Politicizing Elsewhere(s)

Negotiating Representations of Neo-Pentecostal Aesthetic Practice in Berlin

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on ethnographic research in a Nigerian-based Pentecostal church in Berlin, this article explores the discussions that emerged when my scholarly representations of the congregants' aesthetic engagements with the Elsewhere diverged from the church leadership's expectations. More specifically, it interrogates my representational practice in relation to the stakes of the diasporic congregation, which is operating at the political margin of Berlin's widely diverse religious landscape. In exploring the collision of my analytical focus on the affect-charged elements of the believers' routines of connecting to the Elsewhere with the church's emphasis on affective discipline and moderation, the article demonstrates how aesthetic practices that engage with the Elsewhere not only have a religious but inevitably also a political bearing.

KEYWORDS: aesthetics, affect, belonging, diasporic religion, Pentecostalism, politics of representation

How to navigate the thin line between the researcher's analytic agenda and the ethical obligation of preserving the interests of the people we conduct research with? How to avoid reproducing binary thinking in categories of 'us' (the active researchers) and 'them' (the passive objects of our research), which implicitly informs the articulation of this question in the first place? And how do alternative power configurations play out in practice when we work ethnographically with the same religious group over an extended period of time?

These questions became salient in relation to my negotiations with research participants about specific passages of academic texts growing out of my fieldwork with a diasporic religious group in Berlin. This fieldwork formed part of a research project within the Collaborative Research Center (CRC) "Affective Societies" at Freie Universität Berlin.[1] The project comparatively explored whether and how affective forms of religious practice engender feelings of potentially multiple un/belonging among members of two diasporic religious communities in Berlin (Dilger et al. 2018; Mattes et al. 2019). Whereas my colleague Omar Kasmani did fieldwork in a predominantly Turkish-speaking Sufi order, my part of the study focused on Berlin's

congregation of the Deeper Life Bible Church (or Deeper Life). This Pentecostal church started out in 1973 as a small Bible studies group in Lagos, Nigeria, led by then lecturer of mathematics William Kumuyi. Over the years, it managed to establish branches across the globe, including 15 congregations in Germany, and William Kumuyi eventually became the general superintendent of what is claimed to be one of the largest churches in the world (Akoda 2012: 403). The group in Berlin was registered in 1999 and today comprises some 80–100 members of varied socio-economic backgrounds, ranging from jobless asylum seekers to professionally well-established congregants with academic degrees. The majority of them are first- and second-generation migrants, especially from West Africa.

Deeper Life members meet several times a week in person and via phone conferences. The Sunday services—which include affectively intense prayers; separate Bible Study sessions for women, men, adolescents, and children; fervent singing of worship songs; and an extended sermon—draw the largest number of believers. But the Bible Study meetings and 'revival prayer sessions' that additionally take place once a week are no less important for extending one's knowledge of the Word of God, spiritually opening up for the work of the Holy Spirit, and sensorially cultivating and nurturing one's relationship with the Lord.

In the following, I will explore the analytic potential of the discussions that arose when my scientific representations of Deeper Life congregants' engagements with the Elsewhere—that is, their ways of affectively establishing a connection to the divine—diverged from how the church leadership imagined the community to be portrayed in public. Focusing on our negotiations around specific passages of a co-authored book chapter prior to publication, I interrogate the implications of my own representational practice (cf. Vargas-Cetina 2013) in relation to the interests of the diasporic church that is situated at the socio-economic and political margin of Berlin's highly diverse religious landscape. In doing so, I wish to contribute to the discussion on "the methodological challenges when it comes to researching Elsewhere(s)" and how this might affect "a researcher's positionality and politics of representation" (Kasmani et al., this volume), a concern raised by the editors of this special section.

