

**Religion and Transnationalism: Exploring knowledge acquisition  
about African traditional religion among international semester  
abroad students at UKZN**

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## **Declaration**

I, Rowald Quinton Marlowe, declare that this dissertation is my own original work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been acknowledged. I submit it this work to the programme of Sociology of Religion which is under the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. There are no parts of this presentation that have been submitted to another University or higher education institution for degree or examination purposes. Unless it is stated within the text, this is wholly my own work.

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**Rowald Quinton Marlowe**

**18 March 2016**

As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this dissertation for submission

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**Dr F.G Settler**

**18 March 2016**

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## **Abstract**

The mobility of students is a phenomenon which is rapidly growing globally. This study is located at the intersection of migration studies and religion, with a specific consideration of how semester-abroad learn about other cultures and religions. The internationalisation of universities, and appetite for international education have made the mobility of students an increasingly engaging area of study. With the end of Apartheid, South Africa and its universities have become a desirable destination for students from all over the world.

International education is a major contributor for student mobility and it is premised on the idea that once a student leaves their country of origin to study abroad amongst different cultures they develop a better way of reflecting on their own country, their education and that they also develop a better perspective concerning the host country. Most semester abroad students travelling to South Africa are interested in the country's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, while many other wish to be part of the development of the country's emerging democracy. It is precisely in the light of this focus on diversity and development that this study seeks to establish the kind of contact international students have with indigenous religions and practices, and how such experiences shape their orientation towards African Traditional Religion.

This will be achieved through interviewing undergraduate semester abroad students who are a part of campus at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Firstly, inquiry focused on the role of religion in international programmes that the students were a part off. Secondly, it interrogated what kind of contact did the students encounter with African traditional religion and how did it reflect on their religious literacy.

Considering the pervasiveness of religion in South Africa, religion does not feature enough within semester abroad programmes. It does not go beyond a 'tourist' visit which means that students learn about African traditional religion in very stereotypical ideas.

*Key Terms: African traditional religion; Transnationalism; Migration; International Education; International students/Student Migrants*

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

South Africa, as a nation, has been isolated from the rest of the world on the because of the racially discriminatory system of Apartheid. Apartheid was constituted through rules, regulations and laws determined employment, residence and movement along racial lines. The Group Areas Act, which was passed in 1950, made a particular race groups live within designated areas. This act was instituted to reinforce segregation on racial basis and to restrict the movements of people of colour.

Tati (2008) argues that during the Apartheid era, migration to South Africa was largely in the form of labour migrants from neighbouring countries. Migration into the country was restricted by the government legislation which controlled and facilitated labour migration in South Africa. This legal framework permitted migrants to work in the mining and agriculture sector. Further, due to international sanctions against Apartheid South Africa, most international institutions and governments refused to trade with South Africa, which significantly affect people's migration to the region, whether permanent or temporary. Like all other forms of anti-Apartheid activism, that sought to boycott South Africa at the time, many universities and colleges across the world also enforced an academic boycott which restricted student and academic staff interaction with Apartheid universities. This resulted in South African higher education institutions developing in isolation from their international counterparts.

During the early 1990's the Apartheid regime was dismantled, and it was followed with the unprecedented movement of people both within and into the country. This period also saw the significant increase in people from across Africa, and the world, travelling to and through South Africa. This same trend can also be seen through the marked increase of international students coming into South Africa, since the end of Apartheid, through various study abroad programmes (Crush, Williams and Peberby 2005). This increase in student and academic mobility represented a brain gain into the country, adding skills and knowledge that South Africa did not have access previously.

According to Teferra and Altbach (2004), African Universities are under considerable pressure to perform in a global context. This demands a significant degree of international cooperation, characterised by the exchange of ideas and physical mobility. Hahn (2003) argues that despite the commitment to global exchange of people and ideas, the internationalization of higher education continues to impact significantly on ideas of the nation, who 'belongs', and who does not. In South Africa, migration and academic mobility further reinforces ideas about, and divisions between, nationals and non-nationals, and has at times found expression through xenophobia.

There seems to be two responses to migration that emerged after the dismantling of Apartheid. On the one hand the economy has relied heavily on tourism, while on the other hand there has been an increasing anxiety towards migrants from the continent. Landau (2014:1) argues that "after 20 years we are not only backtracking on promises of tolerance, but also on those of an accountable, law-bound government able to realise the physical and economic security South Africa so desperately needs".

With the end of Apartheid, increasing numbers of international students would come to South Africa. During South Africa's early democratic years the most popular topics for international education and study abroad programmes were focused on Apartheid and reconciliation. South Africa was one of the forerunners in depicting ways of peace and reconciliation, and as such most international education programmes were around such topics. As the South African democracy grew so did the programmes of international education. In the immediate aftermath of 1994, South Africa was attractive to such international education migrants for a number of reasons. From interests in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to national academic programmes on transitional justice, public health, and emerging economies, South African universities attracted a large number of migrants over a short period. This is made all the more evident from the fact that between 1994 and 2006 the number of international student in South Africa increased from 12, 557 to 53, 686. UNESCO has suggested that by 2009 this figured increased further to 61, 000, which suggests an annual increase of approximately 3000 international students to South Africa. It is therefore not surprising that the OECD reports that South Africa is ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the world as a destination for international students.

According to Knight (2006) the *internationalization of higher education* refers to “the movement of people, programs, providers, knowledge, ideas, projects and services across national borders”. Students who participate in educational programmes at a geographical setting different from their own, often find that they enhance personal growth and development. One such student, Carolyn Valtos, a participant in the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) in Adelaide, said that: “Overall, I learned a lot more about myself in that one semester than I did in the three and a half years in my home school because of the unique space in which I learned, experienced, and spent exploring another culture”.<sup>1</sup> Thus, we can assume that through international exchange programmes, people become more culturally aware, and able to contribute to harmonious societies in which differences, also in belief and faith, can be respected. In this study, I take as a starting point the idea that an increased understanding of different religions plays a vital role in how individual students understand their host country, and in the development of a tolerance for indigenous traditions.

My study focuses on the nature of international students’ contact with, and knowledge of, African Traditional Religion in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. To do this, I interviewed international students that had participated in exchange programmes to the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The University of KwaZulu-Natal considers an international student as someone who spends a semester, or more, at the institution, and pays fees to the host institution. These students variously participate in undergraduate or postgraduate studies, or take part in short-term programs that are specialised to meet the needs and interest of international groups and students. The University of KwaZulu-Natal is home to approximately 2000 international students. According to Statistics South Africa, of the 106 173 temporary residence permits issued in 2012 by the South African Department of Home Affairs, 16 928 were for study purposes (StatsSA 2012). Consistent with the national distribution, at UKZN international students make up between 5-7% of the total student population during any one year, with the highest concentrations reportedly found in the humanities, and in science and agriculture.

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<sup>1</sup> The Benefits of Study Abroad, Mary Dwyer and Courtney Peters. (n.d.) <http://www.iesabroad.org/study-abroad/news/benefits-study-abroad#sthash.3wRvlQhR.aww1kwNW.dpbs.>) accessed 12 April 2015

In South Africa, the Constitution of 1996 states that “everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thoughts, beliefs and opinion... provided that those observances follow rules made by the appropriate public authorities; they are conducted on an equitable bases; and attendance at them is free and voluntary” (SA Constitution of 1996, Chapter 2 Section2). However, although the post-apartheid administration regards all religions as equal, Christianity continues to dominate the religious landscape (Denis 2006:310). Thus, despite the legal recognition of all religions, including African Traditional Religions, many indigenous traditions continue to be perceived as primitive, anti-modern and consisting of cultic superstition.

In recent years, African Traditional Religion has been at the centre of a number of legal and social debates about religious freedom. The controversies have revolved around initiation schools for young men in the Eastern Cape (Mbiti 2004), as well as virginity testing in Kwa-Zulu Natal (Hans 2013). In 2007 for example, the South African, disgraced politician, Tony Yengeni and his family performed a very public ritual to restore his position in the community. On this occasion a number of cows were slaughtered in line with traditional ancestor ritual practices. However, the SPCA rased objections to this traditional practice provoked and a national debate around African Tradition Religion and its practices ensued. The SPCA based their charges against Yengeni upon animal cruelty (Behrens 2008). When Tony Yengeni was released from prison, his family sought to do a cleansing ceremony that would integrate him back into the community. The ceremony involved the slaughtering of cows in a traditional African ancestral ritual. As part of this ritual it is believed that the cow has to make a certain noise, when it throat is cut, as it is believed that this indicates that the ancestors accept the sacrifice. While the SPCA charged Yengeni with cruelty to animals, state institutions defended the actions of the Yengeni family practice on the grounds of freedom of religion. What emerged during this and other similar debates about indigenous religions is a widespread ambivalence towards, and lack of interest in seeing African Traditional Religion flourish in the post-apartheid public space.

While these controversies show social anxiety about certain indigenous practices, they also demonstrate the presence, resilience and post-apartheid re-emergence of African Traditional Religion (Denis 2013, Masondo 2011). Mdende argues for increased legal provision for African Traditional Religion, and she insists that “it seems that a colonial heritage is still dictating the relationship between law and religion” (2013:82). Mdende’s objections relates

the negative perceptions and treatment that African Traditional Religion receives in the media and in society.

Despite the contestations over the legal status and public practice of African Traditional Religion it remains, after Christianity, the most widely practiced religious tradition(s) in South Africa (Mndende 2013). Considering the pervasive practice of traditional religion, it is my contention that international students are bound to come into contact with some form of African Traditional Religion, or media reports about it whilst living in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

## **1.2 Research questions**

It is in the context of such contestation over the status, and practices, of African Traditional Religion in post-Apartheid South Africa that I sought to examine the extent to which international students' migration challenge or reinforce their ideas about African Traditional Religion. This study seeks to ascertain what, and how, international students learn about African indigenous religion during their tenure at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and how this shapes their knowledge and attitude toward African Traditional Religion.

My interest in international education lies with a wish to investigate student exchange programmes facilitate learning concerning African Traditional Religion. Many scholars have argued that religion plays a vital role in the fabric of many South Africans (Diamond 1994, Mbiti 1990). Thus, I hope to examine how semester abroad students, when they migrate into a country with high religious adherence, interact with and grow to understand role and prevalence of African religion and culture. I do this to ultimately ascertain something about the relationship between international education, as a form of migration, and religion. I seek to gain insight into how this form of migration shapes the experiences and perceptions of African Traditional Religion among semester abroad students – whether through formal or informal contact with indigenous religion.

The main research question for this study is:

What are the processes through which (international) semester abroad students learn about African Traditional Religion, and how does this learning shape their perceptions of this religious tradition in South Africa?

The sub-questions for this study are as follows:

- What is the role and significance of religion in migration through international education programmes to SA?
- What are UKZN semester abroad students' experiences of, and reflections about African Traditional Religion during their stay in SA?
- How does formal and informal contact with indigenous religions shape and international students' perception and knowledge acquisition about facilitate African Traditional Religion?

### **1.3 Methodology**

I interviewed five international students from a North-American country. These students are from a broad range of academic disciplines. Three are from an organised Theological programme. These are students that come from a Christian university in North America into a Theological exchange programme with the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Two are from a prearranged internship programme, where students have an opportunity to complete their internship with various organisations in South Africa. These students are part of any religiously-based exchange programme. The fifth student came to South Africa on her own as an exchange student, and is not part of an organised exchange or internship programme. With such an array of students I was seeking to receive a broad perspective of what students are thought, and learn, about African Traditional Religions in South Africa.

My aim is to investigate what the students knew about African Traditional Religion before they arrived in South Africa. In this, I also explore whether, and how, their religious affiliation prevented or encouraged religious dialogue and learning. Moreover, I aim to explore if the way in which students learn about African Traditional Religion fosters any prejudices, or whether it increases their knowledge base and tolerance.

#### **1. 4 The Significance and contribution of the study**

One of the most challenging issues that the post-Apartheid government of South Africa faces is how to foster religious tolerance in a nation with visible and widely celebrated religious diversity. Statistics South Africa has indicated that in 2001 that majority of the population identified themselves as Christians 79.8%, 1.5% as Muslim, 1.2% as Hindu, 0.3% as followers of African Traditional Religion, 0.2% as Jewish, 0.6% as 'other' and 1.4% as 'undetermined', while 15.1% declared that they did not follow or adhere to any religion or faith community.

Mwakabana (2002) has suggested that, statistically, African Traditional Religion may look as if it is invisible, yet in reality this is misleading as many people practice African Traditional Religion unconsciously, without recognising that they are doing so. Although African Tradition Religion has always been a part of Africa while Christianity, Judaism, Islam and other religions came to the region through migration of settler communities, African Traditional Religions nonetheless suffered denial, suppression and even rejection during the colonial period (Chidester 1999). Thus, is not surprising that there are postcolonial efforts to recover elements of these religions in South Africa as legitimate religions (Masondo 2011).

What seems to be missing in the existing literature is more empirical work concerning African Traditional Religion, and more from an African Traditional Religion perspective without incorporating a Judeo-Christian perspective. Mndende (2013) argues that most scholars who write about African Traditional Religion have done so through a Christian theological lens, often leading to claims that Christianity is an extension of African Traditional Religion.

This dissertation aims to explore the intersection between migration and international education, and how such migration shape experiences and perceptions of African Traditional Religion among (non-African) international semester abroad students. As such, this dissertation contributes to scholarship concerning international education and the processes through which learning about, and in, new contexts takes place. Moreover, this dissertation contributes to scholarship about migration, through examining student migrations, and religion in South Africa. The dissertation also explores perceptions and representations of African Traditional Religion in postcolonial and democratic South Africa.

This research project was conducted through interviews international students, resident in South Africa through their participation in international student exchange programmes. The interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks, and each interview lasted for approximately one hour. The primary objective of these interviews was to explore the various ways and processes through which (international) semester abroad students learn about African Traditional Religion, and this shape their perceptions of this religious tradition in South Africa

The final significance of the study relates to the ways that religion is located in international education programmes, and the question whether international study exchange programmes facilitate tolerance and education, or whether they reinforce stereotypes by fetishising and commodifying indigenous religions and cultures.

