Religious Practices and Networks of Belonging in an Immigrant Congregation: the German-Speaking Lutheran Congregation in Dublin

Christian Ritter and Vladimir Kmec

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how members of the German-speaking Lutheran church in Dublin develop their networks of belonging by taking part in social practices in their congregation. The paper addresses the intersection of religious life, migration experience and belonging. Based on qualitative fieldwork, we assess how social practices embedded in religious activities and beliefs reshape the sense of belonging among members of this congregation. We study the congregation through a material approach while paying attention to its actual religious and social life. The study observes how participation in the social life of the congregation enables its members to create multiple senses of belonging – ethno-cultural, religious and social belonging. The social life of the congregation aids the preservation of immigrants' ethno-cultural particularities, societal adaptation and sense of belonging to their religious community.

Introduction

The social life of an immigrant religious congregation plays an important role in the formation of immigrants' networks of belonging. Research on migration and religion in recent years mainly focused on "new migrants" (post-90s) who are not necessarily from a European Christian background. This body of research highlighted that immigrant religious communities nourish transnational ties and/or assist with their adaptation. Immigrant congregations often accommodate culturally and ethnically distinctive packages that help individuals to maintain ties with their homelands and preserve their identities (e.g. Chafetz and Ebaugh; Ebaugh and Chafetz; Levitt, "The Transnational Villagers" 1-30, 159-216; "God Needs No Passport"; Levitt and Nyberg-Sorensen). At the same time, immigrant congregations facilitate members' adaptation (Handlin; Levitt, "Immigration" 391, 396; Gleason) and provide new social roles (Warner; Avalos; Ling). Immigrant congregations generate social capital that can bond immigrants to their homelands and bridge them with the host society (Allen).[i]

Nevertheless, in debates on transnational connections, immigrant congregations are presented as communities of seemingly unchanging migrants, and as such, ethnic enclaves. These discourses often focus on ethno-national aspects of identity and present migrants in ethnicised terms. Such studies often neglect other aspects of belonging in a religious community, namely religious and social. On the other hand, integration discourses tend to neglect religious practices and beliefs as well as ethnic aspects. Some scholars emphasised the need to move the focus away from transnationalism and integration debates to avoid ethnic bias, in favour of studying immigrant communities in their natural social settings (Glick-Schiller and Caglar; Vertovec).

This paper tells the story of the German-speaking Lutheran congregation in Dublin while studying the impacts of social practices on immigrants' sense of belonging in a more comprehensive manner. Rather than looking at transnational attachments or integration, we study the networks of belonging within the congregation itself. We explore how social practices within this group enhance the formation of networks of belonging among its members. We seek to understand how congregation members make sense of their religious rituals and beliefs, and how this reshapes their sense of belonging within their congregation. A material approach (Warnier; Gowlland) was employed to research the congregation, which reveals the manifestations of its social life, such as social practices and material objects, and their ascribed symbolic meanings.

The paper deals with Germans who are intra-EU migrants - people who migrate within the Schengen Area but often go unnoticed by scholars of religion and migration. This case study provides a valuable example of an immigrant community that includes both permanent residents and temporary migrants. EU migrants can be expected to maintain strong ties to their homelands due to convenient and affordable transport, and can freely move across EU countries (Krings et al.). As EU citizens, they resemble national minorities more than migrants at the same time (Johns). As our research demonstrates, the preservation of ethnic and cultural particularities or the development of a new identity is neither the primary nor only characteristics of this congregational life.

Social Practices and Networks of Belonging in Immigrant Congregations
Among social scientists it is widely accepted that a person's sense of belonging is influenced by social practices through which individuals construct social and cultural interpretations (Holland

et al. 19; Ting 465). According to Geertz, culture can be understood as "the structures of meanings" through which individuals shape their experiences (5). Baumeister and Leary claimed that humans "are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong" (497). Weber argued that individuals are suspended in webs of significance that they themselves weave (qtd. in Geertz 5). Religious communities can thus be understood as repositories of webs of significance. Furthermore, religion often functions as a platform for the development of binding attachments. Religion contributes to the maintenance of the social structure of a group (Gellner 18–19), uniting it into a single community (Durkheim 44). In a similar way, Tweed described immigrants' religion as "confluences of organic channels and cultural currents that conjoin to create institutional networks that, in turn, prescribe, transmit, and transform tropes, beliefs, values, emotions, artefacts and rituals" (69).

