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“Conquering New Territory for Jesus?”

The Transience and Local Presence of African Pentecostal Migrants in Morocco¹

Johara Berriane

Introduction

Access to mobility has become increasingly unequal. Apart from preventing people from moving (Carling 2002), changes in international border controls and restrictive immigration policies contribute to “fragmenting the journeys” of individuals who then become trapped in transit countries (Collyer 2007) at the outer borders of traditional receiving regions such as Europe and North America. This has been the case for many West and Central African migrants heading for Europe who, due to the increased hardening of the EU’s external borders (Vacchiano 2013), have been blocked in Morocco since the end of the 1990s. Whereas some have decided to settle there permanently (Mourji et al. 2016; Madrisotti 2018), integrating themselves into specific niches of the urban economy since the end of the 1990s (Kettani and Péraldi 2011), others still see their stay in Morocco as a stepping-stone on their journey, even though this stay may turn out to be permanent (Berriane 2018). Despite their comparatively small number, African migrant communities are becoming more visible in the urban space and presenting local society with novel cultural and social practices.²

One of the fields in which this new presence is observable is Morocco’s Christianity. Following independence in 1956, the Christian churches built during colonial times served only a very limited number of European worshippers, with Christianity primarily perceived as the religion of the French and Spanish colonizers (Baida and Féroldi 1995). With the arrival first of sub-Saharan African Christian migrants, these mainline churches were not only reactivated but also found themselves in competition with semiprivate churches founded by migrants

in working-class districts of the main cities (Coyault 2014; Bava 2016). These latter religious spaces belong primarily to the Pentecostal Charismatic movement, a form of Christianity characterized by its “missionary aim [with] explicitly global aspiration” (Vásquez and Knott 2014: 344) “in which believers receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and have ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing and prophesying” (Robbins 2004: 117). They are mainly founded and used by migrants from countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Cameroon, and Ivory Coast, and are all located in semiprivate spaces. Their members call them house churches or ministries.³

The establishment and spatial expansion of these Christian places have contributed to the pluralization of Morocco’s religious landscape and local society’s confrontation with new religious forms and practices. Notwithstanding the existence of Moroccan Christians, who have become more vocal via online channels and virtual social networks, Christianity is still seen as the religion of foreigners. The Moroccan state recognizes the mainline Catholic and Protestant churches inherited from the colonial era as places of worship for foreigners and controls and monitors them. Apart from the small minority of Moroccan Jews, who are recognized and protected, Moroccan citizens are officially Muslim, with Sunni Islam the state religion by constitution. Moroccan law does not allow Moroccan Muslims to convert, condemning Shia Islam and combating Christian proselytism. Within the Muslim sphere, the state is increasingly attempting to control the entire religious debate by prohibiting and co-opting every dissident religious voice, particularly those emerging from radical forms of Salafi Islam (Zeghal 2005: 244). At the same time, the state promotes a Moroccan Islam based on Sufi culture and tolerance in order to project an image of Morocco as a moderate Islamic country (Berriane 2016).

This chapter explores how, in this “urban spatial regime” (Vásquez and Dewind 2014: 258) shaped by control of any divergent religious expression and recent migratory changes, African Christian migrants are able to establish places of worship at Morocco’s urban margins. It focuses on the local effects of this religious presence and placemaking and considers how such spaces and the religious practices they involve enable their congregants to build a safe and supportive space and develop new or existing identities (Baker 2013), and how the missionary dimension of Pentecostal movements translates into this context where Christian mission is prohibited. The chapter shows that the Pentecostal house churches are mainly shaped by their members’ transience and aspiration to move on, while at the same time the religious practices and theology involved allow the congregants to reevaluate their stay in Morocco and to become locally

present. The first section describes how Morocco’s migratory context impacts on migrants’ transient belonging in the Pentecostal house churches. The second section explores how these ritual spaces and the Pentecostal theologies that they mobilize help the migrants to reevaluate their failed migration and forge new identities while they are unable to move on from Morocco. The third and final part discusses how these migrant congregations and their leaders negotiate their local presence in a Moroccan society in which religious and cultural pluralism have only recently reemerged.