#### **1.4 Key terms and concepts**

The following key terms and concepts are relevant to the present study:

##### *African Traditional Religion:*

There are debates and contestations about whether it is religion in the singular or religions in the plural sense. However, like some scholars (Mndende 2013) I align myself with Awolalu (1975:) who has explained African Tradition by saying that “When we speak of African traditional religion we mean the indigenous religion of the Africans. It is the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of the present generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (a thing of the past) but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living it and practicing it”.

##### *Transnationalism:*

This is a broad concept because there seems to be many definitions that have emerged over the years. Bailey (2001) argues that scholars of migration studies are now turning to the idea of the ‘transnational’ because people are keeping strong ties with their home land after having migrated away. Moreover, transnational processes are rooted in the institution of the nation-state and derive some of their distinctiveness by transcending the nation (Bailey 2001).

Therefore, Levitt (2004) argues that central to transnationalism is the reformation of society because people are no longer restricted to national borders. She convincingly shows that migrant's lives are embedded within multi-layered and multi-sited transnational fields, a facet that should be considered and integrated into all migration-centred research.

### *Internationalization of education*

According to Knight (2006) the internationalization of higher education refers to “the movement of people, programs, providers, knowledge, ideas, projects and services across national borders.” Yet, because much of internationalization holds the nation state as its primary frame of reference (Hahn 2003) universities are increasing under internal and external pressure to adopt innovative strategies that destabilizes this notion and to present themselves as transnational entities that exist and function outside the frame of the modern nation state.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will provide an overview and review of the areas of scholarship that have informed and supported the development of this thesis. In order to do so, my literature review will deal with migration and transnationalism. This will show the importance of transnationalism in migration studies. Migration is no longer understood in a linear fashion because migrants belong to and participate in two countries or more at the same time. I will also outline some aspects of African Traditional Religion as this is the particular religion that provides the starting point for my examination of how international exchange students learn about religion. This section provides a brief history of African Traditional Religion in Post-Apartheid South Africa, and introduces some debates and contestation over the status and role of African Traditional Religion in public life South Africa.

### **2.2 Migration and transnationalism**

#### *2.2.1 Transnationalism*

Transnationalism is a concept, and a field of inquiry, which is concerned with social processes that are grounded in, and transcend the borders of nation-states (Bailey 2001). It seeks to illustrate how the mobility of people challenge the notion of geographical boundaries because they are actively involved in two or more states at the same time. Nina Glick-Schiller (1992), in her article “Transnationalism: a new analytic framework for understanding migration” illustrates the shift that migration studies have taken over time, and the importance of using a transnational lens in studies of migration. This is supported by Vertovec (2002) who argues that once the social sciences began to see migration through transnational lenses significant new aspects of the activities of migrants could be seen. Vertovec (2002) explains transnational activities are made possible by the ease that migrants are finding with staying in contact with their homeland even after migration, through transnational networks and relationships. Levitt and Jaworsky (2007), in their review of scholarship on transnationalism and migration, illustrate how migrant transnationalism has transformed domains of society such as economics, religion, politics, social life and culture.

Transnationalism is different from other approaches to migration because it challenges the traditional understanding of migration that has been focused on three concepts; assimilation, integration and incorporation. According to Brown and Bean (2006) the process of assimilation begins with the first generation of migrants. It then continues to subsequent generations and takes approximately four generations, after full assimilation, for integration to occur. The longer a migrant lives in the host country it is assumed that they will become more like the residents of their host country. Hence, these traditional understandings of migration work according to a linear logic and often does not provide a coherent frame for understanding other, more temporary forms of migration.

Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) argue that transnationalism is not a lasting risk to assimilation because even though a migrant might be concerned with the issues and concerns of their home country it does not mean they are disinterested in daily operations of their host country. They show that for migrants who are embedded and actively involved in two or more countries simultaneously “home means more than one country” (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004).

Transnationalism can be understood through two main concepts; transnational social fields and transnational networks. Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) have argued that in order to understand the complexity of transnationalism scholars need to think of it as a social field. Transnational social fields encompasses those who remain in their country of origin and those who emigrate. Glick-Schiller (2005:442) defines a social network “as an egocentric set of ongoing social relationships. A social field is a network of networks...that stretch across the borders of nation-states”. People in different places create social relations that are important together. Even though they may be in different countries with other people, they can still create a social space where daily interactions can occur; that is transnational social fields.

A social field understanding exposes different ways of being and ways of belonging, transnationally. Transnational ways of being “are the actual practices that individuals engage in” (Glick-Schiller 2004), such as when a migrant sends remittances back home or watches a home country television channel from a different country. Transnational ways of belonging, however, refers “to practices that signal or enact identities which demonstrate a conscious connection to a particular group” (Glick-Schiller 2004).

### *2.2.2 Migration and religion*

According to Hagan and Ebaugh (2003) scholars of migration and religion, particularly in the United States, have tended to neglect the role of religion and spirituality in the process of international migration. In explaining the significance that religion plays in the lives of migrants; they illustrate the role of religion in the various stages of the migration process. The physical moving to the host country is only the final stage in the migration process (Hagan and Ebaugh 2003). Religious institutions assist greatly in preparing migrants to immigrate; “migrants actively make use of existing cultural institutions, such as the church and religious practices, throughout the various stages of the migration process, from the decision to migrate to the development of transnational communities, [and these] are critical to understanding contemporary international migration” (Hagan and Ebaugh 2003:1159). For most migrants belonging to a particular religious community makes it easier to immigrate, particularly if the host country has an already established community that the migrant can join. Making use of existing institutions assists migrants to adapt to their host country easier and helps them establish a transnational identity. Adogame (2010) has argued that African migrants frequently take their religion or at least some aspect of it with them when they travel.

Religion can be used as a tool that assists migrants with incorporation into their host country because “many religious institutions were founded on universal claims and have always been worldwide in scope” (Levitt 2007:13). Irrespective of where a migrant originates from once they migrated and are a part of this worldwide institution they can get assisted with their incorporation, through getting information about the migratory process. Religion provides a space where migrants can get assistance with solving many of the problems that come with being a migrant, such as obtaining legal documentation. Religion serves as a space for social capital for migrants because they get to participate in celebrations, create networks which can assist new migrants to deal with the pressure of being a migrant. In religious institutions you can find people that are at various stages of their immigration process. This is beneficial because it can assist newly arrived migrants. It is in these relationships that migrants begin to help each other to survive in the host country. Information is shared in these spaces, livelihood is a joint endeavor and the well-being and safety of the other is of importance. As a result a community of mutual respect and trustworthiness can be formed through religious networks and institutions (Menjívar 1999; Schiffauer 2006). Places of worship and religious

participation can provide for immigrants the opportunity for finding support, information and building friendship which strengthens their social capital within the host country (Baas 2010).

Adogame and Spickard (2010) have also considered the importance that religion plays in the lives of migrants. They argue that religion is not an isolated phenomena or an abstracted aspect of an individual's life. It forms part of their human fabric. We find that most migrants would go to a place of worship when encountering a challenge in their host country. In South Africa many migrants found refuge in churches and mosques during xenophobic attacks, for example during the attacks that took place in 2008 (Amisi, Bond, Cele, and Ngwane, 2011; Robins 2009; Peberdy and Jara 2011).

Based on a study of transnational migrants' religious practices in the United States, Levitt (2003:865) asserts that "religious institutions differ from other immigrant institutions in that they see themselves as embodying universal and timeless truths. They provide members with a moral compass and orients them to act upon these values in particular settings in particular ways". Religion is believed to be one of many institutions that reinforce moral values that assist in fostering human unity. 'Love thy neighbor', for example; which is largely a Christian concept is a value that is embodied in South Africa. Most migrants found refuge in churches and Mosques during xenophobic attacks which began in 2008 by many religions and encourages migrants and non-migrants to love to each other which will foster peace and acceptance among them. Speaking into the context of Pentecostalism and South-South migration Van De Kamp and van Dijk (2010) argue that religion "encourages stability in situation of mobility and provides for cultural continuity". This is done through allowing migrants to feel comfortable and have a sense of being at home even though being away from home. Many religious institutions are places where migrants and host citizens gather – although in most contexts such interaction relates to the dominant monotheistic traditions..

Garbin writing about African Initiated Christian Churches shows how Congolese people have managed to establish a "symbolic geographic of the sacred"... [this] relate to the ways in which worshippers and religious experts/leaders define, produce, or imagine translocal fields of religious presence, flows, and mobility" (Garbin 2011:145). This is seen through the many churches that are viewed as international. The author then challenges the notion of territorial identity being a fixed and static notion by arguing that many adherents see their local church as a geographical sacred space elsewhere even though the 'main' church is located in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Therefore, even though a migrant is resident in England s/he

may still identify with their Congolese co-nationals because they practice the same religion. In the book *“Travelling Spirits Migrants, Markets and Mobilities”*, Huwelmeier and Krause (2010) examine how migrants maintain and forge religious ties and identities across borders to maintain links with both the host and the home country. Jackson (2012), in his article *“Place makes a big difference to young people’s attitudes to religious diversity in the UK”*, found that “local patterns of residency, migration and religious practice have an impact upon young people’s attitudes to others” (2012). Moreover, he asserts that preconceived ideas and prejudices can be nullified or reinforced through a local context and religious practices have the potential of building a peaceful society that is receptive to migrants. Significantly, Levitt reminds us that religion does not take place within a vacuum; it lives through specific people in a particular organisation and with a specific community “transnational religious life occurs within organizational context” (2003:854).

### *2.2.3 Migration into South Africa*

Under the Apartheid regime South Africa was largely excluded from the international community, organisations and competitions. This exclusion happened through international boycotts which condemned the apartheid regime. According to Davenport (1987:478) in the 1960’s South Africa was forcefully excluded from world organizations such as the World Health Organization and others because of its racist policies. Internally, the system and structures of Apartheid controlled and monopolized the movement of people. Black people movement was particularly controlled and hindered through the Group Areas Act of 1950 which restricted the movement of people. The Apartheid system was largely race-driven and gave greater liberty to the white population. This had an effect on the immigrants into the country and made it difficult for people to emigrate as well.

After 1994 migration emerged as a major asset as well as a challenge to South Africa. Crush, Williams and Peberdy argue that “despite the importance of both cross border and internal migration to the region, pro-poor policies of governments, the region and continent, as well as donor agencies and countries that include migrants are lacking” (2005:28). They argue that policies that are put in place have a loophole in the sense that they do not cater for people looking for humanitarian refuge. In a book on xenophobia, Crush (2014:8) asserts that current “policies actively diminishing rights and entitlements for migrants and refugees strengthen

institutionalized discrimination and widen the gap between citizens and migrants”. In South Africa it seems to be difficult to obtain residence permits because of the complex, and seemingly corrupt, system that is in place. Landau (2014) argues that South Africans do not seem to be very welcoming of their African counterparts. This is evident from the xenophobic attacks which occurred in 2008, and again flared up in early 2015. Crush argues that the struggle against xenophobia has become more of a structural battle and that this is evident from the ways that “officials continue to react to foreign and domestic migrants by implicitly denying their presence, excluding them from developmental plans or tacitly condoning discrimination throughout the government bureaucracy and police” (2014:13).

Elsewhere, Crush (2014) argues that there are no strategies and plans that are in place to integrate migrants into South African society. For Crush this failure is what lies at the heart of the conflict between migrants and citizens, which he argues have limited any chance of cohesion between the two groups. Crush (2014) goes as far as to say that there is xenophobia denialism in South Africa. In seeking to expose this denialism Crush argued that South Africa “ignores or sidelines the evidence that most South Africans hold extremely negative views about migrants and refugees and wants the state to exercise greater coercive power to purge the country of their presence” (2014:3). In line with Crush’s concern about denialism in the face of ongoing xenophobic attacks, Landau (2014) argues that South Africa has overlooked the impact the migrants have had on bolstering international trade and relations with neighboring countries. Landau shows that as a result of South Africa’s failure to deal with xenophobia, various countries have begun to refuse to trade with South Africa because of the ill-treatment that South Africa has shown towards their citizens. Furthermore, Landau (2014:1) states “after 20 years we are not only backtracking on promises of tolerance, but also on those [promises] of an accountable, law-bound government able to realize the physical and economic security South Africa so desperately needs”. For Landau (2014) the major challenge in combatting xenophobia is addressing South Africa’s structural and systemic orientation against migrants, and a sluggish attitude towards addressing economic poverty. Finally, Landau argues that is precisely because of increasing poverty and social alienation that South Africans resort to making claims that migrants are competing with them with the scarce resources they require in their pursuit of economic freedom.

Crush (2011) argues that although most of the migrants into South Africa are temporary labour migrants coming from neighboring countries, South Africa is still experiencing a

'brain drain' because "surveys of the skilled and professional population and of students in professional programmes show high levels of dissatisfaction and a very strong inclination to emigrate" (2011:25). Crush argues that this paradoxical trend shows some of the important migration trends which have occurred in South Africa since the end of the Apartheid regime and also shows the complexity of policies which are meant to assist migrants.

#### *2.2.4 Migration and education in South Africa*

During the last 10 years South Africa has emerged as one of the top destinations for tourists, seeing an estimated 2 million tourists arriving in the country during the first quarter of 2015. However, with the introduction of new policies and regulations regarding migration into South Africa, many believe that it has contributed to the decrease in tourists and students coming into the country. Despite this, several South African universities continue to be ranked in the top 400 higher education institutions, with the University of Cape Town also breaking into the top 100. This assist in making south Africa not only a tourist destination but also attractive for students from other countries.

Dolby (2011) argues that internationally, most of the study abroad programmes in the 1980's was a phenomenon which was occurring amongst the elite of Europe. This was because it was only individuals who had the financial ability to go abroad engaged in such phenomena. More recently universities have started investing enormously in international education so as to enhance both the international status and visibility of institutions (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley 2009). South Africa has not been immune to this trend and Zeleza (2012) argues that South African universities increasingly rely on and promote the internationalization of education within the region through promoting semester-abroad and other forms of academic exchange programmes According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) some of the push-pull factors in international migration relates to students seeking quality education. Mazzarol and Soutar (2001) have argued that in countries with struggling economies, the social status of internationally educated students are high which for them result in a better chance to climb the economic ladder and contribute to the development of their own economies. Elsewhere, Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino, (2006) shows that employment opportunities in the host country after completion of a degree is a significant pull factor for students' decision about on where to go and study.

