

Conclusion: Thinking through Missionary Work. Moral Geographies, Regeneration from the Margins, Sincerity, and the Gift Economy

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Introduction

The movie *Silence*, directed by Martin Scorsese, tells the story of two Portuguese Jesuit missionaries, Sebastião Rodrigues and Francisco Garupe, who travel to Japan in the hope of finding their mentor, Father Ferreira. In doing so, they hope to establish the truth behind rumours that Ferreira has renounced his Catholic faith after being captured and tortured.

The film is set on a missionary frontline in seventeenth-century Japan where Christians, including Europeans preaching the gospel, endure nothing but persecution and suffering. Characters include villagers practicing their faith in hiding; an indecisive and unstable young Japanese convert called Kichijiro, who is forced to renounce his faith by trampling on an image of Christ before witnessing family members being burned alive and one of his coreligionists being decapitated for having refused to apostatise; and families persecuted by a local inquisition and forced to denounce priests and spit on a cross while insulting the Virgin Mary, before seeing their village destroyed. The story focuses more specifically on the fate of a character named Rodrigues, who offers himself as a hostage in an attempt to save the villagers. After initially being released, he is re-captured after being betrayed by Kichijiro, who decides to return to his old masters. Rodrigues's jailers force him to attend the execution by drowning of four Japanese Christians and to watch his fellow traveller starve for having refused to apostatise. The Japanese local authorities interrogate him about the supposed power of his god, who never appears to intervene to save his followers, and order him to renounce his faith if he wants to put an end to the suffering endured by Christians in Japan. Throughout the film, he is seen suffering and becoming increasingly distressed about God's silence and inaction in the face of cruelty. He finally gives in when he hears Jesus telling him to trample on his image.

Rodrigues eventually finds Ferreira, who has adopted a Japanese name. Ferreira tells him that he turned away from his faith after realising that Christianity would never gain a foothold in Japan. Both are recruited by the local authorities to inspect goods imported from Europe, their task being to prevent Cath-

olic objects and symbols from entering the archipelago. Rodrigues gives up his priesthood, takes a Japanese wife, and appears to abandon his Christian faith. He eventually crosses paths again with Kichijiro who, having become a servant, repents and asks for absolution for his betrayal, which Rodrigues refuses to grant on the grounds that he is no longer a priest and does not have the power to absolve him. Rodrigues ends up dying in Japan years later. His body is cremated according to Buddhist ritual in a traditional casket bearing the inscription “Lost to God.” The film ends with his cremation. A closeup of his hand reveals a small wooden crucifix, presumably left there by his wife while his body was being prepared for the funeral. In other words, despite all the suffering he endured and God’s impenetrable silence, Rodrigues never abandoned his faith, experiencing it for many years in the “depths of his soul”, hidden from view.

In short, the film constructs an ideal image of the figure of the missionary—a figure who, despite all the suffering endured through his calling, perseveres in his faith. Scorsese’s obscure fresco also offers us an aesthetics of the martyrology of the Christian mission, as defined by Bernard Heyberger (see introduction of part 1 of this volume), evidence of which can be found in Christian missionary narratives in many places today, and especially in North Africa and the Middle East, where the idea of missionary failure is as common as narratives of success.¹ In the eyes of believers, both illustrate the glory of their God: the assumption is that by having died on the Cross, Christ is victorious, a notion just as widespread as the idea that faith grows through persecution.

The film also depicts missionary work as a transformative experience for missionaries, understood as a form of subjectivation through trials and tribulations widely found in the narratives available for ethnographic study within the evangelical nebula and beyond, indeed probably throughout Christianity as a whole, not unlike the narratives of the *dawatchis* in Islam.² The construc-

1 See Bernard Heyberger and Rémy Madinier, “Introduction,” in *L’islam des marges. Mission chrétienne et espaces périphériques du monde musulman XVIIe–XXe siècles* (Paris: IISMM/Karthala, 2011), 7. Just to mention two examples: in spite of their failure to convert people in large numbers, the Catholic Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916) or the Evangelical Christian Lilius Trotter (1853–1928), who both dedicated their life to mission in Algeria, became highly inspiring and sometimes venerated figures among their fellows.

