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COMMUNITIES OF COMPENSATION AND RESISTANCE

Integration in the making at an African church in Helsinki and Paris

Abstract

This article explores the ways in which religious communities make available elements of integration to their members. Based on the fieldwork at an African evangelical church in Helsinki and Paris, I show that by providing the members a place for cultural and religious practice, access to relationships of social recognition and material protection, the church community contributes to social integration of its members. I also show that collective resistance to racial stigmatization and urban poverty are significant community effects that help the church members counter obstacles to their participation in the common social life of the host society.

Keywords

African diaspora • community • immigration • integration • religion

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1 Introduction

Evangelical churches of African origin are increasingly visible as a result of the growth and consolidation of the African diaspora in Europe. These church communities have caught the attention of both media and researchers. The former often represents them as something utterly exotic, while the latter have primarily focused on religious, cultural, and social processes within these churches. My approach is different; I ask how participation in such communities furthers social integration of their immigrant members. These communities are approached from the point of view of their internal heterogeneity and of the relationships they establish with society surrounding them and these churches hence appear as places where different elements of integration are assembled.

I understand social integration as a two-fold concept. It is multifarious, encompassing integration of certain elements, groups or individuals into society, and integration of society in the sense of social cohesiveness. I thus analyze community relations as social relationships through which the individual can take part in institutions, structures and culture of the host society. Classical theories of immigrant integration, many forged in the particular context of the United States, have conceptualized it as more or less a gradual, potentially bumpy, assimilation process (Alba & Nee 1997; Gordon 1964; Park 1928). Others again have pointed out the segmented nature of the processes of integration (Portes & Zhou 1993). Previous research on immigrant integration in France and Finland has concentrated principally on the role of socio-economic integration through labor market participation (Forsander 2002; Santelli 2001; Silbermann & Fournier 2006; Valtonen 2001), on issues of language and education (Beaud 2002; Kilpi 2010; Van Zanten 2002) and on the experience of integration and the obstacles to it (see especially Sayad 1999 on France). Although there is some research on immigrants' associations (Pyykkönen 2007) and on immigrant religiosity (Lamine, Lautman & Mathieu 2008; Martikainen 2004), how religious communities actively take the role as agents of social integration has not been systematically analyzed. Although African evangelical denominations have interested researchers (Demart 2008; Fath 2005; Vähäkangas 2009), the imbrication of the churches in the surrounding society has not yet been addressed sufficiently.

The comparative perspective is essential to my work. Despite contemporary convergences in terms of the harshening of immigration politics, it is necessary to keep in mind that integration policies

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and practices in France and Finland are fashioned by different historical developments and ideological frameworks. In France, the migrant workers of the mid-20th century and their predecessors were thought not to need particular public assistance in establishing a decent living (Noiriel 1988). On the contrary, in Finland, public intervention has been intense in the field of immigration since the country started to receive larger annual numbers of immigrants in the early 1990s (Forsander 2002: chapter 2). In this Nordic country, a great portion of migrants have arrived as refugees and the State has been considered responsible for their incorporation into Finnish society. However, whether the policies are informed by principles of Republican assimilationism or a Nordic version of multiculturalism, in both countries they entail a high level of normativity and constraint. My research suggests that differences in the national context influence the social relations at the level of an immigrant community which has the same religious, cultural and organizational content, and that consequentially, variable community effects are being generated.

I will start by describing the two parishes I have studied and then look in more detail at the methods I have employed to study community relations at the church. This will be followed by two sections, each analyzing a modality through which community participation generates social integration. I will first discuss the logics of compensation as observed at the level of individual-community relations. I will then move on to discuss the relation between communities and society, and analyze the former as a resource for collective resistance.

2 An African church community in two European cities

> The Bible says that where ever you find yourself; make that place your dwelling place. Now we are here and we want to dig this land and make this land our dwelling place, just like the Bible tells us.