This chapter is based on ethnographic research at five different house churches—two founded by migrants from DRC and three by migrants from Ivory Coast—founded between 2010 and 2015 in Rabat (two), Casablanca (two), and Salé (one), which I visited regularly over four periods of fieldwork: during October 2015–January 2016, June 2016, October 2016, and September–November 2017.⁴

Spaces of Transient Belonging at Europe’s Southern Frontier

It is 10.30 am. I meet Pastor Paul in front of the vegetable market. His church is in one of the narrow streets of small shops and workshops in a poor neighbourhood in the eastern part of Rabat. After a few minutes’ walk we enter in the courtyard of a house, and Pastor Paul rings a bell next to the ground floor entrance. A woman opens the door and brings us in; she is, I learn later, in charge of protocol. We arrive in the garage of the house. It is fitted with a red carpet and a red curtain covers the front wall. White plastic chairs are arranged in rows in front of a small platform where a transparent desk serves as an altar. The woman of the protocol invites me to sit in the front row. Two big armchairs upholstered in turquoise and gold fabric have been placed to the right of the altar. On the other side, three young men are testing their instruments—a drum set, a djembe and an electric organ—and microphones. The moderator is on the stage, calling loudly to the Lord as she walks around the stage. Another woman is walking back and forth at the back of the room, praying aloud. It is 10:30 and there are only five congregants there, but the moderator asks the three men to start singing, regularly interrupting their songs with her prayers. The room slowly fills with people, and by 11.30 there are 40 people in the church. Pastor Paul, who had disappeared when we arrived, enters and starts his sermon. (Fieldnotes, Rabat, 15.11. 2015)

This Sunday service could have been anywhere in the world where DRC Congolese have settled and created a religious space. However, unlike other Congolese transnational “religious territories” (Garbin 2014: 365), this church

is the outcome not of a planned permanent settlement but of the involuntary immobility of its founders. It is one of the many Pentecostal churches founded by African Christian migrants when the country became a site for the implementation of Europe's border policy. Whereas the Moroccan state at first refused to cooperate with the EU on migration, since the early 2000s, in exchange for privileged partnership with the EU the country has implemented certain operational, administrative, and legal adjustments and passed a new law (law 02-03) in 2003, to address undocumented migration, increasing the power of the military and the police to tackle those whose stay had suddenly become illegal (Perrin 2009: 248). These measures, among others, have led to the more permanent settlement of African migrants who redeployed from the Moroccan north region to the country's main cities such as Rabat or Casablanca.

During this period, the first Pentecostal Charismatic church in Rabat was founded by DRC migrants who, after many attempts to cross the fences separating Morocco from the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla, settled in the city, where they hoped to be less exposed to police control (interview 24, DRC, male, Rabat, 24.10.2017). In 2005, this church was replaced by another in the same district (interview 24, DRC, male, Rabat, 24.10.2017). These first churches essentially operated as places that offered both somewhere to live and spiritual and social support for stranded migrants. At this time, these Charismatic Christian churches were regarded by the state as migrant-smuggling organizations, which resulted in numerous police inspections and the expulsion of migrants, as a former church leader recalled (interview 12, DRC, male, Rabat, 13.01.2016). However, when these first churches disappeared, new ones took their place, and ten years later a survey found around thirty churches representing different Christian faiths where primarily DRC and Republic of Congo Congolese, Nigerian, Ivorian, and Cameroonian migrants gather (Coyault 2014: 19–20). They begin with a few people meeting in a living room, who then move on to rent a place entirely dedicated to church activities and decorated to emphasize its distinctiveness. These places of worship are situated in districts where African migrants have settled more or less permanently over the last twenty-five years. In Rabat, former migrants also run hostels, typically referred to as “foyers,” in the same districts where transiting migrants stay until they are able to continue their journey (Timéra 2009: 182).⁵ In the last five years, African migrants have also started to move to the outskirts of Rabat and the neighboring city of Salé, where they have also created spaces for worship.

This spatial expansion of the Christian landscape at Morocco's urban margins is probably also an outcome of the more stable settling of the African

migrant population in Morocco's main cities, favored by a new shift in national migration policy. In late 2013, the Moroccan state launched a migration policy which gave around 50,000 immigrants, primarily from African countries and Syria, residency and access to public health care, education, and the formal job market. These measures were implemented to demonstrate Morocco's respect for human rights to the African states that have become relevant to its economic and political interests, and are simultaneously an outcome of Moroccan-EU cooperation.

