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Inkulturation und ihre Relevanz für die Sozialarbeit mit AfrikanerInnen in Wien: Am Beispiel der afrikanischen katholischen Gemeinde.

by Julia Heneis. Europäische Hochschulschriften Reihe XXII Soziologie, Band 438. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010. Pp. 120. ISBN: 978-3-631-59961-7. €21.60

Lukas Pokorny

As of January 2014, 16.6% of the population of Austria was born in a foreign country. Among those 1,414,624 people, 43,784 were born in the African continent, roughly half of which come from sub-Saharan African countries. Half of those (excluding South Sudan), or ca. 10,400 people, live in Vienna. The black African community consists of individuals from more than 40 different countries, the majority of which stems from Nigeria (37.7%), Somalia (11.7%), and Ghana (8.3%) (cf. Statistik Austria 2014).¹ The national and ethnic diversity of the Vienna black African community is quite rich, as denoted by its pluralism of religious beliefs and affiliations, ranging from various traditional ethnic faiths (Akan, Odinari, Yoruba, etc.) to twentieth-century Protestant-based syncretic movements, such as the Celestial Church of Christ and the Redeemed Christian Church of God to Sunni Islam and the African Catholic Community (ACC)—just to name a few. The latter, with its large English language congregation, is at the core of Heneis' research.² Founded in 1987, the ACC serves as the major rallying point of African Catholics in Austria. The Sunday service and surrounding events of the English language congregation take place in the premises of the *Pfarrkirche Auferstehung Christi* (Resurrection of Christ Parish) at Siebenbrunnenfeldgasse 22-24, in Vienna's fifth district.³ The ACC is part

1 Evidently, second and third generation Afro-Europeans are not considered by this statistical overview.

2 Cf. <http://www.africancatholiccommunity.at/> (accessed: May 28, 2015).

3 The much smaller French language congregation (comprising around 1/5 of the English language congregation in terms of membership) meets in the *Pfarrkirche St. Canisius* (Saint Canisius Parish) at Pulverturmstraße 11, in the ninth district. Since April

of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Gemeinden aus Afrika und Asien* (ARGE AAG; Work Group of African and Asian Parishes),⁴ which itself is structurally integrated into the *Referat für Anderssprachige Gemeinden* (Department of Foreign Language Parishes) of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vienna, under the auspices of the auxiliary bishop Franz Scharl (b. 1958). The vast majority of the adherents of the English language congregation are Nigerians. That a significant number of Africans living in Vienna are asylum seekers is also reflected among ACC churchgoers. For example, 59 of the 151 questionnaire respondents in Heneis' survey are asylum seekers whereas, in comparison, 38 hold the Austrian citizenship. For many, it is the distinct socio-cultural environment as well as the level of socio-cultural intimacy, supplied by the ACC next to the assortment of religious offerings and ritual opportunities, that is given as a crucial reason for attending ACC events (p. 88). Accordingly, the ACC plays a pivotal role as a provider of pastoral and social care, creating a religio-cultural enclave and an emotional-sensual anchor point. This results to a closer involvement with the ACC that is important, in particular, to social workers, whether they hail from a religious or a secular background. Bearing this in mind, the book attempts to call attention to the ACC as a "resource for social work" (p. 15).

A former sister of the Catholic sisterhood *Caritas Socialis* (Social Charity), Julia Heneis (b. 1980) became an academically trained social worker in 2009, working today with the Salvation Army in Vienna. The book is an unrevised version of her diploma thesis carrying the same title (Heneis 2009), submitted in the field of Social Work (in Urban Areas) (*Sozialarbeit [im städtischen Raum]*) at the Vienna-based University of Applied Sciences FH Campus Wien. It is rather uncommon that publishers accept M.A. theses, let alone (largely) unrevised manuscripts, and even more so, without soliciting external peer reviewers. Peter Lang along with some other vanity presses is a well-known exception. This, however, shall not be a prejudgment of the present book.

