² See Chapter Two, 4.3.2. Here, I observed that none of my participants came from South Africa and that they seem to take their post-colonial position for granted. Even though some participants remember the time of colonialization, they do not seem to connect this to the USA society and its racial categorizations. However, it is important that African-born migrants in the USA gain an awareness of the historical and socio-political perspectives on their African identity, especially in the current circumstances of the year 2020 (during which these final pages are being written), when racial and immigrant injustices are once again important issues in the context of the USA.

⁵³ M. Shawn Copeland, “Introduction,” and Clarence Williams, C.P.P.S., “Pan-Africanism: An Emerging Context for Understanding the Black Catholic Experience,” in *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience*, editor M. Shawn Copeland (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 1-6 and 205-221.

⁵⁴ Paulinus I. Odozor, C.S.S.P., “African Catholics in the United States: Gifts and Challenges,” in *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience*, 195. Odozor initiated taking African migrants’ experiences into account. This, however, as far as I am aware, has not been further developed in the context of Catholic Black ministry and theology. See page: 196-203.

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It is in this context of a lack of welcome and pastoral response that African migrants experience a diminished faith, or even loss of faith. It is precisely this aspect of their migrant experience and its deepening effect on their vulnerability that resonated with the interior aspect of vulnerability and loss of faith in John's narrative of the dark night. It intensifies the African migrants' aspect of dependency in their relationship with God in the interior dimension of their transformation process. In migration theology, migrants are often commended for the strength and depth of their faith, how it enables them to cope, and how it can contribute to the development of the Christian faith and church. What the particular experience of African-born migrants to the USA contributes to this discourse about migrant faith is that their experience explains the source for the depth and strength of their faith. Therefore, it is important to take into account how their racial invisibility effects a loss of faith and how that experience impacts the spiritual depth of their experience of transformation of identity and faith. Their particular migrant experience challenges migration theologians to look for the interiority and the spiritual dimension of the transformation of faith in the experience of migration of all migrants.

The theological import of the African migrant's emigrant identity

In the process of correlation, I explained that the African migrants in their narratives experience transformation in the dynamic between the exterior and interior aspects of their migration experiences. Their narratives explain how the interiority, or the spiritual, dimension of the process of transformation is embedded in the exterior, or sensory, aspects of their migration experience. Their understanding of the interconnectedness of the sensory and the spiritual is grounded in the characteristics of an African religious universe, which has formed their emigrant identities: It perceives life as a process of spiritual and moral transformation, embedded in "the intrinsic unity between individuals and communities," the perception of the universe as an interdependent whole, and belief in an "eternal divine mystery."⁵⁵ For the African migrants who participated in this research, these characteristics are recognized in their emigrant identities and in the losses they experience upon arrival in the USA. They are also recognized in their immigrant identities when they speak about

⁵⁵ Mosha, *The Heartbeat of Indigenous Africa*, 15. See also: Magesa, *What is Not Sacred?*, 1-98; Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, x-xi & 8-11 & 18-25; Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands and Hearing and Knowing*; and Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*; and Elizabeth Amoah, "A Living Spirituality Today," in *Spirituality of the Third World: A Cry for Life*, editors K.C. Abraham and Bernadette Mbuy-Beya (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 50-54.

their efforts to achieve a good life while settling in their new home country and when they explain how they renegotiate harmony between and integration of all forces of life. They speak of how this negotiation effects a deeper understanding of who they are and of their relationship with God. The African migrants' narratives affirm Mosha and Zahan when they, speaking about characteristics of an African religious universe, point to the importance of understanding the interiority of such a spiritual transformation in which a person develops an understanding of "the science of the soul,"⁵⁶ because the "interiority, thought, and intention are the foundations of exteriority and action."⁵⁷

I posit that it is precisely this aspect of their emigrant identities, namely their understanding of the religious universe as an interdependent whole that contributed to both the possibility and the main findings of my research. First, it created a connection between their spirituality and John's spirituality. Second, it contributed to gaining comprehension of the interdependency of the exterior and interior dimensions of their experience of transformation of identity and faith.

Despite the dissonances between the African migrants' narratives and John's narrative of the dark night, it is the African migrants' awareness that faith and spirituality are a corollary of being that resonated with John's religious worldview, namely that all life is grounded in the mystery of God the creator. Based on this resonance, their narratives could speak to each other and affirm, question, and enlighten each other. As I pointed out in the process of correlation, the African migrants' narratives questioned John's perception of the human and divine as two contraries and corrected his perception of the sensory as lower and the spiritual as higher, by appreciating them as equal. I also explained that John's perception of the need for a passive surrender enlightens the African migrants' narratives, in which I could point out that in their narratives they too speak of the experience of a spiritual descent in which they surrender their vulnerability into God and deepen their awareness of their dependence on God's agency.

Furthermore, gaining comprehension of this interior process and the manner in which the African migrants appreciate the role of God's agency contributed to the reassessment of my initial perceived emphasis on the exteriority or sensory aspect of their experience of transformation. I pointed out that it is this dependency on God's agency that defines the African migrants renewed understanding of their relationship with God. Gaining this renewed awareness

⁵⁶ Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa*, 54.

⁵⁷ Mosha, *o.c.*, 10.