Whereas the legal and political situation of many African migrants in Morocco has recently changed, the house churches are still mainly shaped by people on the move.⁶ Today, the congregations are migrants for whom Morocco was the main destination, and others who initially came to emigrate to Europe and have been able to gain residency and make an income in Morocco or are still waiting for an opportunity to continue to Europe. However, although the worshippers' migration and life projects have become more diversified, most still share the aspiration to move northwards, despite the possibility that they will never realize this. The lack of job opportunities in Morocco, which also causes many Moroccan citizens to aspire to emigrate, influences the transience of the church's membership as well as the supportive role of the congregations. There is a small number of economic niches where African migrants can find employment, such as international call centers for those who have at least completed high school, housekeeping, construction, and trading (Kettani and Péraldi 2011; Madrisotti 2018). With access to residency, many engage in trade between Morocco and sub-Saharan cities. However, the majority are still unemployed. Only twelve of the seventy-eight members of a church I visited in Rabat were employed, with two working at an international call center, one as an NGO animator, and nine as housekeepers for Moroccan families (interview 23, Ivorian, male, Rabat, 26.10.2017). The others are still reliant on funds sent by their families and the solidarity of Morocco's migrant churches. For example, an Ivorian lady who arrived in Marrakech in early 2017 to work as a housekeeper found refuge in an Ivorian church in Salé, where I met her in November 2017, after her employer discovered that she was pregnant and terminated her employment. Pastor Paul recalled several times when African migrants stranded in Rabat had sought his help. The small church office is furnished with a thin mattress that is occasionally used by stranded migrants (interview 17, DRC, male, Rabat, 20.10.2016).

My informants among the church leaders often insisted that the size of their congregation changes consistently according to the migration flow and opportunities for their members to cross the border. Church leaders face “a

rotation of people” (interview 26, Ivorian, male, Rabat, 26.10.2017). Even though emigration to Europe has become more difficult and the borders are now controlled more tightly, some are still able to move on via a longer or more dangerous route (Vacchiano 2013). There are regular assaults on migrants at the fences separating Morocco from the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta during which some manage to get into Spain while others are injured or lose their lives (interview 24, DRC, male, Rabat, 31.10.2017). Some congregants, as well as other African migrants and Moroccans with financial means, fly to Istanbul and then take the Balkan route to Western Europe, a path that has also become a way into Europe, especially during the so-called refugee crises of summer 2015 (interview 19, DRC, male, Rabat, 26.10.2016). In his 2014 investigation, Coyault (2014: 92) found that every house church has a person called (in French) a *connexion* who is responsible for connecting migrants with the networks of smugglers who organize emigration to Europe. The church leaders I interviewed, however, tended to deny that they had a direct role in their members’ emigration and insisted rather on their spiritual support for their journey. For example, one part of Pastor Jerome’s work is sending Bible passages to members of his congregation who have left “to help them succeed in their journey to Europe” (interview 19, DRC, male, Rabat, 26.10.2016).

This transience affects the house churches’ financial situation as they cannot rely on regular tithes from their members. However, the departure and successful emigration of church members can play a crucial role in their churches’ existence. For example, Pastor Paul was able to make contact with a Pentecostal church based in the United States and run by a Nigerian pastor with the help of his Congolese mentor, who entrusted the church to him prior to leaving for France. Today, Paul’s church is financially supported by the church in the United States and has become its North African branch. In May 2016, the Nigerian supporter based in the United States traveled to Morocco to organize a five-day seminar on leadership and to consecrate Paul as a reverend. Paul also emphasized the importance of church members’ emigration for the maintenance of his church, not only as a place but also as a transnational network:

The members rotate because new people arrive and others leave; there are those who are passing and want to continue to Europe and others who are here. If worshippers (*fidèles*) leave, they are going to Europe, they can send us 50 Euro or 10 Euro [. . .] there are worshippers who leave and we stay in touch, and there are others [who have left and] don’t even call, but there are others who are loyal, it’s already family, so they leave [and call to say] “I arrived well, I am fine,

but if I find a job, if God blesses me, I will send you something for the church.”