To begin with, Heneis' research does merit publication, yet, as it stands, not in the form of a scholarly monograph but instead as a clearly well-crafted information brochure or work report. Much of the discussion as well as the empirical portions of the study fall too short. Heneis keeps dwelling on the surface, rarely delving into a more profound analytic assessment of her findings. Her theoretical and methodological engagement certainly has

2010, a few dozen believers form a separate Swahili language congregation within the Catholic community. The venue of their liturgy is the *Pfarrkirche St. Brigitta* (Saint Brigitta Parish) at Brigittaplatz 3, in the twentieth district.

⁴ Despite its name, the ARGE AAG also administers a Latin American parish, divided into a Spanish and a Portuguese language congregation.

some room for improvement in terms of scope, execution, and evaluation. But first things first: Heneis' key questions are threefold. Does the subject of 'inculturation' have any significance to social workers dealing with individuals of the black African community in Vienna? Will collaboration between social workers and a religious community (here, specifically, a Catholic congregation) prove fruitful for the social work with African clients? Does critically considering the religious context of African clients espousing a Catholic creed facilitate the social work? To answer these questions Heneis relies on qualitative (three expert interviews) and quantitative methods (158 validly completed questionnaires) expounded in the second part of the book (pp. 57-95). In the first part (pp. 21-56), she presents a brief theoretical outline and a terse overview of the institutional framework in which both social work and pertinent religious (i.e., Catholic) offerings are embedded. A first sub-section sparingly introduces the term 'migration' and, subsequently, adumbrates some (historical) features of sub-Saharan African migration to Europe and Austria, as well as Austria's migration politics at the time (2009). Next, different approaches and methods of social work involving migrants are touched upon—social casework, socio-pedagogical counselling, *Lebensweltorientierung*, social network care, and intercultural competence. Subsections 4 and 5 itemise a number of municipal (city of Vienna) and Christian (Protestant *Diakonie* and Roman Catholic *Caritas*) facilities and social offerings relevant to migrants. Subsection 7 elucidates various technical terms, with a focus on the concept of 'inculturation' alongside the notions of 'culture', 'intercultural', 'transculturality', 'acculturation', and 'enculturation'. Heneis draws the attention to the varying use of 'inculturation' among scholars and disciplines, defining it (inspired by the Swiss theologian Giancarlo Collet [b. 1945]) as to letting oneself get (*Sich einlassen*) into the dynamics of a different culture, searching for connecting points and proactively engaging in intercultural dialogue (p. 48). Such definition is also reminiscent of Aylward Shorter's classical definition of 'inculturation' as "the on-going dialogue of faith [i.e., the Christian message] and culture or cultures" (Shorter 1988: 11), yet without the explicitly religious connotation.⁵ Apart from what Heneis asserts (p. 46, 67), 'inculturation' was originally a theological neologism coined by the Belgian Jesuit missiologist Pierre Charles (1883–1954) in the early 1950s that slowly

⁵ Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) popularised the concept with his 1979 Apostolic exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*. In the 52nd paragraph of his 1990 Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* he gave a resonating definition of 'inculturation'—borrowing from the Final Report of the Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod in 1985—as "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures" (Ioannes Paulus PP. II 1990).

entered into the missiological jargon, most prominently, through the French theologian Joseph Masson (1962) and his American colleague G. Linwood Barney (1973). In her definition, Heneis departs from common missiological usage. Instead, she apparently understands ‘inculturation’ as the process carrying into effect intercultural competence. She clearly distinguishes the latter from a “theology of inculturation” (p. 97). Her terminological detour, important as it were, is not only limited in depth but also greatly isolated from the rest of the study. Readers might connect the loose ends on their own to the findings in the empirical part; from the theoretical perspective, however, Heneis leaves the readers in the dark. Ultimately, she gives a conclusion—“Intensified co-operation of interculturally competent organisations and the ACC may be rewarding for both parts. [...] Clients may benefit from such intensified co-operation”⁶—but without prior establishing a clear line of argumentation. Following these terminological reflections, subsection 8 sketches the divisions of the two host organisations of Vienna’s foreign language parishes as well as the mission of the Afro-Asian Institute Vienna (*Afro-Asiatisches Institut Wien*), a church foundation with the aim to foster intercultural and interreligious competence and dialogue.

