ISSN 2196-9027

Diaconia

Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice

Volume 12 | Issue 1 | 2021

Elia Shabani Mligo
African *Ubuntu,* the See-Reflect-Act Model, and Christian Social Practice: Reading Luke 10:38–42 in Light of African Hospitality

Beatrice Lukalo, Loreen Maseno
Grounded Theology and Disability in Western Kenya

Inger Marie Lid
Integrating Participatory Approaches in Research: Power, Dilemmas and Potentials

Trygve Wyller
Embodied Spiritualities: Methodologies, Practices, and the Issue of Generous Christianities

Kaia S. Rønsdal
Is it Different? Explorations of Empirical Diaconia Research

V&R

Diaconia
Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice
Journal published with the support of four institutions involved in the field of higher education, research and practice in Diaconia and Christian Social Practice: Diak Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, Finland; Diakonhjemmet Foundation, Norway; Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Norway and Eurodiaconia, Brussels, Belgium.

Editor in chief
Professor Dr. Annette Leis-Peters (Oslo)

Editorial Team
Tony Addy (Linz)
Professor Dr. Ninna Edgardh (Uppsala)
Professor Dr. Johannes Eurich (Heidelberg)
Dr. Ingolf Hübner (Berlin)
Dr. Kari Latvus (Helsinki)
Dr. Erica Meijers (Groningen)
Professor Dr. Anne Pessi (Helsinki)
Dr. Kaia Schultz Rønsdal (Oslo)
Professor Dr. Ignatius Swart (Cape Town)
Vera Nygård (Brussels)
Professor Dr. Trygve Wyller (Oslo)
Jeremy Heuslein (Editorial Assistant, Oxford)

Terms of Subscription: The journal shall appear twice a year. It is an open access publication licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International License, accessible at DOI 10.13109/diac.2021.12.issue-1. For a copy of this license visit http://creativecommons.org/license/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

This journal and all contributions and pictures contained therein are protected by copyright. Any use beyond the limits of abovementioned license requires the written permission of the publisher.

Published with financial support from: Nordic Board for Periodicals in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOP-HS), Oslo, Norway.

© 2021 by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, an imprint of the Brill-Group
(Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA;
Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn, Germany;
Brill Österreich GmbH, Vienna, Austria).
Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Hotei, Brill Schöningh, Brill Fink, Brill mentis, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Böhlau, Verlag Antike, V&R unipress.
www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISSN: 2196-9027

Contents

Guest Editors' Comment 3

Elia Shabani Mligo
African *Ubuntu*, the See-Reflect-Act Model, and Christian Social Practice: Reading Luke 10:38–42 in Light of African Hospitality 5

Beatrice Lukalo, Loreen Maseno
Grounded Theology and Disability in Western Kenya 21

Inger Marie Lid
Integrating Participatory Approaches in Research: Power, Dilemmas and Potentials 41

Trygve Wyller
Embodied Spiritualities: Methodologies, Practices, and the Issue of Generous Christianities 61

Kaia S. Rønsdal
Is it Different? Explorations of Empirical Diaconia Research 79

Diaconia, vol. 12, p. 1, ISSN: 2196-9027
© 2021 Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht
Open access publication licensed under a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License

Guest Editors' Comment

What kind of research is diaconia research? As the field of diaconia develops both as academic scholarship and as ever more professionalised practice, a discussion on how we understand diaconia research is timely. If diaconia practice holds particular attributes, this should mean something for how we carry out research within and scientifically approach these practices. How is methodology and theology related in diaconia research? Who and what are our research subjects, who are we as researchers, what responsibilities may we have as researchers in this particular field? With this issue we want to creatively front how to approach diaconia research.

The article by Elia Mligo (Mbeya, Tanzania) surveys the African context and the best way Christian social practice can be accomplished. Through reading Luke 10:38–42 in light of African social practice of hospitality, the article argues that hospitality and any other Christian social practices can hardly be realized in Africa apart from the African *Ubuntu* philosophy of life. It suggests that the see-reflect-act methodology of *diaconia,* taking the African philosophy of life seriously, is appropriate for the African context. Hence, *Ubuntu* makes any methodological approach be African as differentiated from methodologies applied in other contexts.

Loreen Maseno and Beatrice Lukalo (Maseno, Kenya) also consider methodological issues which engage African realities. They highlight the integrating of social science within theology using the case of persons living with disability in Western Kenya. Their article attempts to realize the potential of theological creativity from a bottom-up approach and demonstrates creative explorations of approaches from persons living with disability for a grounded theology. Moreover, this emphasizes how grounded theology is compatible with grounded theory in social sciences as a method for seeking hidden patterns and meanings to unearth stories informing everyday lives of persons living with disability.

Inger Marie Lid (Oslo) presents participatory research as an approach to empirical research, through material from a project studying Christian diaconal practice for deaf persons with disability in a Norwegian context. She argues that a sound empirical research often calls for some inclusion of the persons involved in the research. Consequently, there are important potentials in inclusive approaches to research that may strengthen diaconal research in terms of focus on social and political justice end care.

Trygve Wyller (Oslo) discusses how, in the field of diaconia research, methodology and epistemology cannot be totally separated. He points out that the methodological question in diaconia research clearly includes epistemology. Who has, and where are, the sources, which lead to new knowledge of diaconia? His discussion

Diaconia, vol. 12, pp. 3–4, ISSN: 2196-9027
© 2021 Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht
Open access publication licensed under a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License

presents phenomenologically informed cases and questions how such cases involve issues of humanity and how they relate to church and Christianity.

Kaia Rønsdal (Oslo) discusses whether empirical diaconia research is different from other empirical research. Using the case of a motion picture, different approaches to the narrative are discussed and reflected upon. One way of approaching the narrative is illustrated and emphasised, pointing out certain moments of theological significance.

Articles in this issue of *Diaconia*, though not exhaustive, provide an exciting contribution towards the ongoing search for a methodological perspective to be used in diaconia research. We hope that readers will find the contributions in this issue interesting, and maybe challenging them to explore other new approaches for the next study.

Elia Mligo Trygve Wyller Kaia Rønsdal

Elia Shabani Mligo

African *Ubuntu*, the See-Reflect-Act Model, and Christian Social Practice: Reading Luke 10:38–42 in Light of African Hospitality

Abstract:
Christian social practice (diaconia) is contextual; it is not uniform to people of all contexts. The contextual and neutral nature of Christian social practice means the question of methodology is important when considering it in a particular context. This article surveys the African context and the best way Christian social practice can be accomplished. Through reading Luke 10:38–42 in light of the African social practice of hospitality, the article argues that hospitality – and indeed any other Christian social practice – can hardly be realized in Africa apart from the African *Ubuntu* philosophy of life. It suggests that the see-reflect-act methodology of diaconia, taking the African philosophy of life seriously, is appropriate to the African context. According to this methodological approach, Jesus must be understood as an African stranger who should be welcomed with hospitality and fully incorporated into the African *Ubuntu* way of life. Hence, *Ubuntu* makes any methodological approach be African, differentiating it from methodologies applied in other contexts.

Keywords:
African hospitality, Ubuntu, Christian social practice, foreigner, see-reflect-act, praxis

1. Introduction

The concept of hospitality stems from its Latin origin: The Latin words *hospitium* or *hospitalis* turned into the English word hospitality. These two Latin words were formed in turn from the word *hospes,* which means both host (the one providing hospitality) and guest (the one to whom hospitality is extended). Therefore, the double meaning of the word *hospes* indicates a mutual relationship between the host and the guest, a meaning that can be traced to the Greek *xenos* meaning stranger or guest (Nnamunga: 2013, 167).

Diaconia, vol. 12, pp. 5–19, ISSN: 2196-9027
© 2021 Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht
Open access publication licensed under a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License

The actual Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia* (love of stranger), combined from two Greek words *xenos* (stranger or host) and *phileo* (to love or to have affection) (Magezi/Sichula/De Clerk: 2010, 187f.). Nnamunga (2013, 167 note 441) further writes that, "Originally, in Greek history, a stranger was not welcome and received a hostile reception. This may explain the close connection between the Latin *hostis* meaning 'enemy' and *hospes* meaning 'guest'. Hence, afterward, a stranger was seen as a messenger of God and then the attitude changed from hostility to friendliness. The relationship of the stranger moved from hostility derived from *hostis* to hospitality derived from *hospes*."

Despite its historical background in the Greek world, hospitality is one aspect of Christian social practices which is hard to embrace because it requires welcoming and caring for the dangerous stranger and performing a diaconal action. However, Pohl (2002, 37f.) admonishes us how to understand the church and its role toward hospitality, saying: "Understanding the church as God's household has significant implications for hospitality. More than anywhere else, when we gather as a church our practice of hospitality should reflect God's gracious welcome. God is our host, and we are all guests of God's grace. However, in individual churches, we also have opportunities to act as hosts who welcome others, making a place for strangers and sojourners." According to this statement, hospitality is not a voluntary aspect for Christianity in Africa but rather a responsibility provided that it belongs to Jesus Christ.

2. Hospitality and the Concept of *Ubuntu*

As a responsibility, hospitality in the African context is built upon the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is an African philosophy of life that purports "being human through other people" (Mugumbate/Nyanguru: 2013, 83; Gathogo: 2008a, 39f; Van Breda: 2019, 439f.). Mugumbate and Nyanguru state that the philosophy of *Ubuntu* "has been applied in theology by the likes of Archbishop Desmond Tutu (…), in politics by the likes of anti-apartheid icon, former South African President Nelson Mandela (…), in management by the like as Professor Lovemore Mbigi (…) and in the field of computer science, Linux has developed a software named *Ubuntu* which is developed and shared free of charge" (Mungubate/Nyanguru: 2013, 83). *Ubuntu* is humanism from an African perspective (Mungubate/Nyanguru: 2013, 83f; Van der Walt: 2003; Eleojo: 2014; Mandova/Chingombe: 2013).

The name derives its origin from the Nguni and Bantu languages, and several terms have been used in various places of Africa indicating the same philosophy of *Ubuntu*: *Unhu* and *ubuthosi* (Zimbabwe), *botho* (Botswana), *bumuntu* (Tanzania), *bomoto*, *gimuntu*, *umunthu*, *vumuntu* and *umuntu* (Congo, Angola, Malawi, and Uganda) (Mungubate/Nyanguru: 2013, 85). All of these terms express the existence

of *Ubuntu* virtues of "sympathy, compassion, benevolence, solidarity, hospitality, generosity, sharing, openness, affirming, available, kindness, caring, harmony, interdependence, obedience, collectivity and consensus" (Mungubate/Nyanguru: 2013, 85; cf. Asamoah-Gyadu: 2006; Masango: 2005; Gathogo: 2008a; Gathogo: 2008b, 276ff.).

On the one hand, the power of the philosophy of *Ubuntu* in African hospitality is amplified by the father of African Theology, John S. Mbiti, when he writes: "To visitors, strangers and guests (…) [hospitality] means that when a visitor comes to someone's home, family quarrels stop, the sick cheer-up, peace is restored and the home is restored to new strength. Visitors are, therefore, social healers – they are family doctors in a sense." (Mbiti: 1976, 23) On the other hand, the weakness of the philosophy, as seen in Western eyes, is its romanticizing of community[1] opinions and its failure to pay greater attention to individual opinions and those of minority groups (Gathogo: 2008b, 285).

The question is how can African Christianity make hospitality be a way of life in the Church and in African Christian homes? How can the Church make hospitality a Christian social practice within the African context emphasizing human responsibility? This article, through a literary reading of Luke 10:38–42, argues that the see-reflect-act model is an appropriate methodological perspective to execute hospitality in an African context to make African churches practice responsible diaconia. Hospitality as a Christian social practice that uses the see-reflect-act model should adhere to *Ubuntu* philosophy as an approach toward handling the various risky groups in Africa to meet their human requirements. To illustrate the above-stated point of view, the article reads a particular biblical text to illustrate how Christian social practice poses responsibility to the African context.

3. Luke 10:38–42 in the *Ubuntu*-Centered Context

The text on Martha, Mary, and Jesus appears in the larger context of Jesus' final travel to Jerusalem and before his triumphant entry into the city (Luke 9:51–19:27). Jesus is a traveler traveling with his disciples toward Jerusalem. On their way, they

1 Agulanna differentiates between the two concepts of "society" and "community." According to him, "'society' in general is the totality of peoples that have existed in history. A particular society on the other hand, is a given population living in a certain region whose members cooperate over a period of time for the attainment of certain goals or ends. […]. By 'community' on the other hand, we usually have in mind a sub-society whose members (1) are in personal contact, (2) are concerned for one another's welfare, (3) are committed to common purposes and procedures, (4) share responsibility for joint actions, and (5) value membership in the community as an end worth pursuing […]." (Agulanna: 2010, 286f.)

entered an unnamed village, but one in which Martha and Mary lived. According to the Jewish context, "In order to receive an invitation, a traveler must first get the attention of someone who is in a position to serve as host. Thus, 'a traveler in need of hospitality might stand in a place where he or she would be noticed by the residents' (…)" (Martin 2014, 3).

As was the Jewish tradition for travelers, the group (Jesus and his disciples) stopped at a house headed by a woman (Martha). Martin reports that, "Although women were allowed to invite visitors (cf. Gen 24; Ex 2; 1Sam 25; 2Ki 4), it was normally the men who accepted that responsibility (…). The invitation was offered in the public space, which was considered the realm of the men" (Martin 2014, 3). However, Jesus was willing to be entertained in that house. The woman, the owner of that house, welcomed Jesus and his disciples in for entertainment (v. 38). Hence, Jesus accepted the offer of entertainment in Martha's house and entered the house.

The entertainments reserved for guests on a journey, according to the Jewish context, were many: washing the feet for the guests to free them from dust, providing drink, preparing comfortable places for them to rest, and providing their meals. All these activities fall upon the women in Martha's house without any compensation from her guests. Most of the activities mentioned were generally done by servants or slaves; however, there is no indication in the narrative that there were servants or slaves to help them. Martha and Mary had to provide all the necessary hospitality their Jewish guests expected from them as hosts. Some questions can be raised: First, why did Jesus choose to be entertained in the house owned by a woman? Were there no other houses available in the area? Second, did Jesus make an appointment beforehand so that Martha could arrange for her guests, or did he just enter without an appointment?

The narrative indicates that Martha welcomed her guests unconditionally, without any preregistered appointment, schedule, or arrangements (for another such unscheduled visit, see Luke 19:1–10). I appreciate Dorrell's words:

> Biblical hospitality has little to do with prepared invitations and dinner parties for selected guests. Instead it involves spontaneous common acts of daily life, especially with those with whom we rarely share life together. Eating a meal together, drinking a cup of coffee, or going to the zoo with a homeless person, an international, an ex-offender, an addict, or an agnostic is the stuff of hospitality. Sharing common acts of life with those who are different socially, racially, economically, and even morally creates an environment of mutual love, understanding, and growth among people separated by prejudice and cultural distance (Dorrell: 2007, 72f.).

No schedule is required to welcome the homeless, an ex-offender, or an addict as far as biblical hospitality is concerned; it requires only one's heartfelt concern more

than just physical manifestations. This is also what is entailed by African hospitality centered on *Ubuntu*.

Martha had a sister named Mary (v. 39). Both Martha and Mary are important characters in the narrative regarding the African context. Soon after the entrance of Jesus and his disciples in Martha's house, she went into the kitchen and spent most of her time there. She became heavily occupied by the affairs of the kitchen to entertain her guests. Martha's preoccupation with kitchen affairs soon after guests had entered the house suggests that the arrival of Jesus and his disciples at Martha's house occurred without an appointment, which would have allowed her to prepare everything before the arrival of her guests.

However, Jesus and his disciples are like African guests in Martha's house, who is like an African host. Africans are notoriously hospitable; there is no necessity to make an appointment or any prearrangement to visit an African host. Chinchen puts it clearly: "Africans are honored to have visitors at any time of the day or night. No prearranged time is set, no calendars or watches are consulted, no excuses are made for being busy. The visitor is always welcome in Africa. In fact, the more visitors, the better." (Chinchen: 2000) Life in Africa is life in the community – there is no room for individualism. Jesus entered Martha's house without an appointment and without asking for any service. Martha went to the kitchen to prepare the food for her guests. From the onset of his decision to enter Martha's house, Jesus had no doubt about being entertained, and that was obviously the case. There is hardly an African house one enters and leaves without being entertained; even those without appointments.

In this narrative, Jesus and his disciples are received as guests in the house of Martha without any appointment. The Greek verb used for "receive" is *hupodekhomai*, which means "to receive a guest"; it also appears in Luke 19:6, where Jesus was received by Zacchaeus and spent a night there. Jesus likely spent a night at Martha's house with his disciples. What implication do we get from Jesus and his disciples, who were all men, spending a night in Martha's house, where women, even unmarried women, lived? A simple answer to this question is that "Jesus decided to talk to women," contrary to Jewish and even African cultural worldviews. The Mishnah clearly states: "Jose b. Johanan of Jerusalem said: Let thy house be opened wide and let the needy be members of thy household; and talk not much with womankind. They said this of a man's own wife: how much more of his fellow's wife! Hence the Sages have said: He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Law and at the last will inherit Gehenna." (M. Aboth, 1.5, Danby 1993: 446) Jesus' acceptance of the offer of being a guest in the house of Martha indicates his decision to talk to women.

Moreover, the narrative recounts: "And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching." (Luke 10:39) The Greek word used for seating is *parakathizo*, to "sit down beside someone." Here, Mary takes the

unprivileged position; she sits at a place of honor, a place of humility. In the first-century Jewish traditions, "seating at the feet of" a Jewish Rabbi was a privilege reserved only for men (cf. Luke 8:35; Acts 22:3). A similar situation is found within the African cultural context. On the one hand, women and female children are rarely found talking together with men in a sitting room. In the African context, the sitting room is reserved mainly for the husband and his male children. It is where the father provides instructions to his male children. On the other hand, the kitchen is mostly the place of an African wife and African female children. It is a place where food is prepared for the family and instructions are given to the female children. Therefore, Mary transgresses against both Jewish *and* African traditions: She sits in the sitting room with men and listens to the teachings provided by a man, contrary to Jewish traditions.

The words of Rabbi Eliezer say: "Let the words of the Law [Torah] be burned rather than taught to women." (*J. Sotah* 19a.7). "If a man teaches his daughter the law, it is as though he taught her lewdness." (Mishnah, *Sotah* 3.4) (cf. Wagenaar: 2002; Swidler: 1987, 30f.) These words indicate how women were considered in the Jewish context, where women were considered "the property of men, were not to speak to men outside their family and were certainly not to be educated by Rabbis" (Hilkka: 2015, 3). According to Jewish traditions, Mary occupied an improper space normal Jews could hardly allow her to occupy. On the contrary, Jesus (both a Jew and a Rabbi) approves her presence beside him and makes a radical transformation of worldviews. Most likely, his disciples as Jews would hardly have approved of Mary's presence with them; yet none of them openly indicated this disapproval. As in most of Luke's accounts, Jesus accepts her as his disciple, as a student of the heavenly kingdom of God.

While Mary sits at the feet of Jesus and learns from him, the narrative says that Martha was "distracted with much serving" (v. 40). This difference in activities between Martha and Mary is important if we are to understand hospitality in an African sense. Martha is busy working with worldly food, while Mary is sedentary, sitting near and listening to Jesus' heavenly teachings. There is a dichotomy here: being busy with worldly duties (*vita activa* – a life of actions) and being busy waiting for heaven, being busy with life on earth and being concerned with heavenly things first (*vita contemplativa* – a life of contemplation). Jesus tells Martha that Mary has chosen a good portion ("a good part"), which shall not be taken away from her (Vv. 41–42), i.e., dealing with heavenly matters first before looking at life here on earth, a notion that has suffered severe misinterpretations in the life of the Church.

The misinterpretation of Jesus in this notion of "choosing a good position" has cost the church throughout its life until now. Since the coming of missionaries, the church has irresponsibly emphasized the "other-worldly" matters while underrating "this-worldly" issues. Contrary to Christian emphasis on other-worldly matters, African Traditional Religion, onto which the philosophy of *Ununtu* anchors, has

been a this-worldly religion emphasizing this-worldly issues (see Müller: 2013, 317; Light: 2012, 135; Isichei: 2004, 318). Ehioghae and Olanrewaju put it clearly: "From time immemorial, Africans [in general] have had a longing for freedom from poverty, sickness and demon possession. These longings have found expression in their tales, stories, proverbs, prayers, sacrifices, and wishes. Unfortunately, the mainline churches failed to address these problems, while condemning the solution offered by traditional religions. Worse, some of the evangelical churches conceived the intense suffering of the poor in Africa as a mirage or at least played it down as though it was nothing to attract much attention." (Ehioghae/Olanrewaju: 2015, 71) The emphasis on the "other-worldly" over "this-worldly" matters is a misinterpretation because Jesus does not condemn any of them as being useless. Hence, such misinterpretation is the major cause of irresponsibility among Christians in Africa and the negative attitude toward work leading to abject poverty and suffering because of diseases.

When favoring the "other-worldly" matters, churches have mainly preached a "poverty" theology over theologies of emancipation from poverty. Chitando (2013) defines poverty theology as follows: "'Poverty theology' is the teaching about the evilness of the world and any kind of riches emerging from this world, and that people should not succumb to it for them to attain ultimate salvation in heaven. In this case, poverty is seen as the ideal for heavenly citizenship." (Chitando: 2013, 100) Therefore, emphasizing "poverty theology" is considered a failure of missionary churches in Africa to provide answers for people's world problems, leading them to places to find their answers apart from mainstream Christianity. It is a typical theology of irresponsibility exemplified by Mary's sedentary seating and listening to heavenly provisions without being responsible.

I suggest that, instead of emphasizing the theology of poverty, as has been done for a long time, African preachers should emphasize a theology of responsibility, a theology that changes the social life of people within communities, promotes equality in the hospitality of Jesus, and emphasizes the eradication of poverty and all other vices facing Africans. A theology of responsibility is one that can enable churches and their Christians to consolidate open societies, focusing on meeting people's needs and restoring their human value. This is the theology that clearly defines the role Martha took in the kitchen toward her guests. Martha feels it is her responsibility to care for her guests with the necessary worldly goods.

Choosing a good portion does not exempt Mary from her responsibility to worldly matters. It should be noted that according to the Jewish culture fixing meals in the kitchen was a responsibility of women – not listening to the teachings of the Torah, a responsibility Mary neglected. Martha seems to have been unhappy with Mary's irresponsibility. She could not tolerate anymore. She comes into the sitting room and likely interrupts the conversation. We can imagine which words she shouted to Mary, likely saying: "Mary, you are a woman like me; this is not

your appropriate space as a Jewish woman; your place is at the kitchen!" (cf. Martin 2014, 6). However, Martha directs her complaints to Jesus, her guest. Her anger and frustration makes her go off line and become rude toward her guest. She seems to blame Jesus for not ordering Mary to go to the kitchen to accompany her in the preparations of foods. In other words, she blames Jesus for allowing Mary to occupy her inappropriate space and for letting her remain irresponsible about her duties. She blames Jesus for not caring: "Lord, do you not care [*melei*] that my sister has left me to serve alone?" (v. 40) Then, with anger and troubled (*thorubazo*), she commands Jesus: "Tell her then to help me." (v. 40)

Martha does strange things for a Jewish, or African, woman. First, contrary to Jewish and even African traditions, she blames her guest. In Africa, one cannot say anything bad to children or relatives in the home in the presence of guests because the guests could think that their visiting the house is the cause for the misunderstanding and mistreatment. Second, out of anger, she commands the guest to act according to her will and contrary to Jewish and African traditions. In African traditions, a guest is a noble person worthy of respect and honor. Commanding a guest is against the African virtue of hospitality mentioned in the Introduction of this article. The approach of Martha to her guest for the case of her sister Mary hardly reflects either Jewish or African ways of life. Therefore, in this text, both women, Martha and Mary, transgress the Jewish and African traditions of hospitality. Martha, contrary to Jewish traditions, commands a Jewish man. In many African families, women's arrogance over men has been seen as the major source of much domestic violence. An African man could hardly be comfortable being verbally abused and commanded by a woman without taking revenge.