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of one's dependency to the divine is, in the terms of an African religious worldview, considered gaining understanding of "the science of the soul." Gaining such understanding results in a transformation that impacts the interdependency in the universal whole and benefits not only the individual, but also the community. Understanding "the science of the soul," from the perspective of the African migrants' emigrant identities, contributes to the acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension as embedded in the very material and exterior aspects of their experience of migration. It affirms the interdependency between the exterior, or sensory, and interior, or spiritual, aspects of their experiences of descent and ascent in the experience of transformation of faith and identity.

3.3.3 *Contributions to Understanding Migrant Spirituality*

In Chapter One, I raised the question whether the contributions to the discourse on migration and spirituality responded to the observation that the ability to engage liminality in the experience of migration seems important to achieve settlement and to integrate a migrant's emigrant and immigrant identities. I noticed that Groody in his reflections on migrant spirituality emphasized the emigrant and the initial stages of the immigrant experience. He did not explain how the spiritual development he describes contributes to the migrants' ability to settle and engage the experience of identities in transition. I observed that Cruz speaks about experiences of uprootedness and of being in between. She does not expand on them nor articulates them as experiences of liminality. Furthermore, Cruz argues that spiritualities of ascent do not relate well to migration experiences. Connecting this observation to Fitzgerald's claim that John of the Cross' spirituality and his explanation of the dark night does speak to contemporary experiences of liminality, gave rise to the question whether the spirituality of John of the Cross could be a source for gaining understanding of the experience of liminality in migration and of migrants' ability to engage this experience. In what follows below, I will explain how the comprehension gained regarding the process of transformation of identity and faith in the correlation between the narratives of African migrants to the USA and John's narrative of the dark night furthers Groody's and Cruz' contributions to the discourse on migrant spirituality.

Responding to Groody

In his reflections on migrant spirituality, Groody explains how the territorial dimensions of the migration experience of migrants from Central and South

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America align with an interior or spiritual dimension. Groody explains that the experience of departure aligns with the experience of sacrifice; that the journey aligns with suffering; and that arrival aligns with the experience of the cross. It is interesting to note that on the one hand Groody's alignment of the transitional phases aligns with the three transitional phases in John's narrative of the dark night, but that on the other hand his definition of arrival aligns with the negative aspect of arrival in the narratives of the African migrants. Groody, however, does not seem to perceive in the experiences of the migrants he encounters the positive and eschatological aspect of arrival. From the perspective of my findings regarding the role of spiritual descent and ascent in the process of transformation, I would say that Groody in his observations perceives the experience of spiritual descent in the migrants' experiences, but he does not seem to perceive the experiences of spiritual ascent in which migrants receive the ability to cope through the agency of God.

Groody speaks of migrants as "the crucified people of today's world" who portray a spirituality of the cross.⁵⁸ He claims that the spirituality they develop on their migration journeys evokes the need for a Christian spirituality of solidarity. In his observations on spirituality, he seems to create a divide between the migrants and those who are in the position to reach out to the migrants. Migrants suffer and develop a spirituality of freedom. Those in the position to reach out to the migrants, by developing a spirituality of solidarity, can work to redeem the world and to transform humanity. He describes the migrants' spirituality of freedom as the experience of being received and reconciled in the divine embrace of God's love in which they gain awareness of the "illusions of self-sufficiency," of "who they are before God who created them in [God's] own image and likeness."⁵⁹ In terms of the findings in my research, however, this does not define a spirituality of freedom; it rather describes the characteristics of spiritual descent and the attainment of the attitude of "poverty of spirit." Groody describes the spirituality of solidarity as the experience of a transformational moment in which the encounter with migrant suffering effects a conversion in "the call to "migrate" in love to the "other" in a spirit of solidarity."⁶⁰ In terms of my research, this defines the

⁵⁸ Groody, "The Spirituality of Migrants," 101.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

⁶⁰ Groody, "The Spirituality of Migrants," 151-152. Groody seems to agree with Keul, who also explains that the vulnerability migrants experience evokes responses from inhabitants of the receiving countries or cities. The difference is, however, that Keul acknowledges that those responses can be both negative and positive and that she perceives vulnerability as strength.

experience of spiritual ascent and the attainment of the attitude of “freedom of spirit.”

It seems therefore, that Groody manifests in his reflections a dichotomy between the concepts of spiritual descent and ascent, which becomes entangled in the power relationships that create a division between migrants and non-migrants.⁶¹ One of the core findings of my research is that spiritual transformation happens in the dynamic between the experiences of spiritual descent and ascent. But, rather than perceiving the interconnectedness and simultaneity of spiritual descent and ascent, Groody switches position from the migrants’ experience of descent to the non-migrants need for conversion and explains that change and transformation comes from those who respond to the migrants in solidarity with their suffering.⁶² I agree with Groody that the world needs such a wake-up call and I share his concerns for justice and solidarity. Nevertheless, I posit that it is necessary to discern the entire process of spiritual transformation in the experience of migration. It clarifies the connection between the “spirit of poverty” Groody observes in the migrants’ spiritual development and the “spirit of freedom,” which he mentions, but does not attribute to the migrant experience. As I pointed out in the process of correlation, “poverty of spirit” and “freedom of spirit” together form the hinge in the process of transformation and, therefore, Groody cannot attribute one aspect to migrants and the other to non-migrants. Both aspects are interconnected and belong together if they are to effect the spiritual transformation sought for.

