



FAITH AND THE POLITICS OF 'OTHER'

COMMUNITY ORGANISING AMONGST LONDON'S CONGOLESE DIASPORA

REFLECTIONS ON A COLLECTION OF STORIES GATHERED FROM
MEMBERS OF THE CONGOLESE DIASPORA IN LONDON

Background paper

Caitlin Burbridge

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ABSTRACT

Community organising is an important means of bringing people of different faith, culture and values to work together to hold the government to account for issues of shared concern. This paper provides reflections upon one years experience working as a community organiser with London's Congolese diaspora. The experience exposed the practical, moral and political imperative for doing community organising with diaspora groups. However, the experience also exposed some of the practical, ideological and cultural challenges to the diaspora organising process. This discussion paper uses stories from this experience to raise a new agenda for research. Considering the demands on a community organisers time, the achievements of the London Citizens alliance are remarkable. However, in order to further the effectiveness of this new form of organising, it is necessary to identify the cultural basis of the organising model, and consider the cultural experiences that diaspora groups bring when they come to the UK. These simple reflections provide the basis for a second paper which steps back to consider how rigorous research into the cultures from where migrants come would enhance and shape the process of community organising. This would have benefits not only for members of diaspora communities, but also for those in host institutions as each considers the needs and interests of the other.

CONTENTS

- 4. Abstract
- 5. Contents
- 7. Background
- 8. Introduction
- 10. Community Organising
- 12. Bringing the whole of faith to the table
- 14. Faith and the cultures of diaspora
 - 16-The Practical Imperative**
 - 18-The Moral Imperative**
 - 22-The Political Imperative**
- 22. Citizens Solutions
- 24. Challenges to fulfilling the imperative for effective Community Organising
 - 24-Practical challenges**
 - 26-Ideological challenges**
 - 27-Cultural challenges**
- 29. Conclusion: Moving Forward
- 30. References

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[Contending Modernities](#) is a global research and education initiative focused on collaboration among secular and religious universities, institutions, and leaders.

contendingmodernities.nd.edu

BACKGROUND

Faith is gaining significant traction in the field of international development. The 'Faith Partnership Principles' paper was launched by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in 2012 highlighting a government level recognition of the significant role of faith in international development. This paper seeks to argue that not only is this a unique political opportunity for increasing the effectiveness of development overseas, space is opening up in the national political sphere to more deeply consider the role of faith in the development of increasingly diverse contexts. This coincides with a moment of philosophical relativism in which the 'faith' voice is now gaining legitimacy alongside the secular voice, providing a unique opportunity for faith to influence the national agenda.

DFID recognises the important contribution made by faith groups to international development. The Secretary of State announced in February 2011 that DFID would establish a Working Group to produce a practical Partnership Principles Paper to strengthen DFID's collaboration with faith groups on international development. This would enable us to work together effectively to transform poor people's lives and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.ⁱ

At the heart of this agenda to increase the role of faith in development lies an implicit tension between the goals of different stakeholders. Working with faith groups can be an effective tool for furthering a predisposed political agenda through working with established institutions to appeal to the cultural sensibilities of particular groups. However, this paper seeks to overcome this narrow narrative, and consider how recognizing the role of faith within diaspora groups would not only enhance the ability of national citizens and the state to work with such people, it would also enrich development practice more broadly. According to recent THEOS report 'Wholly Living', *Integral human development...requires that people are rescued from every form of poverty, from hunger and illiteracy...it calls for active participation in economic and political processes and it recognises that every human person is a spiritual being with instincts for love and truth and aspirations for happiness.¹*

The report goes on to outline a clear agenda for change which uses faith-based principles to challenge the fundamental basis of a market oriented system: *We believe an economy re-stitched with the old, failed concepts of individualism and self-interest will continue to fail the people. We call for a new fabric which weaves into its global patterns the right social conditions for human flourishing.*

INTRODUCTION

Britain is at its best when it comes together as a nation, not when it stands divided. That's what One Nation is about. But at the same time we know there is anxiety about immigration and what it means for our culture. The answer is not to sweep it under the carpet or fail to talk about it, nor is it to make promises that can't be kept. It is to deal with all of the issues that concern people. (Miliband, 2013)

Ed Milliband recently stated on behalf of the labour party, 'too little has been done to integrate people who have settled in British society'. This paper argues that community organising is the most creative current response to the challenges posed by the increasing immigration of migrants from across the world into the UK. Community organising recognises people and the complex spaces that they occupy, and pragmatically seeks to impress and infuse the significance of these people and their relationships into the heart of a political agenda for change-an agenda which seeks to improve the plight of civil society as a whole. Rather than ignoring the local, as is common in the political agenda, community organising recognises the world as it is, starting with the 'local', and moving towards the national to make London a better place for people to live.