However, Jesus, like some guests of the Old Testament (cf. the hospitality of Abraham and Lot) and African guests (see Mbiti's attestation in the Introduction above), becomes a blessing to the family, bringing reconciliation between Mary and Martha. He responds to Martha with respect: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen a good portion, which shall not be taken away from her." (Vv. 41–42) In his response, Jesus does not jeopardize the tasks Martha was preoccupied with in the kitchen; rather, he emphasizes what is "needful," the most important aspect in the life of humanity. Jesus does not tell churches in Africa that a preoccupation with worldly matters is useless; rather, he tells them that the Kingdom of God is the most important of all. Therefore, Jesus hardly rejects a preoccupation with worldly matters for people to survive in this world, as most churches in Africa have emphasized in their preaching over the centuries of Christianity in Africa. Jesus strikes a balance between Martha's service (*diaconia*) and Mary's option to listen to his word. Word and service – prayer and work – should go together irrespective of which is more important than the other.

4. African Hospitality, Methodology and Ubuntu

What differentiates African hospitality from hospitality in other parts of the world is that African hospitality is praxis – it is practice and reflection of the practice which leads to improvement regarding the way future guests are handled. And as praxis, it applies the *see-reflect-act* model proposed by the Belgian Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Leo Cardijn and further developed by Latin American theologians Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff (Sands: 2018, 3, 4ff.). According to Sands, "What makes Cardinal Cardijn's method particularly fruitful is how it first seeks to understand the communities in which it is employed – particularly by those outside who enter into a particular community – to safeguard that what one does for social justice actively reflects the wills and wants of said community." (Sands: 2018, 3) This means that the see-judge-act method moves theory into practice and starts with a community and pertinent issues in it.

The goal of the African host is to satisfy the guest or stranger who arrives at their household, based on the philosophy of an African community. The "see" part is analytical: The African host observes the whole process of inviting the guest and providing all the necessary requirements. The major question in this stage is: What should people do to make guests in their homes feel satisfied with the service and be attracted to visit again? This question leads the hosts to struggle to find all means necessary to satisfy the guests with both impression and practical issues of required accommodation regarding services, such as food, drinks, and decent places to sleep. Hosts analyze what they see as their strengths and weaknesses in the process of handling guests. In this case, the "see" part takes place while guests are still in the homes of the hosts (cf. Sands: 2018, 3f.).

The second part is the "judge" (or "reflection") part of the action toward guests. This stage is more *hermeneutical*, interpreting the impression of guests toward the services provided. African hosts first engage guests into a discussion with them after they have provided every required service and before the guests leave the home. This conversation aims mostly at discovering the impression of guests regarding the service provided. Sands provides a similar direction in a context of suffering: "Here, 'judge' is a moment of discernment, and it is done in solidarity with those one seeks to help; it is therefore a community that works together toward this goal, rather than a particular person or group working on behalf of others. Once the proper judgments and/or discernment have been made, then and only then can one 'act' in solidarity with the community toward alleviating suffering – or, better still, act toward empowering those who suffer to alleviate their own suffering." (Sands: 2018, 4) As Sands says, in this stage guests become a resource toward improving the hospitality situation.

In this stage, the guests express themselves in a conversation that provides glimpses into their satisfaction with the service provided. The main problem in

this stage is that most African guests are not courageous enough to mention the weaknesses they saw in the household visited. Here, hosts must be keen enough to discern the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of guests from the general attitude guests show from their arrival to the time they leave the household (cf. Sands: 2018, 4).

The reflection part continues even after the guests have left the host's household. Hosts evaluate all the services provided and ascertain the general strengths and weaknesses in their whole process of handling guests. Some of the questions here are the following: Were the guests satisfied with the services provided? What lesson do we learn from the arrival and stay of these guests in our household? What must we do to improve things for future guests? These questions reveal the responsibility on the part of the host.

The third part – the "action" part – uses insights from the first and second parts to improve the hospitality for subsequent guests. Quoting Cardinal Cardijn, Sands states: "This judgment, finally, does not remain a dead letter, it leads to action: to solving problems, it turns to reality to change it and make use of it, to make daily life vast and beautiful." (Sands: 2018, 4) The weaknesses and strengths analyzed during the first part and the interpretation of guests' impressions during the second part are used to make improvements in handling forthcoming visitors. This part, following the completed reflection, becomes analytical, focusing on fulfilling the intended goals, and disciplined in the provision of services to guests. Hence, Africans resonate within this process of hospitality to guests throughout their life. Though African hosts may not be able to understand this systematic process in their actions to guests arriving in households, in its true sense, handling of guests according to the *ubuntu* lifestyle follows the described praxis pattern and is considered to be research, as briefly indicated in the following paragraph.

Hospitality as *diaconal* work based on *Ubuntu* philosophy becomes part of the research in the process of see-judge-act. It is not something external or additional. In other words, as Stålsett, Taksdal, and Hilden propose, "diaconal research, when conceived as itself *diakonia*, calls for research that combines the forces of individuals and communities in mutual, participatory engagement" (Stålsett/Taksdal/Hilden: 2019, 166). It means that, in the African context, hospitality as Christian social practice cannot be distinguished from doing research. Research is effectively Christian social practice.

Chinchen provides a witness of what happens when the guest arrives in an African household with some examples: "Upon arrival, visitors in parts of Tanzania and Uganda are given a coffee bean to chew, symbolizing acceptance into the community. In West Africa, the host and the visitor together chew the kola nut. The Nandi of Kenya keep an extra plate of food ready for a guest who could appear at any time. Among the nomadic Turkana, when a stranger first arrives, even before greetings are exchanged, food and water are served. The host lays aside all other duties to spend time with the guest. In addition to providing food and accommodation, the

host stays with the stranger and indulges in a lengthy conversation." (Chinchen: 2000) Though Africans provide services to guests entering their households, such activities are not divorced from research, which is necessary to determine their satisfaction and likely lead them to want to come again.

Nnamunga provides the pattern or model of welcoming guests that visit one's household as practiced in East Africa: "First, the guest is welcomed by the host with the word *karibu*.[2] Second, there is exchange of greetings after being seated. There might be kneeling, hugging or handshake. During the exchange of the greetings there is identification. Third, there is a presentation of tangible gift. Among the Baganda and Bahaya, it is coffee. The Chagga normally present the local beer called *mbege*. The Maasai present milk or milk mixed with fresh blood of a cow. *Milk symbolizes life, and for the Maasai it is the most precious gift one can receive*. Fourth, there is sharing of a delicious meal specifically prepared for the guest. Normally, in East Africa, a chicken or a goat is slaughtered for the guest even by hosts who do not eat meat regularly, to highlight the value of healing brought to the hosts by the guest.[3] Fifth, there is integration of the guest into the life of the hosting community. This involves sharing at a deeper level. The guest reveals the reason and intention of his/her coming which is followed by sharing and dialogue. At the level of a wider community, when the guest is to stay permanently, the Baganda normally give a name and a clan to a guest from another ethnic group to show that he/she is initiated in the community and a member of the community. Sixth, there is farewell with hope that the guest will return. A guest is accompanied for some distance before bidding final farewell." (Nnamunga: 2013, 167f.)[4]

Following the above-outlined modes of African hospitality, Jesus, as an African[5] initiated in the life of Africans, becomes a host, a Master of all African hosts,

---

2 *Karibu* is a Swahili word for the English "welcome." It is a word that alerts to the guest that there is peace, and that the guest should feel at home and safe.

3 The Swahili saying so goes: *Mgeni aje mwenyeji apone* (meaning: Let the guest come so the hosts may be healed). In Bena language: *U-mgenzi hilyo* (the guest makes food present). Similarly, the Chagga have a saying that goes: *Mweni nashe naso duhai* (meaning: Let the guest come so that the host may be healed) (Nnamunga: 2013, 168 note 443).

4 For a similar proposed model in Christianity for a Western world, cf. Callahan-Howell: 2007, 67f.

5 Despite being an African by virtue of being the originator of the African hospitality as God, some scholars have traced the African human origin of both Jesus and Mary his mother by tracing the meaning of the name Mary in both Hebrew and Egyptian contexts. His flight to Egypt to escape Herod's fierce massacres of children is depicted as Jesus and Mary's return to their land of origin, a thing that was common in biblical times (Genesis 27:41–44; 2Samuel 13:37–38; 3:3) and African traditional societies when one's life was threatened (see Ezeogu: 2013; cf. Thachuparamban: 2018, 419). Ezeogu states: "It is cultural ethos in biblical times, and still in the traditional African societies, that when a person's life is threatened in his or her fatherland, the surest and safest place of sanctuary available to him or her is his or her mother's maiden home." (Ezeugu: 2012, 277)

and Master of hospitality in the African context and universally. Jesus becomes an African and universal Master of hospitality because he transcends all human categories (Udoh: 1988; Chinchen: 2000). Therefore, in the pattern given above, there are six things notable characterizing the East African practice of hospitality. These things are "welcoming, interaction, identification, sharing, integration, and mutual dialogue" (Nnamunga: 2013, 224). These six things form the praxis – the see-reflect-act – process in African hospitality.

With the six aspects in the African praxis of hospitality, the above pattern of welcoming guests and strangers resonates with Jesus own words: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matt 25:35) It also resonates with Jesus' own service to the whole person, as Guta states it: "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, *teaching* in their synagogues, *preaching* the good news of the kingdom, and *healing* every disease and sickness' (Matt 9:35 NIV). In Mark we read: 'I have compassion for these people; they have been with me three days and have *nothing to eat.* If I send them home *hungry*, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance' (Mark 8:2–3 NIV). Thus, the ministry of Jesus focused on the here and now as well as on the hereafter." (Guta: 2015, 325f.)

5. Conclusion

Reading the text from Luke 10:38–42 in light of African hospitality has uncovered various similarities and differences between cultures. Researchers in hospitality as a diaconal action within churches should take research itself as a Christian social practice, not as something additional or external. The hospitality of churches must reflect the hospitality of Jesus for them to be in part with him as Peter was required, acts that make the Church in Africa a true servant of Jesus Christ.

Methodologically, African Christian hospitality should follow the see-reflect-act model in the context of the *Ubuntu* philosophy of African life to be hospitable to Africans. African hospitality that methodologically follows the see-reflect-act model in the *Ubuntu* African philosophy should move from *xenophobia* (the fear and hate of strangers) (Wandera: 2009, 244) to *xenophilia* (the love and befriending with the strangers), from being hostile to being hospitable, from being exclusionary to embracing the stranger. "Christian hospitality is a matter of welcoming, caring for, and befriending the stranger, the poor and needy, the homeless and destitute, the unloved and the unlikable, the weird and the strange, in gratitude to God and in imitation of Christ." (Wadell: 2007, 77)

Gallahan-Howell echoes this: "Jesus says to all of us, 'Listen, I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me' (Rev 3:20). This verse has represented salvation, the

ultimate hospitality, the welcoming of Jesus into our very lives. He is the guest, yet he brings with him hospitality. He accepts our food and that becomes a symbol of our fellowship. We have but to open the door and offer ourselves. He not only accepts our welcome, but he also welcomes us." (Gallahan-Howell: 2007, 68) This is what happened to Martha's household, and this is what happens to African households when the see-reflect-act methodology is used in the context of African *ubuntu* philosophy as a means of welcoming strangers home; for welcoming strangers is welcoming Jesus.

References

Agulanna, C. (2010), Community and Human Well-Being in an African Culture, Trames 14, 282–298, https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2010.3.05.

Arterbury, A. (2007), Entertaining Angels: Hospitality in Luke and Acts, in: R.B. Kruschwitz/ B. Robert (ed.), Hospitality, Waco, Texas: The Center for Christian Ethics, 20–26.

Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. (2006), Encountering Jesus in African Christianity: A Ghanaian Evangelical/Pentecostal Thought on Faith, Experience, and Hope in Christ, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 62, 363–377, https://doi.org/10.4102/HTS.V62I2.363.

Callahan-Howell, K. (2007), Finding Home, in: R.B. Kruschwitz/B. Robert (ed.), Hospitality, Waco, Texas: The Center for Christian Ethics, 67–70.

Chinchen, D. (2000), The Art of Hospitality: African Style, Missio Nexus, https://missionexus.org/the-art-of-hospitality-african-style/ (retrieved 5 April 2020).

Chitando, E. (2013), Prophets, Profits and Protest: Prosperity Theology and Zimbabwean Gospel Music, in: E. Chitando/M. R. Gunda/J. Kügler (ed.), Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe: Festschrift for Aynos Masotcha Moyo, Bible in Africa Studies 12, Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 95–112.

Danby, H. (1993), The Mishna, London: Oxford University Press.

Dorrell, J. M. (2007), Pass the Potatoes, Please, in: R. B. Kruschwitz/B. Robert (ed.), Hospitality, Waco, Texas: The Center for Christian Ethics, 71–74.

Ehioghae, E. M./Olanrewaju, J. A. (2015), A Theological Evaluation of the Utopian Image of the Prosperity Gospel and the African Dilemma, IOSR – Journal of Humanities and Social Science 20, 69–75, https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-20826975.

Eleojo, E. F. (2014), Africans and African Humanism: What Prospects? American Journal of Contemporary Research 4, 297–308.

Ezeogu, E. M. (2013), The African Origin of Jesus: An Afrocentric Reading of Matthew's Infancy Narratives, in: M. W. Dube/A. M. Mbuvi/D. Mbuwayesango (ed.), Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations, Atlanta, Georgia: The Society of Biblical Literature, 259–282.

Gathogo, J. M. (2008a), African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concepts of Hospitality and Ubuntu, Journal of Theology for Southern Africa 130, 39–53.

Gathogo, J. M. (2008b), Some Expressions of African Hospitality Today, Scriptura 99, 275–287, https://doi.org/10.7833/99-0-669.

Guta, M. (2015), Serving the Whole Person: The Theological Understanding of the EECMY on the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development, in: R. Dowsett/I. Phiri/D. Birdsall/D. Olika Terfassa/H. Yung/K. Jørgensen (ed.), Evangelism and Diakonia in Context, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 32, Oxford: Regnum Books International, 325–338.

Hilkka, A. (2015), Jesus Transforms Cultural Norms: Luke 10:38–42, Brampton FMC, https://fmcic.ca/wp-content/uploads/Jesus-Transforms-Cultural-Norms-Hilkka-Aavasalmis-sermon.pdf (retrieved 4 April 2020).

Isichei, E. (2004), The Religious Traditions of Africa: A History, Westport: Praeger.

Light, V. E. (2012), Transforming the Church in Africa: A New Contextually-Relevant Discipleship Model, Bloomingham, Indiana: AuthorHouse.

Magezi, V./Sichula, O./De Clerk, B. (2010), Communalism and Hospitality in African Urban Congregations: Pastoral Care Challenges and Possible Responses, Practical Theology in South Africa 24, 180–198.

Mandova, E./Chingombe, A. (2013), The SHONA Proverb as an Expression of UNHU/UBUNTU, International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development 2, 100–108.

Martin, L. R. (2014), Old Testament Foundations for Christian Hospitality, Verbum et Ecclesia 35, Art. #752, 9 pages, http://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.752.

Mbiti, J. S. (1976), The Forest has Ears, Peace, Happiness and Prosperity 7, 17–26..

Masango, M. (2005), The African Concept of Caring for Life, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 61, 915–925, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v61i3.465.

Müller, R. (2013), The ‘Indiginizing’ and ‘Pilgrim’ Principles of Andrew F Walls Reassessed from a South African Perspective, Theology Today 70, 311–322, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573613495230.

Mugumbate, J./Nyanguru, A. (2013), Exploring African Philosophy: The Value of *Ubuntu* in Social Work, African Journal of Social Work 3, 82–100.

Nnamunga, G. M. (2013), The Theological Anthropology Underlying Libermann’s Understanding of the ‘Evangelization of the Blacks’ in Dialogue with the Theological Anthropologies of the East African Context: Implications for the Contemporary East African Catholic Church, Ph.D. Thesis, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts, Duquesne University.

Pohl, C. D. (2002), Hospitality, a Practice and a Way of Life, Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology 3, 34–43.

Pohl, C. D. (2007), Building a Place for Hospitality, in: R.B. Kruschwitz/B. Robert (ed.), Hospitality, Waco, Texas: The Center for Christian Ethics, 27–36.

Sands, J. (2018), Introducing Cardinal Cardijn’s See–Judge–Act as an Interdisciplinary Method to Move Theory into Practice, Religions 9, # 129, 10 pages, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9040129.

Stålsett, S./Taksdal, A./Hilden, P. K. (2019), Research as Diaconia: Commitment, Action and Participation, Diaconia: Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice 9, 165–180, https://doi.org/10.13109/diac.2018.9.2.165.

Swidler, L. (1987), Jesus was a Feminist, in: K. Aman (ed.), Border Regions of Faith: An Anthology of Religion and Social Change, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis.

Thachuparamban, J. (2018), African Christianity: A Living and Vibrant Repository of Christian Faith – Part I, Fronteiras 1, 415–430, https://doi.org/10.25247/2595-3788.2018.v1n2.

Udoh, E. B. (1988), Guest Christology: An Interpretative View of the Christological Problem in Africa, New York: Peter Lang.

Van Breda, A. J. (2019), Developing the Notion of *Ubuntu* as African Theory for Social Work Practice, Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk 55, 339–450, https://doi.org/10.15270/55-4-762.

Van der Walt, B. J. (2003), Morality in Africa: Yesterday and Today. The Reasons for the Contemporary Crisis, In die Skriflig 37, 51–71, https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v37i1.458.

Wagenaar, H. (2002), Stop Harassing the Gentiles: Reflections on African Theology 1998–2002, Limbe, Cameroon: s.d., http://www.rug.nl/research/portal (retrieved 4 April 2020).

Wadell, P. J. (2007), Toward a Welcoming Congregation, in: R.B. Kruschwitz/B. Robert (ed.), Hospitality, Waco, Texas: The Center for Christian Ethics, 75–83.

Wandera, J. M. (2009), 'African Hospitality an Endangered Species': A Case Study of Kenya, Theologia Viatorum 33, 243–264.

Elia Shabani Mligo, (Dr. theol.), Professor
Department of Theology, Teofilo Kisanji University, Mbeya/Tanzania
eshamm2015@gmail.com

Beatrice Lukalo, Loreen Maseno

Grounded Theology and Disability in Western Kenya

Abstract:
Kenya still faces challenges in protecting the rights of persons living with disabilities. Although the government has come up with policies to protect the rights of persons living with disabilities, sociocultural beliefs and perceptions of disability have remained a barrier leading to discrimination and stigmatization of persons living with disabilities. To describe these cultural beliefs and perceptions in Western Kenya, this paper focuses on methodological issues engaging African realities relating to disability. It highlights persons living with a disability in Western Kenya to take into account theological engagements in social-scientific integrated approaches. This paper explores the usefulness of grounded theology, with the goal of engaging creative and original findings on living with disability in present-day Western Kenya and demonstrating the potential of theological creativity from the bottom-up, as opposed to a top-down approach. Methodologically, this paper emphasizes how grounded theology is compatible with grounded theory as a method for discovering hidden patterns and meanings and as a way to unearth stories informing the everyday lives of persons living with a disability. In this paper, grounded theology therefore relates the sociocultural beliefs and misconceptions to the transcendent, as generated from fieldwork on disability. Further, it demonstrates creative explorations of approaches informed by understandings of persons living with disabilities in Western Kenya.

Keywords:
grounded theology, persons living with disabilities, discrimination, stigmatization and inclusion

1. Introduction

In Kenya, people with disabilities face many forms of discrimination such as lack of access to meaningful participation in many cultural and religious activities. Chapter 4, Section 54 of the Constitution of Kenya makes provisions applicable to persons with disabilities and protects the rights of persons with disabilities. It stipulates in part that anyone with any disability is entitled, first, to be treated with dignity and

© 2021 Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht
Open access publication licensed under a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License

respect and to be addressed and referred to in a manner that is not demeaning; second, to have access to educational institutions and facilities for persons with disabilities that have been integrated into society to the extent compatible with the interests of the person; third, to have reasonable access to all places, including public transport, information and the like. However, sociocultural beliefs and negative perceptions continue to be a barrier to the freedom of persons with disabilities, who still experience challenges, including being locked up and other forms of discrimination. Thus, there is a clear need to re-examine how to engage African realities with such disabilities. In this article, we study African realities for persons with disabilities in Western Kenya using grounded theology as a methodological approach.

In grounded theology, the theory may be initially generated from the data relevant to theology, or if existing theories seem appropriate, they may be elaborated and modified with existing data. The emphasis here lies on the interplay with the data collected from actual research Further, such an inquiry explores social or human problems, as the researcher builds a complex and holistic picture, analyzes texts, reports details of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell 1998:15).

For this article, fieldwork was undertaken considering the religious engagement in several churches in three subcounties, namely, two Salvation Army Churches in Lurambi Subcounty, two Anglican Churches of Kenya from Butere Subcounty, and two Pentecostal Assemblies of God Churches from Malava Subcounty. This research serves to demystify the social-cultural beliefs on disability in these Churches drawing from connections in grounded theology. Further, it offers a description of these beliefs and perceptions in Western Kenya, while paying close attention to methodological issues. It also highlights the usefulness of grounded theology, thus demonstrating theological creativity from the bottom up. Methodologically, it emphasizes how grounded theology can unearth stories informing on the everyday lives of persons, in this case persons living with a disability.

2. What Is Grounded Theology?

Grounded theology denotes the use of grounded theory in studies relevant to theology. Further, these grounded theologies focus on worldly concerns, whether by attempting to create consensus among different positions through dialogue or by imposing a political regime to eradicate religion altogether (Tse 2014).

In this paper, grounded theology is suggested as a useful methodological approach that is in touch with the realities of the religious arena. The exploration of grounded theology in data generation derives from research on sociocultural beliefs of disability regarding the Churches in Kakamega County. Realities in the

contemporary African context demand reliance on data systematically collected from the field and a sensitivity to the beliefs of both the wider community and Church members.

The role of the Church in beliefs surrounding disability was behind the need to use grounded theology as a method for seeking hidden patterns and meanings. Grounded theology thus adds to the theological reflection, which has been somewhat limited when traditionally using grounded theory (Stevens 2017:201-206). According to Stevens, as a methodology grounded theology is postmodern. It constructs and incorporates different perspectives; it listens. The central focus on the contributions of those interviewed was to analyze and understand what the participants provided as *their* understanding based on their actual life experiences and principles of understanding.

Grounded theology applies grounded theory in studies relevant to theology. Grounded theory is an important approach to data collection in qualitative research methods, relying totally on data collected inductively rather than try to relate data to theory deductively (Khan 2014). According to Strauss and Corbin, as a general methodology, grounded theory develops theory based on data systematically gathered and analyzed (Strauss & Corbin 1998:273). A central feature of this analytic approach is constant comparative analysis with results from earlier rounds of analysis (Glaser & Strauss 1967), which makes grounded theory analysis highly iterative: Core concepts and theory can emerge only after multiple rounds of data analysis. Similarly, such constant comparison allows the analysis of data against other data to identify any similarities, differences, or consequences surrounding key events as well as incidents and patterns in the data. In general, constant comparison advances the coding, categorization, and conceptualization of data (Timonen et al, 2018).

Grounded theology uses qualitative data to investigate the process of believing and finding what is of ultimate meaning. This employs a range of strategies to gather rich data, and it allows the emergence of conceptual categories through careful analysis to produce explanations and potentially new theories that prove relevant to theology (Stevens 2017). Grounded theology reveals places and networks as constituted by practices informed by understandings of the transcendent.