In sum: the comprehension I gained of the experience of spiritual transformation of faith and identity as characterized by the dynamic between experiences of spiritual descent and spiritual ascent challenges Groody to look beyond the suffering of the migration experience. As I have pointed out, the

⁶¹ Nagy would add that Groody is hindered by the pitfall of methodological nationalism, which carries the risk of creating a dichotomy between migrants and non-migrants and of becoming trapped in a discourse on theology that is dominated by migration language. Such a discourse needs migrants to remain migrants and carries the risk that their “longings and aspirations [...] to become non-migrants” go unnoticed. Such a dynamic may have, albeit unconsciously, affected Groody’s perception of the relationship between experiences of descent and ascent. See: Nagy, “Minding Theology,” 217.

⁶² Although Groody explains how the experiences of the migrants he encounters reflect the entire dynamic of the Paschal mystery and are therefore manifestations of “Christian revelation and human transformation,” in his reflections he emphasizes the aspect of *kenosis*, the migrants’ suffering, and their vulnerability. He positions them as victims in need of others to act upon their need for salvation and redemption. See: Groody, “The Spirituality of Migrants,” 152.

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African migrants in their narratives show that migrants not only experience God's embrace as a comfort in their vulnerability and experiences of descent, but they also simultaneously experience God's embrace as their source of strength and ability to act in the experience of ascent. This dynamic in the relationship between spiritual descent and ascent, allows them to become agents of change in their lives and the world around them. Migrants not only evoke solidarity, but also model it, as they grow in courage, kindness, and generosity.⁶³

Responding to Cruz

Cruz, in her reflections on migrant spirituality, resonates with my critique on Groody's reflections. I agree with Cruz when she points out that although it is important to recognize the experience of loss and vulnerability in migrants' experiences of being uprooted and in living on the margin, it is also important to recognize their strength and their coping strategies when she speaks of migrants' courageous hope, creative resistance, steadfast faith, and festive community spirit. Furthermore, I agree with Cruz when she points to the importance of the connection between the meaning of the Cross and the values and promises of the Kingdom of God. I also agree with her statement that migrants "are not just victims, but also subjects and agents of their own destiny... [and] their experience shows us that in the midst of pain and sin it is possible to discover God's abundant grace."⁶⁴

Nevertheless, I raise questions when Cruz dismisses "spiritualities of ascent" as a helpful framework to understand migrant spirituality. The spirituality John of the Cross develops in his works, is generally considered to be a spirituality of ascent, and his treatise *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, is indicative for this. Although Cruz, does not refer to any particular authors or spiritual commentaries, she explains that, according to her,

"Christian spiritual commentators speak of a model of Christian life as ascent or climbing toward God in a manner analogous to the angels ascending and descending the ladder in Jacob's dream or Moses climbing up the mountain of Sinai where he meets God. Indeed, in Christian spirituality there is an entire ascent literature in which spiritual commentators have even mapped out steps, which had to be taken to move up from this world to the

⁶³ The African migrants' narratives affirm Keul's observations that it is not just their vulnerability, but rather the strength that migrants gain out of their vulnerability that challenges the people in the arrival cities, where migrants settle, to change their response to them from "Herod strategies" to building bridges. See: Keul, "The Venture of Vulnerability," 186-187.

⁶⁴ Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, 151.

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world of God. While such an understanding relates to the idea of pilgrimage, it probably could not fully speak of/to migrants' experience of spiritual journey."⁶⁵

Even though, John in his works applies the metaphors Cruz here describes,⁶⁶ I beg to differ with her observations. I will point out how the findings of my research can contribute to Cruz's considerations.

Cruz' critique regarding spirituality of ascent rests on her observations that migration experiences emphasize an experience of descent, rather than ascent. Cruz explains that migrants search for God and encounter God as they descend into the mundane struggles of migrant life. She writes that "the spiritual journey for migrants is probably not a direct or immediate ascent." In this passage she understands ascent from the perspective of "spiritualities of ascent" and defines it as leaving the mundane behind as one focuses on the upward movement toward God.⁶⁷

The concerns Cruz raises are not uncommon. For instance, interpretations of John's work have emphasized his ascetism and the need for purification (in the active night of the spirit) and the effect of purification (in the passive night of the spirit). When discussing how to approach reading and interpreting the works of John, I pointed to Fitzgerald and Tyler's concern regarding the dangers of this emphasis. They point out that this emphasis omits the other dynamics of the spiritual journey. It overlooks the effect of illumination. It omits that John's teaching on the spiritual journey is framed by the concepts of love and desire.⁶⁸ The narratives of the African migrants seem to affirm Cruz' perception of a spirituality of ascent as they question John's appreciation of the sensory and the spiritual. However, in the exploration of this dissonance, I pointed out that the narratives of the African migrants and John in his narrative of the dark night speak about an interconnectedness between the sensory and the spiritual. Their narratives express that it is in the dynamic between the sensory or exterior and the spiritual or interior that spiritual transformation happens.