Questions of power and Othering inherent in studying and writing about religious aesthetics[2] are particularly relevant in light of the obstacles minority religious traditions face in establishing and sustaining their visible presence in a highly contested urban space in both material and political terms (Becci et al. 2017; Knott et al. 2016). Throughout several years, for instance, Berlin's Deeper Life congregation has had difficulty finding a permanent and suitable place of worship in Berlin, not least because of landowners' hesitance to rent a place to what they presumed to be an excessively noisy African church (Dilger et al. 2018). And the "Long Night of Religions," Berlin's municipally supported, high-profile annual interreligious event, which involves a remarkable multiplicity of religious communities that open their doors to the interested public and engage in mutual conversation (Nacht der Religionen 2020), is marked by a curious absence and non-participation of African Pentecostal churches. Moreover, questions of how Othering is involved in the representational practice of the anthropology of religion gain salience in the recent increasingly strained political climate in which the line between political and civic inclusion and exclusion often coincides with the boundary between what is considered legitimate and illegitimate religious practice (cf. Schiffauer 2014).

Despite their largely invisible, and potentially vulnerable, position within urban society, the Deeper Life Church and its members are by no means powerless. In fact, the intervention I wish to make in this article further evolves from a research context of 'studying up' (Nader 1974), that is, from study constellations where the researcher's interlocutors have the power to "negotiate what really is (or is not) the case; what procedures of scientific description are appropriate; what data are legitimate and permissible; and whether, or in what form, the results may be published"

(Breuer 2011: 303). In other words, it is informed by and speaks to reflexive ethnography's concern about how to ethically and productively deal with the Other 'gazing back' (Jacobs-Huey 2002), 'speaking up' (Breuer 2011), and 'talking back' (Sluka 2007) when being "confronted by research participants who read and react" (Brettell 1993a: 22) to what anthropologists write. Going beyond this, however, the article questions the idea of 'them' gazing back and speaking up to 'us' once the process of anthropological text (and knowledge) production has come to a close. Instead, it suggests to view and establish the anthropological epistemological procedure as a process of producing 'negotiated knowledge' throughout which, rather than one party talking back to the other, both parties continuously talk to each other.[3]

This formal argument is developed on the basis of the ethnographic substance of Deeper Life members' engagements with the Elsewhere (and related discussions about appropriate representation). By this I refer to their aesthetic, often highly affect-charged religious practices during Sunday services and prayer meetings, which, relying on liturgically relevant objects and specific material-sensorial arrangements (Kasmani and Mattes 2020; Slaby et al. 2019), enable believers to connect to "an elsewhere that is perceived to be located in a 'beyond' that exceeds the ordinary" (Meyer 2008: 131). As Birgit Meyer (2010: 751) argues, such "a specific religious aesthetics … governs a sensory engagement of humans with the divine and each other and generates particular sensibilities" among members of the respective community.

Drawing on these ideas, I wish to engage with Deeper Life's specific religious aesthetics in a way that speaks to another of the special section editors' concerns, that is, "to invite a thinking of the Elsewhere in religious life-worlds that treads beyond concerns of pious living and salvation and does not deny religious actions their own political bearings" (Kasmani et al., this volume). In fact, it is not the specific Pentecostal affective aesthetics and the believers' related sensibilities in themselves that I am interested in. Rather, I wish to extend the focus beyond the confines of that congregation and bring these sensibilities into relation with another kind of sensibilities, namely, those governing the relations between religious groups in a shared political terrain, on the one hand, and between religious and secular actors, such as the above-mentioned landlords or municipal administrations, on the other. In doing so, I aim to point out how aesthetic practices of engaging with the Elsewhere not only have religious but also, inevitably, political effects. For, among other factors, it is the 'aesthetic regimes' of religious groups that shape their moral self-evaluation and their relations to others, as well as their particular position in the political-moral order of highly diverse post-secular landscapes in metropolises such as Berlin. An exploration of these connections as attempted in this article, I suggest, renders visible one way of the Elsewhere's "impact on the 'ordinary' world" (Kasmani et al., this volume).