Whatever the reason and the final place of desired settlement, Hansen (2002) argues that the benefit of international education comes through migration where “the personal contact with people from other cultures forces [semester abroad students] to react immediately, in real time. These meetings are more likely to have an impact in a personal way than if the same facts had been learned in a classroom” (Hansen 2002:6).

#### **2.4 African Traditional Religion in South Africa**

African Traditional Religion is one of the oldest religions in sub-Saharan Africa (Lugira 2008). According to Lugira (2009) African people have always lived in a close relationship with the land because they usually stayed in isolation from their neighbours. The religions that were developed addressed their particular lives and needs. African Traditional Religion may differ from region to region but there are similarities that bind them together (Awolalu 1976; Lugira 2009; Beyers 2010). However, Amoah and Bennett (2008) remind us that since colonial times African Traditional Religion has been generalized, with little recognition of the diversity in Africa. This, they believe, has resulted in African Traditional Religion being seen as ‘merely’ animism or ancestral worship (Amoah and Bennett 2008).

In his book *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*, Chidester (1996) asserts that religion was but one of the ways that colonialism strived to control and categorise native peoples. Chidester argues that “comparative religion was conducted in frontier battlefields. Comparisons were not merely intellectual exercises; they were entangled in the European conquest and subjugation of African” (1996:219). Furthermore, Chidester states that the construction of the African Traditional Religion in the form that we have it today was largely a product colonial comparative science and indigenous reaction thereto. Historically African Traditional Religion has been constructed through a Western perspective of religion (Ranger 1997; Beyers 2010).

In examining Max Muller’s life and interest in South Africa and India, Chidester (2004) shows that knowledge and power are significant components in the construction of religion. This has been the driving force in showing that Africa is a continent of no “true” religion. This was because missionaries were using their Christian lenses in identifying religion in Africa. African Traditional Religion was not named before settlers entered the colonial frontier. Africans had long practiced it as a way of life and not necessarily named it.

According to Ekeke and Ekeopara (2010) it is the misunderstandings over the concepts of God, divinity and spirits in Africa that has led many scholars to believe that Africa does not worship a Supreme Being. Even this latter idea of a ‘Supreme Being’ emerged as a Western attempt to measure African religious concepts through Christian theological classifications.

#### *2.4.1 Debates and contestation over African Traditional Religions in South Africa*

There are many debates and contestations regarding the status of African Traditional Religion in South Africa. Scholars such as Nokuzula Mndende (1999; 2013), Sbusiso Masondo (2003) and David Chidester (2013), for instance, seem to agree that post-Apartheid South Africa brought about a revitalization of African Traditional Religion. In her article *Law and Religion in South Africa: An African Traditional perspective*, Mndende (2013) argues that even though African Traditional Religion has been recognized in the country, the laws and the policies of South Africa are still in favor of Christian traditions. She argues that major public holidays that the country celebrates such as Christmas and Easter holidays are commonly known as Christian holidays. Thus the dominance of Christianity has resulted in the perception of indigenous traditions as not only secondary to monotheistic traditions but also as primitive, anti-modern and cultic superstition (Adomo 2011, Olupona 2004).

Anthropologist of Religion, Rosalind Hackett (n.d) in her article, “Has Religious Freedom Served Or Failed Africa Traditional Religion” claims that South Africa is one of the best contexts to investigate current debates concerning African Traditional Religion. For Hackett, South Africa is modern, democratic and postcolonial state which has provided recognition and protection of African Traditional Religion in public life. Similarly, Amien (2013) has argued that African Traditional Religion has enjoyed not only legal recognition since the advent of democracy, but also that it has seen increasing visibility and acknowledgement in the media, education, and South African society at large.

Since African Traditional Religion is not an institutionalized or a formally organised religion in the way that Christianity, Islam and Judaism are, it is easily placed in the peripheries of society where it continues to occupy an ambivalent space in society irrespective of increased visibility. In his “Citizenship, Religion and Human Rights” Settler (2002) argues that the history of religion in South Africa has been characterized by the simultaneous denial of indigenous religion and the increasing institutionalization an evangelizing Christian church.

As such, African Traditional Religion has continued to receive ambivalent treatment both in education, and in the media in general. This leads Beyers (2010) to conclude that the more South Africa seems to be secularized, the more people seem to think that there would be a demise of African Traditional Religion.

The term “religion” has been one coined in the West which has resulted in the Christian Western understanding within the scholarly field. Based from a Western understanding of religion African Traditional Religion has been viewed as being primitive, anti-modern and cultic superstition (Beyers 2010, Mndende 2013). As a result there seems to be little room to for the recognition of religions which is perceived to be primitive. Philippe Denis (2006) argues that since the advent of democracy in South Africa there has been a rise and more visibility of African Traditional Religion, especially in places like KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. This the author argues concerning African Traditional Religion that it has the ability to adopt as to accommodate the times it finds itself in. Increased visibility has been evidenced by the formal recognition of African Traditional Religion, culture and legal regimes. Since 1994 the post-Apartheid State has established the National Council of Traditional Leaders in recognition of traditional polities, and the state has introduced a number of laws that recognize and incorporate indigenous healers, and healing practices. More popularly, state events are increasingly opening with traditional praise-singing and accompanied with the slaughtering of sacrificial animals – an event presided over by a Sangoma, a sacred specialist. Since there is no recorded dogma like other religions it is a phenomenon largely practiced at home, or in the family homestead. The new political conditions in South Africa produced a context which is eminently favorable to the expressions of African Traditional Religion. Mulago’s essay *African Traditional Religion and Christianity* (1991), argues that indigenous religion has been a vital religious force in Africa and has had a long relationship with Christianity.

Adama (2001) in *Christianity and the African traditional religion(s): The postcolonial round of engagement* calls for a critical dialogue between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. The author argues that for serious dialogue to commence there are vital components which need to be such as finding a common ground, and creating religious harmony. This dialogue would assist in the understanding of African Traditional Religion and allow practitioners of it to do so freely. The dialogue will allow for interaction between individuals and have positive repercussions on creating peace.

Sibusiso Masondo (2003) outlines and gives descriptions of instances of contestations over African Traditional Religion that has occurred in KwaZulu-Natal which has been in the media because of their conflict with civil society. For Masondo, most of these objections are in relation to the performance of ancestor ritual (traditional slaughtering of a sacrificial animal) which is often objected to as cruelty to animals. Similarly other traditional rituals are objected to on the grounds that they are health risks or they are regarded as demeaning and prejudiced against women.

Jacob Olupona (2004) in his *Beyond Primitivism* argues that the resilience of African Traditional Religion is seen through its ability to adapt to the situation of the person who forms part of it. He suggests that most scholars are of the opinion that people practice Christianity and African Traditional Religion simultaneously. He concludes that in these contexts indigenous cultures are not entirely discarded and that basic beliefs of indigenous traditions are retained in the postcolonial context. Chidester (1992) argues that within the study of the religion itself there are certain terms such as “traditional” that need clearer explanation as to fully comprehend African Traditional Religion. Ultimately Chidester contends that the history of African religion is best understood in terms of colonial and Apartheid practices of denial, and then of discovery of indigenous religion(s).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined some of the important trends of migration, that people are no longer bonded by two borders which are their home and host countries. Migrants are forming part of social fields that go beyond nation-state binaries and it is within such that migrants’ activities need to be studied. When migrants travel they do not do so in a vacuum manner but one of the things they take with is their religion. Religion is an important factor in migration studies because it changes geographical landscapes. When migrants arrive at their host country they also meet with the religion of their host people.

## **Chapter Three: International Education in South Africa**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter seeks to provide a historical overview of international education in South Africa, and then show the current practices that are taking place within international education by outlining the kinds of degree programs that international students enroll for. Lastly, this chapter outlines the role that the University of KwaZulu-Natal is playing within international education in South Africa. A key objective of this chapter is to illustrate that international education, and migration in education, is not a new phenomenon in South Africa. In fact, education at the colonial frontier, and during Apartheid, was a fundamentally international phenomenon. It was, however, a form of internationalization of education that depended upon and reinforced racial segregation. Hence, it is only in post-apartheid South Africa that we find policies and approaches to international education that enable all sections of South African society the possibility to participate in international education programmes. Claims about international education programmes in South Africa need to keep this history in mind, as it is only in the last 20 years that international education has aimed to benefit and contribute to cross-cultural and racial learning, respect and cooperation.

### **3.2 International education: key strategies and concepts**

One fundamental aspect of international education is the mobility of students, this is an aspect that assists greatly in the internationalisation of institutions of higher education (Schoole 2006; Huisman and van der Wende 2007). An institution cannot see itself as being international if there are no international students within it, or if it does not send students abroad. The movement of students and staff contributes to establishing an international institution, because they go and represent that particular institution. UNESCO, in 2012, argued that student mobility is becoming one of the most visible forms of cross-border movement in higher education. Furthermore, UNESCO indicates that worldwide there were approximately 1.1 million mobile students in the 1980s, but in the 1990s that number rose to 1.3 million. It is expected that by 2020 there would be 8 million mobile students worldwide. Increasingly universities are empowering their students to be able to move around the world and study in different contexts. The mobility of students is a phenomenon which is understudied within migration studies, despite the fact that it is a growing trend

internationally. Formally structured and organised study abroad programmes is a small aspect of a bigger phenomenon commonly referred to as student mobility. Institutions perceive study abroad as a vital component that educates students on global issues, and provides opportunities for experiencing different contextual across the world. Dolby (2010) argues that for most higher education institutions, having a study abroad programme serves to promote an institutional image of global orientation and concern.

Chidester argues that education assists students in becoming global citizens, “which is formed on the basis of universal rights and transnational loyalties, has been promoted by an array of social movements, non-governmental organizations and international initiatives...global citizenship...[is] an essential component of citizenship education to prepare students for a globalizing world” (2002:13). Similarly, Ramphela argues that as students get involved with international education they meet and connect with people from different backgrounds experience different cultures, which helps them develop an understanding of their place and role in the world.

According to the Institute of International Education (2012), international education is based on the premise that once a student leaves their country of origin to study abroad, in a different culture, they develop a better way of reflecting on their own country and their education. They also gain a better perspective about the host country through interaction with local culture, language and worldview. Some scholars have suggested that travelling to, and studying in a different geographical area, and connecting with people from diverse backgrounds seem to lead to increased tolerance. (Boaz 1986; Hayden and Thompson 1995). The mobility of students is something that has not been given much attention in migration studies, it is a phenomenon that is rapidly growing and becoming a part of the higher education experience. UNESCO suggests that higher education globally is becoming a competitive field because more and more students seek international tertiary education. International relations offices within universities are also becoming more and more sophisticated as to attract international students by offering degrees that are internationally recognized; by providing internships that provide more practical experience. Institutions of higher education are actively working towards recruiting international students.

Most international students are temporary migrants who return to their home country after completing their programme. Many, however, also choose to stay in their host country after they have completed their degree. The mobility and settlement patterns of migrant students are, hence, varied. There are various push-and-pull factors that motivate international students. Students decide on becoming international students for several reasons and there are certain pull-push factors that contribute to student mobility. There are different approaches to international education and Donohue-Bergeler (2011) argues that students travelling abroad should do so with a mind-set of going beyond sightseeing; learning should not be reduced to the classroom setting alone. Depending on the structure that an international programme has, would lead to a particular goal. Most international programmes have an in-class structure of learning which does not necessarily allow learners to full experience the country they are in.

Hence, Donohue-Bergeler (2011) strongly recommends that excursions be incorporated into international education programmes. Excursions allow for possibilities where students can authentically experience the sensual emotions connected with that county, in ways that cannot happen in a traditional classroom setting. A classroom largely teaches through literature which does not necessary show the physical effect of that particular subject. Having the ability to combine theory and practice allows for a greater learning experience. Donohue-Bergeler (2011) concludes that the learning process includes the transition from a local to a cosmopolitan view and understanding of the world. Advocates of international education believe that when students are able to experience a context other than their own that enhances their awareness of how different the world is from their own. This helps with enhancing tolerance and acceptance of 'the Other'. Student migrants learn formally inside the university and they learn more informally about their host country through general social interaction with people. It is through such interactions that they get exposed to practices of African Traditional Religion and have the opportunity to develop an understanding of the religion.

Within South African universities the majority of international students come from the continent itself (MacGregor 2014; ICEF 2013). There is a majority of African internationals occupying higher education institutions than any other internationals in South Africa. South Africa allows students from the SADC region pay the same amount of fees as South African Students. The political stability and a currency which is stronger than most countries in Africa, South Africa attracts Africans to study in the country. Some African students are drawn to South Africa because of courses that are not offered in their home country. The

SADC region has made large investments in education, according to Kotecha (2012). In 1970 the region used 5% of its GDP, but by 2010 the region was using the most finances in compared to the rest of the world.

Mattes, Crush and Richmond (2000) in their article *“The Brain Gain: Skilled Migrants and Immigration policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa”*, argue that South Africa host many countries within its higher education institution. These students contribute in the production of knowledge. Their impact and contribution in university life is great and yet there are no clear policies that can facilitate the integration of international students in the institutions of higher education in South Africa. Clear and precise policies are needed because, as Ramphela (1999:5) argues, South African universities are transnational, transcultural and transcontinental institutions; this is to say that institutions of higher education in South Africa are transcending borders. Ramphela further argues that “although universities are international, they are also integrated into a given society and region, and social, political and economic system” (Ramphela 1999). It is then imperative that they are inclined towards their local context in which they find themselves. This will facilitate the relevance students’ education into civil society yet also being competitive internationally. The knowledge that students achieve on a tertiary level ought to bring about upliftment to the locality that these students find themselves. It should be added that international students do not only assist in the life of higher education but society at large. As they begin to spend money outside of the university, they also contribute to the economy of South Africa. Students add to the economy through spending money for residences outside of the university, traveling expenses and living cost. Their contribution to the larger economy is imperative.