I submit, therefore, that in disregarding spiritualities of ascent, such as the spirituality of John of the Cross, as a framework to understand the spiritual dimensions of migration experiences, Cruz shifts the emphasis away from the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁶⁶ See for instance: N. 2. 18-20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁶⁸ Tyler, St. John, 50; Fitzgerald, "Impasse and Dark Night," 97; and Fitzgerald, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope," and Fitzgerald, Interview, November 2, 2018. See also: Payne, *The Cognitive Value of Mysticism*, 1-3 and Dubois, *To Be More Fully Alive*, 201.

interior, or spiritual, to the exterior, or sensory. This prevents her from observing that the dynamic between experiences of spiritual descent and ascent constitutes the transformational moment in which, through the agency of God, spiritual transformation happens. Although Cruz may rightly argue against the risk connected to abandoning the mundane inherent in spiritualities of ascent, the process of transformation does call for a moment of surrender and abandonment of those attachments, which, be they material or immaterial, are impediments to the experience of transformation. The African migrants in their narratives explain that it is in the interior and passive surrender of their vulnerability to God that they come to experience the efficacy of God's presence: They receive the ability to let go of aspects of their former lives that impede their settlement. This then allows them to develop a new life in which they creatively and critically engage the diverse elements of their migrant identity.⁶⁹ As they describe how they grow in faith, hope, and love, they not only come closer to God, but they also become like God, which is recognized in their gratitude, humility, kindness, and generosity. In Cruz's words, I would say that this does constitute a "direct or immediate ascent" experienced here and now in the messy descent of their migrant lives.

This means that the characteristics of the "Spirituality of Pilgrimage," including its aspects of descent and ascent, do speak to the migrant experiences. It also means a reassessment of the four values that support migrants on their journeys⁷⁰ from which Cruz derives the three types of spirituality she discerns in migration experiences, namely a "Spirituality of the Cross," a "Spirituality of Pilgrimage," and a "Spirituality of Hope and Life."⁷¹ Cruz claims that the characteristics of the "Spirituality of Hope and

⁶⁹ Here it is good to recall how the loss of faith particular to the African migrants' experiences contributes to the interior dimension of the process of transformation. This is especially experienced in their inability to find or attend welcoming and vibrant faith communities. Therefore, they do not have the advantage of strengthening their faith by means of a "festive community spirit," which Cruz mentions as an important value in migration experience. The African migrants' narratives explain how this lack transforms their relationship with God into a more individual and intentional relationship, which is different from or adds another perspective to the value of "festive community spirit." It deepens the interior or spiritual dimension of their experience, which is part of the dynamic between the exterior and interior aspects of the experience of transformation.

Such an interior aspect of a spiritual development is also recognized by Isasi-Díaz, when she explains that from her perspective spirituality seeks connection to "the radical immanence of God in each of us" and constitutes the "reflective life" in which one becomes conscious of the forces that either "move or paralyze" and which motivates how one acts. Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continúa*, 26.

⁷⁰ Cruz, *o.c.*, 127-140.

⁷¹ Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, 140-151.

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Life” define the migrant experience best. I, however, claim that these three types of spirituality and their respective characteristics are interconnected as elements of one process of spiritual transformation. “Spirituality of the Cross” speaks to the experience of sensory and spiritual descent, the “Spirituality of Pilgrimage” and the “Spirituality of Hope and Life” both speak to the simultaneous experience of descent and ascent: sensory and spiritual. If these three types of spirituality are interconnected, then so too are the four values Cruz describes: “steadfast faith” is both object and agent of transformation, which effects the coping strategies of “courageous hope” and “creative resistance” that migrants attain, and the “festive community spirit” is where this faith is both celebrated and nourished.

In sum: the central findings of my research explain how the spiritual dimension of the African migrants’ experiences of transformation is embedded in the mundane struggles of their migration experiences. My research also uncovers that the transformational moment happens in the simultaneity of the experience of spiritual descent and ascent: it is the surrender and abandonment of the spiritual descent that simultaneously effects the spiritual ascent in which God’s agency becomes effective in the midst of these mundane struggles, recognized in the migrants ability to cope with their “steadfast faith,” “courageous hope,” “creative resistance,” and “festive community spirit.” Therefore, I can say that the comprehension gained in the correlation between the African migrant’s narratives and the narrative of the dark night in John’s spirituality of ascent does contribute to furthering the understanding of migrant spirituality.

4. Concluding Remarks

The field of migration theology considers the experiences of migrants as a *locus theologicus*. It stresses the need to explore the many different migrant experiences and their impact on the theological discourse on migration and migrant spirituality. My research offers three significant contributions and suggestions to further this endeavor in migration theology.

Contributions to Migration Theology

First, my research gives access to the experiences of recent African-born migrants to the USA. I observed that their experiences were absent from the theological discourse on migration in the context of the USA, due to the manner in which the application of racial categories in USA society renders them invisible. By soliciting the migration stories of African-born migrants to

the USA, gathering them in firsthand interviews, and analyzing them, I make their experiences visible and appreciate them as a source for theological reflection. Furthermore, in the process of analysis and correlation, I point out how two aspects particular of African-born migrants impact the transformation of faith and identity they experience on their migration journeys, namely: 1) the realization that they are perceived as “Black” and how that impacts a loss of faith and 2) the realization that their emigrant identities are formed in an African religious universe and how that impacts how they articulate their experience of transformation.