Negotiating Access and Representation

For a better contextualization of what follows, some explications on my pre-fieldwork negotiations with the church's pastor are in order. When I discussed my plan to conduct research in Berlin's Deeper Life community with him after I had participated in the church's Sunday service for the first time, he initially seemed somewhat skeptical. Yet after reading my research proposal and further explanations on the purpose and methods of the study, he warmly welcomed me and granted me permission to pursue my study, inviting me to return on the following Sunday. He also allowed me to refer to his church by its real name, not least because he hoped that it would gain publicity through my publications. However, he made it a condition that I would have to present to him any manuscript before it was published to make sure that there had not been any misunderstandings and that I portrayed the church 'correctly'. From his assertiveness

I concluded that this was a non-negotiable prerequisite for getting access to the church. Moreover, I deemed it ethically sound to concede to him, as the church's leader, the right to see what I would write about him and his congregation prior to publication. And so I readily agreed with the pastor and began my research.

In November 2017, the time had come to ask the pastor for his first approval of a co-authored text on religious place-making in Berlin (resulting in Dilger et al. 2018), and a process developed that I had not anticipated. Throughout the following three and a half weeks, an intricate discussion evolved around terminologies and particular passages of the manuscript. In the view of the church's leadership, that is, the pastor and the church secretary, these wordings misrepresented their religious practice, as well as their connectedness to their socio-spatial environment. I met with the pastor and talked to him on the phone, on some occasions several times a day. I also had phone conversations with the church secretary, whom I called upon the pastor's request. And I e-mailed back and forth with Deeper Life's German overseer, whose approval the pastor had also required. I had revised the text four times already, when the pastor, himself on a journey at the time, once more had me meet with the church secretary. On the following day, I found myself sitting on a park bench near her house in the far west of Berlin. Struggling to brave the wind and the fierce cold that slowly crept up from the ground, for about one and a half hours we meticulously went through the manuscript together, one paragraph after the other. Relentlessly, the secretary asked me to clarify the meaning of specific academic terms such as 'place-making', and made every effort to put some of my observations into context to prevent me from drawing what in her view were wrong conclusions. Finally, we agreed on several further amendments I would make in the paper, and she explained that she would report the outcome of our hypothermic work session to the pastor via phone. A few days later, I finally received the message that the manuscript was approved.

This process was as challenging and nerve-stretching for me as it was, I assume, for the pastor, the secretary, and the German overseer, especially since the deadline for submitting the manuscript to the publisher was drawing closer, and the editors of the collection, of which the text would form part, kept asking me for the final version with increasing insistence. Despite the delays it caused, however, it was also an important learning process, which, I believe, helped me better understand what was at stake for the Deeper Life Church as an institution, as well as for its individual members. Aside from other matters in regard to scientific terminology and details of the church's history, the pastor, secretary, and German overseer raised three major concerns during our negotiations. They were discontent with my use of the term 'ritual', the description of church members moving around during Sunday service, and my assertion of a certain disconnectedness of the congregation from their church's immediate social surrounding and other religious actors in the city. At first, these issues seemed rather disparate and somewhat arbitrary to me. As I will outline in the following sections, however, I eventually came to see them as closely intertwined. For while two of these concerns were related to the way I represented Deeper Life members' aesthetic practices of engaging with the Elsewhere, and the third one revolved around my description of the church's relations to other religious groups and its immediate social surrounding, all three of them could essentially be read as reflecting the church's desire for social recognition and connectivity.

Striving for Discontinuity

The first point of contention consisted in my use of the word 'ritual' in relation to specific religious practices I observed at Deeper Life's prayer meetings and services. This, it soon became clear, was

a terminological 'no-go'. In the pastor's view, 'ritual' referred to non-biblical, pagan, or African traditional rites rather than to Christian religious practice, which is why I had to refrain from using it in my representations of his congregation. My explanation that in the social sciences the term usually denotes symbolically charged, habitualized, and rule-bound performative practices of believers of *any* religious tradition, including Christianity and other Abrahamic religions, and that it had no negative connotations whatsoever (cf. Tambiah 1979; Turner 1982), did not affect the pastor's determined request. The German overseer equally expressed his reservations about using the concept in relation to his church. "'Ritual' has deeper meaning than 'routine' in spiritual documents," he insisted in an e-mail, and asked me to consistently stick to the latter term.