As a type of research-grounded theology, it looks at the context in which religious activities, thoughts, and practices take place. It is an inductive, rather than a deductive, approach that begins by examining the data emerging from a situation and formulating respective theories afterwards. It is concerned especially with the context in which it expresses itself. In general, the grounded approach allows researchers to develop an understanding of how social lives and meanings are continually constructed.

3. Earlier Research on Disability

This section explores selected literature to point out the constructivist nature of disabilities as explored in disability studies. The complexity of disability is referenced given the limitations that face the disabled. It further explores the movement away from a strictly medical definition to one that is more sensitive to environmental determinants and in tune with how people actually experience disability. The literature highlighted also explores the perception of disability in Africa, as being constructed and partly informed by naive religious perceptions. It ends by discussing several theoretical approaches to disability as proposed by various scholars.

Goodley et al. (2018) highlight disability studies as important to reframing the focus along the lines of capacity, potential, interconnection, and possibility. Critical disability studies cover many critical theoretical developments, which offer alternative ways of understanding disability. These include understanding power dynamics and focusing on constructive positive conceptions of disability rather than pursuing a critical perspective on how disability is constructed. According to Goodley, attitudes toward people with disabilities across cultures suggest that social perceptions and the treatment of persons with disabilities are neither homogeneous nor static (Goodley et al. 2018).

Oliver (2012) asserts that there are marked social gradients in disability across the lifespan with evidence of enduring effects associated with childhood circumstances. To him, society has continued to disable the physically impaired by imposing disability on top of their impairments by isolating them and excluding them from full participation in society. This includes proximal risk factors such as lack of physical activity, alongside broader determinants associated with employment opportunities, poverty and poor housing, and inequitable access to services. These environmental disadvantages faced by persons with disabilities are, in turn, disabling themselves and create even further barriers. Therefore, in the studies on disability, we need a paradigm shift involving a shift away from focusing only on the physical limitations of people with disability and excluding the social context.

Swain and French (2012) write about disability as a tragedy in the sense that there are many widely accepted beliefs about what life with a disability is like for children and their families. They include assumptions that people with disabilities lead lives of relentless agony and frustration, and that most marriages break up under the strain of having a child with a disability. Their book, through a concept of the trussed model of disability, argues that many people's perception of disabled people is always negative. These include notions of inferiority, inadequacy, sadness, evil, and disgust.

Berghs/Atkin et. alt. (2019) clarified that the public face of impairments is also challenging previous perceptions by encouraging a more encompassing understanding of being disabled. Therefore, studies on disability have necessarily moved

away from a strictly medical definition, where disability is caused by functional deficits such as physical injury or intellectual disability, to one that is sensitive to environmental determinants and more in tune with how people experience disability in their day-to-day lives (Fougeyrollas et al. 1995).

In Africa, disability was perceived differently in various cultural setups. According to Barbara (2011), disability was socially constructed through the beliefs and actions of society by erecting barriers and structures that limit the ability of disabled people to function normally in society. Therefore, perceptions on disability in Africa were pegged to fears and misunderstandings, stereotyped individuals with disabilities exposing them to prejudice, discrimination, and ultimately to denial of the rights and resources afforded to all others.

Igaga and Mbikusia (1982) emphasize that, in Africa and from an African traditional religious perspective, all abled people were catered to except for people living with disabilities who were either killed by their parents or isolated from society. This traditional African religious perspective posits disability being connected with the stigma of what was believed to be a punishment or a curse from God. Igaga and Mbikusia further observe that, in Africa, whenever disability was detected in a child, there was no provision for rehabilitation or social integration. Therefore, the birth of a handicapped child disturbed the institution of marriage, which is why disabled children in Africa were either drowned or hidden because of the stigma or discrimination of living with a disabled child.

According to Eisland (2004) and Kamba (2013), ability is a temporary characteristic of the human body; all human bodies have a disability whether apparent or not. The lack of knowledge about disability in turn creates a fear of disability. Chisale (2018) refers to this sort of disability as a disability of phobia, which develops because of various negative perceptions of disability constructed and informed by naive traditional African religious and cultural hermeneutics. Based on the foregoing information, it becomes clear that there is a need for a paradigm shift in the way disability is perceived.

From the foregoing, it can also be argued that, in Africa, disability was strongly detested in the community, and that traditional African religion did not care for people living with a disability. Eisland (1994) emphasizes that people of faith, however, should embrace people with disabilities as a first step toward seeing the disabled not as passive victims or objects of pity or charity but as equal and active participants in everyday life, including the life of faith. She argues that God fully embraces all people including those with a disability. She further observes that the foundation of Christian theology is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, although seldom is the resurrected Christ recognized as a deity whose hands, feet, and side bear the marks of profound physical impairment. Therefore, the resurrected Christ of the Christian tradition can be understood as a disabled God. Eisland suggests that theology has yet to fully embrace disabled people.

According to Sheeren (2013), theological issues and especially Biblical interpretations can become a hindrance to the complete inclusion of people with disabilities. Shareen further advises that, in order to achieve total inclusion of people with disabilities, theologians must address the lack of understanding of biblical teachings on disability. Chisale (2020) argues that the fear of disability is perpetuated by naive hermeneutics, particularly of the Hebrew Bible on disability, and the ambiguity of African spirituality on the connection of ancestors with disability.

Amanze (2019b) agrees with Chisale, stating:

> […] the negative attitude toward PDWs [people with disabilities] in the African church is thriving on "negative theology of healing" that focuses on biblical texts that negate their humanity, considering them as "sick people" and in need of deliverance, spiritual as well as physical. (Amanze: 2019b, 131).

Amanze (2019b: 127) notes that the causes of disabilities were seen as ranging from God's punishment for sinning, witchcraft, demons, and anger of ancestors, to the breaking of family and societal taboos and adultery. In other societies, such as in Kenya, people go so far as to treat people with disabilities as things and not as human beings. At the same time, Amanze brings to sharp focus that being disabled is part of God's diversity in creation, so that Christians should welcome people with disabilities who are an integral part of God's creation (Amanze 2019b: 135). This is why Amanze argues that "it is incumbent upon the Church to change this by developing a new theology that is liberating and life-affirming. " (Amanze: 2019b, 131).

Goodley (2011: 35–40) articulates the idea that, to deconstruct asymmetric power structures and the systematic dissemination and oppression perpetrated against the disabled people, society must recognize their voice and accept them as equals. Goodley dismisses the assumption of any inferiority associated with those born with disabilities. This is a steppingstone to positively shaping the social world.

In summary, several theoretical approaches to disability include religious, medical, social, and biopsychosocial models, among others. In the foregoing, we referenced the religious model – the oldest model of disability and one found in several religious traditions, including traditional African religion and the Judeo-Christian tradition. It views disability as a punishment from God for a particular sin committed (Pardeck & Murphy 2012). The medical model views disability as a feature of the person, caused directly by disease, trauma, or some other health condition requiring medical care. The social model sees disability as a socially created problem and not as an attribute of an individual (Barnes & Shakespeare 2010). The biopsychosocial model integrates the medical and social models and provides a coherent view of different perspectives of health: biological, individual, and social

(Olkin 1999). In recent decades, there has been increased emphasis on the social model of disability rather than the medical model (Barnes & Shakespeare 2010).

Although the authors quoted above have made the effort to identify how several rights of disabled people have been (and still are being) violated, how individuals with disabilities can participate in a broad range of educational and community settings, how there's been a shift from a strictly medical definition of disability, an outlook of other ways in which disability can be understood, there are still too few studies on the sociocultural beliefs and perceptions on disability in Kenya using grounded theology as a methodology. That is the contribution of this paper.

4. Grounded Theology Design

The study utilized grounded theology, obtaining data systematically and descriptively based on the unfolding experiences in the phenomenon under study. For this paper, we draw upon grounded theologies because they involve some view of the transcendent; they are grounded insofar as they reflect immanent processes of cultural place-making, the negotiation of social identities, and the formation of political boundaries. In general, grounded theologies include the practice of specific narratives regarding divine action, transcendent presence, or supernatural reality in the immanent world.

Primary data were also obtained from a sample size using interviews and observation methods, which enabled the researchers to determine whether the findings were substantiated as per the research questions. The area of study was Kakamega County, which has 12 subcounties. Of these12, three were sampled which had a larger presence and dominance of the selected Churches in the area, namely Salvation Army, The Anglican Church of Kenya, and The Pentecostal Assemblies of God.

The sociocultural beliefs and perceptions on disability were studied using grounded theology with an emphasis on the position of these Churches. Of the three selected Christian Churches, two pastors were expressly sampled from each one of the two Churches per subcounty, resulting in a total of six pastors who provided information on Christian teachings on disability and the ability of the Church to mitigate social-cultural perceptions and beliefs on disability. From each Church, we sampled two church leaders, totaling six church leaders who provided more information on Christian teachings on disability. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to reach elders in the region who could serve as respondents on the sociocultural perceptions currently in place. The data collection process took 4 months.

Grounded theology enlarged the database for theological reflection in religious spaces and brought theological voices within the respective context to the fore.

As an offshoot of grounded methodology, grounded theology is a process that involves collecting and concurrently analyzing in a cyclical fashion to produce concepts from which a theory evolves (Pulla 2016: 80). Since this study points to participants' experiences and perspectives, the phenomena are construed for what they are in their own right, rather than being inferred based on parameters of some predetermined theory.

At the time of the study, according to Wekesa (2017:210–216), Kakamega County had come up with a strategy to register persons with disabilities at the Gender and Social Development Offices. It was therefore possible for the researchers to learn the status of disability and access information at the same time. The study delineated the experiences of people with disabilities as well as those of the leaders in the three selected Churches in this setting. While undertaking the study, we observed the followed ethical considerations. First, the researchers received informed consent from everyone involved in the study and also treated the subjects humanely and on par. Second, we remained impartial and kept respondents and their responses confidential. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Kenya National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation.

5. Sociocultural Beliefs and Perceptions of Disability in Kakamega County

This paper concentrates on the religious and the social model rather than on the medical model of disability in its descriptions of the impact of the same in the community. As a social problem, the effects of disability are reflected upon as a social problem, not a medical problem – and not as an attribute of an individual. The religious model obtains inferences from the church leaders in their reflection. With this in mind, it was possible to consider sociocultural beliefs on disability gathered from the field, using grounded theology in Kakamega County in the Western part of Kenya. What follows is the presentation of the empirical data divided up into five main themes.

5.1 Disability as a Curse

Most respondents observed that disability is seen because of a curse. It was believed that this curse can affect the whole family and even run from one generation to the other. For instance, if one makes fun of, laughs at, or mocks a disabled person by calling them names or imitating their state of disability, it is believed that the person will give birth to a child with the same disability. Similarly, this curse follows their family from one generation to the other.

During an interview, one of the respondents, an elderly woman in her 50s, gave an example of a woman who mocked and laughed at people with disabilities by

calling them names because of their disability. There was a disabled man who moved by crawling using his hands in the village. Anytime the woman saw him approaching, she mocked and imitated his disability by saying *weilikava yetsanga*, a name given by the Abawanga (the people of the Wanga Subtribe of the Luhya group) to a disabled person who moves by crawling using their hands. According to the respondents, it did not come as a surprise when one of her sons was late in learning to walk, and finally the boy started to move by crawling on his knees. To date, the woman's son is living with a disability like that of the man she used to laugh at. Among the Abawanga, any person who laughs at a disabled person automatically receives the curse. The curse can only be removed if the person immediately goes to ask for forgiveness from the disabled person.

During field research in the subcounties, respondents noted that, if a disabled person is mistreated and by bad luck he or she dies, the curse that follows because of their death affects the entire family. They are attacked by mysterious diseases, and some members of the family acquire similar disabilities of the dead people.

Most of the respondents stated that a curse from a disabled person is believed to be very bad. Therefore, to avoid such a curse, any person living with disabilities should be treated with great care. Respondents further stated that some disabilities have a hidden reason. It was also revealed that, when a child is born, one of the ancestors demands for the child to be named after them. If the parents refuse, the ancestor can strike the family with a mysterious disease including disability. According to the respondents, this is believed to be a curse from the ancestor who was not named as required.

Research findings also revealed that most of the people in Kakamega believe that a curse from God or ancestors causes disability. According to the respondents, people believe that, if one does something that triggers the anger of God or ancestors. The most serious punishment they receive is a curse (Mugambi & Kirima 1976). These authors confirm the foregoing sentiments when they observe that every community has its own beliefs and rules that guide them in order to live in harmony. Wachege (2012) observes that, in many African communities, the fear of curses and cursing is real. A curse is disturbing anguish in life and in the living.

Historically, theologians are believed to have had varied interpretations of the Bible scriptures on disability. In a rather similar vein as that found in the field, disability was believed to be a curse and punishment from God (Amanze 2019). A person living with disabilities was also believed to have been punished because of the parents' sin. Similarly, the Bible links disabilities with uncleanliness, sin, and possession by the evil spirit. In Kakamega County, disability is still viewed as a curse, a punishment from God or ancestors, and punishment for someone who engages in evil acts such as witchcraft or murder. Given this link to evil in life as one of the primary causes, sociocultural beliefs and perceptions have continued

to be a barrier for persons living with disabilities to fully enjoy their rights. The disabled have continued to be stigmatized and discriminated.

It was established that, in Kakamega County, even when a person gets converted to Christianity, sociocultural beliefs embedded in the cultures of Western Kenya cannot be discarded or abandoned completely. The study showed that most Christians still held onto their sociocultural beliefs, which include beliefs on disability. Therefore, beliefs and understanding of disability in society were also evident within the Church. Most church members still viewed disability negatively.

5.2 Disability Acquired Later in Life

The research findings revealed that, in Kakamega County, any person who is born without a disability but acquires it later in life is viewed negatively. Most respondents think that God reveals Himself only through persons who are born with a disability but not those who acquire it later in life. Therefore, a person who is born without a disability but later acquires it is believed to have engaged in evil activities together with their family.

Respondents noted that people believe that disability is associated with a family that engages in evil activities. Such a family is usually identified by mysterious happenings among the family members, including attacks from jiggers, disability especially mental challenges, and recycled poverty within the family. It was revealed that persons living with disabilities are always targeted and killed for different reasons. However, God is never happy with such happenings and punishes the offender. In the same vein, Mugambi and Kirima (1976) observe that human life, which came from God through the spirits and ancestors, was considered sacred and was held in great reverence. It can therefore be argued that it is an abomination to mistreat someone because of their disability. The following verse from the Bible was read by the respondents to support the fore going claim (Gen 1:27): "So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female." Therefore, whether a person is without disability or has a disability, all are equal in the eyes of God. However, this theological approach did not turn out to be predominant in the results from the study.

5.3 Disability at Birth

Our research findings revealed that a congenital disability is believed to be the plan of God. Therefore, such a disability is not viewed as a curse but as the creation of God. According to the respondents, a child born with a disability is to be well taken care of to avoid the wrath of God. Hence, it is believed that God reveals himself through most of the persons born with disabilities. One of the respondents in her late 40s in Navakholo Subcounty narrated a story of what happened to a neighbor

who had a child with disabilities, took care of the child, and how God had blessed the family through the child. According to him, when his neighbor gave birth to a child who was physically challenged and took a long time to learn to talk, people in the community sympathized with them. However, to them, the child was believed to be a blessing, and God was testing their faith. They took good care of the child, and to date, he is running his own business and his parents are proud of him. His siblings were also successful in life. Respondents attributed their success to the good care the parents gave to their brother who was born with a disability. Therefore, not all persons living with disabilities are a liability. If well natured and taken care of, they can become great people in society.

According to the respondents, people in Kakamega believe that any person born with a disability should be taken well care of. This enables other children born without a disability to be successful in life. It was further revealed that people believe that God plans on how to protect persons living with disabilities, which is why even those born with mental challenges hardly fall sick because God protects them.

5.4 Disability and Witchcraft

During our interviews with respondents, it clearly came out that people in Kakamega County believe that families who engage in witchcraft activities do it mostly to destroy other people in the community. However, it was revealed that, for the witchcraft activities to be more powerful, some evil spirits have to be consulted frequently as they are viewed as the source of power to do evil. According to one of the respondents, one person in the family is often sacrificed and made available to the evil spirits to live in. This is the person who later acquires a disability because of being the host to the evil spirits.

The people in Kakamega strongly believe that a family that engages in witchcraft activities cannot succeed completely in harming others before harming their own. Hence, they cause trouble in families, including causing disability, a condition they must first fulfill to sacrifice their own to the evil spirits in order for their engagement with witchcraft activities to succeed.

One of the respondents, an elder among the Abamarama in Butere Subcounty, stated that some families with great wealth are associated with the type of witchcraft believed to be a source of wealth to the family. Unfortunately, these spirits demand to live in the human body as they feed on their blood. According to the respondents, while living in the person, they confuse them, and in most cases, the person loses their mind and hence becomes mentally challenged. In most cases, these people are kept out of the public domain depending on the instructions from the evil spirits or for the fear of stigma.

Mbiti (1991) supports the foregoing information when he says, "some spirits help diviners, mediums, oracles and medicine men in their work." (Mbiti: 1991, 80) These are consulted as the need may arise. They are more or less the tools of their users. On the other hand, the spirits that cause misfortunes, sickness, and even death may be used to do these things by human beings who have the power to do so, most often by witches, sorcerers, or evil magicians (Mbiti 1969). Therefore, not all people, also in Kakamega County, engage in witchcraft to harm others but for their own personal gain.

In Kakamega County, witchcraft is generally associated with disability. During interviews with respondents in Butere, one of the respondents in her 40s noted that families who practice witchcraft usually sacrifice one of their children to their ancestral gods to live in. These ancestral gods are believed to have been inherited from their ancestors and transferred from one generation to the other. Therefore, the ancestors are believed to provide the necessary power when performing witchcraft activities.

Similarly, our research findings among the Abamarama in Butere Subcounty revealed that the child who is sacrificed to be the host for the evil spirits becomes the most beloved child in the family. This was confirmed by one of the respondents among the Marama, who said "the child offered for ancestral spirits to live is so much loved in the entire family". According to the respondents, such a child is well taken care of by the whole family by making sure that they are well fed; their health is a concern for everybody in the family. It is believed that, if the child in any way gets mistreated, the ancestral gods living in them become angered and devise a plan to strike the person who mistreats them by punishing them with a deadly disease or giving the person a disability that is worse than the one who was mistreated had. Therefore, everyone in the family is concerned with the well-being of such a child in the family to avoid tragedy. Similarly, the respondents observed that such a child is never allowed to go out in the public domain but is confined to the home for fear that, if anything bad happens to them, it might provoke the anger of the ancestral gods living in the child and cause a calamity in the family. Similarly, the person is confined to the home and out of the public domain for fear of stigmatization in the community. Hence, respondents observed that the families who live with persons living with disabilities have their own hidden story about the disability. Therefore, people fear to freely associate with them.

From the foregoing discussion, we see that people in Kakamega County fear being associated with disability; they try their level best to appease God and the ancestors to avoid curses that can cause disability. However, some of the activities depict the practice of witchcraft. On the same note, Ashforth (2005) observes that, in parts of Africa, engaging with the spirit world pervades the events of daily life. Stigma and prejudice continue to be a factor in the daily lives of millions of persons living with disabilities together with their families because disability is linked with

witchcraft. Our research findings revealed similar information in Kakamega County concerning disability.

5.5 Disability Related to Incest

The research findings in Kakamega County revealed that people believe that incest was one of the factors contributing to children being born with disabilities. Culturally, incest is a taboo in Kakamega County, and breaking that taboo brings very harsh consequences that become worse if a child is born from incest since the child is believed to be a bad omen and an outcast in the community. Field research revealed that children born out of incest are called *omwana wo luswa* among the Kabras, meaning a bad omen.

During field research in Malava, Butere, and Lurambi, respondents stated that children born of incest were believed to be a bad phenomenon in the community. According to the respondents, such children were born with disabilities and could sometimes be the cause of the parents' premature death. Respondents in Butere Subcounty said that such children are viewed as *abana bo luswa* among the Abedakho and Abamarama, meaning children of bad omen. To avoid bad calamities befalling the family, they were never allowed to survive.

Despite the taboo associated with incest, some people do engage in incestuous relationships resulting in the birth of offspring (Willner 1983: 134–159). According to Lumsden and Wilson (1980), historically speaking, the social incest regulation, which generally culminates in the prohibition also known as the incest taboo, has been considered culturally universal. Similarly, the universality of incest prohibition is based on sociocultural basis of each culture. The incest taboo is one of the most widespread of all cultural taboos, both in present and in past societies. Children of incestuous relationships were regarded as illegitimate and are still regarded as such in some societies today. This was confirmed in Kakamega County in the Western part of Kenya.

Shorter (1998) shares the foregoing information when he says, "Children born of relatives develop physical defects." In Kakamega County, people fear and avoid being associated with disability, which is why incest among the people of Kakamega is not accepted. The foregoing beliefs on incest related to disability in Kakamega County are one of the main causes of stigmatization among persons living with disabilities together with their families and especially in rural villages of Kakamega County. As Goodley (2017) asserts, "Disabled people constitute a huge problem for non-disabled society precisely because they disrupt the normative individual." (Goodley: 2017, 79) The findings from incest-related disability as a sociocultural perception depict the disabled person as disrupting a culture that emphasizes bodily control and associated cultural norms concerning manners, convention, sexuality, and bodily compartment. The study shows that these perceptions have crept into

the Churches and made the restrictions on incest relations even more pronounced – to the greater disadvantage of persons with disabilities.

6. Results from the Grounded Theology Study About the Influence of Biblical Teaching Regarding the Discrimination and Stigmatization of People Living with Disability

In what follows, we endeavor to look at the context in which these religious thoughts and responses take place according to the grounded theology approach. First, field research revealed that sociocultural beliefs and perceptions of disability had extended into the Church arena, which also referenced Biblical texts. Although the Church and a society that includes persons living with disabilities are considered to lie within the mainstream society, persons with disabilities still find themselves isolated. Currently, there are still practices of discrimination, stigmatization, ignorance, and cultural misunderstanding especially on disability among the people of Kakamega County.

Second, the grounded theology approach increased the available data for theological reflection on disability in religious spaces and brought to the forefront of theological voices in the Kenyan context. Above we explored the causes of disability from the sociocultural context and showed the connection to the religious nature of the society. The belief in God and ancestors is emphasized in the explanations of how disability comes about. The theological import here is that the worldview of the respondents has a strong attachment to the supernatural with a lingering belief. This import based on the an grounded theology approach was possible only through a systematic generation of data across subcounties, which availed diverse material for comparison, the reflection of similarities and differences, and the emergence of patterns.

Third, the theological importance of the data from the respondents obtained from the church setting was as follows: Church leaders observed that most church members have yet to truly understand Biblical teachings on disability, which is why most church members have continued to argue that anyone with a disability should not be allowed to move closer to the pulpit or take up any role to serve God. They further confirmed that God does not like anything with a disability as an offering. This finding aligns with the religious model of disability. This is illustrated by case that the respondents referred to. In this case, a priest in the Anglican Church was not fully accepted by most church members and was viewed as a sinner because of his disability. Unfortunately, when he started ailing and later passed on, his death was a confirmation to some of the members that God did not want him to serve in Church as a priest because he was disabled. According to these respondents, it was wrong for the late priest to preach at the pulpit, which is believed to be the holiest

and most sacred place in the Church. His ailing and later passing were believed to be punishments from God.