Secondly, my research correlates these experiences of African migrants to the USA with John of the Cross’ poem and commentary *The Dark Night*, in order to gain a deeper theological understanding of a transformation of identity and faith in the experience of migration. The process of correlation reveals the dynamic of the process of spiritual transformation in which vulnerability, spiritual humility, and God’s transformative agency are key concepts. The relationship between these concepts, as defined by both narratives, structures the plot in their narratives and explains that it is in their perception of God’s agency that they refigure the understanding of their experience of transformation of identity and faith.

Finally, the insights gained in the correlation process provide not only a deeper theological understanding of the dynamics of the process of transformation in the experience of migration, but also offer a new perspective on the different aspects that define migrant spirituality. In the outcomes of the process of correlation, I uncover that both narratives perceive the relationship between the concepts that articulate the human-divine relationship as interdependent and mutually inclusive rather than mutually exclusive. This constellation of interdependency defines the two core characteristics of the process of spiritual transformation, namely: 1) Transformation of faith and identity happens in the dynamic between the exterior, or sensory, and the interior, or spiritual, aspects that define the experiences of the African migrants; 2) The interior or spiritual dimension of the experience of transformation of faith and identity is characterized by the dynamic between experiences of spiritual descent and spiritual ascent. These insights gained explain how the African migrants’ spirituality is defined by both the sensory and the spiritual aspects of their migrant experience and that the spiritual transformation they experience is defined by both the exteriority and interiority of their experiences of descent and ascent.

Suggestions for further research

My research marks the beginning of gathering and analyzing the migration narratives of African-born migrants to the USA and calls for further research on how their migration experiences can contribute to developing discourse on theology and migration.

While this research project adds an African perspective to the many different migrant experiences that migration theology in the USA has taken into account, further research projects should be developed to add more perspectives to the findings of this research. These perspectives may include the emigrant identities of migrants to the USA from other demographics or experiences of African-born migrants in other destination countries.

Furthermore, in my research I emphasized gaining a deeper theological understanding of a transformation of identity and faith in the experience of migration by means of correlating African migrants' narratives with the John of the Cross poem and commentary *The Dark Night*. In a further exploration of this process of correlation between narratives of migrants and John's narrative of the dark night, the question could be raised how the migrant experience of spiritual transformation could bear meaning for understanding the spirituality of John of the Cross.

Lastly, I engaged this research in hopes that it would elicit pastoral responses beneficial for the experiences of African-born migrants to the USA. This implies translating the findings of this research to the field of pastoral theology and implementing them in projects or pastoral approaches that will benefit African migrants in particular, but also might benefit migrants in general. Possible forms of applying the results of this research would be training programs for pastors to gain insight in migrant spirituality; programs for parishes to create time and space for storytelling and narrative analysis; and encounters between migrants and larger faith communities on processes of faith transformation.

EPILOGUE

This research project was born in the midst of the papal shift that happened in the Roman Catholic Church in 2013. On the same day that Pope Benedict XVI announced that he was retiring from the papacy, I decided to take a leap of faith: I was going to leave my paid job to free up time to develop a PhD research project in order to advance my chances as an immigrant theologian in the United States of America.¹ As the research proposal was developing, the Holy Spirit guided the church to elect a pope whose papacy would be characterized by his passion for the preferential option for the poor and his compassion for the least and most vulnerable among them: the migrants of our world.

Pope Francis emphasizes time and again that the phenomenon of migration is a “sign of the times.” He challenges the faithful and theologians alike to listen to the stories and experiences of the world’s migrants to “decipher authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose.”²

Eight years into Pope Francis’ papacy, I hope that I have been able to respond to his challenge. Through this research (and my parish work) I have opened my heart to the experiences of African migrants, as they have opened their hearts to me. I hope that I have listened intently to the stories and experiences of the African migrants, who participated in this research, and that in their narratives I have been able to “decipher [such] authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose.”

¹ This decision, one not uncommon among immigrants, would have financial consequences right in the year where the second of our children was also going to attend a private Catholic (expensive) school, as the public school system was not able to attend to his learning difference. Hence the leap of faith!

² *Gaudium et Spes*, § 11.



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APPENDIX: DATA GATHERING

Interview questionnaire

The main data for this research are the experiences of migrants from Africa who chose the USA as their destination country. These narratives were gathered through interviews, which were conducted as unstructured interviews. During the interviews the participants were introduced to the purpose and the main question of the research, which translated in three questions. These questions were introduced the participants as the three main points of interest for the researcher:

1. How did your migration experience cause a change in who you are?
2. How would you describe this process?
3. How did your faith play a role in this change?

After this introduction, the participant was invited to talk freely about his or her migration experience. Where necessary the researcher implemented a new prompt. These prompts had been prepared in advance and are an operationalization of the both the research question and the categories build upon the research question and the theoretical framework and addressed three themes.

The story of your migration

These prompts or questions will ask participants to share the following:

- *The reason for leaving their home country:* Why did you leave your homeland? What goal did you hope to accomplish?
- *The means of travel to and the method of entry to US:* How was the journey to the U.S.?
- *The means found or provided to settle and the problems encountered:* How was your arrival? Did you have friends, family, or were you alone? How did you find your way around: alone, supported? How were you accepted in this new country? Well or not so well (think of language, skills, professional training)?
- *The status of the journey:* Do you feel settled now? If no, explain why not. If yes, explain what makes you feel settled?