This terminological restriction has complicated my writing about the church ever since. Numerous times during the preparation of co-authored comparative articles about Deeper Life and the Sufi community in which my colleague Omar Kasmani did research, we discussed conceptual alternatives to 'ritual' that would convey the same meaning and were equally applicable in our cross-religious analysis (see, e.g., Mattes et al. 2019). Yet even though it meant additional efforts to find suitable expressions that my interlocutors would not object to, I came to view this terminological discord as highly instructive, especially when taking into account the scholarly discourse around African Pentecostals' positioning vis-à-vis so-called traditional African religions. Several scholars have elaborated on born-again Christians' emphasis on 'rupture' (cf. Engelke 2004; Meyer 2004; Robbins 2007). They have demonstrated how conversion to Pentecostalism implied "a complete break with the person's former life" (van Dijk 2009: 284). Such ruptures meant the interruption of former social relations and the abnegation of previous 'sinful' habits, including the practice of any form of traditional religion. This stems from the fact that the veneration of any material representations of, for instance, natural spirits, gods, and ancestors starkly contravenes "the iconoclastic attitude toward religious objects accentuated in both Protestant and Pentecostal/charismatic churches, which decries … indigenous religious traditions as 'idol worship'" (Meyer 2010: 742; cf. Butticci 2016). This theologically informed "ideology of discontinuity" (van Dijk 2009: 303) also has political implications, for it is informed by a particular "appeal to 'time' as an epistemological category [that] enables pentecostalists to draw a rift between 'us' and 'them', 'now' and 'then', 'modern' and 'traditional'" (Meyer 1998: 317). In other words, taking up "the language of modernity as it spoke to Africans through colonialization, missionization, and, after Independence, modernization theory" (ibid.), the ideology creates conspicuous boundaries between the adherent of African traditional rituals as the irrational and inferior Other and the supposedly enlightened, superior, and rational born-again Self.

Deeper Life's effort to achieve "a distinct break with 'African custom'" (Engelke 2004: 82) became manifest not only in its leaders' opposition to the notion of ritual but also in the pastor's regularly occurring condemnatory references to traditional religious practices during his sermons. One time he drew on his own life story, telling the congregants how, immediately after he had become born-again, he threw away all of his traditional paraphernalia in order to swear off such superstition and fully dedicate his life to the Lord Jesus. And several times he related anecdotes about appallingly violent and bloody practices of witchcraft and black magic he had heard of in Nigeria or witnessed himself in his home village in Benin, only to then emphatically warn his audience to abstain from any such sinful deeds "before it's too late."

In light of such discourses and practices of moral demarcation, which certainly contribute to sustaining Deeper Life members' collective identity and sense of belonging, it is hardly surprising that designating their religious routines as 'rituals'—a term that in their view refers to outspokenly opposed forms of 'backward' African idolatry (cf. Comaroff 2014: 222)—did not appeal to the church leadership. The fact that I was often the only white person among the roughly 80 persons gathering for the Sunday service might throw this issue into even sharper

relief, especially in consideration of church members' experiences of racialized forms of discrimination that occasionally came up during prayer meetings. Describing the church as being engaged in 'rituals', in their logic, must have come close to representing them as backward, irrational, uncivilized, and, perhaps even worse, as sinful—in short as the Other who does not belong in either theological or spatial and temporal terms. What and who is understood to be the Elsewhere, as well as the specific practices of engaging with it, can thus serve as powerful markers of social order and, taken further, of political inclusion and exclusion.

Pursuing Affective Discipline

The second issue of contention the church leaders raised is closely related to the first. It concerned a passage stating that particular phases of Deeper Life's Sunday services allowed for members' *individual* patterns of physical movement more than others. "In certain sections of the service," the passage read in the first draft, "individuals could physically turn away from the collective, pray with their faces to the wall, or wander around in the room, while other phases demanded a higher degree of conformity and synchronicity between those present." During our wintery discussion on the cold park bench, the secretary critically inquired what I meant by "wandering around," emphasizing that such kind of uncontrolled movement went against the church's rules concerning believers' conduct in the house of worship. After I had described in greater detail the impressions that had caused me to write this passage, we explored alternative phrasings that would meet both her request to portray the church routine and worshipping congregants as disciplined, on the one hand, and reflect my observation of temporarily fluctuating grades of bodily movement among the congregants, on the other. "Wandering around" eventually became "pacing back and forth" in the published version, a nuance that would perhaps seem insignificant to an outsider but apparently made a decisive difference to the secretary.