Immigrants' sense of belonging is shaped not by religious beliefs and ideas of sacral contents only; it also has a material dimension. The material aspects of faith practices have been studied by scholars of religion, such as Engelke, Hazard and Taves. A faith-based community also develops a social life within its place of worship. The social life of religious get-together becomes manifested in social practices that play a decisive role in the formation of members' sense of belonging. The conceptualisation of social practice suggested by Shove, Pantzar and Watson seems particularly apt for the exploration of peoples' sense of belonging within a faith-based community (119–134). One's involvement in a set of social practices means actively combining three different elements: materials, competences and symbolic meaning. Any objects used by believers during a religious service can be considered materials. Personal competences are showcased during the service and may include singing, praying and preaching. Meaning is

attached to all the objects and actions involved in religious rituals. As Appadurai points out, meanings are constantly attached to, and detached from, material items (3–63).

Belonging is characteristically fluid in nature and evolves through interactions in which actors negotiate their affiliations with social groups (Hall; Brubaker and Cooper; Burke and Stets). The ability to reflect on oneself as an object is considered to be one of the features of an individual's sense of belonging. In doing so, people make sense of symbols, events and materials that surround them. We consider belonging as part of social identity while focusing on the interrelation between religious, ethnic and social aspects of belongingness.[ii] In this particular case, we attempt to understand how migrants intertwine their ethnic, social and religious belonging within their congregation. We explore how their sense of belonging is shaped by social practices that are collectively enacted within the congregation.

The Lutheran Congregation in Dublin

Although established in the 17th century, the Lutheran church in Ireland predominantly accommodates first-generation migrants, with the exception of a few second-generation Germans and people of Irish descent.[iii] The German-speaking congregation has around 450 registered members (Lutheran Church in Ireland 2013). However, as many members are temporary migrants, the numbers vary each year (Lutheran Church in Ireland 2009). In the most recent Irish census, conducted in 2011, approximately 11,000 Germans lived in Ireland. Notably, the highest percentages of people indicating no religion in the census were from the German and Chinese minorities. While 37 per cent of Germans in Ireland were categorised as having no religion, 28 per cent were listed Catholic and 21 per cent (2,371) indicated "other stated religions" which includes Lutherans and other Protestants (Central Statistics Office "Profile 7").

This means that the registered members of the Lutheran church represent no more than 19 per cent of German Lutherans and Protestants in Ireland. By comparison, approximately 30 per cent of the population in Germany are Lutheran (Statistisches Bundesamt). Nonetheless, German Lutherans in Ireland are more religiously active than their counterparts in Germany. The average Sunday attendance is about 13 per cent of the registered members, which excludes non-Dublin based members, whereas the average attendance among Lutherans in Germany is 3.3 per cent (EKD).

The congregation mainly accommodates two groups of migrants: first-generation German migrants who permanently settled in Ireland, some of whom married Irish citizens and/or gained Irish citizenship, and expatriates who stay temporarily or circulate between Germany and Ireland. The socio-demographic characteristics of the congregation resemble the statistical data for the German population in Ireland. German nationals mainly work as highly skilled professionals in managerial, technical and non-manual positions. The vast majority are employed in the business, banking and manufacturing sectors, although some work in health and social sectors (Central Statistics Office "Profile 6"). While the Sunday service is the central event of congregational life, the group also organises other events such as German coffee meetings, ecumenical lunchtime prayers, Bible lessons and Taizé services. We focus on two different religious events, namely an Easter service and a Taizé service, which differ in content and purpose. Studying the two different services comparatively helps to highlight a set of social practices that create a sense of community. These two particular services were chosen with the intent of gaining a detailed and in-depth account of the interrelation between social practices and belonging. Furthermore, they were selected on the basis of rigorous coding procedures to

exemplify patterns of practices. Similar social practices evolved during numerous other events that were observed.