2 Mathijs Pelkmans, “Frontier Dynamics: Reflections on Evangelical and Tablighi Missions in Central Asia,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 63 (2021): 212–241. There are many more similarities between different religions than is generally claimed, often in exaggeratedly schematic terms, by converts. Through observations of Tunisian converts, for example, we see numerous continuities, whether in comparing linguistic practices, amorous proximity to Jesus or a saint, questions of gender and sexuality or even the idea of the empowerment of the individual—whether through conversion or adherence to a *tariqa* or a *zāwiya*. See Katia Boissevain, “Corps et conversion au protestantisme évangélique au Maghreb: le lieu

tion and circulation of such narratives constitute an integral part of missionary activity and contribute to disseminating an entire imagery of missionary heroism—an imagery relayed by Scorsese in *Silence*. The gift economy,³ the gift of oneself, and even the loss of oneself through sacrifice to God lie at the heart of the Christian aesthetics of failure described here: missionary work is experienced as a salutary fight against the self, as a conquest in the spiritual world rather than an actual conquest of the physical world. Finally, *Silence* evokes the fantasy, or representation, of a hostile “elsewhere”, conceived as the frontier of the “civilised world” where pagan, cruel and violent obscurantism rule and that missionaries seek to resist. In other words, the fight against the self also amounts to a war against the forces of Evil, as embodied in an Other that must be transformed and policed by being led to God.

These various themes are addressed in different ways in all the chapters making up this volume and in the conference papers on which the chapters are based.⁴ Here, we propose to examine them by opening up a dialogue between the arguments put forward by the various contributors and our own research fields, namely Muslim sanctuaries, mosques, and churches in Tunisia and Morocco in the case of Katia Boissevain, and evangelical churches attended by Arabic-speaking migrants and migrants’ children in Sweden (originating predominantly from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq) in the case of Émir Mahieddin. Four points emerge from the chapters as key areas of overlap, offering heuristic research avenues for a comparative anthropology of the missionary phenomenon: 1) a comparative sociology of missionary work; 2) an analysis of missionary geographies and the associated spatial metaphors; 3) the question of mobility in missionary activity, a condition engendering anonymity and distrust and serving to cast suspicion over the authenticity of conversions;

de l'intimité avec Jésus,” in *Corps, religion et diversité*, ed. A.-L. Zwillling (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia/ L'Harmattan, 2019), 156.

3 The idea of gift economy was coined by early anthropologists to refer to systems of exchange based on reciprocity and social obligation to one another as opposed to capitalist economies based on the selling and buying commodities and self-interest. Marcel Mauss. *The Gift* (Chicago: Hau Books/Chicago University Press, 2016 (1925)).

4 This chapter collates reflections drawn from discussion panels in which the authors participated at the conference on “Missions et prédications: comparer et décloisonner l'étude du phénomène missionnaire. Moyen-Orient—Afrique du Nord (xix^e–xx^e siècle)” —“Missionary work and preaching: comparing and decompartmentalising the study of the missionary phenomenon. Middle East and North Africa (nineteenth–twenty-first centuries)” held in Rome from 30 September to 2 October, 2020. The essay draws on the many discussions between the participants and the organisers, to whom we are indebted, especially Séverine Gabry-Thienpont, Norig Neveu and Annalaura Turiano.

4) finally, an avenue focused on interpreting missionary activity through the prism of gift, exchange and debt.