Some explications of the ambivalent role and mobilizations of affect within Deeper Life's aesthetic routines might help to better understand this. To begin with, engaging (with) the Elsewhere, that is, with God and the Holy Spirit, at Deeper Life—as in other Pentecostal churches—is a highly affective affair. It requires congregants' bodies being put in motion, which involves clapping hands and fists beating into open palms. It features bodies collapsing and stretching out on the ground, torsos swinging back and forth, and hands being raised toward the ceiling, craving for divine signals. Throughout prayer meetings and Sunday services, one sensorially induced wave of affective intensity, skillfully steered by the pastor, follows the next: it is this repeated passionate labor of 'opening up' that makes believers susceptible to the divine (cf. Brahinsky 2012; Luhrmann 2012). In Catholic services, in contrast, "you follow patterns," a church member once explained, "but you don't have a deep experience." You hardly have "this feeling" of being close to God. Generating and immersing in affective intensities during prayer and worship, in this sense, marks a significant differentiation between Deeper Life and other *non*-charismatic religious communities.

Notwithstanding the essential role of affect-charged worship in generating religious experience at Deeper Life, however, there are strict limits up to which believers' arousal is considered appropriate. And extending beyond the realm of the church, it is precisely the feature of *constrained* affectivity and emotionality that is essential for the church members' individual and collective morally informed notion of self. In fact, in the church's teachings, moderation and self-discipline are promoted as foundational and inevitable characteristics of born-again Christians' lifestyle. In one of the numerous books in which he instructs Deeper Life followers how to lead a God-fearing life, General Superintendent Kumuyi (2015: 314) demands that "the

lifestyles of Christians are to be examples of moderation, not only in physical matters but also in matters of the spirit; not only in outward appearance but also in inward disposition. Moderation must be reflected in a believer's mood, comportment, carriage, emotional responses, desires, ambitions, and physical actions."

This tenet of moderation also infused one of the children's classes I observed at Deeper Life during which children up to the age of 13 sang worship songs, prayed, and read the Bible together. It was striking how on that day instructors fostered a particular kind of self-awareness among the young believers. They emphasized how extraordinary the children were in comparison to their "unsaved," "unbelieving" classmates precisely because of their emotional temperance. "You are different," one of the teachers explained. "You are God's child. You are not aggressive. You can do everything in a calm manner. You have to know that you are special. You don't hit back [when you're attacked]. You don't flip out. You stay calm." The children were taught that by constantly showing such self-discipline, they "transformed themselves into a Temple of the Holy Ghost."

Further examples of the insistence on affective and emotional moderation can be found in Deeper Life's *Christian Women Mirror: The Magazine to Build Godly Women*. There are sections in the magazine that categorically lay out which emotions are deemed detrimental to a "truly Christian" way of life. "Anger," it contends for instance, "falls one letter short of danger. When you get angry, you're likely calling for danger, because at that point you might likely lose your temper and do something you'll regret … It's no good emotion for a believer" (Christian Women Mirror 2013: 9). It is no coincidence that anger, an emotion that perhaps more than others is associated with impulsive and irrational conduct and is often viewed as a disruptive relapse to 'mere bodily' reaction, is mentioned as particularly harmful, for corporeality generally takes up a crucial position in the church's moral reasoning in the sense of *the* anti-principle in a Christian's life. "Our enemy number one," the pastor once preached vehemently, "is the works of the flesh! If you don't pray that body under now, it will take your soul to hell!"