Misinterpretations of the Biblical texts have contributed to the stigmatization and discrimination of persons living with disabilities in Kakamega County. Hachalinga (2017) shares the foregoing information when he observes that the healing stories of Jesus have also served as proof for the moral imperfection of persons living with disabilities. According to some respondents within the church leadership, it is believed that people acquire disability because of their sinful nature. To them, the Bible concurs with the following information from the book of John (5:14): Afterward, Jesus found him in the Temple and said, "Listen, you are well now, so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." This is a story about Jesus healing a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Such texts give people the basis to believe that disability results from sin. Therefore, to them, theologically speaking, disability is viewed as a punishment inflicted upon an individual or a family by God because of sin. Consequently, among the people in Kakamega County, disability stigmatizes not only the individual but the whole family.

According to the respondents, persons living with disabilities are not supposed to serve God in any leadership position but to remain simply members of the Church. Hull (n.d.) observed that physical disability is seen as an impediment to the exercise of the priestly office. Hull further observed that Jesus uses the expression "blind" as a term of abuse in the Gospel of Matthew that is used by the Church in their teachings to stigmatize persons living with disabilities. In the Good News Bible, Matt. 23:24, we read: "Blind guides! You strain a fly out of your drink but swallow a camel!" According to Hull, Jesus attacks and rebukes certain groups of people using disability terms, to stigmatize persons living with disabilities. However, research findings revealed that people have negatively misinterpreted these teachings regarding disability, which is why persons living with disabilities have continued to be discriminated and stigmatized by some teachings that negatively relate to disability. The foregoing discussion indicates that some of the church teachings drawn from the Bible have had a negative influence on persons living with disabilities by discriminating and stigmatizing them because of their disability.

According to Groce (1999), holiness finds physical expression in wholeness and normality. Physical disability is seen as evidence of someone's sin and a sign of punishment by God. Therefore, bodily perfection is a symbol of the perfection of the soul. Groce noted that people living with disabilities are viewed as socially unworthy. Unfortunately, our study shows that the same extends to the place of worship, the Church. It was revealed that negative perception of disability in the Church is sometimes made clear through the testimonies people give in the Church. A respondent living with a disability narrated the following testimony a Church member gave in Church: "I thank the Almighty God for giving me both eyes, hands, and legs. I am able to run my own businesses without any challenge because I have

no disability." This example demonstrates that persons living with disabilities in Church can be stigmatized and made to keep away from the Church.

We want to conclude this part with an example that illustrates the social consequences of stigmatization in the Church. In one of the congregations, there used to be a teenage girl who was mentally challenged and who was fond of accompanying her grandmother to Church. However, at some point during the service, she would stand up and walk to the front, especially when the preacher stood up to preach. When she failed to find a chair, she would go ahead and sit on the floor right at the front. According to the respondents, her behavior irritated most of the members, and some of them would shout in Lwidakho *murulitsiyo! Asumbula*, meaning "Remove her from there! She's disturbing." According to the respondents, such comments annoyed the grandmother and caused her to skip several services, revealing the social model of disability where the actions of people make disability a socially created problem with related challenges.

7. Conclusion

This article considered grounded theology as a methodological option for fieldwork on persons living with disabilities in present-day, in our case in Western Kenya. It demonstrated the use of grounded theology as a theological method from the bottom-up, as opposed to a top-down approach, in seeking out hidden patterns and meanings and unearthing stories informing on the everyday lives of persons living with a disability. Using grounded theology, we discovered a clear relationship between sociocultural beliefs and misconceptions concerning the Church. For a grounded theology on disability, within the Kenyan context, these experiences remain critical for analysis, so that at an advanced level they can be mainstreamed into theological discourses at the intersection between theology and disability.

The methodological approach used in this paper shows that grounded theology points to participants' experiences and perspectives, even as phenomena are construed for what they are in their own right, rather than being inferred based on parameters of a predetermined theory. The grounded-theology approach reveals practices informed by respondents' (mis)understandings of the transcendent within religious spaces. We considered grounded theologies as a methodology because they involve some view of the transcendent; they are grounded insofar as they inform about immanent processes of cultural place-making, the negotiation of social identities, and the formations of political boundaries.

Church leaders and church theologians need to sensitize more church members in Kenya concerning disability. The Church should always respond to issues of disability, since walls are present that separate people with disabilities from nondisabled persons. Church congregations can be welcoming to people with disabilities

by accepting and affirming them by freeing them from the rejection, discrimination, and stigmatization they experience in most Churches. Further, the Church should be cognizant of family members of people living with disabilities.

Our study based on a grounded theology approach shows that the Church needs to embrace the fact that *everybody* has a place in the Church. Church leaders should be on the frontlines welcoming persons living with disabilities by making them feel accepted. Many people living with disabilities have meaningful contact only with their family and possibly with paid caregivers. They rarely have the opportunity to form lasting friendships in the Church. This is an area where the Church should step up. Acquiring knowledge on disability helps to mitigate sociocultural beliefs and furthers understanding of persons living with disability in the different regions. Similarly, it helps church members in Kenya to better understand Biblical texts positively, which in turn helps to mitigate the negative interpretations of Biblical texts on disability.

References

Amanze, J. (2019 a), What People with Disability Need Most. Three Case Studies in My Parish-Gaborone, Botswana in Disability in Africa, in: S. Kabue/Amanze, J./C. Landman. 2016. (eds.), Disability in Africa: Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies. Nairobi: Acton, 56-60.

Amanze, J. (2019 b), The Mission of the Church to People with Disabilities in Southern and Central Africa, International Review of Mission 108, 124–134, https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12268.

Ashforth, A. (2005), Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Barnes, C./Mercer, G./Shakespeare, T. (2010), The Social Model of Disability, in: A. Giddens/P. Sutton (ed.), Sociology: Introductory Readings, Cambridge: Polity Press, 161–166.

Barbara, W. (2011), The Most Vulnerable Group of People in Africa Today, Africa: African Enterprises Press.

Berghs, M./Atkin, K./Hatton, C./Thomas, C. (2019), Do Disabled People Need a Stronger Social Model: A Social Model of Human Rights? Disability & Society 34, 1034–1039, https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1619239.

Chisale, S.S., (2020), Politics of the Body, Fear and Ubuntu: Proposing an African Women's Theology of Disability', HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 76, # 5871. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i3.5871.

Chisale, S.S. (2018), "Disabled Motherhood in an African Community": Towards an African Women Theology of Disability, In Die Skriflig 52, https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v52i1.2375.

Creswell, J (1998), Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions. London: Sage.

Eisland, N. (1994), The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press.

Eiesland, N. (2004), Encountering the Disabled God, available at https://www.Bible in transmission/files/2004-spring/BiT-Spring Eiesland (retrieved on 23 July 2020).

Fougeyrollas, P. (1995), Documenting Environmental Factors for Preventing the Handicap Creation Process: Quebec Contributions Relating to ICIDH and Social Participation of People with Functional Differences. Disability and Rehabilitation, 17, 145–153, https://doi.org/10.3109/09638289509166709

Glaser, B. G./Strauss, A. (1967), The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Researc,. Chicago, Illinois: Aldine Publishing.

Goodley, D. (2017), Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction (2nd ed.), London: Sage Publications.

Goodley, D./Liddiard, K./Runswick-Cole, K. (2018), Feeling Disability: Theories of Affect and Critical Disability Studies, Disability and Society 33, 197–217, https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2017.1402752.

Groce, N. (1999), Disability in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Rethinking Risability, The Lancet 354, 756–757. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(99)06140-1.

Hachalinga, P. (2017), How Curses Impact People and Biblical Responses, Journal of Adventist Mission Studies 13, 55–63.

Hull, J. (n.d.), Blindness and the Face of God, available at http://www.johnmhull.biz/Blindness%20and%20the%20Face%20of%20God.html (retrieved 1 December 2020).

Igaga, J.M./Mbikusita-L. (1982), The Disabled Child, the Family and the Community, Nairobi: Unicef Eastern Africa Regional Office Publishers.

Igdanes, L. S. (2007), Belonging and Body of Christ: Place, Gifts and Roles in Doing Theology from Disability Perspective, in: W. Longechar/G. Cowans (ed.), A Theological Resource Book on Disability, Manila: ATESE Press.

Kamba, M. K. (2013), Developing a Holostic Educational Programme Through Contextual Bible Study with People with Disabilities in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo: IMANENDA as a case study, PhD thesis, Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwa- Zulu Natal.

Khan, S. (2014), Qualitative Research Method: Grounded Theory. International Journal of Business and Management 9, https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v9n11p224

Lumsden, C/Edward O. W. (1980), Gene-Culture Translation in the Avoidance of Sibling Incest, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 77, 6248–6250.

Mbiti, J. (1991), Introduction to African Religion, Second Revised Edition, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.

Mbiti, J. (1969), African Religions and Philosophy, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers.

Mugambi, J/Kirima, N. (1976), The African Religious Heritage, Kenya: Oxford University Press.

Oliver, M. and Barnes, C (2012), The Politics of Disablement, London: Palgrave Macmillan University Press.

Oliver, B. and Bernes, K. (2012). Challenges of Disability, London: Cambridge University Press.

Olkin, R. (1999), What Psychotherapists Should Know About Disability, New York: Guilford Press.

Pardeck, J.A.Murphy, J.W. (ed.) (2012), Disability Issues for Social Workers and Human Services Professionals in the Twenty-First Century, New York: The Haworth Social Work Practice Press.

Pulla, V. (2016), An Introduction to the Grounded Theory Approach in Social Research, International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice 4, 75–81.

Shorter, A. (1998), African Culture: An Overview: Sociocultural Anthropology, Nairobi, Kenya: Pauline Publications Africa.

Sheerin, F. (2013), Jesus and the Portrayal of People with Disabilities in the Scriptures. Spiritan Horizons, 8 (8), available at https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons/vol8/iss8/14 (retrieved on 26 July 2021).

Stevens, B. (2017), Grounded Theology? A Call for a Community of Practice, Practical Theology 10, 201–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1308455.

Strauss, A./Juliet C. (1990), Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques, London: Sage Publications.

Strauss, A/Juliet C. (1998), Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Swain, N./French, D. (2012), Perceptions of Disability, London: Penguin Books Publishers.

Timonen, V./Foley, G./Conlon, C. (2018), Challenges When Using Grounded Theory: A Pragmatic Introduction to Doing GT Research, International Journal of Qualitative Methods, (9 pages), https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918758086.

Tse, J. K. H. (2013), Grounded Theologies: 'Religion' and the 'secular' in Human Geography, Progress in Human Geography 38, 201-220, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132512475105.

Wachege, P. (2012), Curses and Cursing among the Agikuyu, Socio-Cultural and Religious Benefits. Unpublished paper, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Nairobi.

Wekesa, J. (2017), Status of Disability Sport Policy Implementation in Schools in Kakamega County, Kenya, International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review 4, 210-216, https://doi.org/10.15739/IJEPRR.17.023.

Willner, D. (1983), Definition and Violation: Incest and the Incest Taboos, Man 18, 134–159, https://doi.org/10.2307/2801768.

Beatrice Lukalo, PhD scholar
Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kakamega/Kenya
beatricevugutsa@gmail.com

Loreen Maseno, (Dr. theol.), Senior Lecturer,
Department of Religion, Theology and Philosophy, Maseno University, Kisumu/
Kenya.
loreenmas@gmail.com

Inger Marie Lid

Integrating Participatory Approaches in Research: Power, Dilemmas and Potentials

Abstract:
This article introduces and discusses participatory approaches in research as an epistemological and methodological contribution to research in general and more specifically to diaconal research. I outline characteristics of inclusive research and delve into the opportunities that participatory research offers interdisciplinary research. Next, I introduce and discuss ethical dilemmas that may arise with these inclusive approaches. Finally, I highlight how integrating participatory research approaches can transform diaconal research. I show how this transformation can take place through the codevelopment of new knowledge by citizens who are recognized as subjects of knowledge. The discussion is informed by an example from my own research, a historical study of the Christian diaconal practice for deaf persons with disabilities in a Norwegian context. Drawing on experiences from collaboration in this project, I discuss the spaces of action that researchers have when aiming at inclusion in their research. The article is a contribution to the development of methodological and epistemological issues in participatory research discourses.

Keywords:
participatory research, knowledge production, research ethics, citizenship, disability

1. Introduction

"Participatory research" is an umbrella term, covering different participatory approaches and methodologies. Empirical research is generally practiced by researchers conducting research on, rather than with, persons and groups. For example, in health and social science research, researchers study topics and problems defined from a medical or social-science perspective, wherein persons with situated personal knowledge are involved as interview objects rather than as subjects of knowledge. However, such research practices have been challenged, both methodologically and epistemologically (Spivak: 2016; Siebers: 2008). These practices are critiqued as being objectifying, evoking the civil rights movement's slogan, "Noth-

Diaconia, vol. 12, pp. 41–59, ISSN: 2196-9027
© 2021 Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht
Open access publication licensed under a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License

ing about us without us" (Pelka, 2012). In other words, stakeholders argue for the right to participate in research that is important to them or their group (Bridges: 2001; Beresford: 2013). In Norway, the Norwegian Research Council has called for researchers to explore opportunities for including users and citizens in research projects (The Research Council of Norway: 2020).

Diaconal research comprises interdisciplinary studies of faith-based institutions and church-related social practices focusing on persons in vulnerable life situations, social justice, and human rights, and phenomena related to diakonia. Diaconal practice both provides social services and contributes to the welfare state as value-based actors (Leis: 2004). As a research practice, diaconal research is characterized by interdisciplinarity, methodological pluralism, and normativity. Empirical studies include studies of practices and contribute to establishing links between theory and practice (Stifoss-Hanssen: 2014, 64). Although often theoretical, diaconal studies have become increasingly empirical (Gynnes: 2020; Lid: 2019; Rønsdal: 2016; Eurich: 2012; Wyller: 2009).

Normative and critical dimensions in empirical studies are elements of diaconal research. One normative principle underpinning participatory research approaches is the principle of equal status. Through research it has been demonstrated that even if the intention of diaconal practices is good, over time there have been wrongs and misdeeds in such practices (Foss, 2011; Lid, 2019). Diaconal research therefore needs to consider the experiences of those persons who have been the objects of diaconal care practices. This ethical motivation for participatory research is valuable as a research approach. Diaconal research must include the situated knowledge from these perspectives if it is to create new knowledge to develop further diaconal practices. Persons should not be reduced to simple care receivers in diaconal settings but always be recognized as subjects of their own life (Dietrich: 2014, 14).

In this article, I present participatory research as an approach in diaconal empirical research. I discuss participatory approaches in the different phases of a research project. I then identify and examine specific ethical dilemmas faced by researchers and research institutions when working collaboratively with researchers who are not trained as such. By using a case from my own research, I examine the participatory aspects of a diaconal research project – of which I was the lead researcher (Lid: 2019). I then discuss the spaces action researchers have when aiming at inclusion in research, and what dilemmas they must handle. Lastly, I discuss the opportunities that emerge when engaging in participatory research, including recognizing new subjects of knowledge in research practices.

2. Knowledge Production in Research

In the context of this article, the term "research" refers to "interdisciplinary research." As a form of knowledge production, research takes place in social contexts and is contextual. Both theoretical and empirical research aim at the systematic collection and analysis of data. Here, by using the word "production," I underscore the manufacturing aspect of research. Research is produced by human beings and thus fallible, much like the intended product of research, knowledge is vulnerable. This vulnerability is inherent in the practice of research, regardless of whether the research is mono- or interdisciplinary. My own field of research, disability research, is by necessity interdisciplinary, since disability – both a phenomenon and an experience – comprises individual and contextual factors. These factors include gender, socioeconomic status, the individual embodiment of biopsychosocial health, society, culture, religion, politics, and legislation – all of which are important for understanding disability (Shakespeare: 2018; Garland-Thomson: 2003). Disability, as a site of situated knowledge represents subjects of knowledge, while it is itself an object of knowledge (Harding: 1991).

Knowledge is a complex phenomenon involving knowers, ways of knowing, and the objects of knowledge – including the process of justifying knowledge claims (Stern: 2008). In *Theaetetus*, Plato refers to Socrates' dialogue on knowledge and its complexities (Stern: 2008). A workable definition of "knowledge" in this dialogue indicates that it can be true, needs to be justified, and concerns belief. In other words, the person who knows something believes that what they know is the truth about that specific subject.

Even today we still struggle with understanding knowledge. The Norwegian philosopher Knut Erik Tranøy understands scientific activity as "the systematic and socially organized a) search for, b) appropriation and production of, and c) administration and communication of knowledge and insight" (Tranøy: 1986, 59). Research as knowledge production is systematic, socially organized, and encompasses both the production and communication of both knowledge and insight. Tranøy's definition is helpful, but insufficient for knowledge production as a social process aimed at developing knowledge in a social context. Knowledge is contextual. When working on an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary basis with knowledge production, a shared understanding is helpful, while also acknowledging the complexity of knowledge.

A "knowledge production mode" refers to how scientific knowledge is produced. According to Nowotny, Scott, and Gibbons (2001), basic research, mode 1, is knowledge produced as fundamental, basic knowledge with less focus on applicability, whereas mode 2 research refers to research carried out as collaborative social enterprise. These research practices have a direct focus on implementation and usability, are closely related to contexts, and are carried out in collaborative processes, often

characterized by interdisciplinarity. Because this mode of research is guided by its applicability and usability, the public and the users of research are relevant as actors contributing to the research processes (Nowotny et al.: 2001). Knowledge production in empirical research may therefore include both trained researchers and the users of the research, such as professionals and service users, patients, and clients.

According to the general guidelines for research ethics in Norway, knowledge production in research is guided by four principles: respect, good outcomes, fairness, and integrity (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees: 2019). All empirical research builds upon some form of participation: Participants respond to a questionnaire or an interview, or they are observed in specific situations. Each participant consents to the participation, but the researcher does most of the actual decision-making at all phases of the research process. As such, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is largely a subject–object relation, exemplified by a medical doctor researching patients to find a cure for their condition, or a social scientist researching poverty in urban areas to inform future interventions.

In addition to being dependent on participation, empirical research also depends on cooperation. Because it has an inductive dimension, empirical research seeks to develop knowledge from contexts, people, and experiences – in contrast to theoretical studies, where a scholar generally reads and discusses texts with other scholars. However, empirical research is not exclusively inductive: Popper (1979) argues that all data rely on theory for their interpretation and understanding. Empirical material is intentionally generated by a researcher to answer or shed light on the research questions defined by the researcher.

The empirical research process generally follows a specific trajectory. First, there is the planning phase, in which the researchers develop the project and often apply for external funding (even if a research institution has already provided funds). In this phase, the researchers use their own working hours to develop the project and secure (additional) funding. Typically, there is no funding for coresearchers to participate in this phase of the process. However, a successful participatory research project should include participation from the start: This therefore represents a potential dilemma.

The next phase of the research process begins when the research project is fully funded and can thus be carried out. This is an important phase of the project, as many decisions are made early on. Cooperation in this phase is therefore important for establishing symmetric relationships between the researchers and coresearchers – or at least as symmetric as possible, given the distribution of resources in the project. The third phase of the process comprises the analysis of the empirical material. Here, the participatory dimension of the research project may be diminished, or it may play an important role. The process of analysis may be quite productive

in participatory approaches, as coresearchers often see other aspects of and topics in the material the trained researcher might miss.

The final phase of the project involves discussing and then disseminating the findings. If the research is to be characterized by participatory approaches in all phases of the project, methods facilitating cooperation in the dissemination phase must be employed as well (Chalachanova et al.: 2019; Chalachanova et al. :2020). Below, I refer to all phases, more generally, and to more specifics phases when discussing participatory research approaches.

Persons who are involved in research without being educated as researchers are referred to as "coresearchers." They work together with the trained researchers on research projects. As Cook (2012) explains it, participatory research means conducting research *with* people rather than *on* people. Moreover, according to MacTaggart (1997), this participation must be authentic rather than merely symbolic. The research practices must therefore be guided by an inherent recognition of the new research participants as equal subjects of knowledge. As such, participatory research is characterized by systematic cooperation and relations between the researcher and persons in the field, such as coresearchers.

Inherent to participatory approaches, then, is a shift from subject–object relations to subject–subject relations. Here, new subjects of knowledge are recognized. For example, in disability research, disability as a phenomenon should not be reduced to a medical issue, but instead recognized as an existential and human rights issue. In this understanding, the person with the disability is not approached as a source of scientific data (i.e., as an object of knowledge) but as a subject of knowledge. Such a shift is motivated by a desire to include lived experiences and situated knowledge in knowledge production. New knowledge becomes the product of collaborative work. Access to knowledge production, however, is limited in empirical research. For instance, patients' knowledge is often marginalized, as is that of undocumented migrants and homeless and low-income individuals (Beresford: 2013; Stålsett, Taksdal & Hilden: 2018).

Participatory research has been employed in theology, perhaps most prominently in contextual theology, where laypersons with differently situated knowledge interpret biblical texts together with trained theologians (Green: 2014; Bevans & Tahaafe-Williams: 2012; Pears: 2010). The participants bring with them their situated knowledge – i.e., user knowledge or lay knowledge – and participate in developing new knowledge in cooperation with researchers. Their participation brings with it the potential of providing new ways of seeing (Cook: 2012). It is important to note, however, that scientific knowledge and situated knowledge may differ or be described with varying words and concepts.

Participatory research methods have also been applied for decades in disability studies. In these two fields (disability studies and theology), participants in inclusive approaches may be patients, nurses, persons with disabilities, service users,

members of a congregation, deacons, ministers, and more. Indeed, participatory research in general involves many different actors, including researchers, (professional) practitioners, research funders, ethical committees, and the academy (Seale, Nind, Tilley & Chapman: 2015). Researchers may also choose a participatory approach for many reasons, to democratize research, to emancipate the researched, to obtain stronger knowledge claims (justification), and for ethical considerations (Askheim, Lid & Østensjø: 2019). Motivations for participatory approaches can be traced back to Paolo Freire and his liberation pedagogy and theology (Kindon, Pain & Kesby: 2010).

The strength and breadth of the element of participation in research range from user-led research, at one end of the scale, to consultation of users, at the other end. The "ladder of participation," a model developed by Sherry R. Arnstein (1969), describes the steps from the lowest level to the highest level of participation. However, this model has been criticized for being static (Tritter & McCallum; 2006). The practice of participation is often more complex, and the lines between strong and weak participation may blur and change throughout a project.

An analytical differentiation of participation in research was proposed by Peter Beresford (2013), who himself is both a researcher and a service user and has participated in research as a coresearcher. Beresford proposes an analytical distinction between three levels of participation. At the first level, input from service users to the researchers defines how participation in research is organized; this can mean answering a questionnaire or responding to interview questions. The next level is collaborative or partnership research, where service users and/or their organizations and researchers and/or their organizations jointly develop and undertake projects. The third level has the highest degree of user participation, namely, user-controlled research, where the users also initiate and control the research (Beresford: 2013, 142, referring to Sweeny et al.: 2009). The user-led research level prioritizes the interests and perspectives of user organizations. For this article, we consider the second level, collaborative approaches between researchers and organizations and individuals, to be most relevant.

Seen from a researcher's perspective, the participatory aspect requires preparation and accommodation. Limited resources (time and money) may hinder participation in research. For instance, coresearchers are often representatives of nongovernmental, religious, disability, or human-rights organizations. While some of these organizations may pay for their participatory work, it is usually seen as volunteer work. And while research institutions allocate time for research for professors and sometimes teachers, this is often not the case for researchers from outside the academy. Paying interviewees can be seen as potentially problematic, as it may unduly influence the empirical material. Clarifying the difference between asking someone to participate as an interviewee or as a coresearcher therefor has financial consequences for a research project. Furthermore, as participatory research meth-

ods become increasingly popular, participation fatigue may be a result, as different researchers may ask the same persons to participate.