1 A Comparative Sociology of Missionary Work and the International Division of God's Work

In his contribution to research on evangelical Christians in Turkey, Armand Aupiais refers to the different material conditions in which missionary work tends to be performed, noting that, in many cases, missionaries are not full-time professionals.⁵ The contributions cited here may be seen as offering an outline of a comparative sociology of missionary work, which should be seen as “work” in the true sense of the word, i.e. as an expenditure of energy aimed at transforming our human environment, a process that can sometimes cause suffering and from which added value can be created, at least in moral terms. Indeed, the metaphor is common among Christians, who often describe themselves as doing “the work of God.”⁶ Beyond this, there are surprising concomitant variations among the social forms of organisation of the division of God's work and the capitalist division of labour or entrepreneurial culture.⁷

We could attempt to develop a typology of missionary work, with each type involving different lived experiences of missionary activity as a function of the material conditions in which the activity is carried out. Gabrielle Angey's contribution can be read in this light, with Angey arguing that actors are embedded in different relations of subordination to the institution depending on their social position within it, from the headteachers of African Gulenist schools to the teachers and students themselves.⁸ The assumption is that material con-

5 See his chapter in this volume, “From Missionaries to Missionary Labour. Hypotheses on Contemporary Evangelical Missions Based in Istanbul (Turkey).”

6 Joseph Tonda, *La guérison divine en Afrique centrale (Congo/Gabon)* (Brazzaville: Karthala, 2002 [1997]), 57–60.

7 Nathalie Luca, “Pentecôtisme et esprit d'entreprise en Haïti,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 175 (2016): 105–106; Nathalie Luca and Rémi Madinier, “Introduction: les entreprises face au religieux,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 175 (2016), 15–16; Émir Mahieddin, *Faire le travail de Dieu. Une anthropologie morale du pentecôtisme en Suède* (Paris: Karthala, 2018), 151–152.

8 See Angey's contribution in this volume. Also see Gabrielle Angey, “Des vertus de l'inconfort: enjeux méthodologiques et analytiques d'une enquête sur le mouvement musulman turc de Fethullah Gülen,” *Terrains/Théories* [online] 10 (2019), consulted on 25th October 2020. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/teth/2173>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/teth.2173>.

ditions serve to shape perceptions of missionaries and attitudes toward them among the populations whom they wish to convert.

It would be difficult to establish a definitive, closed typology of missionary figures that fully captures the numerous contexts in which they operate and perform their work. After all, missionary work takes different forms in different social and historical circumstances. In the Scandinavian context, people returning from missionary work in the Middle East range from full-fledged bureaucrats to theology graduates working under a contract with a religious community, forming part of a labour agreement established by a union, providing them with a minimum wage and social protection to help them find another job on their return home—as pastor, teacher in a biblical school, social worker, etc. However, the missionary phenomenon comes in many different forms.

Alongside the “missionary-bureaucrat”, who sometimes acts as a diplomat representing a religious institution or as a development broker (by working as a nurse or a doctor, for example) rather than as a “soul seeker”, there is also the figure of the young “missionary-adventurer” barely out of their teenage years and backpacking their way across the world while preaching the Gospel in what amounts to a voyage of initiation, funded typically by savings built up through seasonal work, as shown in research by the sociologist Yannick Fer on the *Youth with a Mission* networks.⁹

In major European cities (such as Stockholm, but also Paris, Amsterdam, and London), one often encounters the figure of the “missionary in a rush”, a passionate amateur without a formal mandate from an established structure, entirely unpaid and taking advantage of public transport to preach the Word before heading off to the next station or inviting other passengers to church during brief phatic exchanges. Zakaria, aka “Ziko”, an Egyptian met in the Stockholm underground, was doing his utmost to engage with any Arabic speaker that he happened to come across, particularly those who, Coptic like him, had a visible cross tattooed on their wrist or at the base of their thumb on the back of their hand. He would often attend church accompanied by young Egyptians who had just arrived in Sweden.