Research conducted by the ICEF Monitor (2013) indicates that South Africa is an important hub for international students, and especially students from the rest of the African continent. According to the country profiles on the UNESCO, South Africa hosted 61 000 international students within its institutions of higher education in 2009. This high number also indicates that international education in South Africa is flourishing this is due to its reasonably resourced public institutions and the transformation which began in the 1990s under the auspices of the Higher Education Act of 1997 (Dolby 2011:17). According to the UNESCO South Africa is rated among the top twenty counties who is a host to international students globally.

The Higher Education Act offered the basis from which to work towards an incorporative and nationally planned higher education system, and it underpins the setting up of the statutory body, the Council on Higher Education (CHE). CHE advises the minister and promotes quality assurance within the higher education sector (Kotecha, Wilson-Strydom and Fongwa 2012:78). This transformation was needed because higher education in South Africa prior to 1994 was very restricted resulting from the political and economic isolation which was taking place in the nation at the time (Council of Higher Education 2004:212). However, the internationalization of higher education in South Africa has brought new challenges that need to be addressed at a systematic and institutional level. This is because when democracy was ushered these institutions in the country were not well prepared for the influx of international students considering the long isolation South Africa had experienced (Rouhani 2007).

The ICEF monitor argues that the quality of education in South Africa is above par in comparison to other African countries. Furthermore, Zeleza (2012) indicates that South African has outlined higher education from countries around Africa and states that South Africa seems to be above par with the rest of the continent as such many students from Africa especially those occupying the peripheries of the SADC region seek higher education at a South Africa university. The infrastructure, the international recognition of a qualification, and the affordability of education makes South Africa a desirable destination for many students. During the year 2011, ICEF Monitor identified 68 000 of international students, with 40 000 of those being on-campus. The growing popularity of South African higher education has also placed it in the top 20 destination for United States students. The ICEF monitor indicates that there has been a 4.7% rise of students from the United States during 2010 and 2012 studying in South African universities.

Even though South Africa seems to be booming in its internationalization of higher education, there is still some work which needs to be done to strengthen this sector. According to Mattes, Crush and Richmond (2000) it is particularly on a structural and political level that work remains. Once these two components are rectified then internationalization of higher education in South Africa can begin to blossom further. The structures of higher education can be hostile towards international students. For instance international students can pay twice as much as their counterparts for university fees.

Higher education can be one of the institutions where learning across and between religions can occur. Not only because they are educational institutions, but also because they are

spaces where people from different religions, backgrounds and cultures meet and interact; for example through the migrations of international students. Paulo Freire (2000), in his *book Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, offers conclusions regarding the function of education that, I believe speaks critically to the South African context. Freire (2000:34) states “education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world”. The current debates and conflict we are seeing in higher education in South Africa shows that education is an imperative tool in assisting with the decolonise .

### **3.3 Colonialism, Apartheid and the making of higher education in South Africa**

Schoole (2006) tracks the historical development of the internationalization of higher education in South Africa, and argues that international education in South Africa is not a new phenomenon a trend that has been ongoing since the inception of higher education itself. An example of the long history of internationalization of education in South Africa is the South African College, an institution established in 1837 that became the University of Cape Town in 1918. This institution drew its matriculation and examination from the University of London (Schoole 2006), meaning that the students from this university were competing with other students who were in London by writing the same exam as them. In this sense, the exams at the South African College were internationally aligned, and aimed to graduate students that were competitive internationally. Declaring this institution of higher education as public, and maintaining links with the University of London permitted the mobility of students; the universities having links with each other made travelling easier for students. English universities in South Africa had strong links with institutions in the United Kingdom, While Afrikaans universities had connections to their counterparts in Germany and the Netherlands.

Despite the international orientation of some institutions of higher education in South Africa, this internationalization was divided along racial lines. The Higher Education system in South Africa was very exclusive and it reinforced Apartheid. During the apartheid regime there was the Bantu Education, which was passed into law in 1953. The Bantu Education

system was a way of the then government to take control of the education of African children, and in the 1960s the government took charge of the Coloured and Asian schools as well (Thompson 2000:196). Thompson says that Verwoerd who was the President of South Africa during the apartheid regime and the architect of apartheid policy was frank about his opinion concerning the education system. Verwoerd said that “Native education should be controlled in such a way that it should be in accord with the policy of the state” (Thompson 2000:196). Education policies were written and implemented for the purpose of reinforcing the ideology of apartheid. All systems and structures during those times were intertwined and worked in unison to advance the apartheid regime. Education was a major force in perpetuating the policies of the government of the day.

These racially discriminatory education policies would eventually affect the possibilities for internationalization and international education in South Africa. The international community did not agree with the segregation of people and the manner that South Africa was governed and as a result did not have a close relationship with the country. This left South Africa isolated and migration into the country being stringently controlled. Hence, the international linkages and relationships of South African institutions of higher education became deeply contested, as international resistance to Apartheid grew. As a form of resistance to Apartheid outside of South Africa, various forms of academic boycotts took place.

Lancaster and Haricombe (1995:3) have conducted a survey concerning the academic boycott of South Africa, and list the following eight manifestations:

1. Scholars refusing to travel to South Africa or to invite South Africans abroad
2. Publishers, journals, and the like, refusing to publish South African manuscripts
3. Scholars abroad refusing to collaborate with South African scholars
4. Publishers abroad refusing to provide access to information (for example, books or computer software)
5. International conferences barring South Africans
6. Institutions abroad denying South African academics access
7. Institutions abroad refusing to recognize South African degrees

8. Scholars abroad refusing to act as external examiners for theses presented at South African universities.

The boycotts that were taken against South Africa alienated academics, so that they could not participate in international conferences. This meant that the circulation of knowledge into, and out of, South Africa was limited.

### **3.4 Recent history of international education in South Africa**

Education in South Africa has undergone a transformative process since the end of Apartheid. However, the apartheid regime left behind some devastating effects on the educational system of South Africa; there was a demoralization of education which was produced at a structural level and resulted to an obdurate legacy of social and economic inequalities. “This was accompanied and underpinned by a complex skein of discriminatory political and cultural attitudes, dispositions and orientations” (Soudien 2010:4). Redressing these effects in the new and democratic South Africa, meant that it was imperative that transformation would take place (Soudien 2010, Council of Higher Education 2004). According to Ramphele (2000) international education in South Africa increased with the dismantling of the Apartheid regime, because policies and regulations that kept the country in isolation from the international community were changed. The removal of apartheid restrictions regarding the movement of people made a huge difference in the country and contributed greatly into student mobility into the country.

Mouton, Louw and Strydom (2012) analyses the post-apartheid educational syllabus and they agree that transformation was necessary, as Fongwa (2012) proposes, to ensure that previously disadvantaged groups and women could gain access into higher education. The difficulty of coping with academic pressure is also a contributing factor. However, this does not nullify what the new government was striving to achieve at an economic level. The new syllabus would produce significant results because it redressed the skills divide resulting from the fragmented higher education system (Fongwa 2012:77). This has necessitated the recruitment of teaching staff from the African continent, so as to supplement shortages in skills and expertise within South African institutions of higher education.

Post-1994 the new government of South Africa worked to construct a unified higher education system, through merging Universities that were previously racially divided. There are now 23 universities in South Africa. The mergers happened in order:

“to begin to address the history of inequality through merging (in some cases) historically privileged and unprivileged universities; to align university priorities with national priorities for training and development, so as to strengthen and grow the South African economy for global competitiveness; to streamline and consolidate costs; and to ensure that the remaining institutions were financially viable” (Dolby 2011: 16).

The merger of Universities was put in place to establish a more integrated and coordinated higher education system, a system that was formerly disjointed along racial lines which also led to the number of international students on campuses to grow significantly. The merger that occurred in the higher education sector in South Africa permitted and contributed to the increase of international students. Aloyo and Wenzel (2011) conducted research amongst six South African Universities that admit the largest number of international students to study at their university. They claim that international students contribute tremendously to the economy of South Africa and this phenomenon has been seen as a form of international trade, seeing education as a trade has also contributed tremendously to cross-border higher education movements (UNESCO 2012).

However, similar to Dolby’s (2011) concern that policies related to international education are unclear and ambivalent, the Council of Higher Education argued that a “national policy on internationalization for South African higher education remains a significant gap” (2004:214). This could be related to the lack of transformation taking place in the higher education sector. Following widespread protests concerning higher education in South Africa it has become imperative that the transformation of higher education be fast-tracked. The ‘Rhodes Must Fall’, ‘Open Stellenbosch’ and the ‘Fees Must Fall’ movements all illustrate how the university system in South Africa has failed many students.

‘Rhodes Must Fall’ was a radical, and bold, stance taken by students aiming at the decolonisation of the University of Cape Town. Open Stellenbosch, is a movement at Stellenbosch University, sparked by the other student movements that sought to improve black students’ access to higher education. At Stellenbosch University the students’ concern

as a movement was largely around the language policy. The language of instruction at the University was still largely Afrikaans, and the movement wanted this to be changed to English. The movement wanted to “break away from the constraints of the historical injustices perpetuated by this institution and a public image that has been characterized overwhelmingly by Afrikaner culture at the expense of inclusivity” (Peterson 2015). The commonality across these movements is that they wanted to transform institutions of higher education.

### **3.5 Current practices of international education in South Africa**

South Africa has increased its enrolment numbers in the post-secondary sector, significantly in comparison to the rest of the SADC region (Kotecha 2012). The Southern African Regional Universities Association (2012) indicates that South Africa has the largest number of students enrolled in their universities, catering for more than 800 000 students across all fields of study (Fongwa 2012:78). The Department of Education has indicated that there was an enrolment of close to 2 million students at both the private and public post-school education programme and training during the academic year of 2011. Since 1994 there has also been a steady increase in the number of international students enrolled at South African Universities. The SADC region has made large investments in education, according to Kotecha (2012). In 1970 the region used 5% of its GDP, but by 2010 the region was using the most in compared to the rest of the world.

The former Minister of Finance of South Africa, Nhlanhla Nene, in his budget speech in 2015, allocated an amount of R195 billion to post schooling and training, R72.4 billion is for universities that operate with subsidiaries. In addition, there will be an amount of R11.9 billion spent on financial aid to assist students. The Ministry of Education has indicated that the expenditure on higher education is vital if the country is to meet the goals of expansion, transformation and redress (Department of Education 1997). It is believed that this new orientation will result in better education and more interest in the international community wanting to come and study in South Africa. South Africa has also been performing quite well within the world ranking concerning its GDP. Zeleza (2012:1) indicates that the country is occupying the 74<sup>th</sup> position. With a large GDP, the country has the capacity to invest a significant amount on infrastructure, and to assist students in the form of financial aid. All of

this helps with the quality of education that is given at public universities, and it attracts more international students. As was indicated by Fongwa (2012:84) most of the public university research subsidiaries come from the government, meaning that without the governments assistance most universities would struggle, and the education sector would be under pressure.

According to the Minister of Education, in a 2015 speech to international students at Wits University, argued that through academic dialogue with other countries around issues of common concern, South Africa will increasingly become a desirable destination for students. The minister noted that various government departments worked with the various stakeholders to put policies and regulations in place for international students to access higher education more easily. Student mobility is one of the factors that show how a university has been internationalised. Thus without international students, a university's global profile is markedly reduced (Hagenmeier, Quinlan and Lansink 2015). According to Alfonso (2010) Universities' tend to solidify their position globally through the internationalization of their programme and student profiles.

International education is a phenomenon that is becoming common, as more and more students seek education outside of their home country universities (UNESCO 2013). As the figures provided by the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) below indicates, the numbers of international students in South African Universities, and at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in particular, has grown in recent years. Even though there have been periods where numbers declined, this did not minimize the importance of international education in South Africa. As has been asserted by Ramphele et al. (1999,) international students are an integral part of any internationally recognized institution, and South African universities seem to have achieved international recognition and respect considering the number of international students and the collaborations they have with other international universities.

This movement of international students into South Africa is what is commonly known as the "brain gain" (Ramphele et al. 1999; Chien, Chiteng Kot et al. 2012; UNESCO 2012). This is because the country has begun to attract people who are highly skilled and professional in their respective fields. The knowledge that they have has the potential to contribute to the growth of the country and its development. Furthermore the "mobility of students nationally

and internationally to undertake postgraduate studies is an important means of adding to the skills base” (Education White Paper 3).

According to the OECD, South Africa ranks 11th in the world as a destination among international students. The number of international students studying in South Africa has grown dramatically since 1994, from 12,000 in to over 60,000 in 2009. By 2015, international students represented nearly 8% of the 800,000 students enrolled at South Africa's 23 public universities. South Africa has become the most popular place to study in Africa and is one of the world's top 20 host destinations for students from the U.S. There has been an increase over the years regarding the number of students that come and study in South Africa. According to Marko (2009) between in period 1994 to 2006 there has been an increase of 29 671 international students from the SADC region. The country began with 6206 students and by 2006 there was 35 880 international students enrolled at South African universities. International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) reports that in 2012 there were 40 270 international students enrolled within South African universities and the table below shows the sending countries of these students.

	Place of Origin	Number of students	Percentage of Total
1	Zimbabwe	10 846	26.9 %
2	Namibia	2 638	6.6 %
3	Lesotho	2 587	6.4 %
4	Dem. Republic of Congo	2 533	6.3 %
5	Seychelles	2 204	5.5 %
6	Botswana	1 743	4.3 %
7	Zambia	1 015	2.5 %
8	Angola	788	2.0 %
9	Malawi	600	1.5 %
10	Tanzania	456	1.1 %
	All Others	14 860	36.9 %

*Source: International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) <http://www.iie.org>*

The above table illustrates that South Africa has established itself as an important educational destination for the rest of the SADC region. There are 23 universities in South Africa, all of which host international students. According to Marko (2009) the top five universities host the following numbers of international students; University of Cape Town (4423), University of Pretoria (3008), Stellenbosch University (2731), University of KwaZulu-Natal (2229), University of Witwaterstrand (2189). Marko (2009) found that there were 14 580 international students enrolled within these universities. This shows that international students desire to be in a South African University, is not only because of affordability but also the international recognition that South African universities have. International recognition extends to a structural level as well, so that other universities seek to be in collaboration with South African universities. Mahlaha (2012) argues that other universities, such as those in Namibia, seek to have research and academic collaborations with South African universities. This is due to the opportunities that a South African University can open internationally. The collaboration between African universities also assists showing the unity that the continent has on an educational level and are willing to assist each other for international recognition.