(Interview 2, DRC, male, Rabat 19.10.2015)

Apart from former church members' financial support, the departure of congregants enables church members to connect with Christian communities in their European and North American destinations. As I show elsewhere, these transnational ties are consolidated through the circulation of Pentecostal preachers from Europe and Africa (Berriane 2020). The transient membership of these churches is further influenced by the fact that for most of the church leaders, the establishment of parishes in Morocco is seen as only a stage in their journey that will lead on to other places, preferably in Europe. Nine of the seventeen leaders still intend to move northward. Finally, the temporal membership is also the result of church members and leaders who, when they find permanent work in Morocco, usually withdraw from church activities. This was the case for Theodore, who had been an evangelist at a Congolese church in Rabat's J5 district. After finding work at an international call center, getting married, and becoming a father, he completely withdrew from his church (interview 16, DRC, male, Tamesna, 30.06.2016).

The house churches are therefore still spaces for mooring and solidarity for migrant populations on the move or in a transitory life phase which, while it can last a few years, is rarely permanent. Although some church leaders and members are able to secure a steady income, these churches are forged by their members' temporary presence rather than by their permanence. When members move on, the spaces for worship that they initially founded are used and shaped by newcomers, who later entrust them to new Christian immigrants before withdrawing themselves. These religious spaces therefore offer resources (Timéra 2009) for migrant populations who, like many northbound migrants in Morocco, cannot rely on strong social networks. Although there were already some small African migrant communities and networks before the arrival of “transit migrants” in Morocco (Timéra 2009), scholars have demonstrated that most African migrants rely solely on the “transient social ties” (Schapendonk 2012: 36) that they build during their journey across North Africa. Such ties function as bridges in their process of migration but are changeable in the dynamic context of migration trajectories (Schapendonk 2012: 36). Informed by logics of itinerancy, these associational forms are ephemeral: moments of social engagement may be immediately followed by the individual migrant's withdrawal to pursue his or her route and project alone (Escoffier 2008; Alioua 2009). Even though the migratory pattern of church members has been changing

recently, the house churches can be seen as an outcome of these “circumstantial solidarities” (Bredeloup 2013a). They are primarily mooring spaces for migrants who need spiritual support and social relations in moments of in-between, and the temporal membership and transnational connections that members create contribute to their maintenance. This transient and temporal dimension also reverberates in the religious practices that primarily shape the temporal association of people with similar migratory aspirations.

Becoming and Deliverance in the Migrant House Churches

Whereas the Pentecostal house churches in Morocco are created by and for African migrants in transitory space-time and offer a social network and circumstantial solidarities, religious practices in these spaces also have a performative and transformative function for the worshippers, many of whom see their emigration as a means of emancipation from their former life. The trans-Saharan journey of many African migrants, and the migration of young Africans in general, has been analyzed as a means of emancipation, breaking away from family obligations and duties to engage in a new life of adventure and freedom, becoming “actors in stories of their own making” (Bredeloup 2013b). As this section will show, this notion of liberation from the past and of personal fulfillment also is evident in both the Pentecostal migrant house churches’ theology and religious practices and the religious reinterpretation of the migrants’ stay and struggle in Morocco.

For those who cannot move on or who feel blocked, the Pentecostal migrant churches, like other religious spaces in other settings, are safe, supportive spaces where they can build a sense of home, identity, and belonging (Sheringham and Wilkins 2018) sheltered by the “emotionally nurturing benefits” (Baker 2013) of their church membership. Members’ individual involvement can lead to their acquiring important roles. The churches are generally highly hierarchical with mainly male leaders holding most of the authority, although women in particular use the church to compensate for their limited social life in Morocco and are involved in different areas of its organization.⁷ It was striking to see how despite or maybe because of their unofficial status the organization of these religious spaces includes several departments including music, deliverance,⁸ social action, women, youth, protocol, and evangelization, offering many functions and roles to their members, who are all expected to participate in the congregation’s

formation and prosperity. As I show elsewhere, this social engagement may be coupled with bureaucratic activity and serves to develop a sense of belonging and religious citizenship among church members (Berriane, forthcoming).

