The Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren (1910 – 2000) inspired by his reading of Luther often referred to the church as extra nos. For Wingren this meant that no one owned the church spaces. They were always outside, moving, somewhere else. God is undoubtedly the subject of all churches, but the extra nos urges us to look elsewhere for the church; the church space is the surprise, never the limited and the well-known. More people are there, other people are there. “The Church exists for the sake of the non-Christian humanity who are outside it. This is its raison d’être. If instead it exists only for the sake of its members it will be in continual conflict with its indwelling Lord.” (Wingren [1960] 1964, 10 – 11, Kristensson Uggla 2016)

In a Scandinavian historical context, this topic has been challenging theological and diaconal discussions for the last few decades. Questions include: Is diaconia also extra nos? What would this mean? Within Scandinavian churches and theological institutions there are, of course, many who reject the extra nos, arguing instead for the more classical interpretation of diaconia, limiting it to explicit church-run institutions and practices. Due to this situation, diaconia often becomes a contested arena, both practically and theoretically.

In the Scandinavian context, this tension peaked in 1850, and has since then continued to be an issue of debate. At the heart of the conflict was the Danish theologian Grundtvig, (1783 – 1872) who opposed pietist confessionalism and claimed God’s presence in culture, history, nature and the everyday (Gregersen, Kristensson Uggla, and Wyller 2017). Pietist theologians insisted that personal conversion and the following of Jesus were the only acceptable criteria for Christian faith, and for diaconia. Grundtvig’s passion for God’s presence in all creation was thus rejected, and the young diaconia movement (imported from Germany) became one of the most important pietist symbols. Converted members were vital for the construction of modern Scandinavia. According to the pietists the still more secularized state and the still less confessional (Grundtvigian Danish / Norwegian) church were unable to contribute in this way. Pietists therefore built hospitals, schools and all manner of charity institutions and organizations, thus becoming one of the main contributors to the shaping of modern Scandinavia (Christoffersen 1999). The pietists were the modernizers, but the price was high: The extra nos motive had been lost. The paradox is that those who contributed immensely to improved justice systems, more social inclusion and more security in the created world, at the same time did not rec-
ognize that there might be a vocation in all creation and a presence extra nos in all life worlds.

This historical and theological tension has influenced and impacted the discussion of diaconia and diaconal practices in the Scandinavian context. The traditional conflict has been connected to how the theological and diaconal reflection influenced the political building of the welfare state, which has been the signature of Scandinavian social policy since the 1930s. The question is thus: is the ambitious goal of including all citizens in the welfare state an ambition with diaconal significance? In the Grundtvig / Wingren tradition of Lutheran creation theology, the answer must be one of confirmation. The welfare state is obviously not the church. Nevertheless, caring for the creation cannot be irrelevant to God. The Danish theologian and philosopher Løgstrup (1905–1981) famously stated that we always carry something of the other in our hands (Løgstrup 1997). Moreover, by recognizing the calling from the other we are interwoven into such an interpretation of life that comes very close to a religious interpretation.

In a historical parallel, Danish scholars – in particular Knudsen (2000) and Østergaard (2005) – have asked whether the start of the welfare state in reality was initiated with the Church ordinances during the time of the Reformation. The reformers (including Luther’s close collaborator Bugenhagen, who wrote the Danish-Norwegian church ordinance) argued that the responsibility for the poor, the sick and the needy were to be transferred from the ecclesial and monastic hierarchy to the King. The King should, with mandate from the Church, take care of those with social needs. Against this backdrop, theologians and historians have claimed that there is a close and significant relation between the universal ambition of the welfare state and the Christian model of society.

The recognition of all good deeds, also those performed by the welfare state, as part of God’s will and responsibility, radicalizes the question of the spaces and the agents of diaconia. Borders become open, definitions blurred, other people than the inscribed might belong, etc.

In this way, the significance of the outside and extra nos is an important heritage coming out of the Scandinavian interpretation of diaconia. At the same time, the extra nos and the outside as spaces of discovering God’s presence, is an issue beyond the Scandinavian context. Today, in times of multi-religiosity, migration, and populism, the outside and the extra nos have become contested again, this time bringing new challenges. There are strong contemporary positions (e.g., Ward 2000, Cavanaugh 2009), who, once again, argue that the present situation requires – more than ever – a concentration of Christian identity and communities. The extra nos position of Wingren and Grundtvig, therefore, needs to be re-thought and to be re-connected. What kind of extra nos is relevant in diaconia today?