### *3.5.1 International Education/Students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal*

According to the International Relations office at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the university has managed to build a worldwide reputation for academic excellence in teaching and research. The educational qualifications that students obtain have an international standing. Furthermore, this institution has created links with other universities around the globe, thus offering exchange programmes and collaborative teaching and research programmes with other universities around the globe. For example, there is a partnership with the Church of Sweden to facilitate a degree programme in the Gender, Health and Religion discipline. This collaboration seeks to produce an interdisciplinary study programme of gender, religion and health, otherwise not available anywhere in the region. The two institutions combined to present not only a strong academic initiative, but also to strengthen their international networks.

There are approximately 2000 international students registered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the academic year 2015. According to the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Corporate

Relations Office, the university is ranked amongst the top 3% of higher education institutions in South Africa in terms of academic ranking. The statement of the College of Humanities' media page at the University is committed to "advancing scholarship and actively contributing to the intellectual development of the region".<sup>2</sup> In this regard, South Africa seems to be the forerunner in portraying Africa as a continent that has something constructive to contribute to the knowledge construction arena. When students migrants return to their land of origin they contribute in advancing the knowledge within their particular region. South Africa operates as a training facility that equips and provides the necessary knowledge and skills that students would use in their home country which would develop the country.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to show the internationalization of higher education in South Africa, which has assisted in boosting the numbers of international students coming to the country. South Africa has played a central role in the continent of Africa in this regard. This is due to the infrastructure, the number of higher institutions in the country and the links South African higher institutions have managed to establish with the international community.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://coh.ukzn.ac.za/Homepage.aspx>

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I outline and explain the following aspects of the research methodology utilised; research design, research methods, the process and method of data analysis, ethical considerations and, finally, limitations of the study. This study is located in the interpretive and qualitative paradigm, and follows a phenomenological approach. According to Harwell (2011) qualitative research deals with understanding and strives to discover the experiences, perspectives and thoughts of participants.

This study is located within the interpretive research design as it aims to “increase knowledge and understanding and it sets out neither to promote nor to undermine religious belief” (Jackson 2009). In interpretive and phenomenological research, it is vital that as a researcher has an open mind, and is not biased or prejudiced towards the phenomenon they investigate. Furthermore, the interpretive approach presumes that an individual’s experience is best understood when a researcher can interact with the research participants through paying attention to what they say (Gray 2004). As a researcher, I sought to create an environment where participants could express their opinions and experiences freely, without judgement. As a researcher I do not seek to advocate or to diminish African Traditional Religion, but investigate the ways that international students acquire knowledge about African Traditional Religion, and whether that knowledge acquisition facilitate prejudiced or reinforces preconceived ideas. As a researcher it is vital that a personal encounter with the participants be made possible because within an interpretive approach because “meaning are handled in, and are modified by, an interactive process used by people in dealing with the phenomena that are encountered” (Gray 2004:21).

### **4.2 A phenomenological approach**

Phenomenology aims to express individual or collective experiences regarding a phenomenon under study. According to the Stanford dictionary phenomenology is “the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience

of or about some object”. Within a phenomenological study the researcher ascertains the crux of human experiences concerning a specific phenomenon, as it is explained by the participants in the study (Creswell 2008:17).

Partridge has argued that “the aim of phenomenology is to eschew all subjective input and to testify only to what has been observed” (2000:43). The phenomenological approach is one of the most influential approaches in religious studies (Partridge 2000). A phenomenological approach is useful for the study of religion because religion is so diverse and each person has a different perspective and approach to it. The phenomenological approach will assist me as the researcher to rid myself of biases towards the information provided by the participants.

A phenomenological methodology falls within qualitative research methods, and this technique “explore(s) attitudes, behavior and experiences through such methods as interviews or focus groups...it attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants (Dawson 2002:15). Bhattacharjee (2012) has argued that there have been critiques towards phenomenological approaches that view this approach as more of a philosophy than a method. Bhattacharjee (2012) argues that in establishing an “existential phenomenological research method” two components emerge: data collection and data analysis. These components are vital within qualitative research and the method which one uses to fulfill these aspects assist in providing originality of the research project.

The type of phenomenon that a researcher studies also dictates which method that they would use, and the caliber of participants who would be involved in the study; in other words the researcher cannot decide on the participants and then method (Hycner 1999:156). As indicated in the previous chapters of this study, the phenomenon under study considers international students’ perceptions, and their knowledge acquisition, concerning African Traditional Religion. The phenomenological approach will help me as a researcher to establish a data collection and sampling methods of this study. This inevitably will influence the method of analysing information gathered from research participants.

#### **4.3 Research procedures**

Research methods, according to Rajasekar, Philominathan and Chinnathambi, “are the various procedures, schemes and algorithms used in research...They are essentially planned,

scientific and value-neutral” (2013). Likewise Dawson (2007) describes these as the tools with which a researcher can gather information and data.

#### *4.3.1 Description of the research process*

The initial motivation for conducting this particular research project emerged when I was a member of staff of the Azusa Pacific University semester abroad programme in Pietermaritzburg. Through this work I came to know several international study abroad students, and I was intrigued by how they approached, engaged and formed understandings of South African cultures, traditions and religions. Hence, I initially aimed to draw research participants from within this programme, as I was well placed to conduct a study within this programmatic context. However, as my contract of employment with Azusa was not renewed in 2015 and my interest concerning international education broadened, I, in consultation with my supervisor, decided to focus rather on international study abroad students at UKZN.

In September 2014 I applied for ethical clearance with the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Ethical clearance was granted in April 2015. Following this, I liaised with the international relations office at UKZN, the school representative council and some of the international organisations, to assist me in locating international students from North America and Europe.

In the first phase of establishing contact with potential research participants, I approached the International Student Association of UKZN in Pietermaritzburg to ask for assistance in identifying and contacting North American and European students. While the association was willing to assist me, and knew that there were North American and European students at UKZN, they did not have any contact details for these students and could not offer me assistance in establishing contact. Hence, I contacted the International Student Office at UKZN Pietermaritzburg campus who provided me with a list of 25 international students. I emailed these to ask if any of them would be willing and interested to be participants in the study. After receiving no response from any of the students after a month, I decided to adopt another approach to contacting potential research participants.

I then began to walking around on campus approaching students and asked them if they were from North America or Europe. At first this was a daunting task because I am quite shy. However, after I had approached a few white students on campus it became easier to

approach students asking if they were from North America, or if they knew any students from North America. After a few weeks of approaching students on campus I had managed to plan a number of interviews. These interviews did unfortunately not materialise because the students did not show up at the place and time we had agreed upon. This added to my frustrations and anxieties, as time for my project to be completed was fast approaching.

However, with the help of my supervisor I was eventually able to make plans to conduct interviews with a visiting staff member from North America who was accompanied by six of his students, who were part of a contextual bible study course at a theological centre at UKZN. Two of these students were eventually interviewed as they fitted the sampling criteria.

#### *4.3.2 Sampling process*

The students interviewed were selected using purposive sampling, and snowball sampling methods. The selection criteria that I used were that all participants needed to be North American or European international semester abroad students attached to UKZN. I chose this group because I believed that North American and European students would have little previous contact with African Traditional Religion, even if they had some knowledge about it. International students from Africa, I assumed would have had some encounters with African Traditional Religion and thus less able to help provide useful information and experiences for this particular study. In future studies, however, it may be interesting to compare the knowledge acquisition of African and Euro-American students. This was, however, beyond the scope of this study. Students from North America will provide me with an outsider's perspective, as they encounter a religion previously unfamiliar to them. I believed that after spending some time in South Africa, these students would have experienced some form of African Traditional Religion. Hence I focused on students who were registered, or had been registered, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for between 6 months and one year.

There was no privilege granted to a specific religion, nor a particular program, so as to strive to receive a variety of responses. I was able to make contact with 15 participants, but as not able to conduct interviews with all of them, as many did not show up for our scheduled

meetings. All the participants that I did manage to interview came from North-American countries.

Three of the interviews conducted that I eventually conducted were not included into the initial sample group for this research project, and the participant's responses have not been included into the analysis and discussion of data. These interviews were excluded from the sample as the participants did not fit the sampling criteria for inclusion; one was a member of staff, while two were postgraduate students.

#### *4.3.3 In-depth interviews*

In this study I used in-depth interviews as the main research method. Boyce and Neale (2006) have explained in-depth interviewing as “a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviewing with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea”. I have made use of interviews because this technique strives to gain insight in the personal experience of the interviewee (Valenzuela and Shrivastava 2011).

There are three types of qualitative interviews, namely; “unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews” (Dawson 2007:67). In this project, I opted to make use of semi-structured interviews, as these allowed me to remain flexible to the different experiences and knowledges of the participants, while at the same time ensuring consistency across interviews. The students I interviewed were not homogenous and had levels of knowledge about, and exposure to, African Traditional Religion. By utilising a semi-structured interview approach I was able to account for this in the interview process, and I was able to adjust the interview questions and topics of discussion based on the experience of each individual participant. Nevertheless, this approach also allowed me to ask all participants similar questions, so that I could be able also to compare what they have said concerning African Traditional Religion.

The interviews were conducted at various places that were suitable for the participants. I travelled to the UKZN Howard College Campus in Durban for one of the interviews. We conducted it in the School of Philosophy, Religion and Classics board room because it was the most quiet and convenient venue. Another two interviews took place in Pietermaritzburg,

at the yes Please hotel. The students were living there and felt that it would be safe for us to have the interviews conducted there. The last two interviews happened over skype because these students had left Pietermaritzburg to do their internships at different organizations in Cape Town.

Permission was granted for the interviews to be recorded and a consent form, that outlined the purpose and focus of the research, was signed by all of the participants. I developed the interview to address three broad themes, which will be dealt with in detail later in this paper. The first theme was migration, mobility and international education– here I sought to investigate the reasons for why the students chose to participate in an exchange programme. Secondly I focused on religious literacy, which included looking at whether students knew about other religions other than their own. Thirdly I asked questions about their orientation towards African Traditional Religion, these questions were geared towards examining what kind of attitude contact with African Traditional Religions facilitated.

#### *4.3.4 Process and method of data analysis*

In this research project I opted to make use of a thematic approach to analyse the data from the interviews. Thematic analysis is “a method of identifying analysing and reporting patterns within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006:10). It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (or "themes") within data. With thematic analysis the researcher synthesises their research because this is acceptable and thematic analysis permits it to occur (Thomas and Harden 2008). Thematic analysis can be viewed in two ways, firstly it can be an “essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants...[and] secondly, it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (Braun and Clarke 2006:7). This study made use of thematic analysis in both an essentialist and constructivist manner, as I sought to both report the experiences of participants, and analyse the ways in which they represent and understand African Traditional Religion.

This study adopted the analytical procedure suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), and the following steps below in table guided the process of data analysis within this study.

Phase	Activity
1	Familiarizing yourself with the data
2	Generating initial codes
3	Searching for themes
4	Reviewing themes
5	Defining themes
6	Producing the report

*Table 1: Stages of data capturing Braun and Clarke (2006:PG)*

This six-step guide assisted me greatly in analyzing the data, as it provided a guideline for how to proceed with each step in the data analysis process. Phase 1 began as I started to transcribe the interviews, this provided an opportunity to listen and make notes about the content of what each participant was saying. After completing the transcriptions, I started to read the texts over and over so that I could familiarise myself with it and also begin to tabulate what the participants have been saying. In Phase 2, I decided on the initial codes for analysis. These codes were curiosity; willingness to learn; and, knowledge about religion.

Here I noted, in particular, that the students had limited knowledge about African Traditional Religion, as they were most familiar with Christianity and Islam. Nevertheless, the students were interested in experiencing a different country other than their own, so they that could become aware of how people in other parts of the world live. The students were curious to witness the lifestyle of South Africa and wanted to experience the educational system of the country. The students saw the exchange program as a good vocational opportunity for them because the journey would not cost them more then what they would have paid for the semester being at home. One of them indicated that they would get to do their internship here in South Africa and that was motivation enough to inspire them to travel.

In Phase 3 I looked at the codes I had created and started to compare the different transcripts to see if there were themes emerging across the different interviews. These themes captured “something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned responses or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke 2006:79).

In Phase 4 I removed themes created at the beginning stages of reading the data. During the reviewing of data I realized that themes created are only represented a certain percentage of the participants' views and experiences. Therefore, I began to critically analyze the data as to establish themes that would represent an overall impression of the interviews and themes that all participants would be able to fit into.

After reviewing the themes I had created in phase 4, I phase 5 decided on the final list of themes to be used in this dissertation. I chose these themes because these revealed most accurately the reasons for why the students participated in a semester abroad programme. These themes also adequately addressed the question of how students learn about African Tradition Religion and whether attitudes changed or not during the course of their stay in South Africa.

#### **4.4 Reliability and validity**

Golafshani (2003:604) argues that validity and reliability in qualitative research are concerned with quality, trustworthiness, and the extent to which a study may be regarded as plausible and credible. The methodology that the researcher uses needs to be reliable, and able to validate the information as to enable the achievement of rigor. It is the responsibility of the researcher to device tactics in order to verify their investigation (Bashir, Afzal and Azeem, 2008:35), and to ensure that their research findings are "true" in the sense that they reflect the situation under inquiry accurately. Lastly, the researcher must ensure that the study is "certain", in the sense that available evidence supports the findings presented (Guion, Diehl and McDonald, 2002:1).

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations in research are a component that is largely the responsibility of the researcher. This includes ensuring that the study is not harmful to the people involved and that it contributes to a body of knowledge. Ethical considerations in qualitative research are guided by three principles; autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden 2001, Boyce and Neale 2006).