In our analysis, we draw on various field materials such as field notes and interview scripts. We carried out our fieldwork in various sites of the Lutheran church as part of our doctoral research between 2009 and 2014, during which time we also studied other immigrant religious communities in Ireland and Germany. Although we conducted our independent research in the same community largely over the same period, our disciplines differed, hence we focused on different topics and conceptual frameworks. We employed various qualitative interview techniques, such as life story, semi-structured and expert interviews. We included all types of first-generation migrants in our sample. 15 members of the Lutheran church, aged between 22 and 61, participated in the life story interview conducted by the first author. The second author carried out 15 semi-structured interviews with members ranging from 25 to 64 years of age, some of which evolved into life story telling. In addition, we conducted interviews with the two pastors of the church. Since we studied different topics, different sets of questions were used, i.e. Christian raised autobiographic questions about life phases while Vladimir focused on the formation of religious identities. The interviews lasted from one to four hours depending on circumstances and particular requirements. Participant observations were mainly conducted during the services of the congregation, but also took place at church outings, church coffee sessions and informal gatherings.

In order to mitigate any limitations and enhance the integrity of our research, we decided to present our outcomes together to facilitate a cross-discussion of our field experiences (Guion, Diehl, and McDonald). We shared the most relevant data and reflected intensively on the differences and similarities of our field experiences. This investigator triangulation raises the

trustworthiness of our claims as the congregation was studied from different perspectives and we took on different roles during our fieldwork. As a German native speaker, Christian was more of an insider, and coming from a Catholic background enabled him to maintain a balanced relationship with this Lutheran community. Vladimir was an outsider in terms of nationality. However, as a Lutheran minister and fluent German speaker, he was able to build sufficient trust among the congregation.

For the purpose of this paper, we analysed a number of selected interviews with people attending the selected services from our two data sets while identifying narratives relevant to the issues of belonging and social practices. The data was analysed in accordance with the procedures of the grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The selection of services and interview passages in this paper is based on open coding of the collected material. The identified patterns were sufficiently saturated until no new information emerged during the analysis. Our analysis is presented in the form of "thick descriptions" (Geertz 6), and the selected interview passages reflect the diversity of the congregation in terms of gender, age and duration of stay in the country. The names of respondents were replaced by pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

The Easter Service

A Lutheran Easter service was chosen for detailed analysis because it can be used to illustrate how congregation members interpret some of the core practices of the Lutheran belief system. This account is based on a slightly revised field note, the script of the Easter sermon ("Predigt zu Ostern!" 1), an explanation of the Order of Service ("Introduction to Order of Service" 9), and an in-depth interview with a participant. At Easter 2011, two services were held in the church in Dublin. The Sunrise service started at 5 am so that approximately 25 attendees could experience

the dawn. An estimated 60 people attended the second Easter service, which was scheduled for 11 am. Most attendees lived in or near Dublin. On these two occasions the pastor wore a black robe with white collar, which holds two symbolic meanings for German Lutherans in Ireland. On the one hand, this traditional clerical robe reminds German Lutherans of their origins and traditions, but it also reflects the conventional character of the traditional Lutheran church service with its formal and standardised liturgy. The pastor personally welcomed each of the attendees at the church entrance. Anticipating a high number of attendees, the service was thoroughly prepared. A songbook and a little booklet with a drawing of St. Finian's Lutheran church were distributed to those attending. The liturgy comprised three major elements: the Opening, the Service of the Word and the Celebration of the Eucharist ("Introduction to Order of Service" 10), which symbolically correspond with the bodily existence of the faithful, as described in the booklet. In the Opening, the heart and mouth were represented in the prayers and hymns. The ear and mind played their part in the Service of the Word, which included the sermon. Other sensory metaphors appeared in the Celebration of the Eucharist. Similar to other Lutheran services, the Easter service sermon took the lives of the German residents into consideration. This preaching practice during the service is important for the formation of networks of belonging. Believers could easily identify with the local community and feel at home in the congregation as the service was held in German and the sermons contained numerous references to the lives of congregational members.

