## Transnational Religious Networks: Sexuality and the Changing Power Geometries of the Anglican Communion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Parishes</th>
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<td><strong>Church of England:</strong> As societal attitudes have become more tolerant of homosexuality, pressure groups have emerged within the church which support or oppose these changes. Although not yet experiencing TEC’s level of division, there are growing worries about ‘holding the tension’ between differing segments of the church over issues of homosexuality as well as female ordination. There are also divisions over COE’s responses to England’s changing legal context (e.g. civil partnership and anti-discrimination legislation).</td>
<td>Urban area in the north of England</td>
<td>COE-1: A predominantly white parish with a mixed working-class and middle-class congregation. The parish has a relatively high proportion of LGBT members, and a reputation for engaging with social justice issues. COE-2: An ethnically mixed parish, largely Afro-Caribbean and white with a growing presence of African refugees. Considered relatively ‘high church’. Issues related to homosexuality were not often discussed openly at services or church events.</td>
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<td><strong>Church of the Province of Southern Africa:</strong> South Africa is by far the largest member of ACSA. Anglicans account for about 4% of South Africans. The country is known for having the first constitution prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, surveys suggest that a substantial majority of people hold negative views about homosexuality. The leadership of ACSA have espoused generally supportive views on homosexuality, although it has been cautious about gay marriage.</td>
<td>Urban area in the Kwa-Zulu Natal region</td>
<td>ACSA-1: A predominantly Zulu parish in a township area. Homosexuality was not often discussed openly in the congregation, although there was at least one ‘out’ member. The style of worship was high church. ACSA-2: A predominantly white, middle class parish. The church has a ‘broad church’ style and diverse views on homosexuality. Homosexuality was not much discussed and did not feature often in sermons.</td>
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<td><strong>The Episcopal Church:</strong> Episcopalian account for a relatively small proportion (less than 2%) of Americans. The sexuality debates have been particularly divisive for TEC since the consecration of Gene Robinson. In 2008, dissident parishes/dioceses claiming about 100,000 members have formed the Anglican Church in North America, and hope to gain recognition by the Communion. In 2009 TEC lifted a temporary ban (put in place in 2006) on the elevation of openly gay people to the episcopacy.</td>
<td>Metropolitan area of a large city in the northern USA</td>
<td>TEC-1: A predominantly white, middle class parish with a substantial gay, lesbian, and bisexual presence. The liturgical style was a blend of Catholic and evangelical styles of worship. TEC-2: A predominantly white but ethnically mixed congregation with an evangelical style. The parish has been at odds with its diocese about the gay-friendly direction of the Episcopal Church.</td>
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SEXUALITY AND GLOBAL FAITH NETWORKS: A SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHY
Project Publications

2010


2011


2012


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**Methodological Approach**

**Discourse analysis**: analysis of websites, pressure group publications, media, and other documents

**Observation/participant observation**: at major Communion events (including the Lambeth Conference 2008; GAFCON 2008 in Jerusalem; General Convention of the Episcopal Church 2009).

**Interviews with key stakeholders** representatives of national churches; pressure groups; church organisations; bishops

**Parish case studies** (n=6): to explore the relationship between debates in the global communion & everyday local beliefs & practices. Research in 2 contrasting parishes in each chosen national context
I think it’s very difficult for me because I don't know these people. All I know is what I read in the paper, and I know what I read in the paper is so horrible, but I don't know these human beings. I just know [that] I don't know what they've been through.

(TEC-1, older white female, group interview)

A State of Unknowingness

MELINDA: I think it would be very sad if (schism) happens but [...] I think it's almost inevitable because the bishops between them can't sort this out, can they? [...] Were it to happen, I think we would go on very much as we are now, because, at the end of the day, what we're most interested in is our own little patch and the way we live our own individual lives, and the broader picture doesn't really affect us from day to day. But as a whole I think it would be very sad. But I think it's inevitable.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think you would lose? Why would it be sad? What would you lose by that?

MELINDA: Well we would lose this whole concept of unity and communion, wouldn't we? Which is a very important thing...

OTHER RESPONDENTS (overlapping): That's right. Yes, indeed.

Communion as Abstract Commitment
I think most people don’t bother about going to anything but their local church anyway. Occasionally, when (there is) a function at the cathedral and they want us all to go, some of us will go, but not very many because we’d rather go to our parish church, we’re comfortable there […] and I think that’s probably the same in England or anywhere else in the world that you don’t think globally but you like to, you like to be global.

(ACSA-2, older white, heterosexual female, individual interview)

Communion as Abstract Commitment

I sort of alternate between feeling that it’s very important that we stay in Communion with people and then asking myself just why I feel like I should stay in Communion with people who think that I’m an abomination. And I’m not really settled on a specific view, but I actually find myself thinking that the church, the progressive church […] should actually slow down and wait for the conservatives to keep up, rather than thinking we should force the conservatives to speed up to our speed. (My thinking behind that is that when the church was taken to Africa by the missionaries, there was actually a very, very conservative theology which was taken to the African people, and it took the church in the West a thousand years to get over that so why should we expect people to speed up, to go through 800 years of, of spiritual development and growth just because we’re in a completely different place to them. Erm, but then […] I also think that it’s still wrong and the world we’re living in now (is) such an interconnected world that there’s no place to be 800 years behind […] and that the speeches of a bishop in Algeria or South Africa (will make) an impact on the COE […] What these people are saying (is) actually damaging people here’s relationship with God.

(COE-1, younger gay male, individual interview)

Imagining Interconnectedness
THABLE: For me, being an Anglican doesn’t mean anything to me.
INTERVIEWER: Really?
THABLE: Yes. I’m no longer influenced by being an Anglican. I’m influenced by the word of God.
INTERVIEWER: Ok. But you’re still coming to the Anglican…
THABLE: Well, as family. As a worshipping family. Yes.
INTERVIEWER: I suppose that’s the better question. The better question is what does it mean to you all to be an Anglican? Does it mean anything?
THABLE: No. It doesn’t mean anything. It’s just that we belong to the Anglican Community.
INTERVIEWER: So it’s no different from being a Methodist or Pentecostal?
BONGI: But I think this will depend on the level of spirituality of an individual. Others, they really feel very strongly about being Anglican. When they go into church they really want to see this, that, and that which makes this church an Anglican one. But if your spirituality has taken a step up, then you know that God is above Anglicanism. It depends on the level of […] the relationship that you have with God.
(ACSA-1, group interview)