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Migration, diaspora and return

Citation for published version:

Chow, A 2018, 'Migration, diaspora and return', *Studies in World Christianity*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 1-3.
<https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2018.0201>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.3366/swc.2018.0201](https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2018.0201)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Studies in World Christianity

Publisher Rights Statement:

'This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Edinburgh University Press in Studies in World Christianity. The Version of Record is available online at:
<http://www.eupublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/swc.2018.0201>

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Editorial: Migration, Diaspora and Return

Alexander Chow

Migration has featured as a major topic in contemporary social and political discourse. In Europe and North America, where many have lamented the decline of the church, much of this migration includes the waves of vibrant expressions of Christianity coming from peoples with origins in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Of course, the connection between the development of Christianity and the movement of people is nothing new. The book of Acts, for instance, narrates the early church's trajectory from Jerusalem as the centre of Judaism to Rome as the centre of the Gentile world – the earliest 'gravitational shift' of Christianity. Luke describes the Day of Pentecost as the moment when the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers, who were 'devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem' (Acts 2:5, NRSV). These were Jewish believers from the diaspora who had returned and were then living in Jerusalem.

Much of Christian history is a story of the multidirectional movement of the faithful dispersed into new lands and returning to old lands. Continuing this theme, the four main articles in this issue were originally delivered at the 2017 meeting of the Yale-Edinburgh Group on the history of the missionary movement and world Christianity, held at Yale Divinity School from 29 June to 1 July 2017. The theme of the conference was 'Migration, Exile, and Pilgrimage in the History of Missions and World Christianity'. These papers narrate a story of Christianity as a worldwide phenomenon developed, negotiated and reconfigured through migration, diaspora and return.

The lead article to this issue brings light to an important yet understudied aspect of world Christianity: the Russian Orthodox diaspora. Ciprian Burlacioiu focuses on this diaspora to explore the various trajectories of migration by Russian Orthodox Christians after the 1917

October Revolution. In Western Europe, the Russian Orthodox diaspora raised challenges related to overlapping canonical jurisdictions and the need for new centres of theological training in Paris and Oxford. In North America, we are told of multiple layers of Orthodox migrants, from the legacy of earlier Russian migration from the 18th and 19th centuries to the Greek Orthodox diaspora in the 20th century. Burlacioiu's paper offers great nuance to the simplistic centre–diaspora binary by telling the fascinating story of how Russian Orthodoxy has become a global religion.

Like the lead article, the next two articles challenge much of 19th and 20th century historiography about Christianity which focuses on those from Western European origins. Abraham Nana Opere Kwakye speaks about the history of the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society in the Gold Coast, known as the 'Whiteman's grave' due to the number of European missionaries who died in the region. However, the success of the Basel Mission was found in Caribbean Christians who were recruited from the African diaspora as 'returning Josephs'. In the third article, Tim Geysbeek recalls another African, Tom Coffee, an ethnic Kru from Liberia. Coffee was instrumental in the establishment of one of the largest mission organisations in Africa, the Soudan Interior Mission (SIM). As such, these two articles offer snapshots of how the agency of those with African origins were so necessary for the work of foreign missionaries in the African continent.

In our final article, Retief Müller turns our attention to Afrikaner missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. Its focus is on Boer soldiers of the Anglo-Boer War who became prisoners of war and exiled into various island prisons. After the war, these former POWs would be recruited as missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church and sent into the mission field, which Müller vividly describes as 'a site of self-imposed, yet sacred exile'. These four main articles offer cases studies of the multidirectional movement of Christianity, of diaspora and return – or, in the case of the Afrikaner missionaries, of diaspora and return and diaspora.

Two notices about ‘migration’ need to be made at this juncture, related to *Studies in World Christianity* and the Centre for the Study of World Christianity in the University of Edinburgh. Included in this issue is a piece written by Brian Stanley as a tribute to the life and the contributions of T. Jack Thompson, who sadly passed away on 10 August 2017. Jack was both a former associate editor of the Journal and a former director of the Centre. His own life included movements from Ireland to Malawi and eventually to Scotland – a lifelong experience which shaped his understanding and scholarship in the history of world Christianity. In a second note, we are delighted to announce that, since January 2018, Emma Wild-Wood has returned to her alma mater to take up a post as a Senior Lecturer in the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. Not only is she making an invaluable contribution to the School and the Centre for the Study of World Christianity, Emma has joined myself as an Editor of *Studies in World Christianity*. As such, we hope that the Journal (as well as the Centre) will continue for many years to be an important forum for scholarship around the many facets of the multidirectional movements of Christianity as a worldwide religion.