Susanne, who was 32 years old when interviewed, moved from Germany to Ireland in 2001 and founded her own business in Dublin, where she lives with her German partner. She drew support from her experiences at the Lutheran church as they enabled her to connect with other churchgoers:

"The German community has become a sort of a big family to me because it is relatively small in Dublin. You get to talk to people fast... The German aspect is crucial. Because we speak German and because we have the belief as a common ground… My friends [from the congregation] mean more to me than back in Germany, where the family was the most important."

The participant welcomed the opportunity to attend a service spoken in the German language. Participating in the same religious rituals that take place in the home country can create a sense of belonging among the church members. This sense of belonging, stimulated during the service by the various stories about German immigrants in Ireland, is reinforced during the subsequent get-together.

The final significant part of the service is devoted to the celebration of the Eucharist. This highly sacramental section of the service began with a prayer in preparation for the Holy Communion. According to the booklet distributed at the beginning of the service, God is symbolised in the bread and wine received by believers. After the congregation said the Lord's Prayer, the faithful were invited to come forward and receive Communion, which was distributed by the two pastors and an assistant. As the Easter service was well attended, believers wishing to receive communion stood in two large circles while holding hands. The communion ended with a final hymn and prayer. Finally, the pastor informed the attendees of the subsequent get-together in the church garden, where a table with cake, coffee and tea was already laid. The church coffee, as it is known, allowed congregation members to chat and exchange their experiences in the Irish capital. For new members these events were often a welcome opportunity to make

contact with long-term residents of Dublin and to elicit information about accommodation, employment opportunities and leisure activities. In doing so, members built networks of belonging and felt part of the local community. The intertwining of Lutheran beliefs and secular events in Ireland creates a particular social space in which the religious and ethnic identity layers of church members merge into a new identity, i.e. German-Lutheran Dubliners.

The ethnographic account describes how an Easter service unfolded in the German-speaking Lutheran church. Aside from celebrating Christian beliefs, the narrative of the service contains clear evidence of the identity development of its members. The description of some of the Lutheran services is therefore followed by an interpretation of their effect on identity formation. The analysis of the Easter service brought to light a number of social practices that are considered to affect the identity formation of Lutherans. Significantly, German is spoken in the vast majority of situations. Illustrating the close transnational between the Lutheran church in Ireland and the German Lutheran Church, the Dublin-based pastors are short-listed by the Central Office of the German Lutheran Church in Hanover and elected by the local church council. The pastors usually move to Ireland for a pre-determined term, which can be up to eight years. This appointment strategy ensures that the pastors have recent experience of the Lutheran congregational life in Germany and can easily reference the homeland in the native tongue. This policy ensures the sustainability of transnational ties through which not only religious but also ethnic (national), linguistic and cultural particularities are fostered.

The description of the service also indicates how a fusion of two different identity layers takes shape within the Lutheran circles. On the one hand, the Lutheran service is a religious event that provides believers with a spiritual context and interpretation of their existence, but on the other, it suggests an interpretation of their secular lives and destinies in Ireland. The fact that

the service was held in German prompted nostalgic memories for some members who had visited Lutheran churches back in Germany. This was most pertinent to irregular churchgoers who, in the main, only attended church services during the major Christian festivals, i.e. Christmas and Easter. The sermons and other elements of the service, such as collective praying, create a local community consisting of people who primarily share two characteristics: their German origin and a common interest in Lutheranism. The pastors, church council and many other volunteers have created a local system capable of producing a cornucopia of symbolic meanings. Such symbols signify the various aspects of the Lutheran church life, ranging from the architectural symbolism of the church edifice to the analogy between the body of the believers and the various sections of the service. Regular church attendees internalise these symbols while making sense of their existence in Ireland. The collective feeling of belonging to a specific community is reinforced by the social get-together following the liturgical elements of the service. Participation in the service enables congregation members to develop personal identity layers, which differ from the majority population in Ireland, but are also distinct from German immigrants who have joined other local faith-based communities in Dublin.