To complete this overview, we should add the figure of the “missionary-crier” who, positioned at the entrances to the underground or on large city squares, exhorts passers-by to discard the values of the “physical world” and join Christ. There are many other forms of missionary work, shaped to a greater or lesser extent by the capacity of actors to transform their day-to-day lives or

9 Yannick Fer, *L'offensive évangélique. Voyage au cœur des réseaux militants de Jeunesse en Mission* (Genève: Labor & Fidès, 2010), 38–42.

professional circumstances into a missionary platform. Missionary work also has its own “stars” with a global reach and audience. We need only think of the most well-known figures in the region, such as the Moroccan televangelist Akh Rachid (Rachid Hammam is his real name) and Zakaria Botros from Egypt, whose shows, which are broadcast in Arabic, have proved hugely popular.¹⁰

Like any form of work, missionary work requires production tools. Among these, information and communication technologies play a particularly important role, especially in North Africa and the Middle East, where radio stations, satellite TV channels (*Al Hayat TV* and *Sat-7* being the most well-known in these regions¹¹) and websites are used to circumvent laws that place restrictions on evangelisation, either because the practice carries a social stigma or because it is prohibited by law.¹² By using media channels, missionaries have “access” to people’s homes directly without having to move, with only their image circulating in the wider world. Through the magic of technology, families may be converted while comfortably seated in their living room in Algiers or Tizi Ouzou from a TV studio in, say, Stockholm or Nicosia.

The combination of visual media mobility and human immobility can be an advantage. During the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, an Arabic-speaking pastor based in Sweden invested hugely in building his online presence after realising that many people were confined in their homes and had nothing else to do except watch television, often driven by anxiety, so he reported, about wanting information to help them interpret the global crisis. He compared the moment to the so-called “Black decade” in Algeria,¹³ when

10 Fatiha Kaouès, *Convertir le monde arabe. L'offensive évangélique* (Paris: CNRS, 2018), 138.

11 *Al Hayat* is based in Cyprus and was founded in 2003 by the Christian NGO *Al Hayat Ministries*. It broadcasts Christian programs mainly in Arabic in the Middle East, North Africa, North America and Australia. Naomi Sakr, *Arab Television* (London: IB Tauris, 2007), 152. *SAT7* was launched in 1996 and broadcasts programmes in Persian, Turkish and Arabic to more than 70 countries throughout the world. It claims to reach more than 25 million people in the Middle East and North Africa. Source: “SAT7 appoints new CEO”—<https://www.sat7usa.org/ceo-rita-el-mounayer/>. Last viewed on October 8th, 2021.

12 Far from any kind of legal or political homogeneity, we find contrasting and unequal situations in all countries within the Arab Muslim world. Katia Boissevain, “Le christianisme en Tunisie et au Maroc: une évangélisation à deux vitesses”, in *Prosélytismes. Les nouvelles avant-gardes religieuses*, ed. F. Kaouès & M. Laakili (Paris: CNRS, 2016), 120.

13 The “Black Decade” is a common expression to refer to mass violence that occurred in Algeria between 1991 and the beginning of the 2000s, opposing different Islamist movements to the government. The armed conflict followed a coup led by the Algerian army negating an Islamist victory in the first free legislative elections in the country’s history. These events, alternately referred to as “the dirty war”, “the Algerian civil war” or “the years of terrorism” according to the political interpretation one has of them, saw up to 150,000

people, living in fear, were open both physically and psychologically to possibilities and opportunities for media-based evangelisation precisely because they were mostly homebound, keen as they were to protect themselves against what was going on in the outside world. In other words, we need to take account of the material framework and circumstances that enable missionary work and preaching to be carried out, including where these require circumventing regulations aimed at prohibiting such practices. Yet, despite all this, interaction, even of the remote and virtual kind, remains central, and evangelical shows on the radio and online are invariably combined with contacts on social media or by mail to provide more personalised individual responses and support to prospective converts. In Sweden, for example, volunteers are recruited among the Arabic-speaking diaspora to maintain links in countries across North Africa and the Middle East and, in some cases, to bring people together in country.