In contemporaneity it is no longer necessarily only the welfare state or the traditions of Scandinavian culture that represent the extra nos and the outside. The call of the others has now become calls of others who belong to different life worlds...
and challenging religious, cultural and political traditions; and the most challenging call does not even come from humans, it comes from the non-human, from nature.

Therefore, the spatial conflict of the *extra nos* of diaconia is both different and new at the same time. The argument of restriction, however, remains the same: Christians need to protect and develop their identity. The argument of the *extra nos* needs new creativity: How to identify an identity that is not one’s own? The following will sketch out some proposals, moving to contexts beyond the well-known and the safe. The *extra nos* and the other spaces (heterotopias) must establish themselves within decolonial contexts. To make the challenge embodied: Here are some narratives from South Africa.

## 2 Walking the Third Space

When the Congolese refugee Nisha Mlele (name given to her for anonymity by the author) walked through the South African township where she lived one morning in early autumn 2018, the smells, colors and heat were the same as every day. However, for Nisha, this was not an average day, this was her first walk through the township since her husband had died some weeks before. As a child, Nisha and her family fled civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Her journey as a refugee, which also included years spent in different refugee camps in Tanzania, finally brought her to South Africa, where she can stay, but with no public support. A few months before the walk described above, her husband, also a refugee from the DRC, died suddenly from a brain stroke. His family suspected that the stroke was caused by injuries associated with an assault some weeks previously. In many South African regions, especially some people and leaders from the Zulu nation, the historical natives, practice violent xenophobia against other African refugees settling in Zulu areas.

That day, however, Nisha was not walking alone. She was with her pastor and the researcher, the white professor now narrating this story. Nisha attends Sunday services in the township, facilitated by the pastor, singing Swahili hymns and spending time with friends who are also refugees. During weekdays, the pastor organizes activities supporting refugees to find work, accommodation and he does advocacy work for refugees within the local municipality. In other words: He carries out classical diaconia.

Nisha’s walk illustrates a symbolic *extra nos*. During one visit to Nisha together with the pastor the researcher asked whether the three of them could take a walk through the neighborhood. During all the other visits they had just been talking inside Nisha’s house. The walk was primarily intended for changing context, but it turned out to symbolize a lot more. During the walk, the pastor is second in line. Nisha leads, the pastor and the researcher are behind her. The everyday belongs to Nisha.
Walking together, sensing the concrete everyday space of a South African township is everything but reflective theology. Nevertheless, the walk is a piece of spatial, heterotopic diaconia in the Foucauldian and Lefebvrian sense. The sensory level embodies what Lefebvre called the lived space. It is, no doubt, a heterotopic space, an ‘other’ space, also known as the third space (Soja 1996). The walkers spatialize a sensory presence, at the same time connecting and interconnecting. Renewing and confirming the lived spaces of the everyday are the God surprises of diaconia. God performs within the calling from creation.

Nisha and her everyday initiate a heterotopic diaconia. It is a walk where spaces are conquered, and roles are inverted. She is symbolically in the front and the hierarchy is behind. The conventional church decenters and there is a new one emerging, *extra nos*. The walk embodies a perception of diaconia very different from the classical version initiated in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. There the subject of diaconia was the church. The Nisha walk symbolizes a situation where the church is not the only dominating subject. Nisha’s lead illustrates a diaconia where ordinary people, the *extra nos*, are the most significant. The walk is, of course, facilitated and initiated by the scholar and the pastor. In this sense it still has aspects of classical diaconia. Nevertheless, the practice of it becomes different, roles are changing, church structures are less dominant, almost dissolving. There is an *extra nos* in symbolically walking.

### 3 The Third Space and the Church Space

In itself, God’s spatial presence is not a surprise in the story of diaconia. Most diaconia narratives are about this presence, how to pursue or achieve the sacred glimpses of a more just and a more decent life, especially for the poor and the underprivileged. There is a historical tradition of a spatial diaconia, initiated in the early church. One might call this the tradition of the monastic hospital.

One historical and still visible example is the Ospedale dello Spirito Santo, situated only a few minutes’ walk from St Peter’s Square in Rome. Today, the eleventh-century building is a part-modern Italian hospital, part-museum, where one of the most significant hospital rooms (historically as well as theologically), can still be seen, with its huge, rectangular building and altar in the center. To the right there is the women’s ward, to the left the men’s ward. All beds were situated so that one could see the altar while lying on the pillow. The monastic hospital is a symbolic and thoughtful representation of many contemporary and substantial discussions of diaconia.