Based upon a year's experience community organising with a Congolese diaspora church in London, this paper seeks to argue that there are both short and long term imperatives for community organising amongst diaspora groups. These imperatives are moral, political and practical, and have implications not only for migrants, but also for civic life in London in the broadest sense. However, a study of the experience of Congolese migrants in the UK unveils the cultural basis of the community organising model. A lack of understanding of the cultures from which migrants come makes effective community organising challenging. In order to release the potential of community organising as a means of integrating and empowering diaspora groups alongside host communities in the UK, it is necessary to consider the challenges created when trying to apply a 'one size fits all model' like community organising to work with people who have a diverse range of faith, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This discussion will therefore proceed in two parts. This first background paper, produced as part of the Contending Modernities research project, and convened by Notre Dame University, will use testimonial evidence to reflect on the practical challenges of doing community organising with a Congolese community in London. This reflection then contributes to a second paper which considers more broadly how to address the

challenges outlined here, in order to further the objective of active citizenship. Using Said's theory of Orientalism as a lens, the discussion shall consider how a deeper understanding of the contexts from which people have migrated would enhance the effectiveness of community organising in the UK, reaping benefits for both the diaspora groups themselves, as well as achieving broader city wide integration and a more 'democratic' democracy.

COMMUNITY ORGANISING

We learn, when we respect the dignity of the people, that they cannot be denied the elementary right to participate fully in the solutions to their own problems. Self-respect arises only out of people who play an active role in solving their own crises and who are not helpless, passive, puppet-like recipients of private or public services.

Saul Alinsky

‘Community Organising is a method by which ordinary people engage with politics through their institutions-churches, neighbourhood associations, unions-which form an alliance in order to promote the common good. Community organising is the means by which those institutions in turn form people as democratic citizens. The citizens’ organisations which it builds are the vehicle by which they, through their institutions, transform society’ (Ivereigh, 2010; 32). According to Ivereigh (and we should be aware that his writing considers how community organising allows the Catholic Church to live out Catholic social teaching), modern community organising develops four essential characteristics; it is relational, institutional, broad-based, and non-partisan but intensely political. He asserts that the Christian view of politics sits well with the politics of community organising. Community organising training is centred around the tension between ‘the world as it is’ and ‘the world as it should be’. The ideology is that to be politically effective one must ride this tension, operating realistically in the world as it is with all the trappings of power, self interest and money, and at the same time keeping close to the ideals and values which are ‘written on the human heart and described in Scripture as the Kingdom of God’ (Ivereigh, 2010; 34).

Community Organising is a method and practise based upon the idea that organised people can hold the state accountable. Based on the premise that citizens have good solutions, and yet lack power, community organising works to build strong mutual relationships to identify common need and enable people to work together towards the achievement of common goals. President Obama, who worked as a community organiser in a poor area of Chicago identified the practise of community organising as follows:

‘... bringing together churches, block clubs, parents groups, and any other institutions in a given community to pay dues, hire organisers, conduct research, develop leadership, hold rallies and education campaigns, and begin drawing up plans on a whole range of issues-jobs, education, crime, etc... Once such a vehicle is formed, it holds the power to

make politicians, agencies, and corporations more responsive to community needs. Equally important, it enables people to break the crippling isolation from each other, to reshape their mutual values and expectations and rediscover the possibilities of acting collaboratively – the prerequisites of any successful self-help initiative’. (Obama, 1990 in Ivereigh, 2010; 34).

London Citizens is the UK’s largest alliance of faith congregations and civic institutions. There are 250 member institutions in London, the largest city in the wider network of Citizens UK which has branches in Milton Keynes, Nottingham, Cardiff and Birmingham. Citizens UK have won significant change on a number of issues including the London Living Wage, Child Detention, a Community Land Trust and Living Wage Jobs at the London 2012 Olympic games. The New Citizens Organising Team is one of the newer wings of Citizens UK and exists to organise Diaspora groups within London to address issues which are specific to those communities, notably immigration and child detention. The outcomes have been remarkable. The New Citizens Legal Service has been one of the most prominent recent outcomes of this agenda; through which members of the institutions are trained and developed to be immigration signposters, immigration legal advice up to level 2 is provided professional advisors who work on a pro bono basis, and customers are helped through a triaging service which directs them to the appropriate solicitor and offers a reduced rate legal service.

This paper makes the case for why community organising with diaspora groups is important, in particular focusing upon the role of ‘faith’ within diaspora communities, while carefully highlighting that it is a challenging process. It is hoped that this process of reflection might shed some light on how funding further research would advance the effectiveness of this process.

BRINGING THE WHOLE OF FAITH TO THE TABLE

In Bretherton's (2010) discussion of inter faith relations he draws into sharp relief the failure of British politics to engage with faith as a civic practise. Bretherton argues that the market and state are responsible for the production of faith-based practise, and we must understand this process if we are to reach a point where people of different faith backgrounds can come together and work for the common good. 'A major issue in debates about religion and politics is how to encourage different religions to relate constructively in public life. Anxieties about religious intolerance, aggressive proselytism, and inter-religious conflict abound' (Bretherton, 2010; 348). Rather than diluting religion in order to facilitate community integration, Bretherton calls for a deepened engagement with faith. 'How can a common life be negotiated between different faith traditions, with different and competing claims to truth, amid the pressures and structures brought to bare upon that common life by the state and the market on which all depend? (Bretherton, 2010: 346).