The Taizé Service

Although there were two failed attempts to launch Taizé services[iv] in the church in the mid-1990s, over the last decade or so they have become an important part of the Lutheran congregation in Dublin with the arrival of a younger generation in their twenties and thirties. The initiators of the Taizé services in the Dublin congregation attended the Taizé community in France, and some were also familiar with Taizé from Germany. Although Taizé services are popular among Lutherans in Germany, though not always fully incorporated into church life,

many attendees of the Dublin congregation were unfamiliar with the service. This paper focuses on a particular Taizé service during Advent in December 2011, attended by fourteen people.[v] That evening, the light from the cross-shaped candles in the chancel evoked a sense of calmness in the church. Two icons, unusual in the Lutheran tradition, were placed against the communion rails. Participants sat in silence on cushions around the candles, forming a semi-circle. The atmosphere evoked contemplation and togetherness.

For many Lutherans who attend the service, Taizé has become a new element in their religious practice. For Klaus, aged 52, who has permanently resided in Ireland since 1990:

> "Taizé has become my personal spirituality – a lot of silence, contemplative way of praying, and meditation, hymns, mantra-like form of immersion."

Klaus was among those who initiated Taizé in Dublin. Although he was familiar with Taizé when he lived in Germany, it only became a significant part of his spiritual life in Dublin. Through the Taizé service, during which icons are presented, Klaus also started to cherish this Orthodox tradition as a spiritual resource. Some members who were previously unfamiliar with Taizé also embraced this new practice as a significant part of their religious life. Take the example of Miriam, aged 32, who moved to Ireland in 2004:

> "Taizé is very important for me. […] It is important to have this chance to think in calmness [,…] to have the opportunity for silence in the church. […] it is a resource of power for me where one can be naked, without any big liturgy."

Although the Sunday service with classical hymns and church organ remains the core rite of the congregation, some members, regardless of age, are open to new religious practices. Klaus and Miriam similarly as most, though not all, participants consider Taizé as complementing rather than replacing Sunday services. The popularity of this service among many church members corresponds with Warner's research on the role of immigrant congregations in enabling personal religious transformation (Warner). While such a transformation is not merely limited to immigrant churches, interviewees highlighted that it was their immigration experience - new experiences and intercultural encounters - that heightened their search for deeper spirituality and openness to new religious practices. They pointed to the differences between their conventional religious life in Germany and their active religious life in Ireland.

"The move to Ireland was, for me, a religious move at the same time. […] Abraham's story – this is something that I experience on my own. [...] The climate here – where 'wind' is blowing in your face – I do not feel the same in Germany. [...] In Iona [Scotland], I already learned about the Celtic spirituality – close to the nature, the celebration of life, ritual religiousness." (Klaus)

"It [Taizé in the Lutheran church] is a place where people of different faiths can come. […] Faith is important, not the appearance - small denominational differences. I became aware of this only here in Ireland. I come from a small village congregation in Germany where there was no other church except ours. […] Here, one can find many different congregations." (Miriam)

During the service, hymns and chants were sung repeatedly in Latin, English, German or other languages, accompanied by a guitar and a flute. A text from the Bible was read in English and German. The prayer time was an important moment during which participants said their prayers out loudly and openly. The liturgy of the Eucharist was read by a layperson and the consecrated bread and wine were passed from one participant to the next, which is unusual to many Lutherans. In contrast, during the Easter service, the bread and wine were consecrated and distributed by the ministers with the help of an assistant. The simplicity and non-conformity make this service attractive to both young and older members of the church. The service does not include any sermon. As Chris, 38 years old, who moved to Ireland temporarily in 2006 and returned to Germany last year framed it:

> "[Taizé] is, for me, my most preferred and most popular religious service and way of praying – simply because it is so simple, because it contains moments of silence and because it can be done by anyone."