3. Participatory Approaches in Diaconal Research

Diaconal institutions are faith-based organizations whose work is value-based. However, diaconal research should not be reduced to the study of institutional practices. Social work, health, and welfare studies are also relevant to diaconal research. Furthermore, one must examine what lies at the core of the diaconal research: Is it the church, the institution, or the person? In a Scandinavian context, diaconal research is anchored in the interdisciplinary studies of theology, practical theology, and welfare practice, which include social work and interdisciplinary health and welfare studies. The Norwegian diaconal scholar Sturla Stålsett and his colleagues (Stålsett, Taksdal & Hilden: 2018) argue for a rethinking of knowledge production in diaconia and for understanding the process of researching a diaconal practice. Their argument is anchored in liberation theology, alongside a participatory action research paradigm (PAR) as a methodology and research program. Stålsett et al. argue that research, when carried out correctly, can itself become a diaconal practice and argue that specific criteria must be present, for example, the research must be morally committed to social justice, expressed as (diaconal) action, and participatory and dialogical in nature (Stålsett et al.: 2018, 176).

I agree with Stålsett et al.'s argument that research as a practice has the potential to create and establish political and sociocultural changes. To do so, however, the researchers must focus on the aim of the research and strive to take a heterotopic position. In other words, the center of the practice – in this case, the research practice – must lie outside the research institution (Wyller: 2009; Gunnes: 2017). The person involved in research, as a subject of knowledge, is at the center of knowledge production. I am, however, reluctant to describe research as diaconal practice, because of the ambivalences inherent in the power relations in research (discussed below). I am also not confident that a PAR research method can guarantee specific results, as research conducted in social contexts is difficult in so many ways (Dedding, Goedhart, Broerse, & Abma: 2020).

To further the discussion on participatory diaconal research, I now turn to a research project I have headed and been involved in as a researcher. The project was a commissioned research project to examine Christian social practice in the evolving Norwegian welfare state, a historical study conducted between 2015 to 2018 on a diaconal foundation in Norway called the Home of the Deaf (*Hjemmet for døve*) (Lid: 2019). The foundation has offered education, a home, and welfare services to deaf persons with disabilities since 1898. According to Beresford's analytical distinction presented above, the project was not characterized by strong participatory aspects.

The participation was mostly reduced to input to inform the study. My role, as the main researcher, was to lead an interdisciplinary group of researchers which included researchers from sign language, rehabilitation, theology, pedagogy, and disability studies. As such, the project focused on topics across many disciplines – pedagogy, history, theology, sign language, deaf studies, and disability studies. I present and discuss the character of participation in this project below.

The Home of the Deaf was initiated in 1898 by Conrad Svendsen, the first minister for deaf persons in the Church of Norway. It was owned by the Lutheran Home Mission Foundation (Det norske lutherske Indremisjonsselskapet) and was funded through local governments and private gifts. The foundation identified deaf and deafblind persons with disabilities as their target group for diaconal practice; most of the persons living at the Home of the Deaf had learning disabilities. This was one of the few diaconal institutions providing services to persons with disabilities in Norway.

The research project on the social and diaconal historical practice included theoretical resources from diaconal research and disability research. The foundation itself was engaged in the research, as it both commissioned and funded the project. Moreover, throughout the research process, the methods, approaches, and results were all discussed with the foundation. There was, however, less involvement with the service providers and the service users, i.e., the deaf persons with disabilities.

The deaf persons were not treated as equal citizens (neither in life nor in death), from the foundation's start in 1898 until the welfare reform in 1991.[1] Two empirical examples illustrate this. The first example is an illustration of inequality in life. The foundation owned two institutions, one in Nordstrand, on the outskirts of Oslo (now part of Oslo), and the other on the outskirts of Andebu, a small village 120 kilometers south of Oslo. In Nordstrand, the institution consisted of two three-story houses. In the census of 1939, 77 persons lived in the two houses, 11 of whom were members of the Svendsen family, who headed the foundation: one was Conrad Bonnevie-Svendsen, at the time the minister for the deaf in the Church of Norway and the Head of the Home of the Deaf Foundation. In addition, 40 people were listed as inhabitants, being cared for by the foundation. These inhabitants lived under less beneficial living conditions than the Svendsen family, both in terms of physical space and nutrition. The situation was similar at Andebu, where the foundation owned a farm. Here, members of the Svendsen family lived in a large and beautiful farmhouse, while the deaf inhabitants lived in a dormitory – two in each room and without access to hot water. The foundation did in the decades

1 The welfare reform (in Norwegian: *HVPU-reformen*) transferred the responsibility of providing services to persons with learning disabilities from the state level to the local level. The aim of the reform was to improve living conditions and support inclusion in local communities.

before the welfare reform not prioritize improving the living conditions for the deaf inhabitants, deciding instead to renew the farm buildings (Lid: 2018).

The second example illustrates the deaf persons' unequal treatment in death. Not until 1970 did the foundation board decide that upon death the deaf inhabitants should be given individual gravestones (Lid: 2018, 31–32). In other words, before that time the service users were not treated as individuals in death and in the context of the diaconal practice not considered as equal to other citizens in society at that time.

When conducting this historical study, I found it difficult to understand why a diaconal foundation did not work harder to treat the inhabitants as equal citizens in life and in death. The family in charge of the foundation were ministers in the Lutheran State Church and lived in very close proximity to the inhabitants. In other words, they could see the differences in living conditions very clearly. Moreover, the deaf inhabitants were providing the family with the opportunity to live in what in the census of 1939 could be seen as affluence. Indeed, family members lived in nice homes with a cook, driver, and maidservant (Lid: 2018, 45–46). I wondered how this was possible and how to understand the asymmetry in privilege and power in the inner space of this institution, which was led by representatives of the Svendsen family for more than 80 years.

I have been reflecting on the impact a broader involvement might have had on the study. An interview I conducted with Lasse Seder – a service user and on and off resident of the institution since the 1950s – offers some insight into what might have been achieved through an inclusive design. Seder reflected an interesting ambivalence toward the diaconal institution: a balance between critique and recognition. The recognition centered on accepting that perhaps the Home of the Deaf did the best they could, given the era and financial and professional conditions. There were few professionals employed, and little time was available to care for the needs of the individual.

According to Lisa Hall, participatory research includes different spaces and has the potential to create a new third space of understanding (Hall: 2014; Seale et al.: 2015). Participatory research can be understood as a space that is shared between different actors, researchers, the institution, and the users of the institutions' services (Seale et al: 2015, 485). In the study of the historical practice of the Home of the Deaf, I represented the academic interdisciplinary space – as did the other researchers involved in the project. The involvement of the diaconal institution in the project (i.e., via the administrative head and the board) represented a management space. The practitioner space and the service users space were only partly represented through the interview with Lasse Seder and a few other persons.

Participatory research as a research design may influence knowledge production on the microlevel, the institutional level, and the macrolevel. An additional way of understanding this is that two perspectives – both at the microlevel of knowledge

production – were weakly represented. Consequently, the models, theoretical perspectives, and conceptual approaches may not have addressed issues of relevance to the individuals involved. In this case, the interplay between service users and service providers at the microlevel is of specific interest, as both groups knew each other quite well. Some of the service providers were children of former service providers or had grown up near the institution: They knew the inhabitants and service users over a long time and from different perspectives and in different situations. In this kind of context, an inclusive approach could have been promising; a third space for new understandings could have been added to the specific and concrete situations historical studies normally focus on (Hall: 2014). According to Annette Leis (2004), values are of importance for the motivation of independent welfare organizations such as diaconal institutions. When studying the institutions then, the microlevel is crucial to exploring how the institutions' values work in practices involving the lives of persons in vulnerable life situations.

These new approaches developing from historical analysis can serve as a basis for creating new practices, which in turn can support goals of equal opportunity, participation in society, and access to social and political citizenship. Furthermore, one may then evaluate the social and welfare practices of diaconal foundations regarding the degree to which these services are supportive, and advance everyday citizenship for the service users.

4. Institutional Responsibility for Ethically Sound Research

One must clarify what characterizes the participatory aspect of a research project and how the participation is facilitated, in terms of time and resources. Here, discussing the research institution's responsibility is also key to strengthening the structural support for participatory methods. Participatory approaches call for a certain kind of sensitivity and skills at the microlevel. Such approaches need to be facilitated at the institutional level regarding training and resources such as time and money. I first discuss the matter of institutional responsibility.

When a research institution – for example, a university – wants to support participatory approaches, there are legal and ethical issues the institution must attend to. For example, research ethics are part of the methodological training for Ph.D. students and for researchers more generally. This is an important element of conducting ethically sound research that centers on the treatment of all those involved in that research. Institutions and researchers alike bear the responsibility for conducting ethically sound research.

However, when including researchers from outside the academy, the institution alone is responsible for training the coresearchers. According to the Norwegian law on research ethics, the academic institution is responsible for teaching them

the "acknowledged norms for research ethics" (*anerkjente forskningsetiske normer*) (Ministry of Education and Research: 2017). In other words, the ethical guidelines and principles must be known and recognized by all individuals involved in the research. The acknowledged norms for research ethics include the two fundamental ethical principles of "do no harm" and the Kantian humanity formula stating that we should never act in such a way that we treat humanity as a means only but always respect the humanity in persons. Taken together, these guidelines and principles provide the basis for practicing ethically sound research; they represent the acknowledged ethical norms that are then expected to guide the research project throughout each phase. The pedagogical and didactical challenge lies in imparting this knowledge effectively to *all* persons involved in the research. The abstract and universal principles must be applied using concrete examples, so that any coresearchers gain experience with identifying potential ethical dilemmas and conflicts of values – in context, of course. This practice is in itself didactical, as one learns from practicing ethics in social contexts.

4.1 Who Can and Who Should Participate in Research?

A participatory research project has different stakeholders. For example, in diaconal research, the stakeholders are the users of a diaconal social practice: the workers, the leaders, the community, and the researcher working on a project. This may be a project seeking to solve some social or political problem. Those involved in the project have different roles and responsibilities, for example, the trained researcher (a professor who is supervising a Ph.D. student), the junior research (a Ph.D. student in the role of learner, who is learning by doing), and the coresearcher from outside the academia (perhaps someone with a disability, a patient, a child, or a person with dementia). This coresearcher works closely with the trained researcher, either alone or in a team with others. In user-led research, the coresearcher may even oversee the project – either alone or together with the trained researcher.

In research projects relating to practice, including service providers and professional practitioners (i.e., ministers and deacons) may also prove valuable. Indeed, persons who work as professionals have experiential knowledge that is valuable in the production of new knowledge. For example, teachers have knowledge on education that is important to research on education, in combination with their students' knowledge. Moreover, if the topic of the study is the well-being and welfare services for persons with disabilities, both disabilities rights organizations and service providers should be involved as stakeholders. Finally, policymakers deciding what services should be offered would also be important stakeholders in some projects.

4.2 Ethical and Epistemological Dilemmas

There are several ethical and epistemological dilemmas in participatory research. In this article, I focus on power (im)balances: language, analytical concepts, and theoretical models, payment as recognition of time spent, education of coresearchers, and time and money as limited resources. These are all relevant in all the phases of the research process.

The power balance between trained researchers and coresearchers is often asymmetrical. The researchers may be in the most powerful position, through their access to knowledge and important resources while conducting the research. However, there are also situations in which the research users are more powerful than the researcher, for example, when the user represents an institution, such as a state directorate or political office, or a nongovernmental organization (NGO) with formal and informal power (Storeng et al.: 2019). In addition, coresearchers can sometimes have more power than the researcher, for example, when the researcher is a student. One area in which power is exercised is when discussing who should decide which persons are to be involved in a research project: the researcher (academy) or the organization?

Language, concepts, and models may create dilemmas in the research process, for example, if the researcher uses language unfamiliar to the coresearchers. Such language could either be discipline-specific terminology or rooted in epistemological or theoretical concepts. This disconnect occurs because of the difference between the role of language in lay knowledge and in research-based knowledge. Similarly, even academics from different disciplines and contexts sometimes use the same words and concepts for different purposes. For example, from a medical or biological perspective, a word may be neutral yet offensive from a social science perspective. Both gender and disability studies include such terminology dilemmas, as discussed more comprehensively by Judith Butler and Martha C. Nussbaum (Butler: 2006; Nussbaum: 2007).

Recognition through payment of the time spent on research is an important and relevant dilemma in all participatory research projects. Most researchers have a paid position at a university. Consequently, the researchers get paid for their time and have access to a supportive infrastructure, such as libraries, printers, desks, and means of data storage. In research libraries, they can search for literature and receive assistance from a librarian. In addition, researchers often have access to additional support. For example, Ph.D. students have access to supervisors, research courses, and research groups in which they can discuss their research (e.g., choice of methods, theoretical perspectives, and epistemological challenges). The person engaged in research as a coresearcher, however, usually does not have access to any of these resources. One basic question, therefore, is whether the coresearcher should get paid for their work and support throughout the research process.

In nonparticipatory empirical research, the person being interviewed also spends time contributing to the research project. However, in such research projects, payment is often seen as problematic, as it may affect objectivity or create participation bias. But when the interviewee becomes a coresearcher, they engage in a stronger commitment to the research. Thus, paying for coresearchers' time is a way to recognize the work they are doing. Payment for coresearchers should therefore be included in the budget for every research project that uses participatory methods. The head of the research project should also involve the coresearcher in the relevant institution's research infrastructure, including research groups and the use of the library, wherever pertinent.

Diverse research teams that include persons with different types of knowledge and interdisciplinary knowledge bases must establish a common ground for work together and conducting research. Here, I focus on two specific elements: a common understanding of the topic's aim and scope and a common understanding of research ethics, including confidentiality, methods, and research limitations. While Norwegian legislation dictates that the institution bears the responsibility for training coresearchers in research ethics, a good program for such training may be lacking. In these instances, the responsibility rests clearly with the researchers. Continuous interaction between the researcher, supervisors, and institutions may facilitate the development of relevant courses in research ethics for all those involved in a project, which may establish a common ground for – and understanding of – the project.

Can there be *too much* of the participatory dimension? For projects that are not user- or citizen-led, it is the researcher's responsibility to decide what kind of participation is helpful and in which parts of a project. It is also the researcher's responsibility to facilitate equality in the relations between everyone involved. This may be a challenge, as academia is characterized by asymmetrical relations, and as researchers, we may not be conscious enough when identifying asymmetrical relations.

A focus on securing equal and universal citizenship for all has informed the shift from conducting research *on* persons and groups to conducting research *with* them (Beresford: 2013). The persons involved in research are not reduced to simple data for the researcher but instead are recognized as subjects in their own right – subjects who can also develop research topics, questions, models, and concepts (Spivak: 2016). Citizenship agendas prescribe relations between people and larger structures of rules and belonging, which are often but not exclusively the nation-state. A citizenship perspective in research approaches the person as a subject and individual person with rights and duties in line with the UN Human Rights treaties.

At a microlevel, we can employ the concept of everyday lived citizenship, which draws attention to the significance of citizenship as it is experienced and enacted in various real-life contexts. (Kallio, Wood & Häkli: 2020, p. 713). The idea of everyday

and universal citizenship is novel, as citizenship is typically associated with politics or civic life. However, citizenship is important in many arenas and can be described as cultural, religious/existential/spiritual, and social. Citizenship is highly relevant for diaconal research and was an important theoretical perspective in the previously discussed research project on the practice of the Home of the Deaf. However, as noted earlier (and described further below), this study was not characterized by a strong participatory practice.

To obtain knowledge related to everyday citizenship, we need a participatory, inclusive approach to one's research that is open to diverse perspectives from diverse subjects of knowledge. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the inherent potentials in participatory research, not least in terms of human rights and social justice. Care must be taken, however, to attend to the power imbalances between trained researchers and the coresearchers, as these can lead to ethical challenges in the research.

5. New Collaborations in Research

Emancipation and democratization in research have led to new collaborations in research between researchers and nonresearchers and involving research-based knowledge and lay knowledge. I discussed what such changes entail for research ethics. Sound research practice, however, is not just a question of research ethics: One must also take the conditions for participatory research into question. How are coresearchers treated? Can they learn and flourish in these collaborative practices, or are they seen as mere deliverers of knowledge, after which the rest of the work is left to the trained researcher? Do they have the opportunity to improve their CVs and get new contacts, to have access to new (paid) job opportunities?

As we saw above, the most powerful people in the diaconal institution in the historical study – the leaders and those in the head office – participated more directly in the study than the service providers, service users, and professionals. Consequently, the leaders also influenced the study more than the other actors, partly because of restrictions and because of research ethics: Service users are citizens in vulnerable life situations, and some need support from persons they know well to understand the research and provide informed consent during the research process (Chalachanova, Lid & Gjermestad: 2019). A systematic effort to include service users and service providers would likely have provided richer material for the study. If research is to come closer to and support social justice, it definitely needs to apply a systematic focus on finding methods for involving both the powerful and the less powerful.

Based on my rethinking of this diaconal study, we may argue that the use of participatory research methods would strengthen the human rights aspects of this

research. Objectifying subjects in, for example, medical or diaconal research may have supported existing systems and structures of power. For example, it was striking how few traces there were of the inhabitants in the archive of the institution. While this may not come as a surprise, as the archives were established by the foundation, it arguably reflects an interest in the development of the institution – and less of an interest in the living conditions and the everyday life of those who occupied the institution.

6. Conclusion

Diaconal research has normative foundations and focuses on persons in vulnerable life situations and contexts. Participatory research approaches have the potential to support social justice and human rights by facilitating subject–subject relations in research rather than objectifying persons and groups. Focusing on the research process together with the product of research, and identifying ways to work together throughout the project, are valuable means of knowledge production, not the least in diaconal research projects. Such participatory and inclusive processes should be supported by institutional structures and a research infrastructure that is supportive of new actors in research practices. At an institutional level, this may mean cooperation between research institutions, NGOs, and religious/faith-based organizations.

In diaconal research, participatory processes hold the potential for developing new levels of understandings, for example, of historical practices and of how to support citizenship for persons in vulnerable life situations. These kinds of participatory processes can be developed further by finding new forms of collaboration between research institutions and NGOs. One productive way forward may be to facilitate economic and practical coproduction in diaconal research: The participatory aspects risk being weakened in the absence of institutional and financial support. One might even argue that it is a diaconal responsibility to request that researchers include stakeholders in all their projects – in other words, to conduct research *with* persons and groups rather than *on* them.

At a microlevel, participatory methods enable new insights and fill part of the void resulting from the hermeneutical void in diaconal research. This void refers to the voices of the persons living in the institutions that are missing in the archives (Stuckey: 2014). As noted earlier, in my study on the Home of the Deaf Foundation, I had interview dialogues with Lasse Seder, who had been living in or near the institution for 60 years, from his childhood onward. Speaking with Seder offered new perspectives and opened up a new and productive space for understanding and knowing (Lid: 2018, 210 ff).

As a subject of knowledge, Lasse Seder should have been asked to join us as a coresearcher. Seder's recalling of episodes and practices pointed toward ambivalences that were not accessible to me as an outsider, alone. I could neither have analyzed nor understood them without his perspective. Thus, the promise of participatory research lies in these new shared spaces, in facilitating meetings, which are aimed at developing knowledge and understanding together with new subjects of knowledge.

References

Arnstein, S. (2007), A Ladder of Citizen Participation, Journal of the American Instiute of Planners 35, 216–224, https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225.

Askheim, O.P./Lid, I.M./Østensjø, S. (ed.), Samproduksjon i forskning: Forskning med nye aktører [Coproduction in Research: Research with New Actors] Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Beresford, P. (2013), From 'Other' to Involved: User Involvement in Research: An Emerging Paradigm, Nordic Social Work Research 3, 139–148, https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2013.835138.

Bevans, S. B./Tahaafe-Williams, K. (2012), Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century, Cambridge: James Clarke.

Bridges, D. (2001), The Ethics of Outsider Research, Journal of Philosophy of Education, 35, 371–386, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.00233.

Butler, J. (2006), Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, Florence: Routledge.

Chalachanová, A./Nind, M./Østby, M./Power, A./Tilley, L./Walmsley, J./Westergård, B.-E./Heia, T./Gerhardsen, A.M./Oterhals, O. M./King, M. (2020). Building relationships in inclusive research in diverse contexts, Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research *2*, 147–157, doi:10.16993/SJDR.681.

Chalachanova, A./Gjermestad, A./Lid, I.M. (2019), Involvering av personer med utviklingshemning i forskningssirkler [Involvement of Persons with Disabilities in Research Circles], in: O. P. Askheim/I. M. Lid/S. Østensjø (ed.), Samproduksjon i forskning: Forskning med nye aktører [Coproduction in Research: Research with New Actors] Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 76.93.

Cook, T. (2012), Where Participatory Approaches Meet Pragmatism in Funded (Health) Research: The Challenge of Finding Meaningful Spaces, Forum: Qualitative Social Research 13, # 18, https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-13.1.1783.

Dedding, C./Goedhart, N.S./Broerse, J. E.W./Tineke, A.A. (2021), Exploring the Boundaries of 'Good' Participatory Action Research in Times of Increasing Popularity: Dealing with Constraints in Local Policy for Digital Inclusion, Educational Action Research 29, 20–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2020.1743733.

Dietrich, S. (2014), Reflections on Core Aspects of Diaconal Theory, in: S. Dietrich/K. Jørgensen/K. K. Korslien/K. Nordstokke (ed.), Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction, Oxford: Regnum Books International, 13–27.

Eurich, J. (2012), Diaconia under Mission Drift: Problems with its Theological Legitimation and its Welfare State Partnership, Diaconia, 3, 58–65, https://doi.org/10.13109/diac.2012.3.1.58.

Green, L. (2014), Let's Do Theology: Resources for Contextual Theology, London: Bloomsbury.

Gunnes, G. K. (2017), Our Lady of the Heterotopia: An Empirical Theological Investigation of Heterotopic Aspects of the Church of Our Lady, Trondheim, Diaconia, 8, 51–68, https://doi.org/10.13109/diac.2017.8.1.51

Hall, L. 2014. 'With' Not 'About' – Emerging Paradigms for Research in a Cross-Cultural Space," International Journal of Research & Method in Education 37, 376–389, https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2014.909401.

Harding, S. (1991), Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives,
Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Kallio, K. P./Wood, B. E./Häkli, J. (2020), Lived Citizenship: Conceptualising an Emerging Field. Citizenship Studies, 24, 713–729, https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2020.1739227.

Kindon, S./Pain, R./Kesby, M. (2007), Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place, London: Routledge, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203933671.

Leis, A. (2004), Den kyrkliga diakonins roll inom ramen för två välfärdssystem: En jämförande fallstudie av två diakoniinstitutioner i Sverige och Tyskland [The Role of Chuch Diaconal Work within Two Welfare Systems: A Comparative Case Study of Two Diaconal Institutions in Sweden and Germany], Doctoral Thesis, Diakonivetenskapliga institutets skriftserie 7, Diakonivitenskapliga insitutet: Uppsala.

Lid, I. M. (2019), From Institutionalisation to Citizenship: Lessons Learned from Studying Diaconal Practice in a Norwegian Context, Diaconia 10, 51–66, https://doi.org/10.13109/diac.2019.10.1.51.

Lid, I. M. (2018) (ed.), Diakoni og velferdsstat: Utvikling av en diakonal praksis i samspill med myndigheter, sivilsamfunn og borgere [Diaconia and Welfare State: Development of a Diaconal Practice in Interaction with Authorities, Civil Society and Citizens], Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

McTaggart, R. (1997), Guiding Principles for Participatory Action Research, in: R. McTaggart (ed.), Participatory Action Research: International Contexts and Consequences, Albany: State University of New York Press, 25–43.

Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (2017), Lov om organisering av forskningsetisk arbeid – Forskningsetikkloven [Law on Organizing of the Work with Research Ethics – Research Ethics Law], available at https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2017-04-28-23/ (retrieved on 9 August 2021).

Nowotny, H./Scott, P./Gibbons, M. (2001), Re-Thinking Science: Knowledge and the Public in an Age of Uncertainty, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2007), Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Pears, A. (2010), Doing Contextual Theology, London: Routledge.