Recent papers produced by Milbank and Ali as part of the Contending Modernities research project make strong cases for why Christians and Muslims choose to actively engage with community organising, and why the process of community organising moves beyond the narrow 'secular' narrative to which Bretherton refers. For Millbank, 'Behind the secular attempt, for some, seems to lie a hope that cultural and religious identity, the stuff of heritage and character that makes us human, will somehow just 'go away' in the march of rational progress' (Millbank, 2013). Referring to faith leaders involved in community organising, 'Needless to say the perspective of those I spoke to was quite the opposite' (Millbank, 2013).

Milbank's research has revealed that in contrast to a declining faith narrative within society, there is an increasing desire amongst Christian leaders to articulate the nature and role of faith as a voice which is both present and engaged. One priest argued that community organising allows people '*to be the church without driving certain wedges of pre-existent prejudice through dissociated catechism or evangelism*'. It is precisely because community organising does not have an ideology that it allows civic alliances to develop on the basis of drawing together people who are different, as opposed to

neutralising and denying the breadth of traditions and values encompassed in civic space.

Milbank's article draws attention to the fact that not only does community organising bring together people of different faiths, the process also enables Christians of a wide range of Christian views and traditions to work together. Crucially, community organising practices a political methodology which holds being relational above being strategic; allowing relationships to design strategy. As Milbank points out 'the principle of relationality pulls faith communities out beyond their boundaries'. It is in the act of doing community organising that Christians perceive they can be church in the widest sense. This is not to fulfil some vague notion of goodwill, but in accordance with the doctrinal challenge of the gospel they seek to embody. The same can be said of Muslim community organisers. 'It is a requirement of my faith to be involved in the common good and the work of TELCO reminds me of the Covenant of virtue where you uphold justice in society together with others'. *Dilowar Khan, Executive Director of East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre (Ali, 2013)*. As an alliance of civic institutions of all faiths, community organising challenges the assumption that people of different faith groups cannot find common ground from which to work. In fact, the presence of the alliance suggests quite the opposite reality. It suggests that the fundamental basis from which different faith groups act to bring about justice are not dissimilar.

As Ali identifies, one of the main reasons Muslim and Christian communities choose to actively engage with community organising is that it provides a platform where they can 'bring the whole of their values to animate their world view' in contrast to a mainstream political arena which often asks people to leave religion at the door'. Drawing upon these two studies, where Milbank places emphasis on the Christian call to 'be' the church in community, and Ali, on the opportunity for Muslims to share beliefs and traditions in a safe and mutual space, both faiths reflect a need to pursue 'action' from a place of clear values, in order to build relationships which are 'full blooded' and genuinely authentic. All of faith needs to be brought to the table.

FAITH AND THE CULTURES OF DIASPORA

The challenge comes then to consider what this means for migrant faith institutions involved in community organising. The assumption on the basis of the reflections presented thus far is that for an institution to participate fully in community organising, it must be allowed to 'be' and act according to its own values and beliefs in order to fully engage in the process. However, migrant communities arrive in the UK and often live and worship in ethnic groups according to the culture in their country of origin (Sen, 2004). For many of these migrant groups, cultural factors often influence how faith is expressed.

It is common for diaspora communities to form gathered migrant churches where they practise their faith according to familiar cultural practices which have been learnt in their country of origin. The question that needs to be asked is whether the need to embody and retain national cultural practices compromises the ability of diaspora peoples to fully engage in the life of a civic alliance such as Citizens UK?

'The Congolese here (UK) asked for a Congolese aumonerie. The Catholic Church in London asked the Catholic Church of the Congo if they could send a priest for the Congolese. The bishops got together in Kinshasa and they chose me...Here I have a three year mandate...My task is to run the Catholic church here following the Congolese way for those who want to live the Church according to Congolese culture...It's also a link with the Congo...I depend on both the Catholic church here in the UK and the church in the Congo...so that the Catholic Congolese do not lose the praying style, the Congolese praying style...Here they can lose their culture...That's why a lot of Congolese went elsewhere-they didn't like the way people from here were praying...I preach the Congolese way, I give examples from the Congo. Even expressions in our language which translate better...At the end, we give some news, like a priest or a bishop who was appointed in the Congo, or even an earthquake-recently there was an earthquake in Bukavu...We organised a money collection, we sent our contributions...I explained to people that we are here but our heart is there!'