MIGRANT SPIRITUALITY

The story of the challenges encountered

These prompts or questions will ask participants to share the following:

- *A first evaluation of the migration experience:* What did you lose in the process of migration? What did you gain in the process of migration?
- *A closer look at goals accomplished:* In trying to accomplish your goals, what obstacles or successes did you encounter? How did you overcome obstacles and how did you feel in trying to overcome obstacles? How did you celebrate success?
- *A closer look at what has changed:* What cherished memories, traditions, habits, values, and ways of living your faith did you bring from your homeland? Which of these are helpful for life in the U.S.?
- *Looking at loss:* Are there any memories, traditions, habits, values, and ways of living your faith that are not helpful for life in the U.S.? What happens with those memories, traditions, habits, values, and ways of living your faith?
- *Looking at gain:* What traditions, habits, values, and ways of living your faith did you (re)discover in the US? Did they effect a change in you?

The story of your transformation in identity and faith

These prompts or questions will ask participants to share the following:

- *A description of change in identity:* How would you describe yourself and your life, before you started your journey to the US (before the need to leave your homeland arose)? How would you describe yourself and your life today? What would you describe as a major change or changes?
- *A description of the process of change:* Did the changes you observe happen gradually, sudden, or were there times where you felt stuck in this process? If the latter, can you describe what caused this feeling and what this feeling looks or feels like in daily life? What helped you to overcome this feeling of being stuck?
- *The role of faith in the process of change:* Can you describe what your faith has meant to you in the process of migration (while in your homeland, on the journey, while trying to settle, while feeling stuck, and now)?
- *Looking at your relationship with God:* What happened between you and God on this journey? Has your faith changed? Has your relationship with God changed? If so, how?

SUMMARY

This research engages the narratives of migrants from Africa, whose migration journey brought them to the United States of America. Their presence is hardly visible due to the manner in which society in the USA relates to racial categories. This invisibility hinders both the pastoral outreach to migrants from Africa and the theological reflection on their experience of migration and settlement. This research makes the experiences of migrants from Africa to the USA visible by analyzing their migration narratives and by considering them as a source for theology.

Current developments in the field of migration theology and insights from the field of spirituality studies raise the research issue. In the transitional phases of departure, arrival, and negotiation, migrants experience tensions between the emigrant, immigrant, and migrant identities. This process of transitions connects to experiences of liminality, which are characterized as experiences of anti-structure in which all the conventions and categories of a known structure no longer apply, while adjustment to the new structure and its conventions has yet to happen. Fitzgerald's reflections on experiences of liminality and impasse in the experience of the dark night in the spirituality of John of the Cross raise the question whether the experience of the dark night could speak to the experience of migration and vice versa.

These observations resulted in the goal and central question of this research. The goal is to contribute to the field of migration theology and its discourse on the relationship between migration and spirituality and to include the experiences of migrants from Africa to the USA in this discourse. The central question of the research is: Does the correlation between migration narratives from African migrants to the USA and the narrative of the dark night in the spirituality of John of the Cross contribute to a deeper theological understanding of a transformation of identity and faith in the experience of migration?

To engage the process of analysis and correlation, a theoretical framework is built based on the body of knowledge of migration theology and insights gained from the field of spiritual studies. This framework consists of three categories: 1) three transitional phases in which changes of identity are experienced; 2) liminality which affects an oscillation between experiences of anti-structure and achieving participation; and 3) transformation defined as

changes in one's understanding of oneself and of one's faith and relationship with God.

The results of the analysis of the African migrants' narratives, the analysis of the narrative of *The Dark Night*, and of the correlation between them point out where their narratives, affirm, question, and enlighten each other by paying attention to resonances and dissonances in context, character response, and structure.

In the dissonances the narratives of the participants' migration experiences and John's narrative of the dark night question and enlighten each other. One dissonance, regarding experiences of arrival, highlights the eschatological dimension of the experience of arrival in the dark night, which enlightens the migration experience and leads to expanding both the experience of departure and of arrival beyond their geographical and temporal meaning, providing insight in their spiritual dimension.

Other dissonances observed have the same foundation, namely: the different manner in which the participants and John perceive the relationships between concepts that articulate the human-divine relationship. Exploring this dissonance reveals that the relationship between these concepts is interdependent and mutually inclusive rather than mutually exclusive and uncovers how this constellation of interdependency functions in the process of spiritual transformation.

Once the dissonances are understood, the resonances sound clearer and provide insight how their different horizons fuse in the dynamic of the process of spiritual transformation in which vulnerability, humility, and God's agency are key concepts. The relationship between these concepts, as defined by both narratives, structures the plot in their narratives and explains that it is in their perception of God's agency that they refigure the understanding of their experience of transformation of identity and faith.

The experience of vulnerability affects an attitude of spiritual humility and "poverty of spirit" in which one gains new understanding and comes to see one's self and the presence of God in a new light. It is in this new perspective that both the African migrants and the soul in John's narrative of the dark night find the strength to engage this journey with energy and resourcefulness, while not hampered by attachments to prior prosperity. John refers to this new perspective as gaining a "freedom of spirit." In this process of transformation both the participants and John describe a transformation of faith. Through the radical self-acceptance in their transformed faith in God, they not only gain a new perception of themselves, but also a new way of relating to and acting in the world in which they live.