Notwithstanding the role of affectivity as a means of increasing believers' possibilities to get in contact with the transcendent Elsewhere, it is this discursively instilled opposition to any kind of emotional-bodily loss of control that seems to strongly shape Deeper Life members' sense of self and their ways of relating to their socio-spatial environments. Implicitly drawing on "time-honored dualistic philosophies in which emotion, affect, and sentiment are opposed to reason and intellect" (Dilger, Burchardt et al. 2020: 18), an important aspect of their spiritual trajectories consists of proceeding from the passive and uncontrolled endurance of undesirable emotions to the acquisition of a spiritually conducive, skilled 'emotion repertoire' (von Poser et al. 2019). As observed in other diasporic African Pentecostal churches (see, e.g., Cazarin and Burchardt 2020), tempering one's affective response to external stimuli and feeling the 'right' emotion at the 'right' time at Deeper Life was a matter of the believers' long-term self-regulation and learning, be it by way of the pastor's comments on one's emotional display while praying, the instructions given during the children's classes, or respective advice provided in the church's wide portfolio of spiritual literature. In light of these efforts to cultivate affective and emotional balance and discipline, it was comprehensible that any description of Deeper Life's Sunday services as featuring a kind of affective exuberance—observable, for instance, in the form of members 'uncontrolledly' wandering around in the prayer hall—caused the church leaders' unease.

In sum, regular affect-charged and passionately committed engagement in prayers and worship plays a significant role in Deeper Life members' striving for spiritual progress and connectivity to the realm of the divine Elsewhere. Simultaneously, the church's discursively mediated and practically monitored 'emotional regime' (Riis and Woodhead 2010: 10–12) delineates a specific limit of affectivity, whose transgression is viewed as spiritually and morally obstructive. This emphasis on affective moderation helps to explain the church leadership's rejection of their

practices being described as affectively exuberant and (by implication) irrational ritual. Furthermore, it constitutes the point of connection to the third concern the leadership voiced inasmuch as it serves as a crucial marker of difference in church members' endeavor to position themselves vis-à-vis other religious groups, gain social recognition, and achieve a sense of belonging.

Striving for Connectedness and Belonging

If we understand the antagonistic struggle between us and them as a definitional feature of the political (cf. Mouffe 2000), Deeper Life members' practices of acquiring and appraising a particular emotion repertoire are deeply political. For it is precisely the characteristic of affective moderateness and emotional discipline that believers achieve through this process which, in their view, sets them off not only from the followers of other religions but also from fellow Christians adhering to a different affective-emotional regime. From the very beginning, for instance, it has been the pastor's and other church members' concern to contrast their own affective *discipline* with the tendency of other African Pentecostal churches toward affective *excess*.

Emphasizing such distinctions, I argue, has political implications inasmuch as it implied, even if unwittingly, how integrable if not integrated the Deeper Life Church was in comparison to certain other African-based congregations. The church members' affective politics of belonging—that is, their striving for acquiring and sustaining a beneficial and recognized position in the social order of a contested political terrain by way of foregrounding a particular style of religious practice—worked the opposite way compared to the study of African Pentecostals in Italy researched by Annalisa Butticci (2016). In her case, the Pentecostals strove for an "eruption of distinct dissenting aesthetics" (ibid.: 101) in contrast to the aesthetics of hegemonic Italian Catholicism. In the case of Deeper Life, it rather seemed as if church members were hiding their affectivity in order to demarginalize themselves and 'pass' as an affectively disciplined and thus 'normal' church according to German 'standards'. In other words, it was the *denial* of the affectivity involved in their religious engagements with the Elsewhere that played an essential role in Deeper Life members' efforts to *de*-other themselves. This tendency could be rooted in the members' need to solve rather practical problems. It certainly helped, for instance, to counter the above-mentioned landlords' prejudices of noisy African churches in their search for a sustainable and reasonably accessible place of worship in Berlin's contested urban space. This, I suggest, might have to do with the congregants' longing to belong, to be recognized as a legitimate and well-fitting constituent of the German 'host society' not only in religious but also in political terms.