(Abbe Noel Mpati-Nzita in Garbin, 2009; 104)

For many, culture can be understood as fixed in time (Schein, 2012). For others, culture evolves across space and time (Moran, 2001). It is important to acknowledge how the concentration of diaspora congregations in geographic space is a fundamental challenge to the 'geographic' assumptions underpinning community organising. Community organising conceives of a civic space which is constructed over time through the development of relationships between institutions. Through this process issues of common concern (often tied to a geographical area) are identified and can be addressed. Diaspora institutions tend to 'gather' from disparate geographic communities for a short period of time. The purpose of the gathering is rarely attached to the immediate neighbourhood, and more akin to 'the culture of home' (country of origin) or to the many neighbourhoods where people come from. On top of this 'geography of diaspora institutions' is a reproduction of cultural space which is fixed in time and attached to a different geographical context, in this case, the Democratic Republic of Congo. A tension is created between the short-term challenges of community organising, and the long term need for sustained integration in the UK. Requesting a Congolese leader to come to the UK highlights the significance of the relationship between faith and culture, and the need to express faith by retaining attachment to 'home'. However, it can be argued that this process prevents these diaspora groups from integrating more widely into civic space. The discussion shall proceed by using stories collected amongst the Congolese community to outline the imperative for community organising with diaspora groups. It shall then consider the multiple geographic and cultural challenges to this form of organising, in order to identify how to increase the effectiveness of diaspora organising practise. This paper seeks to move forward by asking what this means for London, a place which is rapidly evolving to be the most diverse city in the world. Within that blend of differing cultures is the presence of strong migrant groups who regularly congregate in faith based institutions according to different nationally specific cultural practise. While community organising is a means of uniting civil society, it becomes all the more important to be intentional about involving those communities who feel implicitly isolated.

THE PRACTICAL IMPERATIVE

For organising to achieve its goal of holding the state to account, it is imperative that the issues affecting all of civil society are reflected in the demands made on key state figures. As identified by Anderson (1987), an inability to participate in the narrow 'instruments of democracy' (Foucault, 1987), perhaps through a lack of technical knowledge or cultural proficiency (Davis, 1987), not only inhibits a realisation of the democratic potential of those groups, policies are formed as a result of a democratic process which cannot absorb the opinions, values and needs of the full spectrum of civil society. Therefore, if organising is to realise its goal of 'unlocking the power of civil society' it must include all members of civil society.

Organising begins with a process of listening to individuals to identify issues of common concern. Interviews with two Diaspora Organisers (2012) reveal that there is an explicit tension raised through this process because of the gathered nature of migrant institutions. Diaspora institutions are rarely rooted in a geographical space. For organising to be fully effective, according to its own doctrine, it requires large alliances of people who share concern over one issue, to come together and negotiate change in front of key political figures (often at large public assemblies). Having spent time over a year meeting members of the Congolese diaspora community, the key issues identified were different to those identified by non-diaspora institutions. Largely, organising issues identified by diaspora groups were connected to their status as migrants, and not attributed to a geographical location: issues relating to the physical and legal process of integrating into the country; immigration, lack of language provision, poor translation services in public arenas, low educational achievement amongst Congolese groups, and intergenerational tensions created through allegiances by different age groups, to

YVETTE'S STORY

Yvette is mother to 4 children. Her eldest Jeremy attends a school in a different borough to the one where they live. Yvette has entered the UK as an economic migrant unlike many of the other chaplaincy members. Yvette's case is an important one because as an economic migrant, 'immigration' is not as great an issue for her as it is for other migrants. Yvette's case helps us to think more clearly about 'cross cultural' experience, without the interference of a complex legal situation. Yvette's greatest fear has been the safety of her son. Jeremy gets a bus to school and talks of being bullied both physically and verbally because of his race. Yvette talks of a time when Jeremy was heavily beaten up and abandoned on the top deck of a bus. No-one else on the bus came to help him. It is moments like this that we recognise the value and significance of collective action. Jeremy's story is not isolated, but it is stories like this which are not only problematic for those who experience such direct abuse, but also in terms of escalating a perceived sense of racial inferiority or abuse. The community organising response to such stories has been to launch a campaign to make the streets safer, identifying city safe zones supported by local people right across the city. For these reasons it is clear that community organising finds a creative way to begin to tackle an extremely important issue which concerns a targeted groups of individuals.

different cultural norms. Practically, in order to achieve change on these issues, organising requires an alliance to be developed amongst people who share the same challenges.

London Citizens would never prevent diaspora institutions from joining host institutions to work towards achieving organising goals together. However, the agenda of diaspora groups is more likely to be achieved through an intentional diaspora alliance. It is also necessary to be aware of the practical challenges faced by migrant members attempting to engage in action. For example, those without English language training find it difficult to participate in discussions with members from other host institutions. This is a problem which has been identified repeatedly by diaspora community organisers. One organiser stated, 'I'd love the people from my Nigerian communities to work with host communities, but the reality is, it's incredibly difficult for them to communicate and therefore work together'. The tension here appears to be a consequence both of political structures and resourcing. Should Citizens UK have the resources to invest in addressing the longer-term requirements for social integration (such as language and communication training) then perhaps the discussion might be one of how to address the barriers which prevent these groups from working more effectively together. However, currently, whilst resources are only available to fund organising work on a short term basis, and in order to make tangible change in the short term, it is necessary to organise migrant communities along diaspora lines.