Besides the social and emotional dimension of religious involvement, the Moroccan stay can also be transformative for church members and leaders. The role of conversion and baptism as a ritual of rupture and a complete break from the personal and collective past (Meyer 1998) is particularly relevant in this setting. Due to Pentecostal Christians' belief that anyone inspired by Spirit can found or run a church regardless of educational qualifications (Robbins 2004: 124), the house churches are spaces of engagement for people who feel the need or are inspired to give their stay in Morocco a religious meaning. The leading or founding of a church has become a mechanism through which many church leaders manage to settle and live in Morocco. The church leaders I interviewed tended to emphasize the religious aim of their migration and their function as pastor, apostle, or evangelist as a spiritual gift or divine grace they have received. However, most had received the revelation that they should found a ministry or lead a church during their journey to or stay in Morocco. Pastor Paul, whose initial plan was to seek a life in Europe and who had twice failed to cross the Morocco-Spain border, had not been a pastor or religiously involved before his emigration. In Rabat, he had stayed with a Congolese pastor who, before leaving Morocco for France, ordained him as a pastor (interview 2, DRC, male, Rabat, 19.10.2015). Their forced immobility in Morocco pushed other spiritually inspired Christian migrants to give a new meaning to their stay by founding churches to spread the word of Jesus (interview 10, male, Rabat, DRC, 18.12.2015) and "bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to life in this country where the Gospel was dead" (interview 2, DRC, male, Rabat, 24.10.2014). Some pastors expressed the desire to gather the souls of Moroccans, but they were all aware that the law does not allow them convert locals. Their evangelist activities are therefore mainly directed toward African migrants, usually from their own country and rarely with a Muslim background, but who, according to church leaders, have "never heard about Jesus before" (interview 26, Ivorian, male, Rabat, 26.01.2017) and who are converted and baptized in Morocco.

This proselytizing and conversion activity is also understood as part of the church leaders' "deliverance" work. The belief in deliverance was very widespread among my informants. Many understand their struggle in Morocco and especially their forced immobility as the result of occult forces that somebody, usually a family member, brings about via animist religious practices, sometimes also called witchcraft (interview 3, Ivorian, female, Casablanca, 22.11.2015).

According to the Ivorian congregant Simon, who had attempted to cross the fences around the Spanish enclave Ceuta three times, he was stuck in Morocco mainly due to his family's adherence to traditional African religion. In his eyes, the need for a "ministry of deliverance for Africans" is particularly great: "We can't pray with the white people because unlike us, they don't have to fight against this legacy: their ancestors were already Christians, not like ours" (interview 29, Ivorian, male, Rabat, 29.11.2017). Another Ivorian church requests new members to complete a questionnaire, called *fiche de cure d'âme* (sheet for the cure of the soul), in which they must state, among other things, whether their parents were fetishists, made sacrifices, and/or had moral diseases. Filling in this form is understood as the first step toward deliverance from blocks experienced in life and during migration (interview 20, Ivorian, female, Casablanca, 1.10.17). These practices refer to the widespread Pentecostal belief that the struggles the believer encounters are the result of not only one's own past and current actions but also one's ancestral past: sins committed by parents and grandparents (Meyer 1998: 323). From this perspective, emigration to Europe can therefore only be realized if the worshipper can break this curse and be delivered from the spiritual blocks to their emigration (see also Van Dijk 2002).

Religious worship also tends to focus on migrants' emigration aspirations and struggles. Sermons particularly address mobility, the restriction of which is understood as a spiritual test that must be passed. The Sunday services I attended in Congolese and Ivorian migrant churches had same time sequences: praising through hymns, worship through collective and individual prayer, the sermon, the testimonies, the offerings, and the announcement of the week's activities. The prayers and hymns sung at services represent a religious space-time that highlights the participants' shared waiting and suffering and calls for strength. In the Ivorian churches, dancing was encouraged during the hymns of praise to welcome and celebrate God's presence, as it also was at a service I attended in a small Ivorian church in Salé:

Twenty worshippers gather this morning in this living room, among whom twelve are women. The service, as in other Ivorian churches, is composed of three phases: first the worshippers are encouraged to pray and dance to glorify God, purify the space and liberate it from the presence of the enemy, Satan. In the second phase, worshippers are encouraged to speak out in public and share their testimony. Three worshippers express their feeling of God's presence in their lives and how it makes them feel empowered and strengthened. One tells how he has the feeling that God is with him and loves him and gives him joy. Others recall specific events that have happened to them that they see as God's