Popper, K. R. (1979), Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Rønsdal, K. D. M. S. (2016), Calling Bodies in Lived Space: Spatial Explorations on the Concept of Calling in a Public Urban Space, Doctoral Thesis, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Oslo.

Seale, J./Nind,M./Tilley,L./Chapman, R. (2015), Negotiating a Third Space for Participatory Research with People with Learning Disabilities: An Examination of Boundaries and Spatial Practices, Innovation, The European Journal of Social Science Research 28, 483–497, https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2015.1081558.

Shakespeare, T. (2018), Disability: The Basics, London, UK: Routledge.

Siebers, T. (2008), Disability Theory, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Spivak, G. C. (2016), Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular, in: P. K. Nayar (ed.), Postcolonial Studies, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 60–70.

Stern, P. (2008), Knowledge and Politics in Plato's Theaetetus, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Stifoss-Hanssen, H. (2014), Diakonia as a Professional Practice: Perspectives on Research and Education, in: S. Dietrich/K. Jørgensen/K. K. Korslien/K. Nordstokke (ed.), Diakonia as Christian Social Practice: An Introduction, Oxford: Regnum Books International, 62–74.

Storeng, K.T./Abimbola,S./Balabanova, D./Mc Coy, D./Ridde, V./Filippi, V./Roalkvam, S./Akello, G./Parker, M./Palmer, J. (2019), Action to Protect the Independence and Integrity of Global Health Research, BMJ Global Health, 4:e001746, https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2019-001746.

Stuckey, Z. (2014), A Rhetoric of Remnants: Idiots, Half-Wits, and Other State-Sponsored Inventions, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Stålsett, S. J./Taksdal, A./Hilden, P. K. (2018), Research as Diaconia: Commitment, Action and Participation, Diaconia 9, 165–180, https://doi.org/10.13109/diac.2018.9.2.165.

The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2019), General Guidelines, available at https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/general-guidelines/ (retrieved on 9 June 2021).

The Research Council of Norway (2020), The Research Council Policy for Open Research, Lysaker: The Research Council of Norway, available at https://www.forskningsradet.no/siteassets/forskningspolitisk-radgivning/apen-forskning/nfr-policy-open-science-eng.pdf (retrieved on 9 June 2021).

Thomson, R. G. (1997), Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature, New York: Columbia University Press.

Tranøy, K. E. (1986), Vitenskapen - samfunnsmakt og livsform [Science – Society Power and Way of Life], Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Tritter, J. Q./McCallum, A. (2006), The Snakes and Ladders of User Involvement: Moving beyond Arnstein, Health Policy 76, 156–168, doi.org/10.1016/j.healthpol.2005.05.008.

Wyller, T. E. (2009), The Extended Heterotopia: A New foundation for Diaconia? in: T. E. Wyller (ed.), Heterotopic Citizen: New Research on Religious Work for the Disadvantaged, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 206–217.

Wyller, T. E. (2009), The Heterotopic Citizen? Some Aspects for a 'Science in the Making', in: T. E. Wyller (ed.), Heterotopic Citizen: New Research on Religious Work for the Disadvantaged, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 8–17.

Acknowledgement

This work was funded by VID Specialized University, Norway, as part of *The Citizens Project (CitPro): Everyday Citizenship for Persons in Vulnerable Situations.*

Inger Marie Lid, Professor
Faculty of Health Studies, VID Specialized University, Oslo, Norway
inger.lid@vid.no

Trygve Wyller

Embodied Spiritualities

Methodologies, Practices, and the Issue of Generous Christianities

Abstract:
The article addresses methodological issues in diaconia research by picking up some fundamental insights from phenomenology, especially the traditions from Sara Ahmed and Bernhard Waldenfels. By presenting recent diaconia research the author claims that the phenomenological conception of the human as always a human-being-in-the-world should be taken as a basic human conception also in diaconia research. Phenomenology analyzes human beings as related philosophically, not theologically. However, presenting different kinds of human relations as a basic part of what diaconia is about, diaconia research will be able to discuss what the author calls a concept of a generous Christianity.

Keywords:
Methodology, phenomenology, empathy, sensibilities, ecclesiology, ethnography, Scandinavian Creation Theology

1. The Human Significance

What does it mean that issues of humanity are also the core issues of diaconal research? This is the topic of this contribution. In itself, this topic might not seem to be very controversial: Of course, humanity is a decisive part of diaconia! When one asks, however, what this really means, the matter becomes trickier. In this article, the focus lies on discussing what it means to analyze the human state, phenomenologically, on its own premises and, therefore, not as explicit theology, and still connect it to diaconia. Suddenly, the humanity issue requires reflections on methodology, concerning what constitutes relevant data material, what position is, and basically what a diaconal church is.

Within the broader context of studies in Christian social practices, issues of methodology have created much interest and reflection over the last decades. What is remarkable, however, is that the basic question of whether the humanity issue plays a role in diaconal studies has not been extensively discussed. It has been taken

Diaconia, vol. 12, pp. 61–78, ISSN: 2196-9027
© 2021 Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht
Open access publication licensed under a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License

for granted – the issue of what belongs to Christianity. One example is the Canadian theologian Natalie Wigg-Stevenson (2016, 2018), who in recent years has presented influential contributions to the ethnography and ecclesiology issue. Wigg-Stevenson belongs to a group of British and North American scholars (Ward 2012, Scharen 2011, Whitmore 2019) who have focused on how ethnography is a method for enriching and opening up ecclesiological issues. These scholars presented many stimulating and interesting perspectives, thinking theology from the life worlds of ethnography instead of directly from top-down dogmatics. Wigg-Stevenson (2018:428) argues that theologians should pursue ethnography within their own practices, also including the research subject themselves.

A critical approach to the role of the researcher subject and the expectation to implement ethnography to theologize one's own practices are important issues, which also lie at the center of this article. What differs from Wigg-Stevenson in the following is how I approach issues of humanity. I present many examples established through case studies and ethnographies but interpret these data through analyses of phenomenology before they become theologized. This is why methodology is such an important part of these studies. Methodology is the competence that decides which data material is the relevant material. To discover what is really relevant, the scholar therefore needs theological insights into why human beings must be studied on their own premises and how significant details assume decisive roles in phenomenological approaches. Phenomenology, especially as it has been developed from Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty 2002) to Bernhard Waldenfels (Waldenfels 2019) is a tradition that claims humans can only be interpreted as humans in their relationship to the world. No other can be presented as an object of research, since the other is already part of me when I reflect on them. The primacy of the being-in-the world approach can deconstruct and reconstruct what Christian diaconia is about. This is why methodology is such a significant topic for future diaconal research.

The first section of this article elaborates on why the humanity issue is so basic to interpretations of Christianity. A central question is how not to "other the other." Building on insights from phenomenology and participant observation, the focus lies on how encounters and practices beyond confessional positions cannot help but be parts of diaconal research, data, and interpretations. The second section develops this argument by presenting relevant, recent Ph.D. research, including some of my own recent publications. This leads to the third section, where the issue of position and how the scholar's own position is an important aspect of what it means to build a generous theological diaconia research (Wyller 2021). Generous, in this context, is not a naïve colonial concept but primarily denotes a decentered church; it is a generosity that increases when both the scholar and their ecclesial centering decenter – which might also have political impacts. The final section discusses why diaconal research belongs to the disciplines of theology. Diaconia

is about liberation and transformation. By decentering theological borders and binaries, theology contributes to such aims.

2. Why Is Methodology Important for a Generous Theology of Diaconia?

In the field of diaconal research, methodology and epistemology cannot be totally separated. Methodology discusses how data material, deemed part of an academic research, is established. There is, however, a distinction between issues of methods and methodology. Issues of methods belong to most research publications; reflections on the methods in use much discuss whether the chosen method is properly balanced so that the data are reliable and can be verified. Methodology, on the other hand, is primarily a metatheory of the profile of the research itself; it also discusses why one or several methods provide the most truthful and fruitful knowledge within the chosen area.

The methodological challenges and discussions, however, do not primarily concern choosing the relevant method for a specific material. The basic methodological challenge for diaconal research, in my view, lies in discussing and reflecting on how, and in what way, a given practice contributes to and interprets the nature of Christianity. Which theologies are implicitly – or explicitly – presented in a given practice or an encounter reflected in a research project?

To respond to these basic questions, diaconia methodology must reflect and critically discuss the kind of approaches, theories, and practices that might be relevant in this context. If you are interested in issues of a generous theology, meaning those positions and practices that go beyond the explicit confessional and beyond the religious/secular, as part of the data material, then you need to choose methods and theories that make such a discussion possible.

Below I present some short narratives from research I did myself in South Africa some years ago. The narrative is about a lunch given to me by a female informant of color after the interview was done (Wyller: 2016, 52–59). My interpretation is that the lunch invitation challenged the subject and object roles in the encounter between the two of us. And this interpretation leads to a discussion on the ecclesial significance of the phenomenon of sharing, recognizing others as significant subjects (and a professor of theology as not any more powerful subject), but having to participate in a different script than in the script “researcher controlling the field.” The article elaborates how one might interpret this form of decentering, commented on at more length below. In these introductory comments, the case primarily serves as a draft for what is at stake in methodological discussions – about the deconstructing and refiguring of what diaconia is about. Humanity belongs on its own premises, which makes diaconia theology generous. Therefore, the methodological question in diaconal research also includes epistemology. Who has, and where are,

the sources that lead to new knowledge of diaconia? And how do we discover and interpret these sources?

Because of these epistemological questions, diaconal research belongs to the family of theological disciplines. Theology is a research area that first and foremost analyzes and critically interprets what God's presence and practice are about. Since God is beyond human control, God's presence often lies in surprising practices and performances. Diaconia research must thus be research that looks for the surprising aspect of practices where the unheard becomes audible and visible. Theology is not apologetic, it is not synonymous with explicit faith. To discover the surprising elements, theology interprets and challenges what established faith communities claim as a given truth of faith. Because of this quest for the surprising, the unknowns of what God's presence means, diaconal research is situated at the margins of theology, keeping the theology concept open and asking questions that go beyond the secular-religious binary. Are there practices among the unheard that transform and perform the unknown simultaneously? The choice of what is relevant material for diaconal research is, basically, an epistemological question. What kind of knowledge is true when we search for surprising God's presence?

In the following, I first present and discuss some recent diaconal research to illustrate my position more concretely. Following Mignolo and Walsh (2018), listening and recognizing voices of the unheard is part of a decolonial approach. Yet not even this approach avoids the epistemological question: How to not other the other while at the same time pursuing the ambition to give voices to the unheard? We need to restart reflections on what is the center and what is the margin. In my view, phenomenology opens the critical discussions on this matter. One core insight is that all humans must be presented as a connected humans-being-in-the-world. This connectivity identifies what humanity is all about (Waldenfels 2011).

3. Discovering Humanities: Phenomenological Research (A) in the Diaconal Context

Adelheid Hillestad, Associate Professor at Lovisenberg Diaconal University College, did fieldwork in two nursing homes in Oslo (Hillestad 2019). The aim was to collect information on how the elderly people in these institutions shared practical situations, how they cooperated in very concrete and trivial occasions.

One concrete case is Emma, who sits in the living room with her face toward the corridor. After a while, her fellow patient Solrunn arrives. She notices that Emma is counting the number of lamps in the corridor ceiling. Solrunn, however, is not just ignoring or, even worse, mocking the whole counting act. Rather, she sits down beside Emma and joins in the counting process. We will never know why Emma

counts or why her fellow patient Solrunn joined in. Nevertheless, the fact is that the ladies were sitting and counting together (Hillestad 2019: 90ff).

Hillestad's material was collected using classical fieldwork methods. The added value in Hillestad's work is how she combines fieldwork and phenomenological interpretation. This combination lies at the heart of her research. The data and the participatory observation methods are interesting, but what makes this method relevant for the methodological issue is the phenomenological interpretation. Methodology concerns the pragmatical, philosophical, and epistemological significance of the research profile one establishes and how the collected data material is fruitful and relevant.

Following the philosophical tradition of K.E. Løgstrup (Løgstrup 1997) and phenomenology in the tradition of Waldenfels (Waldenfels 2011) all life is a stretching-out to others. When this is applied to specific material, the phenomenological interest and focus become how this stretching out occurs in the concrete situation presented in the data material.

For phenomenology, there is no empirical individual who is totally disconnected from the outside. Basic connections exist through our senses, which we do not steer. Phenomenological research, therefore, looks for the various connectivities, the relations. A very interesting part of recent phenomenological research was an analysis of psychiatric illness, according to which schizophrenia could be interpreted as "connections out of order" (Zahavi 2001). The basic point in this present article, however, is that the choice of phenomenology has methodological consequences. Choosing phenomenology for interpretation implies that the chosen methods must be aware of details and episodes that other methods might overlook and not register. We see that clearly in Hillestad's research.

Hillestad quotes the Danish phenomenologist Dan Zahavi (Zahavi 2019), who is one of the leading experts today. One of his interests lies in the phenomenon of empathy. Hillestad takes Zehavi's interpretation of empathy and applies it to the Emma/Solrunn relationship. For Zahavi, empathy occurs as a recognition of an already given, sensory, and embodied connection between people. In Hillestad's view, Solrunn shows empathy because she recognizes the existing relationship between herself and Emma by sitting down and joining the counting process. This is, then, a significant methodological consequence: The behavior of the two ladies is not defined "only" as a dementia behavior; rather, it is behavior born of empathy and deep human relations. The ladies change from very reduced patients to performers of moving kinds of humanity. The decisive act of empathy develops from the already given connectivity between them. This means the phenomenological approach is a discovery of real voices of real unheard people. This is significant in itself. In the last sections of this article, I also argue why these independent voices of the unheard are also decisive to the interpretation of the nature of diaconal research.

Some years earlier, another nursing scientist, Lisbeth Thoresen, studied the relationships between patients and professionals in a Nordic diaconal hospice institution (Thoresen 2010). Like Hillestad, Thoresen also based her observations on phenomenology and the implications of the already given relations.

She, however, focused not on the empathy among patients but studied how the nurses related to the patients. Here, she was remarkably more critical in her conclusions than Hillestad was. She was not impressed by the nurses. Different from Hillestad's patient, Solrunn, the nurses seldom seem to recognize the given relationship. Because of this lack of awareness, the nurses do not exhibit the same kind of empathy as the patients in Hillestad's case did. This indicates that voices of the unheard are heard only when the more powerful pay attention to the connections that long exist among all people, independent of power relations.

4. Discovering Humanities: Phenomenology (B) and the Significance of the Scholar's Positionality

There is one specific aspect with a strong significance for the methodology of diaconal research to be gleaned from the cases above. Both Thoresen and Hillestad apply ethnographical methods, fieldwork, and participant observation methods but also add a phenomenological interpretation to the data material analyzed. We might call this a phenomenological (A) methodology. In this A position, phenomenology is an interpretation of specific data material. Hillestad discovers active empathy relationships among persons traditionally deemed as complicated outsiders. And Thoresen critically misses empathy among the professionals. This absence of empathy is based on the interpretation of the terminal patient as still a person-in-the-world, where the terminality does not alter their fundamental status. Therefore, one should expect a stronger emphatic activity from the professional side – that is what one can conclude by reading Thoresen's research. In this way, both researchers address the reader's awareness for the extended humanity that is potentially present in the institutions, if one has the gaze of a phenomenological observer. It is this extended awareness of the human that has a strong methodological significance for diaconal research.

Neither Hillestad nor Thoresen presented their research as diaconal research. Nevertheless, the institutions they researched were (albeit one only partially) related to the history of diaconia or diaconal traditions. The first methodological lesson to be learned from this research is that the level of human awareness and practice presented above should become part of diaconal research. When diaconal research has the ambition to give voice to the unheard, this research should develop interpretations based on how people connect and take the unheard into the audible

and visible. This is why qualities that are connected to the view of a person as a person-being-in-the-world are values pertinent to what diaconia is about.

The practices above were located in diaconal institutions. Nevertheless, an analysis of the human aspects there seems meaningful, even if they are not explicitly interpreted from theological positions. The significance of an independent phenomenology for a final theological discussion of diaconia is the focus of the final sections. It is, however, evident that this methodological approach is the opposite of that of Wigg-Stevenson (and others), who argue in favor of a theologizing ethnography (Wigg-Stevenson 2018). This approach would probably not have discovered the human implications of the empathy relations presented by Hillestad and Thoresen.

This independent aspect is also part of another interesting aspect of this methodological discussion. The researcher's own position plays an increasing methodological role, also in diaconal research (Rønsdal 2017) and in the ethnographic and ecclesiological discussion (Wigg-Stevenson 2018). While obviously influenced by feminist theorists like Dona Harraway (Harraway 1988), it is interesting to analyze how the position of the researcher subject impacts the human level of diaconal research. Again, the decisive aspect is whether the researcher's position is presented as an independent aspect or whether it is immediately theologized.

Hillestad and Thoresen follow Zahavi by not bringing the researcher's own position into the observation. The researcher observes what happens in each practice; the researcher can be a participant observant in the specific practice, but that does not imply that priority is given to reflections concerning how much the researchers themselves are part of the data-material collection. The methodology is classical ethnography in the sense that the field notebooks aim at telling and narrating what happens around the researcher subject. The researcher does not become part of the data material.

In this sense, both Hillestad's and Thoresen's work with traditional fieldwork methodology, by not including the researcher position as part of the data material. Nevertheless, their interpretations of what is contained in the data material are not traditional. Following the phenomenologically basic presumption that no person is an individual solo player, both researchers analyse their data material into more fundamental, embodied connections. Solrunn's behavior comes from her sensing and recognizing Emma's sensory presence. The two women share a common space, and this shared space is the starting point for the theoretical reflections on empathy. The shared common space cannot be verified in the same "objective" way as a strictly visible observation, but it is part of the phenomenological position that such shared spaces form the fundamentals of any interpretation. There are no empirical facts – that is the position of the phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels (Waldenfels 2006: 60). Those who insist on empirical facts objectify the other.

This means that phenomenology contests what it means that something is part of the data material. Phenomenology has a nonobjectifying intention to it. One

could call it a humanizing tendency because of its insistency that data material presupposes that lived relations are the first characteristic of what determines humans. The basic data are dates that narrate these relationships (Schütz 1973).

This basic humanizing tendency is the basic characteristic of all aspects of a phenomenological methodology. There is, however, also a second option in this tradition, something we might call phenomenology B, which includes the observer in the phenomenological data material. The observer moves from a collector of data to being part of the same collection. The difference to position A is significant, though, in my view, the difference is not that radical. The sharing of an already given interconnection of life is fundamental in both traditions. And this is what makes both A and phenomenology B significant contributors to the humanitarian interest of diaconal research.

One recent contribution to the B tradition is Kaia Rønsdal's *Calling Bodies in Lived Space* (Rønsdal 2018). There, Rønsdal introduces the spatial theory from Henri Lefebvre in her fieldwork interpretation. The fieldwork location is the blocks around the main railway station in Oslo, Norway, where she spent many weeks collecting the "tales" of many seemingly insignificant encounters taking place there. One longer citation illustrates Rønsdal's methodological position.

> (16 November, 1:30 pm), from 'Jafs,' observing the intersection: "[…] There are still nine or ten substance users standing here, and no cops right now. #14: It is 13:34, and suddenly … the ones that have been standing here for a while, maybe 10 minutes, six or seven individuals, suddenly there were 25! Complete chaos, with several others approaching from everywhere to join the group. Many just appearing from the outskirts. Some disappeared around one corner, and others around another and some are still roaming around just outside here. So suddenly things are happening. And if one does not pay attention that moment, one misses the whole event. It is just a question of seconds, really. #15: 13:38, two new cops came up from Jernbanetorget and took their place here. I have not seen them before today, so it appears to be up to eight, at least, walking around here. That is not extraordinary compared to other afternoons, but it is ok to have seen. Now, the entire cluster from before has dissolved, only one is left, and three more are on their way in from different sides, they appear to be just passing. They came before the police, but they may have seen them before I did." This tale only exists because of my being there, observing as I did with all my senses, and interpreting and analysing it with the help of my theoretical and methodological foundations. In terms of rhythmanalysis, such a real location not only enables observation, but leads to insights. "The observer is implicated in what is happening on the street, (Rønsdal 2018, 122)

The decisive sentence in the citation is this: "This tale only exists because of my being there, observing as I did with all my senses, and interpreting and analysing it

with the help of my theoretical and methodological foundations." The implication is that the scholar's own embodied and sensory presence is a necessary contribution to what is presented as data material.

Lefebvre favors a phenomenological approach through his insistence that the embodied and sensory (of the scholar as well) becomes part of the data material. His concepts of rhythm and "murmur" presuppose that the body (of the scholar as well) cannot be disconnected from what the data material is. The scholar (even when situated on a "balcony") must be immersed in the lived space of the location. In this lived space the manifold interconnections initiate and develop the specific rhythm. The researcher must be immersed in the same rhythm to narrate what is taking place.

What, therefore, characterizes both the A and the B types is that data material reflects such a perspective on humanity. The A tradition does not include the researcher's position in the same way as the B tradition does. Nevertheless, in discussions on diaconal research methodology, phenomena like sharing and touching are basic. What phenomenology B adds to the A version is its insistence that the research process itself must be part of this sharing and touching part of humanity. If one should be inclined to use a concept like reliability, it makes sense here. One could define reliable data as data when the researcher has become part of sharing and embodied touching. To distance oneself and stay in the observer position reduces reliability – that is the paradox to be learned here. Nevertheless, despite the differences between the two traditions, they share a common humanistic approach to what empirical data material is.

One last illustration comes from my own experience. I have, on several occasions over the last few years, published articles related to some South African migration narratives (Wyller 2018, 2021).

One research interest of mine was to meet and interpret refugee people living in South Africa. There are other refugee routes than the one from South to North. There are also southbound routes, and one ends in South Africa. The challenge in this country is its strongly negative attitude toward "foreigners," people coming in from neighboring countries.

To follow up on some of the persons I encountered during these studies, I revisited one of them in her township house some years ago. The intention was to dig deeper into her narrative to learn more and to reflect on future approaches in this field. In one of the visits, something very surprising happened that changed the research interest and opened me to another version of what diaconal research means.

The narrative is about the female informant Nisha, who invited for lunch after I had interviewed her in her township house. In the published articles, I comment that the lunch situation is a change in the roles between me, the researcher, and Nisha, the township interviewee. Based on this role-changing situation, I interpreted the situation as Nisha decentering me and opening up a decolonial trajectory. Instead

of the colonial situation, the white theology professor coming to the township to register an interview for the next book, a fragile situation develops. Nisha takes the lead, bringing herself to the center.

In the article, the narrative is first used as an illustration to initiate a discussion of profiles of diaconia. It has a double meaning: First, there is the meaning of a stronger subject and agent role of Nisha. The argument is again connected to the phenomenology and position presented above. Obviously, this represents an interpretation on my part. Nevertheless, the interpretation presupposes the phenomenological approach, where one can only narrate one person as a person in the world. Nisha and I relate, and in the lunch invitation situation the being in the world between her and me changes. A different being in the world appears, and that is the interpretative position in the article.

Second, this decentering – the phenomenon emerging from the situation – is what initiates a more explicit discussion of diaconia. Is the decentering a perspective with high relevance to the ecclesiological profile of diaconia? A diaconia that experiences its own ecclesial authority as weakened while the authority of others is strengthened, is, for me, opening an important discussion on the kind of ecclesiology to be pursued, both in diaconal practice and in diaconal research. In this way the Nisha article contributes to the discussion of diaconal research methodology. This methodology discussion has at least two levels or aspects: First, the issue of data collection and the methods used to provide data material; second, and equally as significant, the discussion on how the data material itself profiles what diaconal research is all about, both at the level of humanity and at the level of ecclesia. The methodological challenge is to be open to all possible situations that could give unexpected meaning to the concluding interpretations. It requires, however, also an interest in discovering phenomena that point to increased humanity and – simultaneously – a consciousness and preparedness that such independent analysis of the human can lead to significant ecclesiological interpretations.