THE MORAL IMPERATIVE

The Citizens UK agenda for the most recent diaspora assembly highlighted the strong moral imperative for organising diaspora communities in London. According to research conducted by Kleis (2012) diaspora groups in the UK suffer from multiple inequalities. The assembly addressed the following issues: challenging the lack of reliable immigration advice, placing asset languages on the OCR syllabus, safety for young people with particular focus on 'stand up and take charge'-a campaign which addresses the targeting of young people by police officers on the basis of their ethnicity, and finally changing the culture of enforced removals. According to the rhetoric of organising, which argues that civic change will most likely be achieved when people are organised according to their self-interest (the things about which they care the most), addressing these issues will be best achieved through intentional diaspora community organising. The following story is just one example, which reflects the need for diaspora organising around these issues:

Mimi's Story

Mimi fled the DRC in 2000 to seek refuge in the UK from conflict. Shortly after arrival Mimi met her husband. They married and moved into a council flat in north London. In 2004 Mimi began studying English, in 2010 she completed an office practise course, and in 2011 studied Maths and ICT. Mimi is clearly an ambitious and hard working individual who desires to do well for the sake of her family. In the DRC Mimi holds a graduate diploma which is not transferrable to the UK.

Mimi has two children aged 8 and 5 (at time of interview). Teachers repeatedly inform Mimi that her daughter Victoria is really struggling at school. Mimi is concerned it is because of her home environment. They live in a very small flat that only has one bedroom. Mimi's husband sleeps on the floor and Mimi shares the bed with both of her children. Her husband has bad asthma which is getting worse. According to a school teacher, it is likely that Victoria is performing poorly at school because she does not have adequate personal space for a girl of her age and she does not sleep well. Victoria's schoolteacher took it upon herself to write to the council outlining how important it is that this family get a new home. However, the family tend to be very low priority on the council housing list. Once a week, every week, in order to be considered for a new home, Mimi must go to a meeting point, look at the list of availability and see if the status of her family situation complies with the housing available that week. If so then Mimi enters a complex bidding process. If the family are not deemed eligible they have to wait another week.

The moral necessity of organising is clear. There are significant structural challenges faced by diaspora communities. Mimi's story is just one example of how structural barriers faced by diaspora groups prevent them from making steps towards integration. Other Congolese talked of struggling to find the money for legal advice regarding their

asylum claim, for others they had to wait 5/6 years to get status before they could even consider employment. The 'issues' which are identified in the listening process amongst this community are specific to the parameters of the circumstance of migration.

While the moral imperative is clear in theory, the practical out-workings of this imperative are convened through the concept of 'self interest'. Most of the Congolese I worked with struggled to understand the paradigm within which this idea of self-interest is placed. The notion of the individual within community organising is one which, for some, adheres to a neoliberal morality. It asserts that if every individual acted upon self-interest and pursued their individual skills and interests; we would achieve a fully thriving society. The word society here can be interchangeable with community. However, for members of the Congolese catholic chaplaincy, the calling of an individual is to act on behalf of others in your wider community; the 'self interest of others' is understood to be greater than ones own. This idea is not opposed to organising rhetoric; however the language used is misunderstood and appears to advance what is understood to be a selfish agenda, rather than one of 'selflessness'. It is important to understand why the notion of 'self interest' might create barriers in practise. Speaking with Belange Ngoma, the youth pastor of Peniel Congolese church in North London about community organising, it became clear that the role of self interest as an organising principle was a sticking point for his community, 'If our neighbour or friend in our community needs help of any kind, we go and help them'. There is a natural organising process which takes place within this community on the basis of affiliation, not on the basis of self-interest. The tension is clear. 'Why would you not ask members of host and diaspora communities to campaign on behalf of one another?' Therefore, in order to develop a rhetoric of organising which recognises the notion of 'self-interest' in the light of this is essential for the advancement of the community organising process. This raises important further questions about the language of community organising and whether it adheres to western notions of civil society.

POLITICAL IMPERATIVE

Beneath the multiple practical and moral imperatives for organising with diaspora communities there is a strong political motivations for community organising because of the strategic opportunity it provides for articulating and raising diverse worldviews in the public sphere. Not only does community organising address a clear need through practical methodologies, it brokers and leverages these views into political space by identifying strategic political opportunities. This is an important model for change. One important example of this can be seen in the recent development of the New Legal Social Enterprise (NLSC) which has built relationships with professional solicitors and legal advisors willing to work on a pro bono basis, to help those needing clear and effective immigration advice. Citizens organisers identified the fact that trainee solicitors are required to conduct a number of hours of legal training on a voluntary basis before qualifying. Knowledge of this small but significant nuance in the UK system has provided a window of opportunity through which diaspora organisers have been able to broker influence in order to bring about change for those who perhaps would not have the experience to know how to bring about change for themselves.

Another important political opportunity is that the faith basis of migrant communities is currently gaining traction on the political agenda. With the rise of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) recently launched initiative to study the role of faith in international development programming (2012), community organising needs to influence this discussion and ensure that faith has a genuinely authentic and respected voice. It is necessary to be strategic and create the space through which that voice can be articulated. This is of particular significance for work with migrant communities, because, as the second paper in this series will articulate further, understanding international development processes of participation could have significant implications for how the state works with migrants in the UK. Participatory theory advocates that development work should be highly context specific, noting the complex range of interplaying forces at different levels of society in different countries (Cornwall, 2002). This should have implications for how the state interacts with diverse groups in London. Whilst the government thinks clearly about how faith impacts its participatory governance work overseas, perhaps this is an important leverage moment through which one can articulate the diversity of allegiance and affiliation to faith within

the UK, with the view to this increasing government focus upon sensitive and nuanced integration policy.