This is how Otis, a restaurant dishwasher and a recently married man in his late thirties, responds when I ask him to sum up the experience of having lived five years in his new hometown, Paris. He makes sense of his life-course by mobilizing a spiritual framework of cultural interpretation and the Church is at the center of the experience. By the Church I refer in this article to the evangelical church of African background that I have studied in France and Helsinki. It is not essential to the analysis of community relations and immigrant integration to identify the Church more precisely, and it could be harmful to the protection of privacy and anonymity of the informants considering the small number of immigrants of this origin in the two countries and the small size of the community.[1] However, the Church is illustrative of evangelical churches originally founded in Africa in the second half of the 20th century and active worldwide today (on indigenous African churches, see for example Meyer 2004; ter Haar 2009). The headquarters of the church still lie in Africa where the head of the Church coordinates the activities of his denomination and implantation of new parishes.

As a consequence, the parishes are rather similar in different countries in terms of their organization, activities and style of worship. The members of the church do not consider themselves as merely members of an African church, but rather as members of a global network of Christians. The church draws on the idea of inversed mission which the members often mobilize as a justification of their installation in Europe. Indeed, the implantation of this type of churches religious communities in Western societies should not be considered as an isolated phenomenon, but rather analyzed in the context of contemporary migration patterns, unequal access to wealth in the global south and the pluralization of European societies. One observes at these parishes an adherence to the gospels of prosperity and deliberation which put forth individual well-being and advancement (Meyer 2004). Emigration can thus be understood as a way of breaking free from poverty, and (economic) integration as a way of pursuing prosperity.

The Finnish parish of my research was founded in Helsinki in 2001 and the Parisian one in 2005.[2] They are both still headed by the founding pastors, both immigrants from the country of origin of the Church. During my fieldwork from August 2009 to January 2010, in Paris approximately 30 loyal members would attend the Sunday service, the busiest service gathering 60 attendants for the dedication of children before Christmas. In Helsinki, one found a larger congregation with the number attendants varying from 50 to almost 200 on special occasions. The Helsinki parish attracts a number of mixed couples, and its pastor is himself married to a Finn. He himself is now a full-time religious worker. By contrast, the pastor in Paris, immigrated with his wife, founded their family in Paris and still practices his civil profession. At his parish, families were the majority of participants, while in Helsinki young men were the typical attendants of the church. During my fieldwork in Paris, the church congregants consisted exclusively of migrants of the same national origin as the Church and the pastor. On the contrary, in Helsinki, members of other African nationalities were also present as well as some European and Finnish attendants.

Unrelated to the size and composition of the congregations, however, is the general atmosphere of the Sunday service. It is a moment of joyful worship. The attendants are always well-dressed; men wear suits and neckties, women wear skirts and blazers, and many dress in traditional African garments and head gear. People greet each other with hugs and handshakes; children are welcomed with particular affection and are attended to collectively. The service is celebrated with plenty of music, chanting, lively testimonies and spontaneous praising. Unlike at traditional Finnish or French Lutheran or Catholic masses, interaction between members is common and people come and go during the two to three hours it lasts. Very often, the worship service is followed by a shared meal of traditional fare, spicy rice, fried chicken and coca-cola or the ubiquitous sweet malt drink. As a result, the Sunday service occupies the best part of the day, and

so it should according to the members. Fiona, a mother of four and a working woman, rejoices in Helsinki: "I'm happy about my work at the kindergarten. It's only weekdays. So, my weekend is spent at the church. The whole Sunday, and that's more important than making a big money!"

Yet the parishes diverge in terms of insertion in the two cities. In 2008, the Helsinki parish bought a place of worship and has been renovating it in a collective effort. The place is located close to the city center – just a 7-minute-metro-ride from the central station – and is well-catered by public and private transport facilities. By contrast, the Parisian parish has often been forced to move, and so far has only been able to rent different locales poorly suited for religious services. At the time of my fieldwork, the parish gathered in the basement of a private house in an impoverished, semi-industrial neighborhood.[3] They rent the small locale for Sunday afternoon, an Armenian Pentecostal denomination occupying the morning hours. However, several members live close to the church and some active members commute every Sunday from far-flung areas of the Paris region. In Helsinki, the members are fairly scattered around the metropolitan area and not as strongly concentrated in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. This type of residential distribution reflects the fact that the Paris metropolitan area is more residentially segregated on a socioeconomic and ethno-racial basis than that of Helsinki where migrants often first find housing in the disadvantaged urban districts. More than its corollary in Helsinki, the church community in Paris is affected by urban poverty and residential segregation.