At this point in my Nisha articles, the Nisha narrative served mainly as an illustration and not as part of my bringing phenomenology into a discussion of ecclesiology. In the context of this article, however, it is time to go one more step further. A phenomenological interpretation of the relationship between Nisha and me, the scholar, would, in different ways, highlight the given sensory relationship between the two of us. The feminist phenomenologist Sara Ahmed (Ahmed 2000) is among the most influential thinkers in this area from the last generation. Ahmed builds on the phenomenological basics: A person is already a person-being-in-the-world. We are connected even before we start reflecting and acting. Following Ahmed, one might say that Nisha, because of the already established sensory relationship, is not an alien, she is a stranger. In other words, she is an other, but not an absolutely otherThere is a given connection, and the relationship is one of a powerful person relating to a less powerful person, though there is, nevertheless, a relationship.

In the lunch invitation, we might discover a change also in the kind of relationship. The invitation is always based on the same sensory-given relationship. In the lunch invitation context, however, there is a stronger aspect of agency on the part of Nisha. From a phenomenological perspective, one could say that the new relationship is an agency countering the powerful stranger relationship on the part of the scholar. The decentering phenomenon in the lunch situation could be considered as a confusing power challenge (on the part of the researcher) as well as fragile recentering (on the part of Nisha). Such phenomena enable new discussions on human values inherent to diaconal research.

To be clear: These more explicit phenomenological interpretations belong to a tradition different from data collection. That there is a sensory and embodied relationship between two persons, Nisha and the scholar, is a presupposition to this "method." To focus and underline this being in the world and the consequences it might have, also within contexts of power, is probably the important contribution from phenomenology to diaconal research. The important part of the interpretation, introducing a refiguring agency on the part of Nisha, reconstructs and, in a way, destabilizes, the objectifying ecclesial relations. This relationship is a colonial one, the first one is less colonial, more leaning toward decoloniality. This means that reflecting critically on what decoloniality means is an important task for future diaconal research. The specific challenge is to reflect – ecclesiologically – which voices of the unheard are significant to diaconal practice and interpretation. In my view, one aspect of the unheard is that their voices are unheard because they no longer follow the religious/secular binary, rather conquering significance in the ecclesiological discussions on diaconia.

5. Methodology and the Profile of Diaconia

Diaconia research is a quest for discovering, and strengthening, justice and improving living conditions in the context of the Christian faith. In this context, diaconal research methodology is not only a discussion about the social scientific methods that are most appropriate and relevant to the concrete research idea. Diaconia research also needs to reflect on how Christian faith impacts decisions on what relevant data material is. Therefore, in my view, diaconal research is a theological discipline. But being a theological discipline is not a kind of apologetic or mission activity. Theological disciplines are critical disciplines, studying, analyzing, and interpreting all kinds of Christian faith performances, historically and contemporarily.

In such a context, it is a relevant question to ask how and why phenomenology and reflections following what a human-being-in-the-world could mean as part of a Christian faith context. Such an approach does not mean that faith is required to do

diaconal research or to discuss methodological issues connected to Christian faith positions. Being a critical discipline, diaconal research does not presuppose faith but aims at discussing specific data material or specific interpretations as possible – and contested – presentations of what Christian faith might be. As mentioned above, I have coined the concept of a "generous Christianity" to indicate what I am aiming at. Generous Christianity performs when unexpected aspects of life become part of an ecclesial or diaconal practice. Hillestad's nursing-home residents and the luncheon situation in South Africa are illustrations of what generous Christianity might mean. In themselves, neither the connections between Solrunn and Emma nor the simple meal are specific Christian acts. Nevertheless, they present moments of embodied, decentering performances in contexts that are already profiled as diaconal contexts. Often, Christianity is, historically speaking, a movement that limits its numbers to those explicitly confessing Christian faith. Decentering events disrupt this tradition. In the already defined diaconal spaces, the nursing home and the diaconal township dialogue, the decisive acts are not explicitly profiled by faith. Performing empathy and transforming sharing from a sensory being-in-the-world context are acts that could have been done by anyone, independent of any faith. Nevertheless, they are performed in a diaconal space and thus deconstruct and reconstruct that space. Recognizing these independent acts of humanity as decisive to being a diaconal church, this presents what I have coined generous Christianity.

Adelheid Hillestad's research was done in two anonymous nursing homes in Oslo, one of which is run by a diaconal institution. Nevertheless, Hillestad's analysis of the empathy tendency among the elderly people living in these nursing homes seriously connects to the implications of being-in-the-world. Hillestad is not at all researching whether the elderly inhabitants themselves had some sort of Christian faith. That is not decisive. Her analysis, however, of how empathy is performed among the inhabitants, is, in the Danish theologian Løgstrup's famous formulation, what "suggests a religious interpretation" (Løgstrup 1982:117). The interpretation is on the researcher's side, though it is an interpretation that argues how this specific empathy might be an implicit way Christian faith performs.

This again means, that, in Hillestad's research, phenomenology gives us important access to potential interpretations of what diaconia is all about. Therefore, my argument is that discussing and implying phenomenology is an important part of what a methodological discussion of diaconal research implies. When diaconal research is a critical discussion of how the Christian faith performs, then research and interpretation on what empathy might imply in a diaconal institution – or in a diaconal practice – is both relevant and important.

The decisive thing is that awareness of the significance of independent empathy practices in a diaconal space is an important performance of what the Christian faith is all about. In this way, this position differs from that of Wigg-Stevenson (and others). What is similar is the interest of researching social practices from

a theological and faith-based perspective; what is different is that the position above recognizes non-faith-based acts as transforming parts of what a diaconal space might be. The traditional theological opening for this difference belongs to the theology of Scandinavian Creation Theology (SCT) (Gregersen, Uggla, and Wyller 2017), is a tradition that emphasizes the significance of God's creation as present in all life and all nature. When Løgstrup claims that interdependence "suggests a religious interpretation," that is what he means. Being-in-the-world is an independent experience, available to all. Claiming this kind of independent humanity as part of Christian social practice reveals that this kind of independent humanity must be an organic part of Christianity.

The Nisha narrative above belongs to the same trajectory and may be even more explicit.Moving this short narrative to a level of diaconal research methodology, the first point is that Nisha takes the more active role, and the theologian-scholar experiences a decentering of his own role. In this new role, Nisha connects to the scholar in many embodied ways, in the smells from the kitchen, in the body language of someone doing the inviting. It is the movement and the sounds of the neighbor-friend and her kids, assisting to bring the preprepared meal from the kitchen to the guest. In earlier publications reporting on this event, I focused mainly on the ecclesiology of decentering, as a possible interpretation of the lunch event. Letting the narrated event symbolize the change of role on a more general ecclesial level, the interpretation is that diaconia is enacted when churches decenter and the diaconia objects take on roles as new subjects. In an ecclesiological context, this is an important and relevant interpretation.

I think, however, that this interpretation needs to be taken one or two steps further. Beyond any doubt, decentering diaconal institutions and churches are important implications of diaconia as practical acts. Decentering, however, is not the final interpretation. The most fundamental one is the significance of Nisha's embodied presence and the fragile sharing and being-in-the-world it presents.

What is common to Thoresen's hospice phenomenology, Hillestad's phenomenologies from the nursing home, and the narrative of the relationship between Nisha and the scholar in the township is that they are all narratives of what it means to be in the world. The elderly women in Hillestad's narrative relate to each other because they are already in a sensory relationship. Presupposing this embodied relationship makes an unexpected subjectivity possible among the women.

The scholar visiting Nisha in the township is also already in a sensory relationship with her. Indeed, the scholar cannot be in the world without already relating to Nisha. And Nisha is not in the world without already reaching out to the scholar. It is within this already being-in-the-world relationship that the new role changes take place. A diaconia methodology must be aware that these sensory relationships

are always there and must act to present, analyze, and interpret them. That is the beginning of a program for diaconal research methodology.

6. Generosity: The Methodological Challenge of Diaconal Research

For many years, and on many occasions, the tendency has been to consider diaconal research multidisciplinary. I think we need to modify this position to increase clarity about the kinds of methodological challenges that occur in the field of diaconia. From the presentation above, and including the other articles on methodology in this issue of *Diaconia*, there can be no doubt that diaconia is a discipline that requires competencies of all kinds. This need for different competencies, however, is not necessarily the same as establishing a discipline as multidisciplinary.

Put differently, diaconia as a discipline is decided by its material and the interpretation of that material. The size and presence of the material are almost unlimited, though that does not mean that the discipline is unlimited. Rather, diaconia has been developed, practiced, and used as a concept within the Christian tradition. To me, this means that diaconia is a discipline that researches and interprets practices and findings that contribute to a deeper understanding of what Christianity is about.

This does not mean that diaconal research is an apologetic discipline, or that it is a discipline that aims at judging who is on the inside and who is on the outside. The phenomenological cases presented above, however, do indicate that issues concerning the nature of humanity are central to diaconal research. This kind of humanity can be interpreted as a significant aspect of how the Christian faith reflects on humanity.

As stated above, there is an ongoing discussion concerning the definition of diaconal research as a discipline. Is it multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary – or what? There are, no doubt, historically good reasons for this debate. Theologians from many previous generations have often discussed diaconia only dogmatically or only normatively. Theologians have often started from a top-down, preconceived position of the most valuable theological profile (from their vantage point). From this top-down position, they then analyzed aspects of diaconia, whether historical or contemporary praxis, to arrive at their own preconceived position as the most appropriate way of doing diaconia.

Because of these theological traditions, nontheological diaconal researchers have often insisted on maintaining the interdisciplinary identity of the discipline to escape the top-down monopoly of theology. This in turn narrowed the theological interpretations of diaconal research. Diaconal research must relate to the praxis of diaconia, which implies that elaborations of the lived life of diaconia praxis are mandatory aspects of this discipline. Nevertheless, focusing on lived lives and

practices does not in itself lead to a multidisciplinary understanding of diaconal research.

What makes diaconal research a specific theological discipline is, very simply put, the fact that diaconal practice challenges and widens the nature of Christianity. There have long been discussions on the historical origin of the Greek word *diakonein* (Collins 19XX), the claim being that the *diakonos* did not perform charity work during early Christian times. Charity and diaconia, it is said, belong to modernity and have no historical roots. As interesting as this discussion might be, contemporary diaconal research cannot be decided from Church history; it can only be interpreted and understood in the context of what Christianity *might* mean today. In some parts of the world and in some confessions, diaconia is not a frequently spoken word. In the Catholic Church the keyword is "caritas" rather than diaconia; in the Anglican church, the deacon does not have the same role as in Protestant churches. And in the Global South, diaconia is not very frequent: One more often talks about Christian social practice or also even practical theology. Nevertheless, in all cases, these social practices take place as significant aspects of what Christianity means and implies.

My position is to elaborate on the concept of generous Christianities. This concept indicates that profiling and presenting Christianity means including life forms and life praxis that are traditionally not recognized as decisive to what Christianity is about. Classical Christian attributes might be salvation, faith, conversion, afterlife, baptism, the Lord's supper, blessings, etc. Returning to the research done by Hillestad, Thoresen, Rønsdal, and myself, it seems that none of us mention such traditional Christian concepts or *challenges*. Therefore, the question is whether this kind of research belongs to diaconal research at all. In my view, it does – for two reasons.

The first reason is the formal one: The practical context for all four research cases is primarily diaconia institutions or practices. One of the nursing homes of Hillestad developed from a diaconal tradition, the hospice researched by Thoresen is also part of the diaconia context in that country, and, finally, the township meal took place within the broader context of a local pastor ministering to improve the living conditions of his church members. In all cases, there is an original Christian motivation and intention behind the practices and the institutional profiles. This formal argument, however, does not suffice to discuss what diaconal research methodology requires. Rather, there is a need for a second criterion to determine the kind of Christianity presented in diaconia practices and acts.

This second reason is connected to what I have labeled "generous Christianity." The methodological challenge is to discover and research ways of what being-in-the-world means in a concrete case or situation. When such acts happen in diaconal contexts, then we might experience what a generous Christianity truly is. This second reason is the basic one when it comes to labeling diaconal research as

belonging to the family of theologies. Theology concerns how we understand God's presence in the world and not about what the actors themselves claimed to be God's presence. Theology is a reflection on how God's presence comes as a surprise and as a previously unestablished knowledge. It is in this sense and in this direction, I argue that diaconal research comprises research for a (more) generous Christianity.

This does not mean that diaconal research necessarily has an opinion of the quality of Christian identities in the given practices before the research starts. What it does mean, however, is that the kind of Christian profile presented in some practice, project, or encounter is what unites this discipline and makes it not a multidisciplinary but an exploratory discipline within the field of theology.

Many competencies are required to address the different expectations one encounters in working within this discipline of diaconal research. And no one has all of them. Some diaconal researchers are educated theologians, though many are not. Several diaconal researchers are very competent social scientists, and there are others educated in other disciplines as well. My claim for diaconal research as an exploratory discipline within the theology area does not require all diaconal researchers to become theologians. What is does require, however, is a conscious reflection on the kind of critical approaches desired to contribute to this exploratory discipline.

There are numerous questions and issues to be reflected in a follow-up of the position presented above. The position is exploratory and connotes the necessity of more deep-digging discussions than what is possible here. Among the many relevant questions are these: Which methods are most relevant to research the being-in-the-world perspective? Which implications for the choice of data material come from the goal of critical research of what a generous Christianity is about? How can spatial theories and theologies of creation contribute more concretely to diaconal research? Can one determine the political implications in a diaconal research that aims at discussing whether there is something called a generous Christianity profile of the specific practice, project, or encounter?

This article cannot respond to all of these and many other questions and issues. They all belong to important future issues for a diaconal research methodology. Nevertheless, the search for a more generous Christianity unites them as a programmatic expectation for present and future diaconal research. When this is the methodological focus, one might call diaconia practices embodied spiritualities. That there is humanity just by being-in-the-world and that this is an independent, and embodied, humanity must be part of Christianity: That is the secret of Christian faith.

References

Ahmed, S. (2000), Strange Encounters. Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality, London: Routledge.

Collins, J.N. (2002), Deacons and the Church: Making Connections between Old and New, Morehouse Publishing: Harrisburg.

Gregersen, N.H./Uggla B.K./Wyller, T. (ed.) (2017), Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Haraway, D. (1988), Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, Feminist Studies 14,_575–599, https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.

Hillestad, A. (2019), Menneskelig(ere) møter: Om samhandling, fellesskap og empati mellom beboere i en skjermet avdeling på sykehjem [(More) Human Encounters: About Interaction, Community and Empathy Among Residents in a Protected Unit in a Nursing Home], Oslo: Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo.

Løgstrup, K.E. (1982), System og symbol: Essays [System and Symbol: Essays], København: Gyldendal.

Løgstrup, K.E. (1997), The Ethical Demand, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002), Phenomenology of Perception, London: Routledge.

Mignolo W./Walsh, C. (2018), On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis, Durham: Duke University Press.

Rønsdal, K.D.M.S. (2018), Calling Bodies in Lived Space: Spatial Explorations on the Concept of Calling in a Public Urban Space, Research in Contemporary Religion 27, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Scharen, C./Vigen, A.M. (ed.) (2011), Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Schütz, A./Luckmann, T. (1973), The Structures of the Life-World, Volume 1, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Thoresen, L. (2010), Empati og intersubjektivitet. En studie av hospicesykepleie [Empathy and Intersubjectivity: A Study of Hospice Nursing], Oslo: Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo.

Waldenfels, B. (2006), Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden [Basic Concepts of a Phenomenology oft he Alien], Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Waldenfels, B. (2011), Phenomenology of the Alien: Basic Concepts. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Waldenfels, B. (2015), Sozialität und Alterität: Modi sozialer Erfarhung [Sociality and Alterity: Modes of Social Experience], Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Ward, P. (2012), Introduction, in: P. Ward (ed.), Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1–11.

Whitmore, T.D. (2019), Imitating Christ in Magwi. An Anthropological Theology, New York: T. & T. Clark.

Wigg-Stevenson, N. (2016), An Intriguing Third Way: Mapping Contextual Education for Curricular Integration, Teaching Theology & Religion 19, 41–56, https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12319.

Wigg-Stevenson, N. (2018), What's Really Going On: Ethnographic Theology and the Production of Theological Knowledge, Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies 18, 423–429, https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708617744576.

Wyller, T. (2016), A Spatial Power that Dissolves Itself: Space, Theology and Empathy – When the Colonized Enter the Empire, in: H.J. Sander/K. Villadsen/T. Wyller (ed.), The Spaces of Others – Heterotopic Spaces: Practicing and Theorizing Hospitality and Counter-Conduct beyond the Religion/Secular Divide, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 52–79.

Wyller, T. (2018), Decolonial Counter-Conducts? Traces of Decentering Migrant Ecclesiologies. Alternation. Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Art and Humanities in Southern Africa 22, 142–158, available at https://journals.ukzn.ac.za/index.php/soa/article/view/1224 (retrieved on 9 August 2021).

Wyller, T. (2019), The Heterotopic Creation: A Short Contribution to Subaltern Ecclesiology, in: E.-M. Wiberg Pedersen (ed.), The Alternative Luther – Lutheran Theology from the Subaltern, Lanham: Lexington Books, 89–100.

Wyller, T. (2021),The Makeshift Curtain: A Generous Christianity: Ecclesiologies Beyond the Religious-Secular Binary, Dialog 60, 185–190, https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12676.

Wyller, T. (forthcoming), Diaconia/Empowering/Social Development, in: W. Gräb/B. Weyel/E. Lartey (ed.) International Handbook of Practical Theology, Berlin: De Gruyter.

Zahavi, D. (2001), Schizophrenia and Self-Awareness, Philosophy, Psychiatry, Psychology 8, 339–341, doi:10.1353/ppp.2002.0031.

Zahavi, D. (2019), Phenomenology: The Basics, Routledge: London.

Trygve Wyller, (Dr. theol.), Professor
Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo/Norway
t.e.wyller@teologi.uio.no

Kaia S. Rønsdal

Is it Different?

Explorations of Empirical Diaconia Research

Abstract:
Is diaconia research different from other research? Does it have implications that the research takes place within the field of diaconia? What are the methodological reflections of the concept of diaconia regarding research? The *practice* of diaconia claims to be something particular, and, furthermore, diaconal *action* claims to need to be nurtured by the confession of God. The discussion in this article has as its starting point that these claims can have implications for how researchers of diaconia approach the fields of these practices and actions. This article explores the topic using the motion picture *Kitchen Stories* (2003) as both starting point and case for discussion. It discusses and reflects on various approaches to the narrative. Whether the title question concerning difference is answerable or not, and possibly what the answers may be, is not for his article to conclude. The aim is not to find distinctive marks of diaconia in methodology and research ethics, but rather to explore ways of centering everyday life in this research. This is illustrated and emphasized in the last part of the article, which points out transgressive moments in the narrative of the movie that may be of theological significance. *If* diaconia research is indeed different, this approach is one means of exploring what this may mean.

Keywords:
empirical diaconia research, epistemology, methodology, embodiedness, transgressive human encounter, everyday life

1. Introduction

What does it entail to do empirical diaconia research? Does it imply that the research takes place within the field of diaconia, rather than, say, anthropology? I assume most researchers interested in human beings and their practices share the concerns discussed here, regarding not contributing to the marginalization of others through our research endeavors. The *practice* of diaconia claims to be something particular. It is claimed to be a response to "challenges of human suffering, injustice and care

© 2021 Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht
Open access publication licensed under a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License

for creation" (LWF: 2009, 8) Furthermore, diaconal *action* claims to need "to be nurtured by the confession of 'the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God' from, through, and to whom all things are, and to whom belongs eternal glory (Romans 11:33ff)." (LWF: 2009, 92) The discussion in this article has as its starting point that these claims can have implications for how researchers of diaconia approach the fields of these practices and actions. It discusses whether, by the very practice it is interested in, researchers of diaconia can and should approach it differently than simply adhering to the production of knowledge witnessed during the last 75 years.

Reading empirical research, I have rarely seen methodological reflections concerning what it means, if anything, to do diaconia research. To define diaconia as an academic field distinct from others, the research needs to reflect on the grounds behind our research. To develop a serious and responsible research methodology within our field, we must consider more than challenges and questions concerning the hows. Ethnographic studies may, for instance, be relevant, but they cannot be templates applied without rigorous reflection to the discipline one belongs to and the relationship of this discipline to its field of research. The work and effort applied to define diaconia as an academic field must be reflected in its research endeavors – whether diaconia is a particular practice, founded on particular ideas and values. It must follow that this is reflected in its empirical research.

This article explores the topic, using the motion picture *Kitchen Stories*[1] (2003) as starting point and case for discussion. The movie has been used extensively to discuss research methodologies and ethics. The reason I use it once again is twofold: First, it is accessible to everyone, so the material, so to speak, can be experienced by colleagues and students beyond Northern Europe as well as new generations. Second, it does not concern itself with the field of diaconia, rather with transgressive human encounters, which should be the concern of diaconia. I argue that these appear in the mundane and everyday, which the movie depicts to perfection.

I start by giving a detailed outline of the narrative of the movie, to form a central point of the reflections related to the attentive awareness of perspectives and voices, emphasizing specifically how the story is not the only one to focus on. Then I explore diaconia research as a field. I discuss and reflect on the different approaches to the narrative of the movie. Finally, I illustrate one approach to the narrative and point out certain moments of theological significance.

1 The movie is available on YouTube, subtitled in several languages.

2. Kitchen Stories

In the middle of the 20th century, the kitchen was seen as central to the modernization of society. In the Nordic countries, the kitchen became a space of possibilities, a presupposition for a modern and fashionable way of living (Hagemann: 2010).

In Sweden, the Hemmens forskningsinstitut (HFI) – The Research Institute of Homes – carried out elaborate research, including laboratory research, measuring women's working habits in the kitchen, to determine possible rational gains (Hagemann 2010; Rosenberg: 2012). How did women move within the home, what appliances were used together, how could kitchens be standardized to ensure women did not waste time, energy, or health by taking unnecessary steps (literally) in their homemaking activities?

This is the background and starting point of the movie. HFI now wants to research single male households. A caravan of Swedish researchers sets off to observe, monitor, and report. They are equipped with cars and HFI campers to travel to rural Norway to observe single men in their kitchens. At this time, Sweden was in a period of extreme economic growth, while Norway had a more modest development. Because of Sweden's passive role in the Second World War, there is also a general mistrust in the Norwegian population toward the Swedes.

The Norwegian hosts have volunteered, or been recommended to volunteer, by the village doctor, to have a researcher in their kitchen. The participants are to be compensated by receiving a horse.

We follow the HFI employee Folke Nilsson, who is to stay with Isak Bjørvik in the weeks before Christmas. Isak, it turns out, has changed his mind, and no longer wishes to participate. It takes several days before Folke can start his monitoring of Isak's kitchen habits. The monitoring setup is that the Swedish researchers have brought their own HFI "umpire's chair." Every morning, the researcher enters the kitchen, bringing packed lunches, coffee in a thermos, and work equipment. The researcher sits in a corner, overlooking the entire kitchen. He draws lines on a map of the kitchen of how the host moves in his kitchen and takes notes on times and other habits. At night, when kitchen activities are considered over, the researcher retires to his camper outside the host's house. There is to be absolutely no communication between the observer and the observed, as this is felt to jeopardize the integrity of the research.