SUMMARY

The outcomes of the correlation process, also uncover two core characteristics of the process of spiritual transformation, namely: 1) transformation of faith and identity happens in the dynamic between the exterior or sensory and the interior or spiritual aspects that define the experiences of the African migrants and of John's description of the effects of the dark night of the senses and spirit and 2) the interior or spiritual dimension of a transformation of faith and identity is characterized by the dynamic between experiences of spiritual descent and spiritual ascent. These insights contribute not only a deeper theological understanding of the dynamics of the process of transformation in the experience of migration, but also offer a new perspective on the different aspects that define migrant spirituality.

In conclusion these findings are brought in to conversation with the contributions of Groody and Cruz to point out how they enrich the discourse on the relationship between migration and spirituality and to argue that understanding the dynamic of the process of transformation in the correlation between the narrative of *The Dark Night* and the narrative of African Migrants to the USA contributes to developing an understanding of migrant spirituality.



SAMENVATTING

Dit onderzoek stelt verhalen van migranten uit Afrika, die naar de Verenigde Staten kwamen, centraal. Zij zijn nauwelijks zichtbaar vanwege de manier waarop de Amerikaanse maatschappij omgaat met raciale groeperingen. Deze onzichtbaarheid belemmert zowel de pastorale zorg voor deze Afrikaanse migranten als de theologische reflectie op hun ervaringen als migrant en nieuwkomer in dit land. Dit onderzoek maakt de ervaringen van de Afrikaanse migranten zichtbaar door hun narratieven over migratie te analyseren en te beschouwen als een bron voor theologie.

Recente ontwikkelingen op het gebied van migratietheologie en inzichten uit studies over spiritualiteit staan aan de basis van dit onderzoek. Tijdens de opeenvolgende fases van vertrek, aankomst en onderhandeling ondervinden migranten spanningen tussen de verschillende elementen van hun identiteit als migrant: emigrant, immigrant en de nieuw te vormen identiteit. Dit proces van transitie sluit aan bij ervaringen van liminaliteit die gekenmerkt worden als ervaringen van anti-structuur. Gebruiken en categorieën van een bekende structuur zijn niet langer van toepassing en de aanpassing aan de nieuwe structuur en de daarbij behorende gebruiken moet nog plaatsvinden. De theorie van Constance Fitzgerald over liminaliteit en de geestelijke impasse in de donkere nacht in de spiritualiteit van Johannes van het Kruis roepen de vraag op of de ervaring van de donkere nacht iets kan zeggen over de ervaring van migratie en omgekeerd.

Deze observaties hebben geleid tot de doelstelling en de centrale vraagstelling van dit onderzoek. De doelstelling is tweeledig. Ten eerste, een bijdrage leveren aan de migratietheologie en het debat over de relatie tussen migratie en spiritualiteit; ten tweede om de ervaringen van migranten uit Afrika naar de VS te betrekken bij dit debat. De centrale vraag van dit onderzoek is: Draagt de correlatie tussen de narratieven van Afrikaanse migranten naar de VS en het narratief van de donkere nacht in de spiritualiteit van Johannes van het Kruis bij tot een dieper theologisch begrip van transformatie van identiteit en geloof in de ervaring van migratie?

Voor het uitvoeren van de analyse van en correlatie tussen de narratieven, is een theoretisch raamwerk opgezet op basis van kennis van migratietheologie en inzichten uit spirituele studies. Dit raamwerk bestaat uit drie categorieën: 1) de drie fases van transitie waarin ervaring is opgedaan met verandering van identiteit; 2) liminaliteit, die een oscillatie veroorzaakt tussen ervaringen van

anti-structuur en geslaagde participatie; en 3) transformatie van iemands zelf-verstaan en van geloof in en de relatie met God.

De resultaten van de analyse van de narratieven van de Afrikaanse migranten, de analyse van het narratief van *De Donkere Nacht* en van het proces van correlatie geven aan op welke manier deze narratieven elkaar bevestigen, bevragen en belichten door aandacht te besteden aan de overeenkomsten en verschillen in context, reacties van karakters en structuur.

Wat betreft de verschillen bevragen en belichten deze narratieven elkaar. Bij een verschil, dat betrekking heeft op de ervaringen bij de aankomst, komt de eschatologische dimensie van de ervaring van aankomst in de donkere nacht duidelijk naar voren. Dat zet de migratie-ervaring in de schijnwerpers en leidt tot de uitbreiding van zowel de ervaring van het vertrek als van de aankomst, die verder gaat dan de geografische en tijdgebonden betekenis en geeft inzicht in hun spirituele dimensie.

Andere gesignaleerde verschillen hebben dezelfde grondslag, namelijk: de verschillende manier waarop de Afrikaanse migranten en Johannes de verbanden beschrijven tussen de concepten die de god-menselijke relatie uitdrukken. Bij het nader onderzoeken van dit verschil komt naar voren dat er een samenhangend en wederkerig verband is tussen deze concepten in plaats van een elkaar uitsluitend verband. Dit brengt aan het licht hoe deze wederzijdse afhankelijkheid functioneert in het proces van spirituele transformatie.