There is, in short, an entrepreneurial dimension to missionary work in the sense that the aim can be to convert the constraints imposed by legal frameworks into opportunities, creating a malleable form of missionary work capable of adapting, even in purely formal terms, to legal regulations and of changing from one country to the next. As an aside, another figure can be added to our suggested typology: the figure of the “musician-missionary”, extending the tradition of the suave forms of evangelisation referred to by Bernard Heyberger and using emotion as a channel for conversion. Where persuasion by words alone is not enough, people’s hearts need to be touched—not least through the medium of art.¹⁴ For example, a charismatic American pastor referred during an interview to having gone on a missionary “tour” with a rock band, for whom it was much easier to obtain a visa to enter the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. Emanuela Trevisan Semi also shows how constraining regulations imposed by the Emperor of Ethiopia in the end of the 19th century failed to prevent European missionaries from developing an entry strategy to gain access to Ethiopia through the intermediary of “indigenous missionaries”, who were assumed to be more effective at converting other natives based on the hypothesis, common to many missionary fronts, of the effectiveness of “race affinity.” Thus, like any form of economic production, God’s work creates a racial divi-

victims. For more details, see Abderrahmane Moussaoui, *De la violence en Algérie. Les lois du chaos* (Arles: Actes Sud/MMSH, 2006).

- 14 Katia Boissevain, “Les chants évangéliques en Tunisie. Des chants locaux venus d’ailleurs,” *Science et Vidéo*, 4 (2013), URL: <http://scienceandvideo.mmsch.univ-aix.fr/numeros/4/Pages/2.aspx>; Mahieddin, Émir. 2013. “Les musiciens du Christ. L’esthétique du pentecôtisme suédois,” *Science & Vidéo*, 4 (2013), URL: <http://scienceandvideo.mmsch.univ-aix.fr/numeros/4/Pages/3.aspx>.

sion of labour that can be seen at work internationally. What we also see is a gendered division of God's work, albeit varying according to time and place. In evangelical contexts, women are often seen as being especially gifted missionaries, combining evangelisation with care work. This is not unconnected to the local gendered divisions of capitalist work. Placed as they are in a subordinate position, women often find themselves performing their missionary work through tasks that amount to domestic work, or they may be sent to places seen as being the most challenging locations before later being joined by men—once all the hard work has been done, so to speak—to celebrate baptisms, as was the case in Sweden in the early days of the Pentecostal movement.¹⁵ Female missionaries, who are often celibate or single, would often be posted to the farthest corners of the country, or to the remotest areas of countries in the South, where some were even allowed to subvert the existing gender order in the centres to which they had been posted.¹⁶ Such was the case, for example, of the Swedish Pentecostal missionaries in Brazil in the 1930s, who had all the attributes of a pastor, at least until the local Brazilian pastors began contesting their status.¹⁷

2 Moral Geographies of Missionary Work: Spiritual War and Regeneration from the Margins

The theme of the elective affinity between missionary work and social margins, as raised by Armand Aupiais but also found in Naïma Bouras's work, appears to be an important focus of analysis. Missionary work can target the margins, just as the margins can guide and direct missionary work. In a sense, missionaries often find themselves occupying a dual position of marginality, in both the society that they have left behind and the society that they are seeking to integrate. Some become highly skilled cultural brokers, mediators, or diplomats

15 On gender division of labour in Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity, see Maité Mas-kens, "Identités sexuelles pentecôtistes: féminités et masculinités dans les assemblées bruxelloises," *Autrepart*, 49, no. 1 (2009), 65–81; Malogne-Fer, Gwendoline & Fer Yannick (eds.), *Femmes et pentecôtismes. Enjeux d'autorité et rapports de genre* (Genève: Labor & Fidès, 2015).

16 On the gender division of labour in missionary work in the Middle East, see Norig Neveu & Séverine Gabry-Thienpont, "Missions and the Construction of Gender in the Middle East," *Social Science and Missions*, 34, no. 1–2 (2021), 1–27.

17 Émir Mahieddin, "La parité en Christ. La féminisation du pentecôtisme suédois," in *Femmes et pentecôtismes. Enjeux d'autorité et rapports de genre*, ed. G. Malogne-Fer and Y. Fer (Genève: Labor & Fidès, 2015): 243–264.

in the dialogue between different worlds. In an altogether different sense, and perhaps more interestingly from our perspective, missionary work can serve to reinforce sociocultural margins and even produce them by transforming spaces into key fields for missionary work. In other words, missionary work may be envisaged as an attempt to symbolically construct a frontier, in the sense of a pioneer front.