3 Methods and materials

> That the ethnographer can be diverted, that nothing one finds on the field corresponds to ones assumptions, that one's hypotheses break down one by one in contact with reality, although one is carefully prepared for the investigation, are the proof of doing empirical science and not science fiction.[4] (Jeanne Favret-Saada, 1977, Les mots, la mort, les sorts, p. 31)

I was first introduced to the Church by a longtime member with whom I made an exploratory interview in Helsinki. What then followed was six months of intensive participation in the parishes' activities and filling in three thick ethnographic diaries. The busiest times in my field were Sundays. I would attend the service, the Sunday school and the informal social gatherings after these events. In addition to the regular church activities, I also had the chance to assist at a wedding, a birthday and wedding anniversary celebrations, as well as the activities of women's groups. I was also able to meet with several members casually in everyday situations, like sitting down for a cup of coffee. Being present in the field was important to me for three reasons. First, little scientific literature is available in France and in Finland on African evangelical churches. Second, the subject being unfamiliar to me, it was necessary to get acquainted with the parishes in order to craft valid questions for the interviews. Finally, the religious communities are relatively closed groups, and my regular presence facilitated working towards relationships of confidence and making contact with interviewees. I adopted the position of a pupil that allowed me to learn about the community from its more experienced members.

Even if borrowing from ethnographic methods was important for my research, the main method consists of interviews. In each country, I carried out 18 recorded in-depth interviews with parish members representative of the membership demographics. All the interviewees were first generation immigrants, aged 25–57 years, and had migrated from the same African country between 1985 and 2009; 12 interviewees were men and 6 women. The questions that guided the open-ended interviews relate to four broad topics: migration trajectory, composition of overall social ties, meaning of participation in the church community, and morality as defined by interviewees. Through these questions, I wanted to identify the interviewee's social position, sources of protection and recognition, and about how they constructed the in-group and its outsiders. The interviews also helped me relativize the normative religious discourses produced at the time of the worship, and to understand how the individuals interpreted and applied the religious principles in their own daily life. In addition to the interviews, the informal discussions were also invaluable in the study of the community relations. Sometimes these discussions were very important, for example, with the mothers of little children who hardly found any free time for a discussion with a student in social sciences other than Sundays at the church.

I have analyzed my interview data and ethnographic diary thematically. I first read each interview transcription individually, marking down themes and elements of interest. This stage of the analysis helped me understand the heterogeneity in the community relations at the individual level. I then treated each national corpus separately looking for similarities and differences within the interviews and the field notes, and sorting out regularities and singularities in them. The third stage of my analysis consisted of treating the materials of the two national set simultaneously, comparing and contrasting them. This stage was especially important in analyzing the forms of collective resistance that figure as salient in the two countries and the ethnographic observation contributed much to it.

4 The logics of compensation in community relations

> Here, you don't have a place you contribute to. That's why the church is important for me. It's a place of value. You feel like you belong to a group. There are people with children. You have responsibility there. And another thing, that's about feeling. It's love. You feel that you're important. And in this society I don't really feel important.

Eddy, a working man in his late thirties and having lived in Finland for almost 10 years accounts for the place the church has in his every-day life and many parishioners would agree with him. However, to understand the relations through which the community makes elements of integration available, one should address the heterogeneity of the community rather than the average qualities of its members. In this way we can successfully analyze the dynamics and multidimensionality of community participation, and understand the community's malleability as a strength in comparison to the rigid normativity of the public integration programs. The individuals participating in church activities have in common their Christian faith and an adherence to a shared morality informed by religious principles. But they also differ from each other in terms of age, sex, family ties, socio-economic position, migration trajectory, broken social relationships, place of residence, legal status as migrants and relations with the national population. Indeed, the church communities attract a diverse membership. In order to explain this diversity, I have analyzed the logics of compensation in community relations, and three modalities it can take.

By the compensating faculty of community relations, I refer to a relational mechanism through which investment in community relations can alleviate fragilities in other social relationships. In his theory of social ties, the French sociologist Serge Paugam (2008) analyzes four categories of relations that attach individuals to each other, i.e. kinship ties, amorous and friendly relations, employment relations and social ties based on citizenship status. According to the theory, these relations guarantee to the individual material protection and social recognition. By attaching individuals to each other, they create the relational tissue of social life. The more numerous and diversified ties attach the individual to others, the less she suffers from relational fragility, and the less she risks social exclusion.