Inzicht in de verschillen, verhelderen de overeenkomsten en verschaft inzicht in de manier waarop de verschillende horizonnen van deze narratieven samenvallen in de dynamiek van het proces van spirituele transformatie. In dit proces zijn kwetsbaarheid, nederigheid en Gods handelen de sleutelconcepten. Het onderlinge verband tussen deze concepten, zoals beschreven door beide narratieven, geeft structuur aan de plot in hun verhalen en verklaart dat de veranderde waarneming van Gods handelen hun begrip van de ervaring van transformatie van identiteit en geloof bepaalt.

De ervaring van kwetsbaarheid beïnvloedt de ontwikkeling van een houding van spirituele nederigheid en 'armoede van geest' waardoor het verstaan van de eigen persoon en van de aanwezigheid van God in een nieuw licht komt te staan. In dit nieuwe perspectief vinden zowel de Afrikaanse migranten als de ziel in Johannes' narratief van de donkere nacht de kracht om deze reis te ondernemen met energie en vindingrijkheid, niet gehinderd door gehechtheid aan vroeger welzijn. Johannes noemt dit nieuwe perspectief het bereiken van 'vrijheid van geest'. In dit proces van transformatie beschrijven zowel de Afrikaanse migranten als Johannes een transformatie van identiteit en geloof.

SAMENVATTING

Door de radicale aanvaarding van deze transformatie krijgen zij niet alleen een nieuw beeld van zichzelf, maar ook een nieuwe manier van omgaan met en handelen in de wereld waarin ze leven.

Het proces van correlatie legt ook twee centrale karakteristieken bloot van het proces van spirituele transformatie in de twee narratieven, namelijk: 1) De transformatie van geloof en identiteit vindt plaats in de dynamiek tussen de buitenkant ofwel de zintuiglijke waarneming en de binnenkant ofwel de spirituele aspecten, zoals beschreven door de Afrikaanse migranten en Johannes als zij spreken over de effecten van migratie en de donkere nacht. 2) De binnenkant ofwel de spirituele dimensie van deze transformatie van geloof en identiteit wordt gekenmerkt door de dynamiek tussen ervaringen van spirituele nederdaling en spirituele opstijging. Deze inzichten dragen niet alleen bij aan een dieper theologisch begrip van de dynamiek van het proces van verandering in de migratie-ervaring, maar bieden ook een nieuw perspectief op de verschillende aspecten die de spiritualiteit van migranten bepalen.

Tenslotte zijn deze inzichten in verband gebracht met de bijdragen aan het debat over migratie en spiritualiteit van Groody en Cruz om aan te geven hoe deze inzichten dit debat verrijken en om te laten zien dat de correlatie tussen de narratieven van Afrikaanse migranten naar de VS en het narratief van de donkere nacht in de spiritualiteit van Johannes van het Kruis inderdaad bijdraagt aan het theologisch verstaan van de spiritualiteit van migranten.



CURRICULUM VITAE

Dorris van Gaal was born in Schaijk, Noord Brabant, the Netherlands. In 1994, she obtained, as a first-generation student, her M.A. in Theology from the Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen (since 2004 Radboud Universiteit) and her M.Div in pastoral-theological work from the Katholieke Theologische Universiteit Utrecht. She worked as lay-pastor in parishes with large migrant communities in Utrecht and Nijmegen. In 2004 she studied Latino Spirituality and Migration Theology with Virgilio Elizondo and Timothy Matovina at University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana. In 2006 she migrated with her husband and children to Baltimore, Maryland in the USA, where she continued working for the Roman Catholic church, developing faith formation programs for parishes in Baltimore City, Maryland. Since 2007, she also teaches theology courses as an affiliate professor at Loyola University in Maryland and Notre Dame of Maryland University. She teaches courses in World Christianity and Migration Theology, Introduction to Christian Ethics, Comparative Religious Ethics, and Biblical Spirituality. In 2014, she enrolled as a (part-time) PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen. Her pastoral work for the Northeast Catholic Community of Baltimore formed the context for her research. This collaboration of seven parishes in Northeast Baltimore recently experienced a large influx of immigrants, predominantly from Africa. For her PhD research she gathered and analyzed narratives from African migrants to the United States of America in order to gain a deeper theological understanding of their spiritual development. Two articles on the topic have been published in 2021: "Stories of Transformation: African Immigrants to the USA and the Dark Night of John of the Cross" and "A Forgotten Mission in African Catholicism? Migration Experiences from the African Catholic Diaspora in the United States." Presently, she serves as a teacher of religion for Calvert Hall College High School, a Christian Brothers' all-boys high school in Towson, Maryland.

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Marie-Isabel Kane

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Zwischen europäischer Harmonisierung und nationaler Kompetenzwahrung

Europa vollführt einen Balanceakt zwischen selektiver Öffnung und Schließung gegenüber Drittstaatsangehörigen. Die Flucht aus armen und konfliktreichen Ländern soll begrenzt werden. Im Wettbewerb um die klügsten Köpfe will die EU jedoch nicht verlieren. Zur Erreichung beider Ziele pocht vor allem die Kommission auf europäische Geschlossenheit. Sie erntet dafür keine ungeteilte Zustimmung, berührt ihre Forderung immerhin einen Kernbereich nationalstaatlicher Souveränität. Trotzdem wagte die EU erste Schritte zur Regelung der Migration von hochqualifizierten Drittstaatsangehörigen. Schlug sie damit den Weg zu einer europäischen Arbeitsmigrationspolitik ein?

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