Historically, hospitals were organic parts of religious institutions, also in pre-Christian traditions. Greek sites show traces of specific rooms for the sick, built in connection with groups of priests or other sacred representatives of the religious site (Thompson and Goldin 1975). This tradition continued into the first Christian cen-
turies. The hospital was either an integrated part of the monastery, or the hospital itself expanded into a total ecclesial space.

The paradox is this: The monastic hospital, for many still today holds a significant diaconal practice. It was exactly what the Protestant (Luther and Pragman [1521] 1964) reformers most wanted to impact. The monastic hospital was the opposite of the *extra nos*. Even if there were exceptions, and many different traditions developing within the Protestant (Lutheran) churches, the resurgence of hospitals in the first centuries after the radical years of the Reformation, were different from the monastic hospital from the Medieval Ages. The decisive point was: Always outside (*extra nos*) the now demolished monasteries. This is the start of the diaconia as modernity. The caring for the sick and the needy developed as manifestations of the process of differentiation, no longer chaired (and controlled) by the ecclesial hierarchy. Many hospitals, even though they were often run by Christian people or organizations, became part of what later generations would label secularization, taken to mean disconnecting from the ecclesial structures.

Modern diaconia was shaped in this context. What followed in the diaconal revival movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth century challenged the *extra nos* once again. The complaints about a decrease in the specific Christian profile of the diaconal work in institutions and churches on the one hand, and the need for a more just sharing of social goods became a starting point for the period where diaconia often stood up against what the diaconal leaders of the time labeled as secular society. The monastic hospital was not reintroduced, but a permanent tension was born. The diaconia movement was strengthening and began to contribute substantially to the construction of the modern-day western world, both in the North and in the South. Diaconia, especially in parts of Africa, China and India took on important and influential roles in the different and numerous colonies they occupied.

When Nisha fled from DRC via Tanzania, she could have travelled to areas in Southern Tanzania. In the areas close to Lake Malawi, German missionaries from the Berliner Missionswerk, moved north from South Africa and settled at the shores of the lake in the small village of Matema. The Lutheran hospital is still there today, receiving primarily HIV and malaria patients, and cooperating with the other Lutheran hospitals further North. In the same area there are schools, churches, and villages, all impacted by Lutheran traditions and customs. The missionary diaconia contributed to the ambiguous project of modernizing and colonizing the African continent. The Berliner Mission in Matema, Tanzania is just one illustrative case of this.

The diaconal mission narrative deepens the significance of the Nisha Mlele’s township walk. Nisha’s walk is facilitated by a pastor and joined by a professor, but she literally walks away from them. The walk also symbolizes a shift from colonial to heterotopic and decolonial diaconia. The indigenous, originally the receivers of diaconia, turn around and perform beyond the charities. In the midst of the precarious township life there are no diaconal institutions. In this symbolic act the discussions and the tensions move in directions far away from the diaconia discussions.
of the nineteenth and even the twentieth century. Space, resistance, and embodied empowerment are moving to the center.

4 An Epistemological Challenge: Developing a New Discipline

In contemporary Germany, Scandinavia and elsewhere, the institutions, organizations and projects coming out of the Inner Mission context have impacted and continue to impact on the interpretation of what diaconia is. In addition, the paradox is that the Inner Mission grounded the diaconal turn of the eighteenth century and onwards, partly implying a Protestant revival of the model of the Ospedale dello Santo Spirito. The argument was that churches needed to engage more meaningfully in real-life challenges, for missionary reasons, as well as to ameliorate conditions for the poor and the sick themselves. The diaconal movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, was born out of this realization. The issue of the space for diaconia was central. The churches (and inner missions) should expand beyond the space of the church hospital in Rome, and from the sacramental hospital ward, move from the rather disengaged Lutheran orthodoxy, towards the urban poor and today, to the global poor.

Theodor Schäfer (Schäfer 1914) was the first to propose that there was a need to study and research what was, during his time, the increasing influence of the Inner Mission diaconia. Schäfer called this study field *Diakonik*. Schäfer's interest was to give more significance to the Inner Mission and its projects for people in social and spiritual “need”.