Isak is clearly unhappy about having Folke in his kitchen and immediately starts to sabotage the project. For example, he takes his coffee cup out of the room and often turns the lights off, leaving Folke in the dark. Sometimes Isak has all his laundry on lines crisscrossing the kitchen, so Folke cannot see what he is doing. The observer is unable to turn the lights back on or move his chair or the laundry, as he is not allowed to manipulate any events. Isak does not eat or do anything in the kitchen, so most of the time Folke is just sitting there all alone, waiting. The

viewer learns that Isak has a portable stove upstairs in his bedroom, where he cooks and eats. Isak has also drilled a hole in the floor in a cupboard just over Folke's head, giving him a view of the notes and drawings about his movements.

In the evenings, when Folke has retired to his camper sitting just outside Isak's farmhouse, the two men watch and listen to each other's signs of life. Folke plays music on his radio, heard inside the main house, while Isak has visits from his friend and neighbor, the war veteran Grant. Both men are clearly interested in what the other is doing, but Folke's position prohibits any interaction. Folke's manager comes by every once in a while, to check on how things are going. He tells about another researcher who has been drinking with his host, which means he obviously has to be fired.

We learn that Isak has a horse in his barn, which he loves dearly. The horse is sick and seems to have limited time left. We understand that this is why Isak volunteered for the project, because of the promise of a horse. However, it turns out that what the hosts receive is a traditional Swedish *wooden* horse.

It is clear from the two men, and also from the manager and the other researchers we hear about in the dialogues, that the unnaturalness of the project is wearing on all of them. The HFI employees miss their homes and families, while the hosts are often lonely. Being forced to be together without actually engaging is an almost impossible task.

For Isak and Folke, breaking the sacred rules of the project happens rather unceremoniously. As Isak is filling his pipe, he realizes he does not have any more tobacco. Folke takes his own packet and throws it from his umpire's chair to the table. After filling his pipe, Isak fills a cup of coffee and gives it to Folke, who drinks it immediately and thanks Isak.

This is the moment when the two men start to interact. Folke still sits in his chair, and Isak still sits at the table, but they converse about their childhoods, World War II, their families. They recognize each other's stories and are fascinated by their differences. They are very careful to not be caught socializing, as they have learned about Folke's colleague, who was fired and had to return to Sweden after fraternizing with his host.

In the early stages of their growing friendship, Folke falls ill with something like the flu. Isak hears him coughing all night. He goes out to the camper and takes him to the barn. He places a cat's fur around Folke's neck and lifts him up to place him on the horse, stomach down, backward, with his face on the horse's croup, as this will speed his recovery. Folke sleeps on the horse for hours. Meanwhile, the manager shows up asking for Folke, and Isak lies about his being in town.

Later, Folke gets down from his chair, and they sit together at the table, socialize at night, eat and drink in the camper. They both explicitly lie to the manager several times to protect each other and their relationship.

The movie is sweet, warm, and entertaining. The characters show us how people break out of their designated roles – the researcher and the researched, the man on a chair and the man in his kitchen, the host and the guest, the Swede and the Norwegian, the farmer and the office worker – as they become friends and grow closer. Furthermore, it becomes obvious that the situation demanding them to be neutral and objective – in line with what was believed to be both professionally and ethically sound – directly affects and changes the routines it was supposed to access and transfer to HFI.

It is also a critique of the idea of people simply observing other people to learn about them. It is used as an example for teaching in theory and method as well as for research ethics. It is even mentioned on The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee's webpage as a movie addressing complications that arise in research projects where the goal is to avoid human interaction with those we research (De nasjonale forskningsetiske komiteene; n.d.). Contemporary research has moved beyond such ideas, and research ethics teach us to consider what and who we involve in our research, and what we see as researchable. To contemporary researchers in the social sciences, the portrayal in *Kitchen Stories* of the HFI's belief in objective information about human behavior is humorous. To some, the point of the movie is outdated, as empirical research has moved far beyond the issues of objectifying of our research subjects. I disagree, both because I do not think the discussion was pushed as far as it should have been, and because, for diaconia in particular, it should be discussed beyond the question of objectifying the other.

The movie can and should still serve as a reminder of how we do research, how we see our research subjects, how we understand ourselves as research subjects, and why, how, where, and when we do research.

3. What is Diaconia Research?

Work on diaconia, whether by students or scholars, often refers to the Lutheran World Federation's document *Diakonia*[2] *in Context*, to give an outline of an understanding of diaconia as a concept. There, diaconia is understood as central to "the identity and mission of the church. […an] implication in the sense that diakonia is a call to action, as a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation" (LWF: 2009, 9). As the title of this document shows, the central concepts

2 Note on the spelling: There are differences in the spelling of the word diaconia/diakonia in English. Sometimes scholars differentiate the spelling when they speak of diakonia as a perspective and the academic field, and diaconia as an action and practice. I use diaconia, though it may differ in quotes and references.

emphasized in addressing human suffering are transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment.

Diaconia as practice responds to "challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation" (LWF: 2009, 8), and diaconia research includes research within these practices. Both concern what is done and the rationale behind these actions – and their outcomes. The LWF *Diakonia in Context* document contains reflections on the methodology of *diaconia practice*, stating the following:

> The so-called "hermeneutics of suspicion" can be one important tool for bringing critical perspectives to diaconal action. Hermeneutics means "way of interpretation" and requires an inquisitive mind. This includes always asking: whose interests are behind what is said and done? The world and its problems look different from the perspective of the powerful than from the perspective of marginalized groups. Thoughtful diakonia has to be aware of this conflict and give space to voices which are ignored. Such practice belongs to good biblical tradition, pointing in the direction of prophetic diakonia. (LWF: 2009, 59)

In empirical diaconal research, we lean on the methodological traditions from other disciplines. In itself, this is not problematic. After all, disciplines such as human anthropology and sociology have been doing empirical research for generations. However, when we apply their methodology as recipes and checklists, without considering and reflecting on the contexts and content of our own field, we not only end up possibly damaging the practices and humans involved in our projects: We also fail to place our discipline on the map in its own right, thus jeopardizing our own academic foundation.

So what and who is the subject of diaconia research? As a researcher of diaconia, what is it that I am interested in and where can I find answers to and discuss things a researcher from another discipline cannot? Is it diaconia research when I discuss my material within the framework of diaconia? Is it diaconia research when the field of study is defined within the framework of diaconia or the church?

The last question was addressed by the Lutheran World Federation concerning diaconia as a concept:

> God's gracious presence in the world for peace, justice and reconciliation cannot be limited to what is realized through diaconal action, to what Christians say and do. That is why diakonia cannot be exclusive either in its theological self-understanding, or in its practical exercise. Diaconal action needs to be nurtured by the confession of 'the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God' from, through, and to whom all things are, and to whom belongs eternal glory (Romans 11:33ff)." (LWF: 2009, 92)

Concerning empirical diaconia research, this obviously means that practices outside the church and diaconia are also subject to research. It should also mean that people and practices explicitly not identifying with diaconia can be discussed and interpreted within the framework of diaconia. The approach to the field, regardless of its being (self-)identified as diaconia or not, should *also* be part of what identifies the research as diaconia research. Furthermore, the LWF document refers to "values guiding a diaconal code of conduct, [that] should contribute to the welfare of all people involved in the world, and especially see that their rights are respected" (LWF: 2009, 90).

This should also be self-evident in empirical research and have strong implications for research ethics. All research has ethical implications: "Research is of great importance – to individuals, to society and to global development. Research also exercises considerable power at all these levels. For both these reasons, it is essential that research is undertaken in ways that are ethically sound." (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Commitees: n.d.) The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees emphasizes principles such as respect, good consequences, fairness, and integrity (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Commitees: n.d). Academic disciplines have guidelines for ethical commitments in research, related to the subject of research and the implications to humans, animals, nature, etc. Should diaconia research entail particular research ethical considerations?

It can sometimes seem that, because diaconia is built on a particular awareness of standing on the side of the suffering, the quality of the ethical considerations is implied or present by default. On the contrary, this awareness and consideration must be explicitly spelled out and integrated at all levels of research. Empirical diaconia research must claim a specific diaconal research methodology, where the ethical considerations are not tasks but equally obvious to the research venture as any notebook or recorder. A student or scholar of diaconia should continuously and consciously practice awareness of power structures, silenced voices, violated bodies, perpetuating violence, microaggression, and positionality, as they are enmeshed with the research practice.

4. What About Isak and Folke?

In the following, I use the movie to discuss ways of doing empirical diaconia research, letting Folke symbolize different approaches in the research and Isak the subjects and practices of interest.

Contemporary diaconia research would probably not engage with research searching for information about humans as objects moving predictably and countably without consideration for their opinions and own perspectives on their practice.

Today, to explore Isak's everyday behavior and habits, Folke would emphasize the importance of *talking with him*. He may have been part of conducting a quantitative questionnaire, asking a great number of people standardized questions concerning their kitchen habits. Or, it may be a qualitative study, with more open questions, where the participants could answer in detail. Why do you do things in this way, what is important to you when you do these things, have you considered other ways of doing these things? Folke and his colleagues would ask several people such questions using qualitative interview methods, engaging with the informants in elaborative conversations on planned topics and questions. Thereafter, they work with the information obtained, analyzing and interpreting what it may mean within different conceptual or theoretical frameworks. Often, researchers find new questions or perspectives pointing to new interpretations; sometimes, we can make claims to how our findings may change approaches and practices.

In the movie, when Isak moves around his kitchen, his moves are mainly defined by the location of the kitchen elements. The sink is placed on one wall, so when he wants to fill his coffee pot, he takes it there and then brings both pot and cup to his woodstove. The map and measurements of these movements are factual. However, no information is gained as to possible *reasons* for the location of the different "stations" in his kitchen, or whether he finds it practical – or whether he has considered these locations at all. Should he ever think about reconfigurations of his kitchen, is efficiency his main concern? Or would he rather want his woodstove placed on the outside wall, his chairs and table under the window, allowing him to drink his coffee by the table while looking out over his barn, maybe seeing his horse? Maybe the entire kitchen is completely irrelevant to Isak, it is just there where his parents built it. Or maybe he hates the kitchen, because it reminds him of his loneliness, but he uses it because he has to.

When Isak is so exacerbated by HFI's silent presence in his kitchen, he changes his routines and practices. He finds ways of cooking and eating, bypassing the kitchen altogether. The issue of researcher presence changing the behavior of the observed, changing the information gained, is crucial. However, how this presence affects the research subjects we engage with in terms of expectations before and after our research endeavors is equally important. Folke not only inserts himself into someone else's life and home, but his project entails extraction from those. Maybe Isak's inventiveness in avoiding the kitchen revolutionizes his cooking and eating habits. HFI, using their approach, will never know because they never ask. They do not even know whether he cooks and eats at all, because it is outside their literal view. They do not think Isak's thoughts and opinions are important to what they want to know.

Including Isak's voice and participation is important and ethically substantially sounder. Nonetheless, there is reason to ask some critical questions when we consider empirical diaconia research.

I return to the outline of a methodology in diaconia practice from LWF.

> "Whose interests are behind what is said and done? The world and its problems look different from the perspective of the powerful than from the perspective of marginalized groups. Thoughtful diakonia has to be aware of this conflict and give space to voices which are ignored." (LWF: 2009, 59)

Though related to the practice, should it not be reflected in how we research those groups?

If Folke and his colleagues were to critically address these questions in their research, what emerges may not align with what they consider important. The research is part of improving homelife for housewives and single men. The point of highlighting how the kitchen practices can be improved is partly to improve working conditions but also to increase consumption. In other words, the interests behind what happens do not agree with Isak's interests. What he is invited to participate in, and the models worked out to learn about his habits – even if qualitative research methods including his perspectives and opinions are applied – rely on a very specific framework. Furthermore, within this framework, there is less room for Isak to freely express his perspectives. This may be well and good considering the objective of the study.

My point is that, within practice-related diaconia, researchers must consider interests, perspectives, and voices from the very beginning, forming objectives and questions to address them. This means that researchers interested in the practices of diaconia as well as its principles, motivations, and theories have to define other fields and other questions, producing knowledge where the silenced voices are raised. In the case of Isak and Folke, Isak's voice is left out. Yet, given the framework of the research, Folke is also silenced, as HFI is the centered agent.

5. The Questions We Ask

The field of diaconal practice includes marginalized groups, engaging it with colonization, gender, race, power, pastoral power, etc. We must pay close attention to how ideology, power, and hegemony play out, maybe even make *that* the main objective of our research.

Empirical diaconia research must include reflection and consideration of these topics, from the start to the end. This includes considering who we are as humans, as researchers, in relation to our field – and what our research entails in the contexts we carry it out. If we are siding with the marginalized, we must first and foremost consider who they are, on what and whose terms they are marginalized. By this I

mean how we mark others as "marginal," often without acknowledging our own privileged position, be it in our gender, in our roles, or in our race. In finding the unheard or absent voices, we must consider our own role in the silencing.

As researchers in the fields of diaconia, we must not only concern ourselves with whoever may be "'erased' from the discursive space" (Dutta: 2007, 306), but pinpoint our participation in this erasure. We must also strive to not perpetuate marginalization. Furthermore, as empirical researchers of diaconia we must carefully consider how we insert ourselves in the lives of others.

All of these perspectives must be a conscious part of the development of empirical diaconia research. This may entail diaconia formulating other questions than the other disciplines. Consider, for instance, the research question: "What role does diaconia in church A play among people living with HIV in location B?" There are many answers already implied in this question, and the question influences how the field and its people are approached and what questions are asked. It also affects how the questions are heard and considered.

What if there were a research project exploring conceptualizations of HIV in location B, exploring whether and how it was discussed in church groups, mass, interest groups, etc. It may be carried out by participatory observation, for example, which would highlight other voices, point out discursive privilege, stigma, power relations, etc. Maybe it uncovers surprising perspectives not considered at all. For instance, in the first example, it is implied that diaconia or the church plays a role, so they may be included in the questions. In the other example, no one talks about the church or diaconia at all, though other agents may be playing important roles. Maybe the church is considered a perpetrator in stigmatizing people living with HIV. This is just as important to the science and practice of diaconia, maybe even more so, than the answers to the first question. The church[3] has played an important role in colonizing, marginalizing, and othering. It also plays an important role in creating reconciliation, hope, and healing. However, *diaconia research* cannot explore the latter without constantly considering the first. The church is a space of power and discursive privilege, including the "power to tell a story about who the Other is and who 'We' are. […], and use these stories to legitimize oppression" (De Souza: 2019, 20).

It does not suffice to think about this or to claim to be on the side of the oppressed. In her work on food pantries, Rebecca De Souza problematizes the entanglement of charitable practices with religious and moral discourse, often exempting them from critical interrogations: "Discourses of charity and good works make it really hard to critique these spaces, and as a result the many injustices [of the food system] remain hidden from view." (De Souza: 2019, 21) This is something a researcher within

3 I intentionally leave this unspecified.

diaconal practices should carefully consider, both concerning our informants, ourselves, and the practices we explore in our research. We must be aware of our own participation in this shutting up and the ways we do this; it may, for instance, be done by simply being present, by the questions we ask, by our gender, how we move in the spaces, and the color of our skin (cf. Haraway: 1988; Hoel: 2013). And we struggle to counter this participation and the participation of others by critically scrutinizing the steps of our work. It is not only about writing and choosing our words: It is about awareness of whose works one reads and builds on as well as the methodologies on which one builds one's work, and our epistemology.

In the following, I illustrate another way of understanding the narrative of the two men, highlighting other, meaningful material for diaconia. I focus on the transgressive moments where something *changes*. Something takes place in the small space between these two people which allows us to discuss and explore theologically significant matters of human encounter and relations.

6. Rethinking the Narrative of Isak and Folke

In Norwegian, the movie about Isak and Folke is called *Hymns from the Kitchen*, and we could creatively consider an empirical diaconia research project exploring neighborly love in everyday life (cf. Rønsdal: 2018a, 2018b) or the calling (cf. Nahnfeldt: 2016; Rønsdal: 2018a), maybe including perspectives of the sacredness of a home (cf. Reaves: 2016). In such a project, we are looking for something that informs diaconia and theology. We have done home visits to several people, participating in their everyday life, engaging in conversations about their practices and attentively taking in what is taking place. The narrative of Isak and Folke is part of our material. What do we look for?

The narrative contains several breaks and transgressions, opening perspectives that may be interesting to discuss, first of all, the event that may mark the substantial change. Isak lives his life, one day to the next, taking care of what he values: his horse, his friend Grant, his tobacco and coffee, his property. Isak values his coffee and tobacco, and so does Folke. When one day Isak realizes he has no tobacco left, Folke throws his packet on the table next to him. When he accepts the observer's tobacco, it seems self-evident to Isak to pour him a cup of coffee. They enjoy their coffee and tobacco together, in silence. Still, the space has changed, and their roles have changed. For the first time, they are in a shared space, together, two people sharing their common pleasure of tobacco and coffee. Both appear more comfortable in this space, as it may have more familiar rules. They are sharing seemingly unimportant things, but they are really inviting the other human being into a shared space.

Both men accept what they are offered, and both recognize the transgressive invitation. Not necessarily consciously, but that is how I as a researcher interpret it.

This transgressive moment changes everything, and the two men encounter each other as human beings. If we follow the ethical demand of Knud Løgstrup that you cannot engage with another human being without holding pieces of her life in your hand (Løgstrup: 2000 [1956]), then this demand is realized when the men invite each other to engage. Conceptualizations of calling could be discussed regarding this encounter. In Lutheran theology "calling" is the name for the task, God-given to humans, of assuming responsibility for each other. This responsibility is founded on an idea about humans' cocreating missions, and it adds a sacred dimension and ethical value to all interpersonal encounters and practices (Nahnfeldt: 2016). The calling bears the characteristic of disruption or an encounter, and it also takes place in even the minor encounters in lived spaces (Rønsdal: 2018a, 2018b), such as the exchange of coffee and tobacco. It is central to the Lutheran view of man to bear responsibility for one's fellow human being. The fact that being human means being called is inherent to what it means to be human (Nahnfeldt 2016: 17).

The other transgressive event I would like to point out and discuss is what happens when Folke gets sick. This occurs very early on in their growing relationship; they have just recently engaged as something other than observer and object. They are not obliged to each other through the roles of their former relationship, and the new status is fragile. How Isak will or will not deal with the fact that Folke is ill also puts all the strict rules of HFI into question. Can Isak notify someone of Folke's situation without revealing that they have engaged outside the rules? At night, Isak hears the never-ending coughing from the trailer. We cannot know whether he considers his options, but in the end, he decides to help. He finds Folke more or less unconscious and carries him out to the barn to his beloved horse, also sweating from fevers. Keeping his chest warm with the cat's fur and placing him back-to-front on the horse is supposed to help. We do not know how or why, but the tremendous effort of carrying the large semiconscious man across the farm and lifting him onto the horse tells us that it is not some prank at Folke's expense. When the very strict manager arrives the next morning and looks for Folke in the empty trailer, Isak covers for him, sending the manager into the village to look for his colleague. While Isak is alone in the house, he checks out the notebooks lying on the umpire's chair and even go as far as to add marks outlining the movements he is making. When Folke's health improves and he wakes up on the horse, he is puzzled yet definitely feels better. Isak offers his bed in the house, so that Folke's recovery can continue in the warmer house. This is when Folke finds the observation hole in the floor, looking down in his notebook with maps of Isak's movements in the kitchen.

The scene of the elderly man carrying the larger man through the dark, across the snowy yard, struggling to place him on the horse is both comical and touching. The unconditional love and care – or sense of responsibility – that has to be there to bother with helping a stranger who has literally invaded his private space is noteworthy. The event reminds us of theological concepts such as calling, hospitality, ethics,

etc. I would highlight the virtual nonverbal character of the event: The only sound exchanged between the two is the coughing. The body in need calls to the other through what I would deem embodied spatial calling (Rønsdal 2018a), and there is an embodied response. There is an incredible amount of information and material to discuss concerning this embodiedness, although not a single word is uttered. No questions set these events into action, we do not learn of any considerations taken, and we do not learn anything afterward about what the two men thought about it. Still, there are significant actions that cause us to ponder theologically relevant topics at the core of diaconia.

The fact that Isak involves his dying horse in this event is also significant. He risks and shares what he holds most dear for the sake of a stranger. It is enacted and lived generosity toward another human, entailing an openness and willingness to let the other affect, disrupt, setting his life in motion (Diprose: 2002, 195).

By exploring the narrative this way, both Folke and Isak are centered, as are their encounter and their relationship. Their narrative lets us explore theological concepts, both challenging and enriching them. Diaconia is involvement in people's everyday lives, diaconia is encounters and relationships. Centering the everyday, attentively exploring its disruptions and transgressions, is one way to approach diaconia research.

7. Concluding Remarks

I have used the movie *Kitchen Stories* to explore ways of understanding different research approaches, specifically addressing diaconia research. I have argued for considerations of what it entails to do research within the field, and how this can be reflected throughout. I have shown how approaching the events of the movie from various perspectives highlights different dimensions of theological significance. I aimed to center everyday life, pointing out how emphasizing its disruptions and transgressions is one way to approach diaconia research.

The fields and the practices are what inform us, what develops that is ethically and theologically significant and transgressive in human encounter. In the case of Isak and Folke, the actions worth discussing lie in their characters and their actions, rather than in some prepared understanding of who they are and role they are given.

References

De nasjonale forskningsetiske komiteene [The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees] (n.d.), Salmer fra kjøkkenet (2003) [Hymns from the Kitchen (2003)], available

at https://www.forskningsetikk.no/ressurser/fbib/filmer/salmer-fra-kjokkenet-2003/ (retrieved on 17 February 2021).

De Souza, R. T. (2019), Feeding the Other: Whiteness, Privilege and Neoliberal Stigma in Food Pantries, Food, Health, and the Environment, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Diprose, R. (2002), Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Lévinas, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Dutta, M. J. (2007), Communicating About Culture and Health: Theorizing Culture-Centered and Cultural Sensitivity Approaches, Communication Theory 17, 304–328, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2007.00297.x.

Hagemann, G. (2010), Kjøkkenet som samfunnsprosjekt [The Kitchen as a Society Project], Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning [Journal for Gender Research] 34, 290–309, https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1891-1781-2010-04-04.

Haraway, D. (1988), Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, Feminist Studies 14, 575–599, https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.

Hoel, N. (2013), Embodying the Field: A Researcher's Reflections on Power Dynamics, Positionality and the Nature of Research Relationships, Fieldwork in Religion 8, 27–49, https://doi.org/10.l558/fiel.v8i1.27.

Løgstrup, K. E. (2000 [1956]), Den etiske fordring [The Ethical Demand], Trondheim: J. W. Cappelens Forlag.

Lutheran World Federation (2009), Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia, Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, available at https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DMD-Diakonia-EN-low.pdf (retrieved 17 February 2021).

Nahnfeldt, C. (2016), Luthersk kallelse. Handlingskraft och barmhärtighet [Lutheran Calling: Power of Action and Mercifulness], Stockholm: Verbum.

Reaves, J. R. (2016), Safeguarding the Stranger: An Abrahamic Theology and Ethic of Protective Hospitality, Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications.

Rosenberg, F. (2012), Science for Architecture: Designing Architectural Research in Post-War Sweden, Footprint - Delft School of Design Journal 6, 97–112, https://doi.org/10.7480/footprint.6.1-2.

Rønsdal, K. S. (2018a), Calling Bodies in Lived Space: Spatial Explorations on the Concept of Calling in a Public Urban Space, Research in Contemporary Religion 27, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Rønsdal, K. S. (2018b), Hverdagsmarginalisering og bytilhørighet [Everyday Marginalisation and City Belonging], in: I. M. Lid/T. Wyller (ed.), Rom og etikk. Fortellinger om ambivalens [Roomn and Ethics: Narratives About Ambiguity], Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 55–72.

The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (n.d.), General Guidelines, available at https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/general-guidelines/ (retrieved 17 February 2021).

Kaia S. Rønsdal, (Dr. theol.), Associate Professor
Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo/Norway
kaia.ronsdal@teologi.uio.no