CITIZENS SOLUTIONS

A number of important initiatives have been developed by Citizens UK in response to some of these practical, moral and political challenges. Each solution is firmly rooted in the lived experiences of members of many diaspora communities.

One notable initiative has been the development of the New Citizens Legal Social (NCLS) enterprise. During time listening to members of the Congolese Catholic Chaplaincy it became clear that a huge challenge for people seeking status in the UK is negotiating a highly complex immigration system. There is little UKBA guidance on how to work through the system, therefore often people turn for help to members of their own community. However the experience is often exploitative. Numerous cases of fraud and exploitation were unveiled through a listening process. Often those seeking status were given false or inaccurate legal advice by cowboy solicitors at vast expense. To address this problem, Citizens UK developed an innovative triaging system where quality professional solicitors from a number of leading firms would work on a pro bono basis to provide legal and reliable immigration signposting. Through this process we could ensure that members of the diaspora communities were aware of their status and the steps they needed to take to negotiate the system without being taken advantage of. The initiative is significant for two reasons in particular. It shows a clear and practical response to a need that was recognised at ground level. It acknowledges the immigration system as an important systemic challenge for many. Finally, the process takes seriously a plight which might be deemed at a policy level to be insignificant in relation to other supposedly more pressing 'justice' challenges.

HUBERT'S STORY

Hubert is currently lives in London on job seekers allowance. Hubert trained at university as a construction engineer; however he has found it extremely difficult to find work in the UK. Before he can try to use his papers he needs to pay £200 to get them translated into English. However, as the UK system is so different he needs to retrain in order to be taken on for jobs he would be qualified for back in the DRC. When asked about alternative career paths for him, referring back to construction engineer Hubert said, 'this is what I want to be doing'.

Hubert decided to become an immigration signposter with London Citizens both to develop his own skills but also to commit to changing an issue about which he feels very committed. 'Immigration-this is a problem which is shared by so many of my people. I understand this and it must change'. Inspired by his own experience waiting 6 years for his status to remain and work in this country Hubert believes that people need help understanding the system because 'these things actually matter'.

I hosted an immigration workshop in partnership with Finsbury Park Mosque. Members of 3 institutions attended; Muslim Welfare House, Finsbury Park Mosque and the Congolese Catholic Chaplaincy. The turnout was far higher than anticipated, therefore proving that this addresses a clear need. Whilst one to one client sessions were taking place, those in line were engaged in a workshop designed to help identify good and bad legal advice. Not only is this a useful service, members of each member institution were trained as immigration signposters. Engaging members deeply in the process ensures that this is a service which is owned by the people for whom it is beneficial through accountable and trustworthy relationships. It is hoped that the process will continue to develop individuals. Another important example of how community organising has enabled diaspora groups to hold government to account has been in the work done to get asset languages recognised by the Oxford and Cambridge exam board at GCSE level.

What about culture?

Although there are clear practical, moral and political imperatives for community organising with diaspora people, the physical process of organising raises important questions about whether the model well negotiates and facilitates effective organising with people of such a range of backgrounds. While clearly there are ways of negotiating faith groups to work together for the common good, the way faith and culture interact in an organising sphere raise into question to what extent the ability of faith groups to work together is also dependent upon common cultural norms. The next chapter shall articulate some of the practical, ideological and cultural challenges of applying the organising model to work with migrant communities. The findings create a strong imperative for further research in this field.

CHALLENGES TO DIASPORA

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ORGANISING

Practical Challenges

The concept of community organising has been much harder to convey to people within the Congolese Catholic Chaplaincy than it has been in non-diaspora institutions. As identified by Rowlands (2011), it is essential to consider the basic premise of organising as a western construct, and one which is articulated through western language and social norms.

The cultural basis of some basic tools used in organising methodology became exposed when used in a diaspora context. Organising has a strict relationship with the notion of 'time'. In an assembly for example, holding speakers accountable for their five minute speaking slot is considered an important way of keeping assembly members engaged in the meeting. Controlling time ensures that people know what to expect of the assembly. The same principles are therefore applied to all aspects of organising life. Notions of time and being 'on time' are different in the DRC, and therefore presented multiple challenges. Frequently it was my experience that encouraging members of this community to attend meetings or assemblies on time was difficult because it was not understood to be a priority. Notions of time, as articulated by Rhoma (1995) in his reflections upon Latin American change projects, carry very different meanings in different cultural contexts. His argument proceeds by suggesting that time can carry relational value, as opposed to efficiency value. For example, while one might perceive someone who is late to have caused offence and inconvenience to the person they are meeting, in many Latin American cultures, being late is a sign that the individual invested an appropriate and meaningful amount of time with people that they met along the way. While this argument can also act as an excuse for poor time management, it does raise the significance of rethinking the cultural assumptions associated with time.