*Diakonik* was meant to be a scientific study of these practices in the Inner Mission context. This word is still in use to this day. In Germany, where the discipline *Diakoniewissenschaft* is established in many universities, the field of study is often, like in Heidelberg, a branch of Practical Theology. There are also diaconal studies and professors in several European universities. In Nordic countries, there are no specific institutes for the study of diaconia like there are in Germany, but there are chairs at Universities and University colleges in Oslo, Uppsala, and Stockholm and in different Danish and Finnish institutions.

The contemporary challenge for all these kinds of diaconal studies is to move beyond the narrow field of the *Diakonik*. The issue of the outside and the *extra nos* seems difficult to pose within that context. The Nisha Mlele walk challenges the different *Diakonik* research traditions. Nisha enjoys meeting neighbors and friends after so many months absent. She reconquers a greater space.

There is no altar and no ward in Nisha’s walk, but there is an obvious joy in encountering others. Neither is any direct vocation taking place. Nisha leads the walk herself, a walk of reconnecting, hugging her DRC neighbor, who seeing Nisha coming, runs to her house to tidy before her friend (and the pastor and the professor)
visit. We share in the sensations of the room, the smells, the friendly voices chatting. We are, in a way, decentered from both church and vocation, and still, there are all reasons to call this diaconia. Roles are inverted, gender, power and spirituality are not in someone’s specific property. It is a disruption and a decentering of what used to be called diaconia.

5 Theoretical Aspects and Concepts

One first basic criteria of the decentering is that the institutional church does not act in Nisha’s name. Nisha is the actor. Not Diakonik, but freedom walk. Socially, one might call the context, the subaltern context. However, different from Spivak (Spivak 1988), the subaltern (Nisha) speaks a lot, sensory speaking, audible speaking, another language that is not the language initiated by the professor and the scholar, Nisha spatializes with language during the walk. This is third space; the decentering heterotopia that mirrors the surrounding spaces, as defined by Foucault (Foucault 1986).

The walk Nisha performs is an embodied spirituality, not as an instrument of transformation, but as an organic part of the transformation itself. Nisha walks spaces of justice, joy and recognition. The institutional church, the pastor, (and the professor) walking two steps behind her. Nevertheless, Nisha walks in the front, taking the space back in her social context, remaking her relations with her neighbors and friends, receiving inclusion and generosity, reclaiming the space that has been hijacked by the paradoxical xenophobia.

This implies that the traditional (colonial) binary of the religious and the secular does not make sense when trying to interpret the walk. The Nisha walk is a seemingly very secular practice, but in the context presented above it is not. More than 70 years ago, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Bonhoeffer and Barnett 2012) criticized Karl Barth for not being aware of the Arkandiziplin. By that, Bonhoeffer meant that Barth was unable to see and formulate how the gospel was embodied in the world with no boasting whatsoever. What seemed secular was in fact not: it was the secret of the gospel incarnated in lived life. Nisha walks the Arkandiziplin.

Two generations of scholars have discussed what Bonhoeffer really intended with his Barth critique and whether the critique was fair. What matters here, however, is that Bonhoeffer’s critique does make sense in the context presented above. The decentered, heterotopic diaconia as the embodied, spatial agency of people, is the diaconal praxis to look for. Here is the Arkandiziplin, more fruitful for the discussion of diaconia in a paradigm other than the established Diakonik trajectory.

The Diakonik tradition presupposes that diaconal practice and diaconal theology belongs to ecclesiology and grow out of it as a theological discipline. It is the church that acts, the central category in the Diakonik tradition. The decentering of diaconia is an act of God in the hands of humans. Sometimes it happens as an explicit part of a church, sometimes in the grey zone and sometimes just anywhere. The Nisha walk is situated in the ambiguous space in between the grey zone and the ‘anywhere’. The
basic point is that diaconia is a decentering, spatial act where people are connected, and justice is enhanced.

6 The Church as Event

Based on the above, diaconia is about empowerment, social transformation, and justice. Yet, those who are empowered, transformed, and enjoying expanded notions of justice are themselves working actively to achieve them. Reconstructing subjectivities within new spaces is the core element of diaconia. This performs innovation as well as ecclesial significance. In the case of Nisha, she leads the walk; the pastor and the professor come two steps behind. Nevertheless, it is the pastor, who has contributed to making the walk possible. He knows her for many years, assists her to find a small income, invites her to Sunday services and facilitates the walk on that specific day. However, Nisha walks in front, the pastor decenters.

In Protestant dogmatic, the church is an event. In Protestant theology, therefore, it is misleading to look only at the institutional side of diaconia. Diaconia embodies dogmatically what the *extra nos* is substantially about.