This perspective helps to render visible relational fragilities of the immigrant members of the Church. Due to the non-citizen status of many members, they are vulnerable to social exclusion because of having an inferior access to rights, opportunities and goods compared with the native-born population. They are often disadvantaged in the labor market which accentuates a risk of poverty. Furthermore, many have experienced disruptions in family relations due to the migratory experience. When it comes to sociability, individuals differ much from each other, but immigrants generally benefit from smaller and less dense networks than the non-migrant population. At the two parishes I studied, such fragilities are evident. Many members have difficulties securing satisfying and stable employment. Some struggle to legalize their stay in Europe. Others suffer from lack of meaningful relationships with friends and family, and all have experienced or witnessed incidents of racial discrimination.

Despite differences in individual situations, the Church makes available to its active members such elements of integration they may not find elsewhere. The members identify the Church as a privileged place for maintaining a familiar form of cultural and religious practice. Otis, a devoted member, describes his experience of going to the American Church in Paris – a US origin congregation – upon arrival in the city: "Well, it's maybe more European. Their mode of worship is a little bit dull for me, because I'm used to the African Pentecostal stuff. You dance and sing. But there's no dancing there! They are more like orthodox. They just sing hymns and they read the scriptures and more hymns. It's much too dull for me! I prefer a church where I can let myself go. I can dance and sing, and when I'm glorifying God I know I'm doing it from the bottom of my heart. That's my way of communicating with my creator. In the American church they had their way. But I prefer my way. That's like my African heart."

The African church stands in contrast to the host society, perceived as significantly different from one's in-group. It is a place of expression and regeneration of a particular identity.

In Helsinki, at the annual multicultural service where congregants from different countries wore their ethnic attire and presented music and folk dances, a young student I met for the first time told me: "Here I can meet my countrymen and speak my language. It's like in Africa, we worship, we sing, we shout. It's like in Africa! Are you scared?!" She was dressed in her tribe's traditional clothes and deplored my, and the Finnish teams', lack of a festive national dress and joyful music. Her words first troubled and then intrigued me. They seemed cast into our relations the ubiquitous tension the immigrants sense in interactions between Africans and Finns, with the difference of me being the inferior outsider. The Church is indeed a place where symbolic boundaries (Barth 1969; Cohen 1985; Lamont & Molnar 2002) are constructed: the solemn is separated from the joyful, silent from noisy, authentic from pretentious, African from European. It is a place where the positive identity of each member as evangelical, African, black and immigrant is regenerated in societies where these attributes are negatively charged. In this process, the members define who they are and are not, who are insiders and who are to be concealed outside the community. Such an identification process is necessary for making sense of one's position in society and vis-à-vis others.

The possibility of maintaining one's familiar and traditional cultural practices is also closely related to questions of recognition. Reasoning in terms of compensation, the Church figures as a place where one can be one's "whole Self" (Cohen 1985: 106–108) and members easily label it as a "home away from home". The parish is a primary locale of meaningful social relationships for many church members. It is a place where they have access to reciprocal relations in which a positive recognition of one's attributes is affirmed (Honneth 2005). At the Church, those who appear the best integrated, are the least dependent on the community for social recognition, and put forth the cultural and religious practice in an African tradition as the main reason for their attendance. However, for the majority of the members, the Church is the center of their social life. As in the host societies, many parishioners have difficulty in accessing relationships of visibility and recognition; the community relations compensate for these shortcomings.

In addition to compensating for lack of recognition, the community relations can also convey material protection to its members. Financial difficulties come in many disguises. For most members, making savings is very difficult, if not impossible. Many have remittances duties towards their nuclear or extended family in Africa. Fulfilling these expectations is taxing, especially to those whose economic integration is uneven or nonexistent. Although none of the interviewees was unemployed during the research, some had experienced periods of unemployment. Two of the French interviewees were outside the formal labor market due to lack of a residence permit. Several suffered from an insecure job or one not matching their qualifications. Some church members who had been in the country for a long time benefited from different social aids to make the two ends meet. This was more frequent in Finland where the interviewees were often in a formal situation as residents and thus entitled to services and allocations like the national population. On the other hand, few migrants were supported by their family in Africa, had a superior professional position, or were without financial difficulty. In Helsinki, a handful of parishioners had been able to buy an apartment. In Paris, everyone was either renting or being lodged, and finding decent housing was a shared concern. The members were therefore in very different economic situations and variably exposed to the risk of poverty.