action: one woman tells the assembly how she was able to find a place to live in Rabat that she can afford; a young man recounts how he has been hired by an international call centre, even though he did not work very well during the probationary phase. Another woman tells about a near miss in her car that was a sign of God's presence in her life. After these testimonies the worshippers dance and pray aloud, asking the Lord to take the floor and take control of the sermon and inviting the preacher to speak. The preacher is Tina, a young woman who is wearing a Moroccan caftan; she asks her followers to open their Bibles (some have books, others follow on their smartphones) and read Genesis 26, verses 12–25. Today's sermon is about Isaac, who had to abandon his home and his well and start life in a new place. He is presented as a model to follow. The preacher exhorts the congregation to "be strong: the fact that you're facing difficult times does not mean that God has abandoned you. Even though God is silent, He is here and looking to see if you are coming to Him." She continues: "Probably you ask yourself 'Will I be able to go home with something in my hands? Will people one day talk about me? Am I going to be in Canada or the US one day?' But don't be in a hurry, because unlike you, Isaac didn't have the Holy Spirit to console him, he didn't have the Bible to comfort him. God will bless you, but you must be patient and pray, you have to pray for God's consolation." Later Tina recalls Job, "who lost everything and later received double," and says to her congregation "Your actual situation is not your final situation because here we are not at home, we are at the front; we don't have family here, so don't lose your zeal for coming to church and don't lose heart, because God is with you." (Fieldnotes, Salé, 26.11.2017)

Emigration to Europe or North America was one of the main topics of the sermons I attended, with the preachers typically advising the congregation to pray and fast regularly and to maintain their belief in the force of the Holy Spirit and the Bible, which would help them to achieve their goals. Migration is therefore positively valued, with Isaac seen as a model to follow to achieve the social and economic capital that the congregants aspire to. The sermons and public prayers all addressed finding a job, housing, and financial means in Morocco, and hopes of a Western Union cash transfer arriving soon. At the same time, the struggles encountered in Morocco are understood as a spiritual test to overcome. At every sermon I attended, the church leaders constantly referred to following the model of Job, who, although he lost everything else, never lost his belief in God. This account suggests that the house church members' difficulties were a test from God, who has allowed the Devil to act in their lives as he did with Job. The testimonies at the gatherings were also important as they functioned to strengthen members' Christian faith. Describing God's work in their lives is a

further means of translating and mediating God's presence and blessing in the congregation (interview 16, DRC, male, 30.06.2016).

This "sensational" (Meyer 2009) collective worship enables the congregants to experience a transformation. Collective worship involves "embodied performances" (Vásquez and Knott 2014) with a formative function for the believers. A female member of Pastor Paul's house church compared her experience of the divine in her church to that of the Protestant mainline church:

Here it's not difficult to keep up with the service. The worship service is different: here it's more eventful, and in the Protestant church there's the liturgy, it's ta-ta ta-ta when you have to sing, then everybody has to be quiet and when you have to pray it's only one person who gets up—that's the difference. Apart from that, the prayers especially are similar to our prayers [and] there are some things that are a little soft with the Protestants. I mean the pastors of the local parishes are usually cold; when the pastor is cold you feel this coldness in the church. If the pastor is hot you also feel it and you see the difference. Here we are in a revival church, it is this revival that you feel, you feel God's Spirit moving among the assembly: that's Jesus' will. (Interview 5, Republic Congo, female, Rabat, 13.12.2015)

The notion of movement is prevalent here. Although it takes place in another realm, the forced geographical immobility that many church members are experiencing seems to be replaced here by a religiously experienced mobility enabled by the powerful energy or "heat" generated by the religious worship. Besides the more spontaneous and energetic religious worship in the Pentecostal church, the worshippers' "sensory engagement with the divine" (Meyer 2009: 13) has a performative and transformative effect. The dancing, singing, and loud praises evoke a sacralization of the space-time of the worship that enables a religious presence and the congregation's local participation. This production of sacred spaces goes beyond the confined space of the house church, as the following section will show.

Local Encounters in the Moroccan City

As mentioned, Christianity in Morocco is mainly understood as the religion of foreigners. Morocco's policy toward Christianity, such as the migration policy launched in 2014, is primarily linked to the country's foreign interests and the kingdom's attempt to appear to the world as a tolerant and welcoming country that protects the rights of foreigners. However, while Morocco recognizes the

existence of foreign Christians in the country, it does not recognize the newly established Pentecostal migrant house churches.⁹ From early 2000 to 2014, these churches were regularly subjected to police raids, with undocumented members deported across the Moroccan-Algerian border (interview 27, DRC, male, Rabat, 31.10.2017). Today, due to changes in the migration policy and many congregants’ access to a residency permit, expulsions are no longer witnessed. However, the churches’ location in residential neighborhoods and the loud prayers and singing during services cause conflict with neighbors, which must be managed. Local authorities have to find a balance between protecting immigrants’ religious rights, addressing the complaints of house churches’ neighbors, and keeping the Christian religious groups’ out of the public eye and preventing them proselytizing. These religious communities are therefore primarily seen as belonging to the officially recognized churches established during the colonial era, such as the Catholic Church and the *Eglise Evangélique au Maroc*, which the Moroccan authorities frequently ask to intervene and persuade their “followers” to stop disturbing their neighbors.¹⁰