The service has renegotiated the conventional character of the Sunday service and other more formal religious celebrations, such as the Easter service. Traditionally the congregation sits in the church pews during services, however, in a more relaxed fashion, during the Taizé service people are invited to sit or kneel in the chancel. The service is organised by laypeople, without the involvement of the clergy, and the pastors do not wear their clerical black robes. These findings correspond with previous research that emphasised the decreasing role of conventional forms of religiosity (Davie "Religion in Britain"; "Patterns" 20; "Europe" 8, 147-8; Higgins; Marti and Ganiel 5-33, 109-32).

Nevertheless, some similarities with the Easter service can be observed. Participants help with practicalities, such as collecting the hymn books, candles and cushions, and preparing tea and coffee. The service was followed by a get-together over a cup of coffee and tea, which provided an opportunity to engage in conversation with friends and meet new people. The social aspects of these practices are important in building the sense of community and togetherness. Although the service marks the development of a de-ethnicised religiosity, the sense of ethnic and cultural belonging is still important to some participants. The fact that the service takes place in the Lutheran church building, and is conducted in German, is a significant factor in peoples' motivation. Even those for whom Taizé became a principal part of their religious life expressed the need to practice their faith in a form characteristic to Lutherans. For example, Chris noted:

"I sometimes miss there [in Taizé] a sermon or a lesson focusing on the explanation of a biblical reading such as it is done in a church service. Obviously, this cannot be found in Taizé services. But Taizé services have become for me a replacement to a church service. This means that I do not necessarily have to attend a church service on Sunday again."

Chris' statement exemplifies how immigrants can negotiate between their own tradition and a new practice. While attending both Taizé and Sunday services, he seeks to overlap his two identifications.

The Taizé service demonstrates how an immigrant congregation can adopt new practices that renegotiate immigrants' sense of belonging. The attendees of this service are not exclusively focused on cultivating their ethnically and culturally bounded religious traditions. They embrace

and combine different and new practices within their own religious tradition. Similarly, as Allen observed in his research, the role of this Lutheran congregation can be described in terms of both bounding and bridging social capital (Allen). In addition to the cultivation of their transnational ties, by participating in Taizé services, these people embraced practices that are not confined to a particular ethnicity.

Conclusion

The social practices that take place within different religious rituals in the German-speaking Lutheran congregation in Dublin influence the formation of networks of belonging of its members. This paper looked at social practices during an Easter service and a Taizé service. The in-depth analysis of the Easter service indicates that the Lutheran congregation has developed a number of social practices that affect its members' sense of belonging. Although the tradition-oriented practices such as singing and preaching in the Easter service foster the cultivation of ethnic, cultural and linguistic particularities of this community, other social practices such as the social get-togethers are also significant for the development of the congregation as a network of belonging. The example of the Taizé service shows that migrants can be open to new religious practices. Although perceived unconventional by many members, Taizé services can, however, also help sustain ethnic and religious particularities. These services also foster social interaction. Despite the fact that the two practices vary in form, they are compatible in the way they impact on the formation of immigrants' sense of belonging.

We observed that it is not only the relationships as such, but also the contents and settings of social practices, within the religious life of a congregation, that contribute to the community formation. We identified two main reasons why the Lutheran congregation influences the

formation of German immigrants' sense of belonging. Firstly, social practices are constantly enacted and the participation in the congregational life enables members to create a sustained we-feeling and sense of community. Secondly, social practices in the congregation provide its members with means of making sense of their lives and beliefs, which are shaped by their migration experience. Social practices of the congregation form a social force that believers use to seek explanation of their own destinies. The construction of members' sense of belonging is closely linked to the community formation process.