I have considered three different modalities of the parishioners' relations to the material protection guaranteed by the community to make sense of this relationship: charity, insurance and dependency. The best integrated minority contribute to the community through paying tithes (10% of their monthly income) and giving offerings. Their relation to the collective material and financial resources is best described as charitable. They contribute without benefiting from other than symbolic recompense, such as respect and prestige. However, the most commonly found modality of these relationships can be thought of in terms of insurance. Many members have a fair level of income but might be in a precarious situation in the labor market. They contribute to the collective resources and count on receiving help in case of hardship. On average, the members of the Helsinki parish enjoyed a better income security than their counterparts in Paris, and all the interviewees would be concerned by these two profiles: charity and insurance. Finally, the poorest members cannot contribute to the collective effort. On the contrary, they depend on it for survival. This was the case of two persons at the French parish who depended entirely on the collective material protection.

Although community relationships can generate social integration in several ways, attribution of protection is strongly articulated with the members' adherence to the community's social, moral and religious norms. The members are required to actively participate in the community in a practical and symbolic sense, and the most dependent ones' participation is controlled by the other members. Those depending on collective resources were engaged in diverse tasks, such as maintenance of the church locale, playing music at services, ushering and practical organization of church events. They also had to prove their adherence to the shared Christian morality. The social control ensured that they attend masses and other church events regularly and prove to adhere to a certain collectively approved lifestyle, consisting of religious devotedness, striving for prosperity and living "in a virtuous manner". In brief, in compensating for the fragilities of the social relationships of its members, the church community simultaneously acts on their integration into the host society and generates in-group solidarity and loyalty through normative regulation of the community.

5 Collective resistance as an element of integration

Key elements of understanding the way the parishes are integrated in the two societies include residential segregation, urban poverty, the size and position of immigrant population and racial discrimination. These shape the community effect that is being generated and the way the members respond, individually and collectively, to obstacles to integration. The members' collective effort to protect the in-group's vulnerable and the regeneration of a positive identity can be interpreted as forms of collective resistance in a social context where they constitute a racialized and relatively underprivileged minority group.

6 Resistance to racial stigmatization

> Like at work, some patients' families they don't trust black people to take care of their family. And I've been in a place, like many years ago in a hospital, the patient told me that because I'm black I shouldn't touch her. And I looked at her and I told her that I'm sorry, but I'm your nurse today and if I don't take care of you then you die. [pause] And I said it straight.

A nurse in her late twenties, married and about to start a family in the country she calls her home for almost 10 years, Beth describes a racist incident at work in Finland. Most parishioners would find the situation familiar, and quite a few would also identify with the way Beth confronts the patient. She actively challenges the aggressor by drawing on her position as a professional upon whom the patient is literally dependant. This can be considered as a way of "talking back", that is, challenging the dominant way of speaking about African black immigrants (Jokinen, Huttunen & Kulmala 2004; Rastas & Päivärinta 2010). Many interviewees, particularly in Helsinki, account for the importance of the church in resisting to such stigmatization. Beth expresses this idea later in the interview: "I'm grateful for them [the church]. They have been quite much there for me. Like they have helped me feel worthy and I know I am. I can give a piece of my mind to those who come calling me names now." A significant type of community effect can be interpreted as collective resistance to racial stigmatization. This effect is perceptible in both cities but since

accounts of racism were especially frequent and dense in Helsinki, I mainly draw my examples from that context.