The imposed invisibility and confinement is particularly problematic for Pentecostal churches, whose prosperity and success depend on their capacity to conquer and occupy space (De Witte 2008). As it will be demonstrated now, migrant churches participate in the local soundscape, and their leaders engage in social activism to circumvent their church’s imposed public invisibility and spatial confinement. These strategies have evolved remarkably during the last ten years in the new migratory context.

First, the use of sound and music during services despite the disturbance and conflict this produces can be understood as a means of expanding the church’s influence beyond its confined and invisible place of worship and asserting its existence in the neighborhood. On a Sunday afternoon in late October 2016, the Congolese evangelist Jerome invited me to attend a religious gathering. It was the last session of a three-day seminar that he had organized. When I arrived in the street where the church stands, I could already hear the drum and electric bass guitar and hymns being sung in Lingala.¹¹ Whereas there was no visible indication of the existence of a church in the street—a common feature of all the migrant churches I visited—the music and loud praising of God clearly suggested that a religious meeting was taking place. During the service, the moderators and preachers explicitly encouraged dancing and loud prayers to chase out evil and prepare for the divine presence (Fieldnotes, Casablanca, 1.10.2017), suggesting that these corporeal sound practices were also a means to sacralize the space beyond the walls of the room where worship was taking place.

The Pentecostal Charismatic movement's constant need to conquer and occupy space is expressed here as sound practices that "transgress spatial boundaries and mediate between public and private, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility" (De Witte 2008: 692). This temporal expansion of the religious space is a means of affecting local spaces through sound and participating in Morocco's "audible city" (De Witte 2008): it seems to provide a way for Pentecostal migrant churches to announce their presence.

Paradoxically, the conflict caused by this audible presence can also be understood as a way for Christian migrants to participate locally and claim their right to the city. Their audible "presence making" (Larkin 2014) has become even more pervasive since 2014. Although their sound practices led to conflict and local police summoning the church leaders, after stopping for a few weeks, the churches were usually able to resume their activities. Since the change in the country's migration policy, church leaders have become more confident, aware of the legal protection that, according to Roger, regularized migrants have since been enjoying:

Since 2014 things have changed, many things have changed. The persecution and the pressure of the neighbors has decreased considerably because of the regularization operation that the King has launched. It has created more peace—when the King launched the operation he created a climate of rapprochement and it has changed the mentality of the population. Moroccans have understood that the King is trying to get closer and they tell themselves that now [the migrants] have their residency. Before they didn't have it so they could depend on that, but now they have residency that means that if [a migrant] is right he can even make complaints against us: now the game has changed. (Interview 26, Ivorian male, Rabat, 26.10.2017)

The fact that the house churches do not have permission to exist as a church could be used to prohibit their activity, but the Moroccan authorities evoke other, more secular arguments to manage the issue such as "disturbance produced on Sunday morning when the neighbours want to have a rest" or Morocco's prohibition of gatherings of more than ten people without permission (interview 2, DRC, male, Rabat, 19.10.2015). For example, the governor of the city asked a church leader facing resistance from the inhabitants of a social housing estate of Salé, where he had established his first church, to enter into a dialogue with his neighbors "to explain the importance of the church to them directly" (interview 2, DRC, male, Rabat, 19.10.2015). The fact that the authorities do not base their argument on religion when banning congregations gathering in private echoes

the requirement to protect minorities’ religious rights. It can be seen as a sign of a certain respect for Christians and other “people of the Book” in the national context, where religion plays an important political and social role. At the same time, we can assume that the conflicts involved—although they have led to temporary banning of worship—have been a way for the churches to become locally visible and to claim their right to exist.