This is, theologically speaking, the reason why the Reformers closed the monastic hospitals in their areas. The decentering movement needed to be performed in a robust manner. In Oslo, Norway, the stones from a demolished Cistercian monastery were used for construction of the Royal castle. These were radical manifestations of a decentering reformation.

7 Decolonizing Diaconia

Based on a substantial critique of colonial power, including churches and Christendom, Catherine Walsh and Walter Mignolo (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) have developed what they call a decolonial approach. The decolonial is the explicit resistance to colonial hegemony. The decolonial focuses on bottom-up-practices, indigenous traditions, everyday local knowledges, especially in the Global South. The intention is to reestablish all under-researched and normatively insignificant practices and life-worlds as sources of resistance and empowerment, no longer as victimized receivers of so-called colonial beneficence.

The *extra nos*, decentering, heterotopic diaconia in the example of Nisha could also be seen as part of this decolonial trajectory. The introduction to this article located the origin of the outside to a tension within Scandinavian theology and diaconia. The Nisha narrative has expanded the *extra nos* into a much larger context where it belongs today. In the decolonial context of Mignolo and Walsh, the Nisha practice is a trace of a new diaconia. The empowerment comes from a decentering of the church, intending to avoid the colonial violence of its centering. This also means that the township walk leaves the secular/sacred binary. Surpassing the clas-
This empowering aspect of diaconia is, however, also its theological challenge. It can be illustrated through the important and influential scholarly and activist work of the South African theologian Gerald West (West 1995, 2013). West has contributed to African liberation theologies since the last years of apartheid. Strongly influenced from the Kairos document (2010), West for many years identified with the third historical period presented in the Kairos document, the prophetic theology. Theology had to act prophetically; the churches had to be on the side of the oppressed. Church theology could not develop without prophetic practice, aiming at freedom and empowerment of people of colour and the underprivileged.

Over the last few years, West, however, has published more on what he now calls “people’s theology” (West 2012). Churches are no longer the only source of theology; churches might not even have the only theological competence. There is a theology of the people, meaning that the resisting practices of the oppressed themselves are the new sources of theology.

Gerald West’s theology of the people and the diaconia of the decentering church move in the same direction. The minister walking with Nisha, literally two steps behind, embodies and symbolizes a non-instrumental diaconia of the people. It is the walking, the township neighbors, the smells, and the invitations to meals, including the resistance to all violence and injustice, that is the diaconia of the people. It is diaconia because it is a church-facilitated embodied event, but at this moment, the church is at least two steps behind, leaving space for the people, for Nisha. She empowers and resists by walking, by walking extra nos.

However, this means that the theology of diaconia can no longer be viewed solely from a one-sided functionalistic point of view. The traditional, diaconal, functionalist contribution to church and society in itself is, of course, still important and remains one of the major contributions of the church to modern-day society. However, these practices need to be critically analyzed with regard to how much they contribute today to the decentering practices of diaconia.

The reception, the entanglement of earth, smells, expectations, colors, and voices; the pastor still two steps behind, all make this walk different from the functionalist (and colonial) diaconia. The diaconia of the Nisha walk involves Nisha taking the lead while the church (symbolized by the pastor) is reducing and almost dissolving behind her. It is Nisha in her sensible relations to the earth that is the start of a diaconia beyond colonial faces of modernity.

8 Heterotopic Diaconia

The American sociologist Rogers Brubaker (Brubaker 2017) has coined the concept of “Christianism” to label the fusion of populism and Christianity. Christianism implies
that nations should avoid Muslims and other non-Christian immigrants. The Christianists claim that it is by disconnecting from non-Christians that you protect secularity, liberal freedom, LGBT rights and universal Human Rights.

The Christianist version offers one profile of Christian identity. Christian faith is preserved and protected by not allowing anyone but the faithful to be the value center of the nation. God is on your side, but this is not a God that surprises. God is in his church and the diaconia protects what it should protect.

The heterotopic diaconia is the opposite of the Christianist diaconia. The heterotopic diaconia represents another option for Christian identity. Christian performance happens also when someone like Nisha walks away from the classical center. This is the diaconia of the people (West 2012), and this is the diaconia where the Trinitarian God acts. Leaving the center in order to spatialize for others is at the core of Christianity’s other identity profile.