Discrimination can also take non-verbal forms that are difficult to counter. The Finnish social anthropologist Anna Rastas (2002) shows how young people identified as members of ethnoracial minorities are treated with discriminatory gestures and non-verbal practices. In a country as homogenous in terms of physical appearance as Finland, a significant modality of experiencing hostility is the way the white national population looks at the young minority members. The results of my fieldwork are similar to Rastas's analyses in the sense the looks and the management of physical distance emerged as important tools of discrimination. This silent form of violence adds to having experienced or witnessed verbal and physical assault. The church-goers describe discriminatory experiences at several sites of their daily activities: at work and school, in their neighborhood, in leisure activities, in public transport, the list is long. Eddy describes several discriminatory incidents from overtly frequent controls of his ID by the police to being systematically followed by the security guards grocery shopping. Finally, he arrives at the most banal expression of rejection: "And of course here [in Helsinki] no one will sit next to you in a bus. They just don't. They'll rather stand than sit next to a black man."

Finland is lived as a fundamentally white society where being Black often signifies rejection from social interactions or stigmatization in public space.

Erwing Goffman's (1963) analysis of the nature of the stigma is hence readily applicable to the experiences of the church members. The imposition of a racial stigma assigns them a spoiled identity and transforms social relationships. Consequently, in addition to sharing a moral and religious community, the interviewees share a racial community, not so much because of their will to reproduce one, but because of being identified as one and sharing the experiences of stigmatization. The Church appears as a place where the individuals can appropriate the discrediting attribute in order to challenge it. At the church, the cultural forms as well as religious doctrines developed in Africa are actively maintained. The Church thus makes African-ness its pride. Here we can extend the analysis of the anthropologist Meyer (2004) on the anti-colonialist dimension of the indigenous African churches to the migratory context: the African immigrant members of the Church represent themselves as devoted Christians, as missionaries in Europe and as virtuous individuals. The congregants, like Beth, can find a positive affirmation of her identity at the Church which gives them tools to counter racist assaults in everyday life. But drawing on the common religious worldview and practice as an element of superiority is not on its own a sufficient way of effectively challenging racial stigmatization.

In the interviews, other particularly frequent modalities of countering the racial stigma were based on one's professional status and moral rigor. These invalidate the popular representations of African immigrants as idle, undeserving or deviant, representations that the church members are eager to challenge. The community generates an alternative moral framework which can be mobilized to challenge stigmatization. Depending on their social position and their experiences, the members draw moral, socio-economic and racial boundaries to affirm a positive identity and to claim a social recognition (on such boundary work, see Lamont 2000). Individuals mobilize symbolic boundaries differently; their moral content remains rather invariable. In describing what Finns should do in order to live in a more virtuous manner, Charles, a passionate evangelist and a proud father of a small family, accounts for several aspects of the shared morality: "And for you to serve him you must drop your old passions. You have to become new. That means, the things that used to give you pleasure before, the drinking, you make love or sex with anybody, you don't care, all day, you just hope you don't get AIDS, you enjoy your flesh. Oh no! That must come to a stop. You must have the fear of God. The way you treat other people, God created them, that must stop. The way you address the elderly people, you don't care who they are, fuck you [imitating], no, that must stop. You will commit sin but you must not be enjoying committing sin."

As church members define themselves as people who maintain a direct communication with God, who lead a virtuous life and who respect the family and the community the migrant members can represent themselves as morally superior to the national population.

In Paris too, many church members have witnessed or experienced racial discrimination. Much like in Helsinki, such experiences were encountered in working life, aboard public transport and in the neighborhoods. However, the interviewees appreciate the "African quartiers" of Paris where most of them frequent businesses and services. They also declare themselves content to see Blacks occupying jobs in public and visible instances; working for the police force, in the banks, at the airport and in insurance companies to mention some examples. On the contrary, their Finnish pairs deplore never seeing Blacks in what they consider important jobs. Eddy describes: "I've changed planes on Charles de Gaulle and all those Blacks working there! It just feels really ok. You don't see that in Helsinki..."

In Finland, the interviewees account for a feeling of isolation and they seem to lack a group of reference. To escape from spaces marked by hostile looks and gestures, the church community yields recognition to the relatively few yet overtly visible African migrants.

7 Resistance to urban poverty

"I'm a newcomer in France and he [roommate, member of the church] helps me, they help me. I need that. And then I can play. Like when he saw me I told him I'm a drummer and he didn't believe me and then the first day we met he took me here and he saw me play and he was like wow. And so that was how I got here and he was like I want to play with you, man. And I said I have no money. So, I'm living with him now and it's good. I don't pay anything. Like I have no money. Absolutely nothing. He's a good guy. I live with him here. But you see how it is. I mean it [neighborhood] is no good. It's a dangerous place.