Finally, church leaders also gain publicity via their role as social activists. Under its new migration policy, the Moroccan state and national civil society have to manage the integration of new established migrant communities and need interlocutors for these groups. Among these, African church leaders have become important partners due to their active involvement in the social and political mobilization of migrants that has made the migration issue in Morocco more visible both locally and internationally.¹² Church leaders have started to found associations and therefore become more public. Of the church leaders I interviewed, four had decided to found a local association, and the others told me that they intended to adopt a similar approach. Although such associations are primarily founded to gain legal status and permission to organize gatherings, they are more than a mere facade for church activities: they are a means of making their charitable and cultural dimension public through the churches’ organization of sports activities and concerts.

With the new migration policy, the humanitarian market and services for regularized migrants have increasingly developed in Morocco, and many Moroccan and international organizations and public agencies are involved in the field today offering traineeships, microcredit, and other services to migrants. Through their association with these organizations, the church leaders have become important interlocutors for them, enabling them to organize food distribution, donations of clothing, and information sessions on health and legal issues. Moroccan associations and local authorities even seem to favor working with church leaders, as I observed during a meeting organized by the Congolese pastor Louis’s association to inform African migrants about their rights and access to employment. The Moroccan co-organizers, from the Moroccan Human Rights Council (CNDH) and the public employment agency, insisted to me that due to Louis’s religious authority he would “make a better work.” (interview with members of the national human rights council CNDH, Mohammedia, 25.11.2017). The integration narrative was also incorporated by the church leaders and recurred frequently in the interviews, showing how church leaders were able to legitimize their religious activity in this mainly Muslim setting. The church leaders constantly insisted on their role “as spiritual guides guiding the

migrants” (interview 19, DRC, male, Rabat, 26.10. 2016), “to teach them how to have good relationships with their neighbors” (interview 3, Ivorian female, Casablanca, 22.11.2015), “to show them how to respect morality, [. . .] to respect the law and live in harmony” (interview 2, male, Rabat, DRC, 19.10.2015), and to become “good citizens” who “respect Moroccan norms, their religion, and work for good cohabitation” (interview 12, DRC, male, Rabat, 13.01.2016).

The local encounter that the churches create is therefore mainly shaped by the different actors involved adopting “techniques of inattention,” in the sense of “attending enough to know that one does not have to attend” (Larkin 2014: 1007). Although the Moroccan authorities are fully aware that house churches have no official status, the fact that their members do not try to make themselves publicly visible and/or evangelize to the local residents makes it unnecessary to pay too much attention to their activities. Although locals feel disturbed by the noise produced by churches in their neighborhoods, their complaints have no effect, and as a result, they attend less to this disturbance. Finally, the church members have developed strategies for ignoring their neighbors’ complaints since such complaints now threaten their safety and their church’s existence less, and continue to attempt to impose their religious practices and identity and their right to be. These techniques paradoxically enable the church leaders and migrant congregations to be locally more present and to participate—even though via conflict—in the Moroccan city.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the making of religious spaces and the engagement that unfolds within them has become a means for many spiritually inspired migrants including both house church leaders and worshippers to reevaluate their ruptured emigration to Europe and give new meaning to their period of stay in Morocco. The existence of Charismatic house churches is not only a mechanism for Christian African migrants to settle in Morocco and claim a local presence but also an outcome and means of circulation. Whereas the very existence of these religious spaces is linked to the blocks and ruptures that many West and Central African migrants experience during their journey toward Europe, their religious practices are forged by transience, circulation, and movement. This reveals perfectly how religious placemaking is both the outcome of the stabilization of a migrant group in one place and a significant supporter of circulation. The churches are places for migrants to not only become

locally grounded but also move on, although in this age of unequal access to mobility such movement is often temporally stopped, hindered, or redirected to other destinations. From this perspective, these religious places can be seen as “gateway nodes” (Vásquez and Knott 2014: 344) where Christian African Charismatics can live and temporarily ground themselves and also connect with transnational Pentecostal networks.

The church leaders’ relative success in maintaining their churches and becoming locally publicly present raises further questions about their actual and future impact on Morocco’s cities. Today, Morocco’s attempts to promote itself as an inclusive and tolerant country influence its management of the unofficial migrant house churches. However, the religious aim of the church gathering, even though it produces “noise,” is treated with more respect than before, leading to less attention from locals. This acceptance is, however, conditioned by the migrant churches’ public invisibility and the church leaders’ adoption of secular roles in public, shedding light on the intermingling and overlapping of secular and religious norms in this context in which religious pluralism has only recently reemerged.