Secondly, language is a big challenge when community organising. As identified by an Organiser, working with the Nigerian community has meant that she relies a huge amount upon the existing patriarchal structures within the church in order to organise, because it is only the established leaders with whom she can communicate. While organising seeks to redistribute power and develop leaders horizontally across an institution, in practise organising depends upon clear communication. When it is only

leaders who speak English and can listen to the community to relay the issues that they face to an organiser, then there is only so much influence an organiser can have in terms of ensuring the development of a range of leaders who are articulating the needs of the breadth of the community. This reality intersects with strong institutional and faith based commitment to the structures of established power within the institution, making it very difficult to achieve change, regardless of how many lay people want to be involved. As identified by Sylvie, convincing the leadership to change their views on how our church is structured would not only be insulting, it would compromise a commitment to their divine responsibility.

Finally, as identified by one male Organiser, gender can be a barrier for work with diaspora institutions which, based on experience, are often more conservative in their views about whether men and women should work together. Aware of this, work with Muslim Welfare House has previously largely been with men who are members of the institution. While this has been fruitful, and clear change has been achieved through work to develop city safe zones and establish the Living Wage at institutions across the borough, the reality is one where women within the institution do not yet play an equal role in organising. This raises significant challenges for the organising process; particularly focusing upon whether or not organising is compromising its attempts to redistribute power horizontally if the pragmatism of the process actually re-establishes predominantly patriarchal structures (Davis, 2005).

On the basis of her experience, for one Organiser, the greatest barriers to effective diaspora organising have been to do with language, notions of time, individual issues, and finally more broadly notions of what it means to be democratic. It is interesting therefore that this Organiser's motivations for organising come from having developed a belief, whilst studying anthropology, that there is an inherent problem with studying 'the other' as is typical within the development field. For this Organiser, her work with diaspora groups is much slower than organising host community institutions. Another important point raised by the Organiser, which we shall discuss at greater length in paper 2, is the tension between the nature of migrant cultural events and services, and the content of political assemblies. In the Organiser's experience, migrant communities, (and she stresses those particularly from African pentecostal backgrounds) find assemblies bland and boring. This is not because of a lack of care for the issues being addressed, but more to do with the manner in which the assembly is conducted. The controlled manner with which assemblies are conducted professionalises civil society in

order to be taken seriously by political leaders. This raises a more fundamental question not only about how community organising might be shaped for diaspora groups, but also about how diaspora groups might shape organising.

Ideological Challenges

As highlighted at the beginning of this paper, despite challenges presented when people of different faith choose to work together, research by Millbank and Ali confirms that community organising provides a new paradigm through which Muslim and Christian communities can now articulate and animate their faith in the public sphere. An important question to consider therefore is where faith and culture intersect. It has been my experience over this past year that, not only is the language of 'self-interest' problematic for the Congolese community, organising presents problems because it can appear to equate religion with politics in a way which is alien to those involved. For one Organiser, one of the greatest challenges of working with diaspora groups is the lack of understanding she feels regarding the reasons and motivations behind the actions of individuals. Working on an immigration campaign which is developing a culture change within the institutions which facilitate deportation, an Organiser articulates her frustrations at the use of 'God' as an explanation for situations. 'People who are in very insecure immigration situations frequently tell me that they are here because God has put them here, and therefore he will help them'. While the Organiser does not question or attest the validity of this belief, her frustrations arise when these beliefs and statements stand in the way of a practical response to justice which embodies these beliefs. Negotiating these strong beliefs and values and being able to articulate how they are not incompatible with organising principles is essential in order to conduct effective organising which both values the individual and achieves the end goals.

BELANGE'S STORY

Belange is a youth worker at a Congolese church in North London. As someone who came to the UK aged three, he has no recollection of life in the DRC. It is particularly interesting therefore to find that he works and worships amongst a diaspora congregation. Despite complaining that he is 'very frustrated by the lack of integration amongst churches', Belange has continued to commit to this community, the one in which he was brought up and therefore feels very much a part.

Belange's reflections are particularly interesting because he is someone who intimately understands this migrant group, and yet someone who has little experience of the country from which this culture is grown. Perhaps the most striking comment in our discussion was a reflection on how Congolese communities are organised. 'In a remote village you have to make everything happen yourself', and yet in the UK, 'small communities are not very obvious'. This has two significant implications for understanding civic organisation. Firstly, the suggestion is that Congolese people have a much more integrated sense of 'community' as a unit through which a group of people are geographically and socially in relationship. An implication of this fact is that community organising understands the organisation and development of community to be a strategic rather than natural process. Two conclusions can therefore be proposed. The first is that the basic premise of community organisation is counter to the notion of community with which they are already immersed. Secondly, the idea of community organised across civic institutional space, as opposed to geographical space, is perhaps one which is entrenched in a western ideology. 'Culture is to social organisation as mind is to brain' (Douglas, 2004). This observation makes an important contribution to this discussion. There is an implicit assumption that culture has to be learned. However,