I can't go to the station in the evening. You know, that's why I picked you up. I don't want you to walk around alone. And you see that park, it's no good. Like the day you walk your dog maybe but not in the evening. There's all kind of people like drunks and this dirty business. I don't like those black people here. And there's a lot of Arabs and that's bad. But now I'm living here. You know, I have a place to sleep."

Michael, young man living in Europe since the late 1990's, is entirely dependent on the protection assured to him by the other church members. He has no residence permit, no formal job, and no place to live. At the time of my research, the church community entirely supported Michael and another man in a similar situation. The sermons and prayers at the Paris parish casually treat the themes of enduring poverty, surviving homelessness and "keeping close to the Lord" even in times of material and emotional difficulty. Michael's situation is of extreme gravity, but several Paris church-goers live in urban areas where one finds a concentration of poverty, unemployment, substandard housing and an overrepresentation of immigrants and foreigners (on France's urban inequalities, Wacquant 2006). Many of these members are drawn to the Church because of its promise of assistance, temporary or prolonged, partial or substantial. In Paris, the Church resembles a parallel social system, protecting its members from poverty and exclusion. This is what most clearly distinguishes the two parishes.

Following the theory of social ties, community relations are crucial to the majority of the members of the Parisian parish because the state, the labor market and the family do not succeed in guaranteeing them sufficient material conditions of living. At the time of my research, several persons were in an ambiguous situation regarding their residence permit: some had none, some had that of another European country, and some were having difficulty renewing theirs. These conditions significantly hinder the members' access to jobs, social services and housing. That such difficulty was not observable at the Helsinki parish does not mean that informal migration does not exist in Finland. It is rather indicative of a strict immigration regime and the phenomenon's inferior scale as compared with France. That collective resistance to poverty is a more significant type of community effect generated in Paris does not denote its insignificance in Helsinki either. Immigrants are indeed overrepresented among those concerned by urban poverty in Finland (Linnanmäki 2009). But it is quite recent that the emergence of phenomena similar to urban poverty in the large cities of France has been observable in Helsinki. One does find territorial concentrations of low income households, unemployment and immigrant populations but these tend to be limited in space and quality (Vaattovaara, Kortteinen & Schulman 2011). On the other hand, this may be explained by trends in immigration, such as the reasons of entry in the country and the different positions of Helsinki and Paris on the map of international migrations.

In addition, the church communities' membership demographics can be thought of as indicative of vulnerable groups among immigrants of the nationalities present at the church. Indeed, in Finland young men and in France young families make up the majority. In Paris, the few students I met came from wealthy families who provided for their living. In Finland, students are not entitled to the same student allocations as the nationals, and they have to provide proof of sufficient funds to stay in the country. The young men and few women students juggled studies, work and remittance charges and many had given up studies, the original reason of immigration, to engage in full-time work to make a living for themselves and their families. By contrast, families with children in France described their experiences of several social services and allocations, much like the Finnish nationals. Many families had found a place for their children in public kindergartens where English was also taught and this was valued by the parents.

By contrast, in Paris, the families appear less integrated in the French socio-political system. The Church also assures transmission of English language and family socialization. For example, Sarah's husband works as a truck-driver and is often on the road in Europe for long periods of time. Sarah is responsible for bringing up the children and supplements the family income by babysitting. Attending the church for Sunday service and Wednesday family gathering is essential to Sarah: "It's very important to come to the church and it's so important with kids. I have three and they need to be here in an environment where the family is cherished and they feel safe. They have a model."

The students and the young families I met were not dependent on the community in the same way as Michael, who depends entirely on the Church. Rather, they had relations of insurance to protection. They benefited from shared meals, passing on of goods (clothes, house-ware) and information, and of the perspective of assistance in case of urgency.