In order to appreciate both sides of social work interaction, Heneis employs two methodological instruments. On the one hand, expert interviews intended to collect the views of social workers and of an ACC chaplain. On the other hand, a questionnaire survey with 158 individual respondents. For the qualitative interviews, Heneis addresses four major issues (p. 61), namely: (1) the problems Africans face; (2) what is needed by them; (3) if the interviewees desire any collaboration between social work and the respective church community; and (4) whether the concept of ‘inculturation’ is known and, if so, how it is put into practice. Although the three interviews conducted broach an array of topics, the extent of information gathered is effectively relatively modest. This is due to four reasons. Firstly, based on the sample interview included in the appendix (pp. 99-101), the interviews are too short, not allowing for specific issues to be covered in more detail. Secondly, the interview structure seems to have been too rigidly following a fixed set of questions. A semi-structured interview would have been a much better choice, enabling the interviewer to add follow-up questions and explore certain themes of interest further. Thirdly, the number of interviews is a) too low, in particular given the brevity of the standardised interviews, and b) hardly representative, especially in the case of the social workers. To recruit more interviewees—social workers and ACC staff—could not have

6 “Die verstärkte Zusammenarbeit von interkulturell kompetenten Organisationen und der ACC könnte für beide Seiten sehr bereichernd werden. [...] KlientInnen könnten von einer verstärkten Zusammenarbeit profitieren” (pp. 97-98).

been a major obstacle. Fourthly, the approach taken in phrasing some of the questions provides no incentive to give a more substantial response in return. For example, the central issue of the research revolves around the notion of 'inculturation'. However, one may not expect by a non-theologian to necessarily know such a rather distinct technical term (or by a theologian for that matter). To avoid incomprehension on the respondent's part, one must adjust the language. Taken all the aforementioned together, the themes summarised by Heneis in the assessment part offer little new information and are of only scarce significance regarding the three main research questions (see above). Even the section on the key topic of 'inculturation' remains comparatively limited.

The questionnaire survey reached a substantial segment of ACC followers, that is, 158 of some estimated 400-plus at the time. Heneis presents the assembled data in a number of charts. Additionally, explanatory remarks are included. 21 questions divided into five areas—(1) personal data; (2) where do you go when you need help and where do you get it; (3) questions around African Catholic Community; (4) living in Austria; and (5) what is needed to improve your stay in Austria—attempt to ascertain the social situation as well as the social care demands and offers received, respectively, of the respondents. The most frequently highlighted areas of required or lacking support fall into the categories of work, permit of residence/status, German language training, finances, and accommodation. Of the total number of the respondents, 68% (N=130) turn first to social workers or relevant facilities if difficulties arise and 32% to a chaplain, signifying the central role the ACC plays not only for spiritual but also social care in general among the Catholic black African community. More than 70% of the respondents (N=147) experience the ACC as helping in the process of integration into Austrian society. An even larger figure of 93.2% (N=147) favours a closer co-operation between (social work) advice centres and the ACC clergy.

The survey outcome underscores the meaningful position of ACC (or institutionalised and thus externally approachable religion in general) as the intersection point of external social work provider and receiver. It is a plea that professional social work must therefore not underestimate but dynamically utilise the ample contribution such organisations make to improve the socio-cultural, emotional, and spiritual well-being of their members. In many ways, social work and church-related pastoral engagement overlap and thus may synergise if collaboration succeeds. Likely, the most obvious shortcoming in Heneis' book is that she prefers description over elaborate analysis. Her empirical research lacks comprehensive systematic assessment. She does not link theory and practice; the golden thread is occasional-

ly very well hidden to the reader. The initial research questions—even though it is naturally clear from the offset that they need to be affirmed—are not separately addressed. Heneis remains too taciturn when it comes to evaluating in the second part, whereas the discussion in the first part turns out too cursory and, as for her theoretical considerations, quotation-laden. Even when quotations are absent, much is borrowed from the secondary literature, minimising her original creative contribution. Overall, Heneis offers a nice and generally well-written study if one only looks for an easy-to-digest introductory essay; however, it is not a piece of exceedingly well-informed and critical scholarship, leaving (too) much open for discussion and further research, too many gaps in the argumentation, and too limited the interplay of theoretical evaluation and empirical documentation.

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