Cultural Challenges

It is common for members of diaspora groups hold attachments to their home country, rather than the one to which they have migrated (Lindsay, 1998). This can be explained on the basis of clear psychological evidence of the need to construct identity on the basis of familiarity (Clive, 2006). Inevitably this has an impact on the extent to which migrants desire to participate in civic life in the UK, creating a demand for an argument or narrative which carefully places the importance of organising within this mentality. This also raises important questions about the differences between migrant communities. The Congolese diaspora in London is largely made up of people who have fled conflict and sought asylum in the UK. Therefore, the attachment to 'home' is likely to be greater than for those who are economic migrants as evidence from the Ghanaian community shows. This nuance must be reflected in organising practise.

This mental and physical attachment to home raises important questions about the nature of civil society as a whole. There are good reasons, as identified above, for people to retain emotional connections to families and loved ones at home. However, it is possible that the attachment to home is accentuated by a feeling of cultural 'difference' or 'otherness' which is felt by those trying to settle in this country. This idea will be explored more fully in the second paper in this series, but an important example is presented by Belange from Peniel Congolese church. Progressing from the challenge made by Rowlands (2011) that we must redress the assumption that we should just 'teach' people from non-democratic countries how civil society works, Belange argues that civil society in the DRC is constructed on the basis of fundamentally different principles, and it has a very different relationship with the state to the UK. 'We look after one another in communities. We have no power over the state and our traditional structures at village level dictate how we do things'. This conceptualisation of democracy challenges the idea that civil society can achieve change. A question I was repeatedly asked when trying to develop leaders to take ownership of the city safe campaign embodied this understanding of hierarchical structures; 'What is London Citizens going to do for us?' No matter how many times the emancipatory vision of community organising was articulated, the fundamental premise of a donor-recipient relationship in which civic institutions are the recipients was clearly well ingrained into the mind-set of these Congolese people. The principle of civic negotiation with the state was, for many, an alien concept.

‘May parents are always talking about violence. What are these meetings? How will they make anything happen?’ (Levi, 2012). Not only did I find that understandings of state-civil society relationships fundamentally different for the Congolese people I got to know, notions of civic change were also understood through a very different lens. Having experienced power being asserted through predominantly violent means, conceptualising the effectiveness of state accountability through processes of negotiation and non-violent action requires a significant shift in mindset. Community organising does recognise the need to unlearn power structures in order to re-learn new ones. However, this paper seeks to argue that the principle of unlearning structures and re-learning structures requires more than just a change in knowledge base. This process requires a long-term commitment to engaging people in evolving democratic processes, and recognising that this will take time. This provides a particular challenge for those whose mind-set is attached to home, as identified above.

CONCLUSION: MOVING FORWARD

SYLVIE'S STORY

For Sylvie, being a Congolese migrant in London should be more than just achieving basic existence within an ethnically Congolese caucus. Sylvie is an example of someone who has fought hard to integrate into British culture, whilst working hard to retain her own cultural identity in order to eventually improve the plight of in the Congo. Sylvie is particularly concerned with finding ways to address issues of domestic violence in the DRC. Sylvie is a volunteer with UN Women, an English language teacher, London Citizens leader, and parent to 4 children, amongst numerous other roles.

As someone who has experienced integration into the UK through the complex immigration system, and has worked hard to retain a sense of dignity through work in the face of inadequate support, Sylvie's involvement both within and beyond the Congolese community gives her a nuanced perspective on the fears and challenges created for someone who is a Congolese migrant in London. At a basic level, for Sylvie the reasons why members of the Congolese community of which she is a part are prone to functioning primarily within this group go beyond culturally familiarity, and in fact find their root in 'fear'. Based on experience, her opinion is that the preconceived notion of racial hierarchy is a driver in determining the sense of place of a migrant in London.

It is clear that civic space produces and reproduces social inequalities, hierarchies and injustices. Despite claims by state level practitioners that they are committed to addressing these issues through strategic processes of integration, the outcomes can only be minimal. As outlined, the challenges of social inequality and lack of integration are magnified for migrant communities who are confronted with a multitude of legal, social, cultural and economic barriers which, when combined with the psychological strain of the migration process, can be highly alienating. This paper has argued that there are clear practical, moral and political imperatives for conducting community organising with diaspora communities, with implications for life at the local, national and international scales. However, it has also identified a huge and important agenda for research. The degree of nuances identified when organising with a group of asylum seeking migrants suggest that research must be conducted in order to understand in detail the cultures from which different migrant groups migrate to the UK, in order to understand how best to advance the project of community organising. These nuances are practical, ideological and cultural in nature, and require a comprehensive analysis of the faith basis, and democratic experiences from which the values of individuals are derived. Only then can community organising realise its full democratic and emancipatory potential.

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Primary Sources

Interviews were conducted over a year spent community organising with London's Congolese diaspora. Evidence was collected from Congolese migrants, community organisers and interviews with academic researchers. This was a participatory research process informed by methodologies established by Davis. Further information available on request.