In light of these aspirations, it is little wonder that the leaders also objected to their congregation being represented as socially and geographically disconnected, which constituted the third point of contention. As far as I could observe, the congregation had not established any significant ties with the members of the German Evangelical free church that hosted their gatherings in a house it owned in a quiet residential area of northern Berlin. Nor were there any relations with people living in the immediate neighborhood. Yet the pastor decidedly disagreed with the passage in our original manuscript that addressed this as an isolation of sorts. He pointed out that although the ties to the free church were not close, there was regular contact between both groups: once a year, Deeper Life congregants attended an informal get-together organized by their hosts, and, as I had indeed witnessed, a few members of the free church visited Deeper Life's Sunday services every now and then. Furthermore, he reminded me that his church formed part of two Pentecostal networks through which they maintained relationships with fellow believers in Berlin and other places.[4] Acknowledging his objection, I added some lines and a footnote to our manuscript that mentioned these connections, even though they

seemed rather sporadic to me. Nonetheless, it was important for me to convey a sense of Deeper Life's detachment from its direct socio-geographic surrounding, not least because I considered this an important detail that ultimately led me to look for other forms of place-making effective within and beyond the congregation (e.g., regular prayers for the re-spiritualization of the city of Berlin) (Dilger et al. 2018).

Conclusion: From Partial Truths to Joint Knowledge Production

In the majority of anthropological studies, the agendas and expectations of the researcher diverge from those of the researched by varying degrees. "Anthropologists are sustained by the notion that the fieldwork is professionally, politically or scientifically valuable," Jessica Falcone (2010: 254) argues, "while informants are often sustained by the expectation of increased prestige, socioeconomic gain or social gain." In the case of Deeper Life, my interlocutors were certainly less interested in my scientific analysis of their religious practice than in gaining visibility and having their belief proliferated through my writing. In fact, more than once the pastor prayed for my own conversion, envisioning me as spreading the word of God in German society once I had become born-again.

The church leaders' first reading of our manuscript must have been disappointing, and not only in this regard. It also revealed our diverging interests inasmuch as, in line with the CRC Affective Societies' research focus on affect and emotion, my agenda consisted in carving out, bringing to the fore, and elaborating on precisely those affective dimensions of Deeper Life's aesthetic engagements with the Elsewhere that the church members wished to relegate to the background when presenting themselves to 'the public'. While I persevered to describe as vividly as possible the affective measures of congregants' prayer and worship practices through which they aimed to establish a direct relation to what goes "beyond the ordinary" (Meyer 2012: 24), they were keen to be represented as affectively disciplined and, by implication, as fitting well with their perceptions of their host society's expectations. In this sense, it seemed to me that what was occurring was a considerable clash of opposing politics of representation. In the framework of Rancière's ([2000] 2013) theory of the politics of aesthetics, one may say that, as a researcher, I was 'distributing the sensible' in a way that was diametrically opposed to Deeper Life members' ways of doing so.

In the discussions I had with the church leadership about these divergences, I gained a clearer sense of their sensibilities, which in turn made me ponder my responsibility as a researcher. I came to think that my particular way of representing Deeper Life members' affect-laden practices of engaging with the Elsewhere could, even if unwittingly, have just as political implications as their own efforts of placing themselves at a particular position in socio-political hierarchies of belonging through the representational emphasis of their affective-emotional discipline. And this is particularly relevant, I feel, in light of ongoing controversial—and not least highly affect-driven—political debates on religious diversity, migration, and integration (Griera 2012; Koenig 2007), in which religion has become one of the principal markers of who is and who is not considered to belong in particular political territories, social collectives, and moral communities.