Traditionally, the academic study of diaconia calls itself multidisciplinary. That is, in a way, true. A variety of methods and disciplines can be drawn on to analyze all the different aspects of the Nisha walk, the justice-making connected to it and the organized work following from it and leading up to it. Still, it follows from this article that diaconal studies belong to theology in a mix between ethnography, ethics, dogmatic and practical theology. Nevertheless, it also follows that the starting point does not come from above, but from the experiences and the embodied connectedness that people share and experience. This starting point is the basic, and the theology of diaconia needs to be developed and reformulated any time the smells and the injustice are new, and a new God surprise is needed.

The heterotopic diaconia is therefore not only a diaconia for the Nisha township walk. However, the important and decisive global diaconal work for justice and recognition needs to take its values from the insights of the walk. Here is the challenge for the future societal ambitions of diaconia. Colonial history has shaped the modern world. The challenge is to develop empowering structures and institutions that aim for the heterotopic, the decoloniality of diaconia.

9 Diaconia as Decolonial Counter-Conducts

This way of elaborating diaconia also points to interesting new perspectives for political theology. We can learn that from a parallel between the extra nos tradition developed above and the concept of counter conducts developed by Michel Foucault in the last years of his life. The walk of Nisha is a walk beyond the secular/religious binary. The church decenters, but in the extra nos tradition this does not mean that God is lost, on the contrary the Nisha walk subverts the conventional, but it opens a future through Nisha’s agency, “a diaconia of the people” (West 2012). The parallel is to be found exactly in this connection between resistance and blurred religion that is also present in Foucault’s interpretation of counter-conducts.
Counter-conducts developed from Foucault’s studies of pastoral power (Foucault 1994, 2006, 2007). Pastoral power means a practice where the abbot – since the early days of monastic history – has absolute control over the spiritual lives of the monks under him. The goal of this power was to rule the souls of the obedient. In a next step, Foucault then developed his theory of governmentality which was a prolonged pastoral power outside the monastery: “What I mean in fact is the development of power techniques oriented toward individuals and intended to rule them in a continuous and permanent way. If the state is the political form of a centralized and centralizing power, let us call pastorship the individualizing power” (Foucault 1994).

The strong and influential tradition of pastoral power was, for Foucault, the main source for how discipline, control and self-control developed in medicine, prisons, and institutions for “the mad”. Foucault’s seminal books on the history of medicine and the history of madness found its material, first of all, in French Catholic institutions and hospitals (Foucault 2006. However, parallel material has, of course, also been found in post-Reformation Protestant institutions (Villadsen 2011).

On this background, there is no doubt that Foucault was one of the main inspirations when Mignolo and Walsh developed their decolonial thinking. Colonial oppression involves economic and political oppression. Nevertheless, some of the main roots are in religion, especially in the traditions of pastoral power where power was executed in such a way that obedience and suppression became the norm. From this perspective, there are good reasons for Mignolo and Walsh to disconnect from religion. For them, religion belongs to the epistemological power that has mainly contributed to the colonial empire.

Nevertheless, there are traces of an opposite epistemological position in Foucault’s thinking, and this is the point where the decentering extra nos and the radical power critique of Foucault connect in a surprising way. Foucault himself is obviously not focused on the theology of a decentering church / diaconia, but he is, implicitly very close in his late elaborations on counter-conducts (Foucault 2006, 2007). Counter-conducts are religious traditions that have a liberating and empowering aspect. Not all kinds of pastoral power are oppressive, Foucault himself found evidence of such practices in mystical, eschatological movements in the late medieval period, traces of a religiososity other than the (controlling) Christianity of modernity: “Spirituality, intense forms of devotion, recourse to Scripture, and the at least partial re-qualification of asceticism and mysticism are all part of a kind of re-integration of counter-conduct within a religious pastorate” (Foucault 2007, 229). According to Davidson (Davidson 2011) the counter conducts, originating in these marginal areas of religion have a subversive aspect, taking a position different from the ecclesial power structures. There are good reasons to call counter-conducts heterotopic, decentering practices in their context.

Nisha Mlele’s township walk does not belong to the any kind of medieval mysticism or millenaristic speculation. Nevertheless, her decentering walk is a walk beyond the religious/secular binary, leaving the hierarchy two steps behind, and con-
structuring a new space for Nisha. It is a decolonial and diaconal counter-conduct that re-spatializes and symbolizes the decentering power.

**Bibliography**


Luther, Martin, and James H. Pragman, ed. 1964. *De votis monasticis Martini Lutheri Iudicium (A Translation of Parts III and IVa).* Saint Louis: Concordia Seminary.