The Parisian parish is a community of strong ties and solidarity where the members know and control each other. A members' living conditions are taken in charge collectively, job or housing search is a collective matter and responsibility. This type of organization may explain the small size of the community, as it simply cannot cater to more vulnerable members. In this regard, the Helsinki parish stands in a stark contrast to the Parisian one. Many members are linked to each other by strong ties, but the community leaders are also eager to establish contacts beyond the community. As the members are in a generally better social position and less precarious, the community can orient its resources into its future development and activities beyond the in-group. In fact, the Church has a very active evangelization group that undertakes weekly campaigns on the streets of the capital city, they cooperate with Finnish and international Pentecostal groups, and the church generally welcomes newcomers. It has invested in the church locale, bought musical instruments and computers, organizes age-specific and thematic group activities and has plans for future acquisitions. In Paris, the pastor's major preoccupation is finding a more stable prayer room for renting and assisting his followers in securing decent conditions of living.

In brief, the inscription of the immigrant community in different social and urban environments leads to the generation of a different

community effect. The church community is a powerful agent of resistance to poverty in a context where its members' social integration is conditioned by social, racial and urban inequalities. Notably, at the Parisian suburbs, the risk of exclusion seems to apply to everyone. On the other hand, in a context less marked by such risk, some groups appear more vulnerable than others, like the students and single adults in Finland. The two cases invite us to think of immigrant communities as an important element of integration rather as an impediment to it. Furthermore, my research shows that the less the community is concerned by the immediate survival of its members, the more it is to interact with society surrounding it and in doing that, advances the social integration of its members.

8 Conclusion

In this article, I have analyzed how community participation generates social integration of immigrants. My research discusses the mechanisms of compensation and collective resistance as two important modalities through which the church members can make the new host country and city their "dwelling place". Two dimensions of my approach are important to note; first, the analysis of both individual and structural factors influencing the relations established and maintained between individuals, the community and society; second, the comparative manner of reasoning. It is through this research design that I have attempted to address the heterogeneity at each parish and the similarities and differences between them.

The religious community I have studied is implanted in two national contexts, where we find slightly different publics, and where a different type of community effect appears significant. In both cases, individual investment in community relations can compensate for fragilities in other social relations. In France, one observes a larger African minority, but also a greater concentration of poverty and unemployment in urban neighborhoods with an overrepresentation of foreign populations. There, the members of the Church tend to be in a more disadvantaged position than in Finland. At this church group, collective resistance to poverty emerges as a major community effect and the primary modality through which the community generates social integration. In Finland, the parishioners tend to be in a better socio-economic position then their French pairs, their condition as a visible, racialized minority affects the community effect. It is collective resistance to racial stigmatization that appears as the most salient modality of generating integration in Helsinki. However, individuals of African origin face racial discrimination and a disproportionate risk of poverty and exclusion in the two countries, and despite the predominance of one or another of the forms of collective resistance, both are operational at each community.

The comparative research exposes different modalities through which community relations can contribute to social integration of immigrants. By valorizing the African cultural and religious practices, the Church participates in formation of positive individual and collective identities. In addition, the shared moral framework helps them as church members to position themselves in the host society in terms that they actively define. As enduring stigmatization is detrimental to the psychological health, the Church can be considered an important source of well-being for its members. Finally, the community yields protection to its most vulnerable members. By doing all this, the two communities address a variety of individual situations. Unlike the official immigrant integration programs, alternative solutions to integration are made at the Church. Future research should extend the analysis of immigrant communities as sites of integration and as vital elements of integration assemblages in these and other countries. This would have at least two main advantages. It would broaden our understanding of social integration and thus call for a critical examination of the current assigned ideals of an immigrant integration trajectory. More importantly yet, such in situ research can involve immigrants themselves in producing knowledge about and developing better policies of social integration.

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Notes

1. For these same reasons, the names of the informants have been changed.
2. The Helsinki parish is the Church's first congregation in Finland, whereas the one I studied in Paris is the second one. This dissymmetry is due to the fact that the pastor of the Finnish parish knew personally the pastor of the second Paris parish. Upon my departure for Paris, he put me in contact with the pastor and advised me to conduct my research there. It was only later on during the fieldwork that I became aware of this fact. Another dissymmetry originates from the fact that in France one finds many and large African churches which use French as their language of worship. The English-speaking Church hence caters for a minority of African migrants in France, whereas Finland attracts relatively more immigrants from the Anglophone Sub-Saharian Africa.
3. Since the time of my study, they have once more had to change locations.
4. The translation from French is carried out by the author.

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