The participants in the study were provided with a consent form to read and sign prior to the start of the interview. The consent form asked the participants to indicate their willingness to take part in the study, and informed them that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the process at any given time. The consent form promised the participants that their responses would be anonymised so that it would not be possible to identify them in the final research report. Moreover, the consent form informed the participants that the study was conducted for as part of my Master's degree dissertation project. All participants interviewed agreed to having the interviews voice recorded and transcribed. I transcribed the interviews verbatim myself. The interview recordings and transcripts were stored in a safe place, and the names of the participants were not revealed to anyone.

#### **4.6 Delineation and limitations**

The biggest limitation of this study was the small number of participants that took part in the study. Due to the difficulty in getting students to commit to an arranged meeting, and the limited time we had for interviews because students would meet with me between their classes. I believe that if I had used ethnographic methods I would have been able to uncover more information, as what students say and their first reaction towards a phenomenon are varied and may change over time. However, due to time limitations of my programme, and the initial difficulty in getting participants, I was not able to add an ethnographic aspect to the project.

I discovered during the interview process that it was more likely for me to get female participants than males, because most international students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal are female. As much as I tried to get access to male participants it was difficult, and a big challenge to find them. As a result, my analysis relies heavily on insights from interviews with female students. While I believe that this does not bias the findings significantly, other perspectives may have emerged if I had been able to interview a higher number of male students.

## CHAPTER FIVE: STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS OF MIGRATION, EDUCATION AND RELIGION

“South Africans are very proud of their traditional values and religion... we went to a few museums and stuff and there was always a showcase about the use of traditional herbs or traditional beliefs or like the value of animals within traditional cultures so I feel like there is a lot of pride in traditions and African Traditional Religions”  
(Samantha)

### 5.1 Introducing the participants

All the participants in this study come from North America, and have links with the University of KwaZulu-Natal either as full-time exchange students, or as participants in a particular course offered at the university. For the purposes of anonymity I have given each participant a pseudonym.

#### *Megan*

Megan is 22 years of age and currently a 2<sup>nd</sup> year student at the University of Calgary, Canada. She is an international relations major, and an exchange student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for one semester. Megan has taken this opportunity because some of her subjects for the semester deal with African politics, and she expressed the view that the best way of learning about Africa would be to do it while being in Africa. She is also very interested in the political affairs of Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa in particular, and has taken a few modules concerning it. Being an international relations major, Megan came to South Africa and UKZN because she wanted to broaden her horizon in the sense of learning about other cultures. Megan feels that through travelling and coming on an exchange programme to South Africa, she is able to expand her own intellectual horizons, something she believes is necessary for a student on international relations.

### *John*

John was born in the United States, in Chicago, Illinois. He is a 4<sup>th</sup> year student at the University of Illinois completing a degree in physiotherapy. This is his first experience of travelling, as he has never before been outside the United States. Even though he did not know anything about South Africa before arriving, he was excited to be in the country and expected to explore the country. Moreover, John has been hoping to be able to do an internship, with the possibility of it being accredited to his studies. John believes that having the opportunity to do an internship outside of his home country would place him at a greater advantage and set him apart from his peers when applying for grad school placement. He believes that by gaining experience from outside of the United States he will be able to return home with a broader perspective concerning physiotherapy, having learnt and practiced it outside of the United States.

### *Samantha*

Samantha, a 19-year old woman, is in South Africa with a group of students visiting the theological research centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Samantha's primary focus whilst being here is on expanding her understanding and approach to contextual bible study. Samantha is a public health student at her home university, Calvary University. She believes that the church plays a pivotal role in the lives of people especially here in Africa. She sees the church as a place where people's minds and attitudes are developed. Therefore, she hopes to use the bible to motivate people to care for their health better. She has always been interested in discovering the way that tertiary education is taught here in South Africa, and being part of an exchange programme provided a perfect chance to do so. Samantha decided to come to South Africa, and UKZN, because she believes that the focus of the theological programme at the university is most suitable to the kind of work she wants to get involved in after completing her studies.

### *Shaista*

Shaista is a 4<sup>th</sup> year student at the University of Illinois, in the process of completing a degree in Community Development. Shaista is from Illinois and is 22 years old. Before applying to

go to college, she always knew that she wanted to study abroad. Even though she has travelled quite extensively, this is the first time Shaista has travelled as a student taking part in an exchange programme. Due to factors in her background she did not want to go to a country that would be conservative in its matters of social justice, or a country that is one-dimensional in their religious views. When she started college, a part of her orientation in her first year she heard of the study abroad opportunity to South Africa and instantly she knew that she wanted to do it.

### *Callie*

Callie is 19 years old, and was raised in Texas, although she is currently residing at Conway as a 2<sup>nd</sup> year student at Hendrix College. Callie is completing her studies in International Relations, a degree programme she enrolled in because she has a desire to learn about other cultures. Callie is a Christian, and when the opportunity presented itself for her to come to South Africa and learn about Contextual Bible studies she took it because it brings both of her interests together. Once she has learnt the techniques of contextual bible study, Callie would like to be a part of a group leading discussions amongst homeless people in the United States. She believes that South Africa is one of the few countries that are practicing contextual bible studies, therefore she was excited to come and learn from the best.

For all but one (Callie) of the participants, coming to South Africa was their first experience of international student migration, although several had travelled outside their country of origin previously. All of the students had particular reasons for coming to South Africa, it was not a random occurrence. However, while three of the students saw South Africa as a country in which to learn about new cultures and traditions, others were attracted to the country and the University of KwaZulu-Natal for reasons related specifically to their area of study. Overall, however, all the students expressed the view that South Africa has a lot to offer to international students.

## 5.2 Motivational factors and effects of international exchange

“Experiencing another country’s cultures and norms and traditions is an excellent way of exposing yourself...it is really important in order to be well grounded and to be acceptant of others” (Shaista)

In this statement Shaista conveys her understanding of migration and international education as a way of being exposed to cultural diversity. She feels that by gaining experience with cultures and ways of being that are different from one’s own, one can also learn to become more accepting and tolerant as a person. As such, she argues, the experience of being in South Africa has reshaped her worldview and made her a better person. Shaista presents an understanding of international education as being an undeniably positive experience.

According to Shaista, being a study-abroad student increases ones tolerance of others because of how it places you in a different setting, and forces you to be surrounded by people who do not subscribe to your own cultural norms and traditions. Similarly to Shaista, Callie also stated that international education has forced her to

“Step out and learn and understand that there is a lot to learn and gain from meeting people...because different cultures hmmm I guess have different advantages, different advancements...you kind of get a different perspective on things, a less American [perspective] I guess and a more of a holistic perspective”.

For Callie, the benefits of participating in international exchanges do not end with increased self-exposure and becoming critically aware of cultural diversity, it also includes a holistic understanding of the world that can lead to the acceptance of others. This is similar to what Shaista said about becoming more tolerant. In this way, both Callie and Shaista argue that international education enhances ones appreciation of cultural varieties and diversity, by exposing one to new ‘realities’ and ways of doing things.

John stated that semester abroad studying meant that he had to “just open [his] eyes to the way that much of the world lives other than my own little bubble of Illinois and Chicago.” For him, being part of an exchange programme to South Africa meant that he had to understand that the world is bigger than his hometown and area, and that in different parts of the world there are different ‘rules’ and ways of doing things. In this, he suggests that he would not have been able to learn this if he had not taken part in cross-border migration.

John argues, in this statement, that once you are abroad your worldview broadens, and that there world becomes reshaped as you learn to view things differently through meeting other and different people. In this sense, his argument is similar to that of Shaista and Callie; beginning to think holistically and developing a recognition that reality is relative makes it possible to understand that there are different ways of living and being in the world. As a result it is harder to judge what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour or belief among other people.

There are a variety of ways that students gain accreditation for being an abroad student, the knowledge acquired is valuable, however there is also the issue of whether they remain behind with their academics in their home country because of the abroad experience or whether the experience boosts their academic credits. For Samantha the experience of studying abroad meant that she gained knowledge and skills that she could take back with her and implement in her community back home. She said: “when we go back we [are] going to be continuing to [study] contextual bible studies and then leading one at a homeless church back home”. This is a statement that signifies the importance of learning generic skills that can be transferred across different contexts. Samantha suggests that what she learned about contextual bible study in South Africa is highly contextual, yet at the same time is something universal. Samantha is in South Africa learning the tools and skills of contextual bible study, and although she is doing it in South Africa she says that it can also be executed in the United States.

For John coming to South Africa was his first travelling experience, one that placed him at an advantage compared to the rest of his peers back in the United States. He said that

“for me the first and foremost benefit is the internship which will look amazing for graduate school... it will give me a lot of experience to carry on into my future... to bring in that broad perspective”

John points to the uniqueness of semester abroad experiences, and argues that it will play an important role in his future. Apart from what he learns, the simple fact that he has undertaken an internship in South Africa is a positive benefit. Moreover, he states that study abroad students gain experiences that play a significant part in setting them up for the future. Even though John was not particularly enthusiastic about his travelling, he did appreciate it in the end because he was able to see the impact that it could have for him. These students, even

though they may be doing the same courses as back home, such as physiotherapy or international relations, the content and context of being in South Africa provides a different learning experience. This expands their knowledge and makes them more competitive, and it increases their chances of being accepted into grad school.

Migration through international education is a phenomenon that is becoming an industry on its own, some universities are investing a lot of capital and resources into it. Through my interviews I discovered that many universities in the United States are sending students abroad to various countries to partake in various experiences on a frequent bases. Callie explained the institutionalisation of study abroad programmes at her university;

“At school they have this thing where they kind of pay for students to go out and do this type of stuff. So that what has enabled me to go out both here and in Vietnam”  
(Callie)

In order for semester study abroad programmes to succeed and be popular, students need to buy into the vision and idea of these exchanges as beneficial. Students need to believe that they will gain insights, experiences and knowledge that will help them in their studies and futures. International student migration cannot blossom unless students are convinced about the importance of it, and it depends on the availability of opportunities – that there are partnerships between their own universities and universities in other countries. International partnerships make it possible for students to be mobile.

There is a difference between just traveling on your own as an individual and when you go as a student. However, universities increasingly highlight the benefits of study abroad exchanges as including both ways of traveling. Universities present international exchanges as a way in which for students to gain more experience academically, and receive a great amount of exposure socially when they travel as student-tourists. In this way, study abroad exchanges are marketed and understood as being a way of combining educational development and training, and tourism and personal development. Shaista, who has travelled extensively as a backpacker and tourist in different countries, said this concerning her travelling as a student

“It gives you a different sense of how you would perceive the country how you perceive the people there and just kind of a way you think about it like”

From Shaista's statement, there seems to be more intentionality with being a student with regards to connecting with people and with learning about South Africa. The structure of international exchange programmes provides opportunities for this intentionality to occur, although the programmes may have different emphasis for different groups of students. This is seen through the change in perception, and through the way that some of the students come to see the value of mobility in their education. Samantha, for example, said that study abroad programmes "give you an opportunity to kind of adopt from them, and then to learn from you". For students such as Samantha the more they travel the more that they get to learn from others, making them feel as though they can impact more on the lives of others with the knowledge they gain from being student migrants. This, however, is reliant on that international student migrants entering into mutual relationships with the people of the host country that they are in.

International education seems to be an integral part of the student life of the participants in my study; they find that being mobile provides them with experiences that are beneficial to their studies. Migrating as a student has many benefits, as indicated in the quotes I have presented above. In this section I have highlighted that, in the opinion of my participants, international education broadens students' perspectives and allows them to become more grounded in the world in which they live. Samantha spoke clearly about this "I think that it gives you a sense of independence that you don't get being home". For her, traveling abroad as a student made her feel more grounded and rooted at home, as it made her more independent and able to be and live on her own. Moreover, in this section, I also aimed to illustrate that while a lot of what students learn when they migrate is contextual and particular to where they arrive, many of the things that they learn are generic issues that entail valuable lessons, such as increased tolerance of others, also for their life 'at home'.

### **5.3 Religious literacy among study abroad students**

The type of programme that a student embarks on and the type of education that the host institution provides, means that international student migration can contribute to increased religious literacy. What a student learns and the manner in which learning is facilitated contributes to the development of attitudes and perceptions that a student will have towards that particular religion. My participants, regardless of their personal religious affiliations,

were willing to learn about other religions. For some, like Shaista, South Africa was an interesting country because of its religious diversity; “South Africa is very accepting of a lot of religions so it’s not that they have one central religion.”

Most of the participants, however, had very limited understanding and knowledge of indigenous religions, such as African Traditional Religion. This limitation caused students not to want to elaborate on the topic of African Traditional Religion much, and they had to rely on their own very limited experiences. When I spoke to Shaista, for example, it seemed as though she could not distinguish between African Independent Churches (AIC) and African Traditional Religion. This was particularly evident when she responded to my questions about African Traditional Religion by referring to African Independent Churches. She gave the following response when I asked what she had learnt about African Traditional Religion while in South Africa:

“it’s pretty limited but from like the class we kind of learnt about the AIC’s and two types of AIC’s and then how it’s kind of integrated or a synchronistic way of having the missionary colonial religion and the indigenous African practices and beliefs”

This statement also shows that institutions of higher education seem to be more comfortable with teaching about African Independent Church, rather than African Traditional Religion. The former is more convenient to speak about, and does not disturb the status quo of the day. Because, as stated in the literature review, the colonial religion is still interwoven in the fabric of the religion.

There seem to be strands of colonial residues within the religious arena of South Africa and this shows that this is problematic because the status quo remains that religion in South Africa cannot progress or exist without colonial structures and ideologies. This is what I seem to believe African Traditional Religion is being against or striving to show a different perspective.