To what degree, then, am I as an anthropologist to make compromises in writing about the church in order to respect my interlocutors' emotional and political sensibilities? I believe that it is ethically obligatory to acknowledge research participants' interests by avoiding certain terminologies, omitting particular quotes, and changing descriptive details, as long as these concessions still allow for the reader to draw the unambiguous conclusions the researcher deems appropriate. Contrary to the experience of other ethnographers, whose research participants

were profoundly dissatisfied if not outraged about how they were represented in anthropological texts (Falcone 2010; Glazier 1993; Greenberg 1993), I had the feeling that in my case, fortunately, my negotiations with the church leadership ended on a note that was satisfactory for both sides. More than that, I came to the conclusion that it was the beginning of a learning process for both parties. The second manuscript, a text that contained very personal and in my view actually more critical takes on the affectivity involved in the church members' engagements with the Elsewhere (resulting in Mattes et al. 2019), was thus met with significantly less opposition. This may be ascribed to my substantially increased sensitivity concerning the language I used in my ethnographic vignettes and the ensuing analysis. In fact, during writing, I was constantly envisioning what the pastor and his secretary would say about the text (which is not to say that I censored myself), or the church leaders' more realistic expectations with regard to how I would represent them. In any case, I presume that the respective negotiations would have been a lot more difficult, if not conflictive, had we not proven our will to understand our mutual perspective and to approach one another before and during the intricate and detailed discussions of the first manuscript.

"It is important to stick to the truth!" a Deeper Life official once told me during that process. Yet, as we know, 'the truth' is no more than a mirage, when approached on anthropological grounds. "Ethnographic truths are … inherently *partial*—committed and incomplete," James Clifford (1986: 7) notoriously argued more than three decades ago. "But once accepted and built into ethnographic art, a rigorous sense of partiality can be a source of representational tact" (ibid.). In my research on how Berlin's Deeper Life members engaged with the Elsewhere, I learned to appreciate the surplus of this 'representational tact', inasmuch as it led me to think more rigorously about the potentially political effects of these aesthetic engagements, as well as their scientific representations in the here and now.

Aside from that, these discussions and negotiations vividly illustrated to me how relevant and analytically fruitful it is to conceptualize the anthropological endeavor as a process of joint knowledge production, even if, as was the case in our project, one does not draw on explicitly participatory research methods. I agree with Jessica Falcone (2010: 261) that "the anthropologist is under no obligation to collaborate with [one's] informants if it would reify fictions" and that "informants are under no obligation to approve of what is produced by the anthropologist." Yet the systematic confrontation with partiality in the form of discussing my manuscripts with my interlocutors prior to publication continues to form part of the routine of transposing my ethnographic observations at the church into text. And rather than an obligation that may to some extent strain and obstruct procedures of academic publishing, I prefer to focus on the new insights into the positionalities, agendas, aspirations, and affective dispositions of both the researched and the researcher that this routine might generate (cf. Stodulka et al. 2018).

Finally, I wish to echo Stephen Glazier's (1993: 38) plea that "rather than looking at anthropological texts (books, dissertations, films, articles, and so on) as the fruits of research designed to be shared with an audience of scholars …, it is … more appropriate to view books and articles as integral to the research process itself." This applies particularly for research contexts, in which one continues to work with research participants who have received (and, as in my case, actively negotiated) the 'results' that have been and will be published about them. This article thus exposes the necessity to account for the Elsewhere's bearing on the here and now in a twofold sense. First, it draws attention to the potentially political effects of ethnographically representing religious engagements with the divine. And, second, it simultaneously illustrates how, in some contexts of anthropological text production, the relegation of our interlocutors' reception of our work to a distant Elsewhere not only would come close to an ethical impossibility but also would result in a substantial epistemological void.

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◾ **NOTES**

1. In this multi-disciplinary research center, "researchers from nine different disciplines across the social sciences and the humanities investigate affect and emotion in their respective role for social cohesion, be it in the arts, in politics, with regard to migration or dealing with new media technology" (https://www.sfb-affective-societies.de/en/ueber-uns/index.html).
2. Following Birgit Meyer (2012: 27), I understand aesthetics here "in the basic Aristotelian sense of *aisthesis* as the sensorial engagement with the world." By affect, I refer to "those encounters between bodies that involve a change—either enhancement or diminishment—in their respective bodily *capacities* or micro-powers" (Slaby and Mühlhoff 2019: 27; emphasis in original).
3. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need to clarify this argument and for suggesting the notion of 'negotiated knowledge'.
4. A few months after our conversation, I learned that one of these networks no longer existed.

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