As far as immigration experience is concerned, the members of the congregation undergo a change of their personal belonging in the first instance. Having left their country of origin, they maintain an emotional attachment to Germany. The new experiences in Ireland challenge their previous self-image. Over time, the members of the Lutheran congregation in the Irish capital develop a new sense of belonging with two layers. The first layer contains the symbolic meanings that are attached to their ethnic identification. Their ethnic identification is, however, intertwined with their religious layer. For most of the German-born members, the Lutheran church is one of the few places where they can maintain parts of their German identity. Nevertheless, their belonging to their German-speaking congregation is reshaped by new religious practices. The congregation has established a system of symbolic meanings that enables members to collectively make sense of their lives in their new home. The ethnic and religious layers merge during congregational life and new ethno-religious connotations of belonging arise.

Our observations confirm previous research highlighting a religious congregation can initiate a community life that enables its members to create a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, we did not only focus on ethnic and cultural bonds or on integration. We explored the formation of networks of belonging in this particular congregation in their multifaceted ways. The two

events analysed comprise three different but overlapping aspects. Firstly, religious events produce and re-produce various religious contents that strengthen and/or renegotiate members' religious beliefs and practices. Secondly, the use of the German language and the specific Lutheran-based content of the activities help sustain ethnic, national and cultural bonds, while members adjust to life in their new country. Thirdly, the activities also serve a socialising function while creating a platform for the exchange of information and the development of social networks. As a result, the participation in religious events facilitates the development and realisation of a sense of belonging that is three-fold: religious belonging, ethno-cultural belonging and belonging to a particular community. The multifaceted nature of the networks of belonging in this congregation demonstrates that individuals' as well as the group's belonging and/or identity are not static, rather dynamic and constantly evolving. In addition, our findings challenge the literature on transnational migration that tends to present the identities of religious migrants in homogeneous and ethnicised terms.

It is important to acknowledge that one's sense of belonging to, and networks of belonging within, a community can change in the course of time. Our research focused on a specific period in the lives of the members of this congregation. Future research should investigate the formation of one's sense of belonging to a religious community over one's life course, and to what extent the patterns and modes of belonging are sustained within a congregation. In terms of theoretical frameworks, the findings of this research suggest that scholars of religion should examine more intensively the intersection of social practices, belonging and religion while considering both functional and substantive roles of religion.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributors

Christian Ritter holds a PhD from Ulster University, UK. In 2014 he became a postdoctoral research fellow at the Istanbul Studies Center, Kadir Has University. Vladimir Kmec is a postdoctoral researcher at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Groningen, a Peterhouse postgraduate scholar at the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge, and a research affiliate at the Von Hügel Institute at the University of Cambridge.

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i

The concept of bonding versus bridging social capital was introduced by Robert Putnam (Putnam).

ii

While sociologists refer to belonging as an aspect of identity (Bauman), anthropologists view it as a basic human need (Baumeister and Leary). Linking both perspectives, Croacher claimed that identities are "belonging formations" (39). Ethnicity and religion can be fused in one's identity (Barot 5). Immigrant religious congregations serve as ideal platforms for this fusion (Bankston and Zhou 523). In this research, we use Beckford's approach to religion, which looks at what religion means in terms of social interaction and at its significance in particular social settings. Beckford suggested focusing on religious meanings that individuals attribute to situations, actions, feelings and ideas (Beckford 16–20).

The Lutheran Church in Ireland has only one mother parish in Dublin – the St. Finian's church. Since most members come from Germany, services are held mainly in German, although an English-speaking branch is also part of the congregation. Services in German also take place in Sligo, Galway, Limerick, Killarney, Cork, Wexford, Castlepollard and Belfast. With the EU enlargement in 2004, the church premises came to be used by the Latvian and Polish congregations.

Taizé services follow the liturgy of the Taizé community, an ecumenical monastic order in France. A typical Taizé worship includes hymns based on simple phrases sung repeatedly or in cannon in different languages, a recitation of religious texts, prayers and meditations.

Since 2004, the Taizé services have taken place on Thursdays. Meanwhile, the service has been renamed *Thursday Prayers*. During the fieldwork, a usual Taizé service was attended by around ten people, and occasionally by up to twenty participants.