Without adequate religious literacy it is difficult to see the synchronicity that religion in South Africa is trying to achieve. In the interview Callie stated that “I wish I could learn more, I wish we could be here longer so I could continue going to that class, it’s really fascinating”. Here, it is clear that Callie would have liked to have learnt more about religious diversity and African Traditional Religion while in South Africa. Callie, like several of the other students, said that she did not feel sufficiently well-informed concerning religions other

than her own. Megan expressed a similar opinion when she said that: “It’s hard to answer a question [about African Traditional Religion] especially since I feel I don’t know much about it and I think I cannot give it justice”. Both Callie and Megan here express respect and awareness of religious diversity and different religious traditions in South Africa. They recognise the shortfalls in their own knowledge, and express a clear willingness and desire to learn more. Whether they in fact will learn more, however, depends on the opportunities made available in their programmes. I do feel that their expressions of desire to learn more about African Traditional Religion was probably closely related to the fact that I was questioning them about their knowledge of and experiences with this particular religious tradition. It is likely that they felt guilty about their limited knowledge in the interview, and therefore expressed a desire to learn more.

However, these statements also indicate an awareness of the harmful effects of judging a religion without knowing anything about it. Judging a religion from a generalised perspective can be harmful, like judging with the lenses of your own religious affiliation can be detrimental because you do not see that religion for what it really is. Several of the students indicated that they did not wish to discriminate against African Traditional Religion, but that their limited knowledge might lead them to do so. Callie expressed the importance of learning about other religious traditions very clearly;

“I mean that it is always good to have an awareness that is not all like if I come from a small town in Texas where the majority of people are Christian so it is good to go outside and see other aspects of faith”

What Callie expressed here is that it is easy to be absorbed to the way of life within your own faith tradition, and that when this has happened and you come across another way of believing it may unsettle you.

Shaista stated that

“I think that regardless of whether I think that they were expressions of African Traditional Religion am sure that there are underlining themes of South African culture that stem back to African Traditional Religion that have just always been a belief in the country in a way that the country kind of runs in terms of those exact traditions/beliefs”

There seemed to be a cognizance amongst my participants that South Africa is a very diverse religious nation, and that there is not one singular religion that dominates. John suggested that the concept of “ubuntu” was a ‘cool term’ and that although things may be less traditional in contemporary South Africa “for the most part they still help they still help people who need it and I think that was very neat”. This student shows that many people in South Africa still live with a close connection to traditional rituals and practices. Through this the student dismisses the notion of tradition being something that is only practiced in the rural parts of South Africa.

Four of the five students that I interviewed did not have a high literacy concerning African Traditional Religion when they arrived in South Africa. However, this changed over time, as these students had varied direct experiences with African Traditional Religion, within and beyond the classroom. The students’ experiences allowed them to begin to have a conceptual understanding of what African Traditional Religion consists off.

#### **5.4 Orientations towards African Traditional Religion**

A key part of this project was for me to examine the ideas, perceptions and knowledge that international students have concerning African Traditional Religion, and to explore whether contact with religious practices in any form affected the knowledge and behaviour that students displayed. As a part of this, I aimed to explore the processes of gaining religious literacy, and whether this affected the perceptions of students. Over the course of the research project I found that most, before entering South Africa, were not aware of the religious traditions that make up the religious landscape in South Africa. They were not aware of African Traditional Religion, nor could they place it in within the broader spectrum of indigenous religions. During our conversations and the interviews, however, I began to see a shift in their understanding. Shaista, after a lengthy conversation, said “Oh okay then that would make sense I just didn’t realise that’s what it would be called”.

For several of the students having direct contact with and experiences of African Traditional Religion resulted in a change in how they perceived and valued the religious tradition. John, for example, said that:

“I said it’s kind of a witchdoctor crazy religion type of thing but experiencing it and having talked with them I kind of have more respect for it and where they coming from you know honouring their ancestors and huh I understand it more and it has opened up my eyes as to why they practice their beliefs in that way”

Here John explains how the sentiment that African Traditional Religion is something that is primitive and irrational, resulted in the difficulty in understanding why people would participate in such a religion. At the outset, John participated and observed the religion more out of curiosity than respect and clear knowledge of the tradition. Unlike John, I found that Samantha came to South Africa without any preconceived ideas. When I asked her about the impact of her experience of African Traditional Religion had on her knowledge of indigenous religions she said that “I did not have that much of a preconceived idea about indigenous religions and so it’s just have been what I’ve seen here”.

It was clear in the interviews that whether students had preconceived ideas of African Traditional Religion or not, their encounters with the religion did impact on their perception of this particular tradition, and indigenous religions more generally.

“I think that I have gained a little bit more respect for it, for the huh traditional religion typically [than] I might think you know like before experiencing it. I would think that is kind of like witch doctor fudo type of stuff (John)”

Several of the students appear to have been so captivated by their own religious affiliation that it was through the semester abroad experience in South Africa that they first were able to experience a religion other than their own. During the international exchange programme they seemed to feel more free and better able to participate in other religions than when they were still at home. Nevertheless, several of the students expressed a deep sense of respect and appreciation for other religions. As articulated by Callie:

“I think that it impacted on my understanding that there are more religions than I thought and that no one religion is right or wrong. People’s beliefs make them who they are and religion is a large part of an individual”.

This statement illustrates that through her experience with African Traditional Religion, Callie came to feel more knowledgeable and open about other religious traditions. The encounter with a religion that at first appeared wild and unorganized granted Callie with

insights that she would have not obtained from merely reading about it or speaking to people who do not subscribe to this particular religion. In this sense, direct experiences of, and contact with, the religion was key in changing her perception, and making her express a more positive attitude towards African Traditional Religion.

Callie recognized that there is diversity and difference, and through her statement we see an increase of acceptance and understanding of other religious traditions. First-hand experience with a religion that is different from your own, then, plays an important part in fostering appreciation for traditions. It may also encourage further reflection of your own faith tradition.

We see through Callie's statement that religion plays a fundamental part in an individual's life. Samantha made similar remarks when she said that "I know the church plays a pivotal role in people's attitudes in Africa especially so kind of coming to learn on how to use the bible in motivating people to care for their health". It was clear in the interviews that the students have come to understand that in South Africa religion plays a significant part in the lives of individuals, whether or not they state this or not. As South Africa is a religiously diverse nation we witness through these students that it is more difficult to understand African Traditional Religion outside from the people who practise it because it is so intertwined and engraved in the fabric of their daily living.

The students revealed through the interviews that knowledge of religious diversity in South Africa is something that they are not acquainted with. The preparations that they went through did not adequately prepare them for the religious diversity of the country. Even though they did not know, they did seek opportunities to gain information. African Traditional Religion is something that they have encountered and as such would like to learn more about it. The field trips and the excursion that seemed to be arranged for them, were centered on this religion.

## **CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 The role of religion in migration and international education programmes**

Within the field of migration studies, religion is an aspect that has not been given much attention. Hagan and Ebaugh (2003), however, argue that religion plays a key role in the migratory process for many contemporary international migrants. They point out, for instance, that migrants call upon the sacred constantly throughout their journeys. From the time the time that migrants decide on migrating to preparing for their immigration, during their journeys, and upon arrival in the host country migrants call on the sacred, in search of counsel, guidance or support (Hagan and Ebaugh 2003). Nevertheless, migration studies have tended to view religion largely in an instrumentalist manner; hence overlooking the significant role religion plays in individual decision-making processes (Levitt 2001; Obadare and Adebaniwi 2010).

Some of the students that participated in this research project were clear that religion played a major role in their deciding to migrate, preparing for migration and/or, what they did after migrating. Even though she was an International Relations major when she arrived at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Megan registered for religious studies courses. She took these religious studies classes so that she would understand more about how people in South Africa approach and make decisions. Several of the students reported that although they had to consider whether South Africa was conservative or liberal, the religious profile of the citizens did not feature before they travelled to South Africa. For one student, Samantha, the doctrine and the teachings of the hosting institution guided her in not only choosing the country where she should study, but also meant that the Bible became a significant part of what she did while in South Africa. Her religious affiliation as a Christian was a significant factor in her decision to embark on such a journey to study abroad.

The students who participated in this project indicated that while some international education programmes organized religious exchange activities, they also had experienced an aspect of religion through those programme that did not seek to explicitly promote inter-religious contact or exchange. In this sense, there seems to have been an awareness in most of the programmes that many international migrants, and students, have religious beliefs and convictions that need to be considered in the planning of international study programmes. Among the students that I interviewed, there was a group of that went on several excursions

so that they could experience South Africa in a more holistic manner, and see the diversity of religions that make up South Africa. Many of the participants were very open to these experiences, and were curious to know more about the South African religious landscape. Some students had the opportunity to work within different organizations as part of their internships. For many, this included experiences of religious communities and institutions. Shaista explained to me how every day the staff of the place where she worked would gather for a prayer session before they could engage in their daily activities. She was constantly encouraged through biblical texts to treat people in a particular manner that would reflect what she regarded as acceptable Christian standards.

Migration seems to change the landscape of religion (Levitt 2001; Vertovec 2000). Since migrants bring along their faith and their religious teachings into the host country, they also inevitably transform the way religious practices are performed. In this project, this became evident by the fact that a church in KwaZulu-Natal, that some of the international students had attended, changed from ministering in isiZulu to doing so in English because of the presence of North Americans in the church. One student reported that despite the fact that a pastor struggled immensely with communicating in English, he insisted on speaking English because he felt the need to accommodate them as visitors in his church.

There were three participants who came to learn the skills and techniques of contextual bible study. They expressed the desire to return with all that they have learnt and implement it at their home countries, particularly in their work in homeless communities. The migratory experience for these students did not only benefit them as migrants, but also promises to be of benefit to their home communities upon their return. We see through these students that even though they were here in South Africa, their focus was to enrich their homeland. The relationship that the University of KwaZulu-Natal has with its partners, for example in North America, permits the movement of students, and enables them to go on exchange, learn new skills and use these to the benefit of their home communities and institutions. The three students that came to South Africa primarily to learn skills in conducting contextual bible study sessions are particularly good examples of this.

## **6.2 Semester-Abroad students' learning experiences about religion**

International Education approaches learning in various ways. The International baccalaureate approach argues for a student-centred and a constructivist approach in learning, because these approaches would contribute, address, and support the student in their totality. Aspects that are fundamental to such a student-centred learning approach are “creating multiple experiences for knowledge construction, creating authentic and complex socio-cultural learning environments to mediate learning” (IB 2012:5).

These methods of learning and teaching students is so that students could have an “understanding and appreciating other parts of the world, different religions, cultures and points of view are essential elements of global competence” (U.S. Department of Education International Strategy 2012:16). This will facilitate increased tolerance amongst students, and foster social cohesion, because religion seems to be a key instigator of conflict. International education is based on the premise that once a student leaves their country of origin to study abroad amongst different cultures, they develop a better way of reflecting on their own country, their own education, and they are believed to develop a better perspective about the host country (Institute of International Education 2012). Perhaps the lack of preparation evident is seen amongst the participants in this study is due to international education being more concerned with what happens after a student leaves. This was the consensus amongst the participants, “a contrasting method for exploring the learning phenomenon is to trust in one’s own experience.” (Hansen 2000:25). The students would express their excitement more around projects when they were doing activities that would interest them and which they saw as beneficial to their overall exchange programme experience.

The students’ level of interaction with religious communities during the exchange programme varied, depending on the type of programme they found themselves in. Among the students that were interviewed for this research project, three were part of structured religiously oriented exchange programme. A further two were a part of a formally organized academic exchange programme that included students from other disciplines, but had no formal or organised emphasis on religious or theological studies.

With regards to religion, those students in formally organized programmes had the opportunity learn about African Traditional Religion in university courses and lectures, where they were formally taught some aspects of the religion. This, however, was often

complimented by the experiences that students had outside of the classroom. Three of the five students only learnt about African Traditional Religion through conversations with local students. Two reported participating in domestic rituals – although they did not regard this as religious activities at the time. Through their experiences combined with their new knowledge, they could then construct some ideas about African Traditional Religion, though most initially reported about it in terms of cultural practice.

The programme for the one group of students did include any particular modules related to religion, but nevertheless took the students see various religious sites and traditional villages. This indicates the level of commodification of African Traditional Religion in international student exchange programmes. For example, on a field trip to Drakensburg Mountain, the students were required to learn about the Khoisan people and their way of life, including their religious beliefs, traditions, and practices. In the interviews I conducted, however, I did not feel that these students were able to make a connection between these field trips and what they were learning in class. John, when attending a fieldtrip that was aimed at learning about the Khoisan people, said that his guide kept emphasising that they were on a history tour not taking part in a lesson on religion - despite the fact that the tour focused primarily on the religious life of the Khoisan people.

Of the two students that participated in domestic rituals, one reported having had the opportunity (with their cohort) to witness a wedding ceremony and attend rituals that accompany a wedding celebration in an African culture. One student also explained that during his travels he had the opportunity to live with people that practiced African Traditional Religion. The most effective form of learning about African Traditional Religion seemed to be the out-of-classroom learning and observation. Because this is when the students had the opportunity to participate and experience African Traditional Religion for themselves instead of learning it through a textbook or being told about it.

Megan spoke of her first experience of encountering any form of African Traditional Religion, and explained that she was just observing what was happening around her. She did not think about it and perhaps for her it was just people dancing and entertaining others. Nevertheless, Megan felt that through these experiences she gained valuable knowledge and understanding of African Traditional Religion.

As mentioned by John “experiencing it and having talked with them I kind of have more respect for it and where they coming from...honouring their ancestors... I understand it more and it has opened up my eyes as to why they practice their beliefs in that way”. We see that the method of facilitation is important because it contributes to the overall perspective of what students understand concerning African Traditional Religion. Speaking about the classroom setting when learning about African Traditional Religion, Callie asserted that “he [the professor] did a good job oh well I didn’t know anything so he could have been telling all lies”. Both of these students reveal that the teaching methodology is vital. Although the latter did express levels of tolerance at a later stage, her articulation was not as deep as the former. This is due to former having the chance to experience African Tradition Religion for himself.

With regards to their acquisition of knowledge about African Traditional Religion, the personal religious affiliation of students was not a challenge for them to engage in other religious practices. John, for instance, is a Catholic Christian who nevertheless expressed gratitude and appreciation for having the opportunity to experience another. Shaista, who was raised as a Muslim but currently considers herself as non-religious, escorted her friend to church every Saturday. Her reasons were not to try and be converted or seeking religious guidance, but she would go because she was accompanying her friend that did not feel safe walking alone since the church was quite far. It was the lack of adequate knowledge that caused majority of the students not to speak confidently about African Traditional Religion, “I don’t know much about it and so I don’t have a fully formed opinion I think I would have to learn a whole lot more” (Callie) The constructivist approach permits students to be inquisitive and curious, inquiries and asking questions are important components of this approach.

### **6.3 Imaginaries of African Traditional Religion among semester abroad students**

Chidester (1996) identified periods in the historical European contact with, and production of knowledge about African Traditional religions and societies, namely; the frontier, imperial, and apartheid comparative religions or epochs. The frontier period was when missionaries arrived in South Africa. Missionaries found that there were groups of people who were living in isolation from each other. The brief contact that missionary encountered, unfamiliarity of

the local languages and the lack of understanding about rituals and customs led missionaries to think that South Africa had no religion. This resulted in the idea among missionaries that South Africa lacked a systematic belief system because the people were not living in close proximity to each other (Chidester 1996). This served the agenda of colonialism because a people without a religion were seen as animals. This denial of the humanity of indigenous South Africans permitted missionaries to control the so-called natives, and gain possession of their assets and land. However, the longer the missionaries remained in the land the more progressive were their understanding of religious life in South Africa became (Chidester 1996).

The second phase of Chidester's (1996) description is the imperial period, which marks the period of 'discovery' of traditional religion. In this phase, missionaries acknowledged that there was a religion amongst the natives, but this realization was not based on their integration amongst the people. Missionaries recognised the native religion in comparison to their own. As a result, they did not equate the 'newly discovered' religion with their own religion, but rather viewed the 'native' religion as primitive. This classification came about because European missionaries were looking at religion in evolutionary terms. Evolutionary works according to a linear progression logic, and a perspective wherein binaries of 'savage' and 'civilised' are created. In this view, African Traditional Religion was considered to be at a primitive stage, that is, very low on the evolutionary ladder, while the religion of the missionaries was considered to be fully developed. Therefore also being the yardstick for measuring what is, or is not, 'religion', and the extent to which the 'discovered' practice could be considered religion. Missionaries were at a stage of civilisation and saw it as their moral obligation to assist Africans to reach that point. Since they were contributing to the civilisation of South Africans it legitimised colonialism in the land. The contexts of people were not taken into consideration during the imperial phase.

In the third phase, which was Apartheid, some context was recognised, leading to the segregation of people. With the same evolutionary mentality it was believed that leaving the 'natives' in their different, and supposedly natural, localities to allow separate development was the most appropriate model of organising society. Since there was separation there was no contact or meaningful dialogue taking place between African Traditional Religion and that of the colonisers.

Although students were not aware of African Traditional Religion before coming to South Africa, there was a major shift in their knowledge base after arrival. Regardless of the programme they were taking part in, all the students did have at least one opportunity to go on an excursion and learn about religion in South Africa. Some of the students extended this, and acquired more knowledge through friends and connection they had made.

### *6.3.1 Ancestors and spirits*

The participants in this study all had some encounter with African Traditional Religion, in one way or another, while in South Africa. All students had the opportunity to learn some aspect of African Traditional Religion even though this was not a focus area in their exchange programmes. As a result, students would show signs of confusion and very basic understanding. When speaking about African Traditional Religion, Shaista, for instance, made comments about African Traditional Religion that revealed an understanding of it as fetish. She said; “Apart from ancestral worship I don’t know of too much”. By saying this, Shaista indicates that she does not have adequate knowledge concerning African Traditional Religion, but she does know that it has elements of ancestral worship. This is perhaps due the historical representation of African Traditional Religion. John also indicated a limited view of African Traditional Religion as superstition: “from an outside perspective like I said it’s kind of a witchdoctor crazy religion type of thing” (John)

One of the students, Samantha, expressed some understanding of the ancestral worship aspects of African Traditional Religion;

“the focus on...healing when I say healing am thinking of sangoma’s and nyanga’s focus on ancestral spirits like being in touch with people who have gone before you and kind of speak on your behalf to God kind of thing so they like intercessors” .

According to a student who was learning about African Traditional Religion in a classroom, the professor dealt with the ancestral aspect of it. They indicated that some people in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal would not leave their land due to their family members buried on the land. The student could not understand this because it was not explained to them that “divination and sacrifice are pivotal features of African Traditional Religion” (Grillo 2010:145). Neither was she aware of African Traditional Religion, it was during our

interview and discussion that she came to understand that connection with ancestors is a part of African Traditional Religion.

### *6.3.2 Is it really a religion?*

The element of African Traditional Religion that lecturers decided to focus on, then, were those concerned with ancestral worship. This goes to show that students may not necessarily critique or question what they learn. When elaborating on what she knew, Shaista asked of African Traditional Religion “is this even a religion?”, making it evident that while she does not deny the existence of African Traditional Religion, she lacks the language to express her understanding. Megan expressed a similar sentiment when she said that “it seems more traditional in their practices” (Megan)

Shaista, although she was not aware that I was enquiring into her knowledge of African traditional religion, had something interesting to say;

“I think that regardless of whether I think that they were expressions of African Traditional Religion am sure that there are underlying themes of South African culture that stem back to African Traditional Religion that have just always been a belief in the country” (Shaista).

Here, Shaista recognises that African Traditional Religion is something that many South Africans still follow, even if it is implicit. Shaista’s remarks seem to resemble what Grillo (2010:144) articulates when stating that “the study of African Traditional Religion, whose practices are synonymous with ethnicity” shows that this religion is something engraved in the fabric of people. These assertions cannot be clearly articulated through in class learning alone. International students are friendly and seek to make friendships and through their interactions they can make assertions concerning their host country. In other words “those religious traditions created by African peoples that are closely linked to their sense of ethnic identity and provide a spiritual connection to the land, to the supreme being, to lesser spirits and to their ancestors” (Baum 2009).

### *6.3.3 African Traditional Religion vs. African Initiated Churches*

One of the participants, Callie, kept referring to African Initiated Churches (AICs) when questions about African Traditional Religion were raised. She seemed to view African Traditional Religion as stepping stone into Christianity, and did not recognise African Traditional Religion as a religion in its own right. She further stated that; “It seems like it varies a lot there are like branches of it in the AIC”

The categorisation speaks to the different strands that African Traditional Religion has. This student, by incorporating notions of Christianity when speaking of African Traditional Religion, displays a failure to recognise it as a tradition independent of the Christian normative view that most students held. Chidester (1996:4) argues that categorisations of religion were used to control people and that there was an “evolutionary trajectory from primitive magic to civilized science” when classifying religions.

Another student stated in the interview that “I know that nowhere is just solely homogenous religion there is some diversity”. Yet, the diversity spoken of here did not necessarily include African Traditional Religion. This student saw African Traditional Religion as being a precursor to Christianity, and she equated African Traditional Religion to African Initiated Churches. Hackett (n.d) asserts that African Traditional Religion has been dominated by Christian and Islamic missionaries and their activities. The process of colonisation sought to nullify the existence of African Traditional Religion, through denying that it existed. Through this the public spheres of African society is dominated by Christianity and Islam (Hackett nd).

African Traditional Religion is not a fixed or unchanging religion, it has evolved over time. Yet, due to the dominance of Christianity and Islam it has become difficult to distinguish African Traditional Religion from other religions. When I asked the participants about this, one of them, a Christian student, spoke of African Initiated Churches and said that she saw these as an integration of missionary colonial religion and indigenous African practices and beliefs. Whenever I asked her about African Traditional Religion this student would refer to African Initiated Churches. This serves as a denial of African Traditional Religion, and a lack of knowledge in identifying what African Traditional Religion is all about. Although African Initiated Churches have aspects of African Traditional Religion in them, they are distinct traditions and institutions.

In order to be able to tolerate or be prejudiced against African Traditional Religion, one firstly needs to see it for what it really is. Hence, Beyers (2010) argues that African Traditional Religion cannot be viewed through the lenses of Christianity, because that would deny the validity of the religion. Chidester (1997) says that:

“only when one turns away from the attention of the West altogether will the African come to the forefront. Now, this ‘African’ is not supposed to be an untouched entity, free from all outside influences, such as Christianity, Islam or modernity. Taking the historical context into consideration will promote the reality of the African”.

Most students coming from a Christian religious background begin to view African Traditional Religion through a Christian lense. This then makes it impossible to see the religion for what it really is. As John remarked, before he had encountered African Traditional Religion he viewed it as something that was “crazy”. He could not fathom the beliefs that people could ascribe too for honouring their religion.

#### *6.3.4 Africans are traditional and very religious*

Samantha, a public health student, articulated that

“I know the church plays a pivotal role in people’s attitudes in Africa especially so kind of coming to learn on how to use the bible in motivating people to care for their health and to care for the environment is something which is very important”.

There seemed to be an overall impression that African Traditional Religion is something that is largely practiced in the rural areas of South Africa. Students who had the chance to travel wished that they could have spent more time on the road to learn more about the ‘real South Africa’. City life is something they felt that they were used to, and that there were many similarities between North America and South African when it came to urban life. Yet, when it came to areas like the Eastern Cape, and rural KwaZulu-Natal, the students felt like experiencing them would add meaning and value to their exchange experience.

### *6.3.5 Religious literacy and tolerance*

The methods of teaching religion are not adequate in terms of allowing students to rigorously engage with religious practices in South Africa.

Being religiously literate assists students in obtaining a broader perspective on the world around them, and can enable students to appreciate religious diversity. A religious understanding that does not only focus on the self but the society at large is

“critical, outward looking, and dialogical. It recognises diversity, and encourages students to learn ‘about’ and ‘from’ religious and nonreligious worldviews. It involves both ‘understanding religions’ and ‘religious understanding’...These are essential skills in a multi-faith society and a diverse but connected world” (Woodhead nd:34).

Encounters with African Traditional Religion left students with a greater appreciation for religious diversity. It was interesting to note that irrespective of their religious affiliation students were always encouraged to interact with locals. For the students that I interviewed, however, it seemed to be a difficult task to turn away from the ideologies of the West, yet after spending some time in South Africa they did make a conceptual shift. Hence, it appears that it is not until one leaves ‘home’ and begins to see how the world lives beyond what one is used to, that an appreciation of other faiths, perspectives and cultures can really appear. The students had this study had the opportunity to see other facets of faith. In so doing this brought awareness that there are other ways of believing, “it is always good to have an awareness that is not all like if I come from a small town in Texas where the majority of people are Christian so it is good to go outside and see other aspects of faith” (Callie). Callie here recognises the need to have a broader perspective of religion as to also increase her tolerance and acceptance of other religions. This global perspective not only grounds her in her particular religion, but also assist her in connecting with others.

With all the techniques and skills that one can apply to international education, it is all in vain if they do not contribute to humanity and the development of people. Hence we find Horton, Freire, Bell and Gaventa (1990) saying “...a good radical education, it wouldn’t be anything about methods or techniques. It would be loving people first”. Starting from this premise when one engages with African Traditional Religion, one can begin to see the religion for what it is.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

Having started my own thinking with Chidester's (1996) schema about the production of religion in the colonial and postcolonial context, I sought to reflect on the place and status of African Traditional Religion in South Africa in general, and among semester abroad students in particular. While most student reported little knowledge about African Traditional Religion prior to coming to South Africa, most report some degree of engagement with local religious traditions.

As the students sought to make sense of their various experiences, the following key findings emerged thematically. What I sought to discuss in the above chapter was that in semester abroad student's imaginaries, African Traditional Religion was framed either as a 'crazy' religion – which was intelligible and unknowable, or as a variation of Christianity – which mostly saw the practices of African indigenous churches. Ultimately what came out of this research was the fact that through their international education programmes, students were already oriented towards learning about new traditions, but that the lack of attention to indigenous religious traditions meant that what the students learnt about African Traditional Religion, was often informal and unintentional, and therefore limited to gainins a basic level of religious literacy.

## CONCLUSION

The ritual killings that I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis are common symbols of African Traditional Religion, at least in the South African public imagination. It was, in my opinion, a lack of understanding of African Traditional Religion that resulted in the court case between Tony Yengeni and the SPCA.

Literature of religion and migration largely deals with how migrants would use religion for their migratory process (Levitt 2001; Adogame and Spickard 2010). Religion is seen as a means to facilitate incorporation, integration or assimilation into the host country, yet it is very seldom that literature addresses a migrant's interaction with the host countries religion. Hence, I believe that there needs to be more work done about what religious literacy semester abroad student acquire as a result of their temporary migrations. What this study revealed is that international student inevitably encounter indigenous religious tradition – whether through formal programmes or through informal, social interactions. In most cases the international students interviewed were confronted with religions that they are not aware of. Due to the general lack of attention given to religion in international education programmes, students' articulations about African Traditional Religion were limited to Christian normative association such as African Independent Churches – or the more commodified, and fetishized ideas of indigenous religions as utterly, and exotically different.

It is important that international education and migration studies begin to take religion seriously because it plays a significant role in the way that people conduct their daily lives. By international students knowing and understanding the religions of their host country they can also begin to be more aware of how to respond to the people of the host country. It appears to me, upon the conclusion of this research project, that many international education programmes are relatively fixed and rigid. In the sense that before the student leaves their country of origin, the organisers of the programme already know what is going to take place.

The programmes are so filled with activities that students do not have the liberty determine for themselves what they want, and need, to experience. South Africa is, for instance, a country with a diversity of religions and they are all important, yet it seems through my investigation that little or no attention was given to religion in the planning of international

study abroad programmes, unless they were organised within religious or theological studies programmes.

Finally, what emerged from my study is that although most of the programmes and students considered here claim the importance of learning in, and about new contexts – the premise of most international education programmes – the tendency to moderate, or tailor-make, semester abroad programmes, means that the possible lessons that students can learn is severely limited. What my research revealed is that most aspect of students' formal knowledge about African Traditional Religion came through cultural tours and not classroom, or interpersonal exchanges – it was often an add-on. This, in my view, limited the potential of learning through international education – because if students are asked to migrate across the world to be exposed to different ways of learning and knowing – then, the domestication of that engagement surely undermines the very promise of international education.

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