The anthropologist Mathijs Pelkmans argues that frontiers suggest the idea of a wilderness, of a potential yet to be realised, a land conceived as “other” that needs pacifying and regulating. In this sense, frontiers come to be seen as horizons toward which we project our imagination, invested with ambivalent feelings (fear and desire, anxiety, and hope) that are engaged, and engage us, in action: they represent both margins and projects.¹⁸ The aim of this process is to regenerate, and thereby construct, a centre by working at the boundaries of a group and/or territory. These practices often go hand in hand with the idea of the subversion of a social order aimed at restoring a defeated spiritual order. The practice of regeneration through symbolic spaces conceived as margins appears to be characteristic of all three monotheistic religions in missionary, propagation, and preaching activities, whether the aim is to convert people outside the group or to reconvert members deemed to have “lost their way” despite already forming part of the group, as illustrated by the case of the Tablighi in Islam and the promoters of the Jewish Orthodox website such as Israel Torah, examined in this volume by Sébastien Tank-Storper. In his analysis of the conditions of (re)conversion to Judaism, Tank-Storper notes that a concern for what goes on at the boundaries amounts to a way of regulating what goes on at the centre—in other words, of establishing or reinforcing an orthodoxy. The centre-periphery dialectic takes different forms in different missionary contexts and can often be metaphorised in space, shaping and directing religious networks and practices, as well as the forms of symbolic embeddedness found in specific territories.

In September 2017, the charismatic evangelical congregation of Vineyard Stockholm moved out of the centre of Stockholm to the city’s outskirts in Solentuna Municipality.¹⁹ For the new pastor, Andreaz Hedén, God’s work could

18 Mathijs Pelkmans, 2021. “Frontier Dynamics,” 222.

19 Vineyard is an association of evangelical congregations that claims to be “non-denominational.” It was founded in 1974 by Ken Gulliksen in the United States and reached Scandinavia in the beginning of the 1990s after a conference held by its charismatic leader, John Wimber (1934–1997), who had his roots both in the quaker and the hippie movement. It insists on the efficiency of charismata, the gifts of the Holy Spirit (speaking in tongues and its interpretation, prophecy, healing, vision, etc.), while distancing itself from Pentecostal and Charismatic theologies, as well as their liturgical styles, which they considered to be too “showy”. It advocates a relaxed style, subsumed in the slogan: “come as you are!”

only be done among the marginalised. Andreaz was a graduate in the history of ideas and an avid reader of Nietzsche and Foucault and could often be found wearing a Palestinian keffiyeh. In his notoriously complex preaching, he would claim that gender is a social construct and that quantum physics can help to grasp God's power. He insisted on the fact that the role of the Church was played out in the most vulnerable quarters of society, where social bonds are often broken. In his view, the Church needs to act there as a restorative force (*en helande kraft*) among the dispossessed and marginalised. The entire congregation followed him in his vision, shared one evening in January 2017 during tense exchanges among the assembly. Andreaz stood up in tears, enjoining his coreligionists to think about the fact that while they were quarrelling amongst themselves in the warmth of the church, refugees and migrants were sleeping rough in the biting cold of the Swedish winter and, that in doing so, the congregation was failing to perform its role as a representative of Christ.

While downtown Stockholm remains a key location for evangelists on account of its political centrality, another site has become a major new location for evangelisation: suburbia (*förorten*).²⁰ It is precisely here that members of the Vineyard Stockholm congregation, like others, have chosen to do God's work, shifting their missionary frontier to the suburbs. Similar dynamics can be seen at work in other denominations. For example, the pastor of one of the first Pentecostal churches in the centre of Stockholm took pride in the fact that most of his members came from the suburbs to attend services and that the original members of the congregation, who originally were native Swedes, had been replaced over time by young people from immigrant backgrounds. The Church had begun evangelising activities in four different suburban locations to convince migrants who, according to the pastor, found it easier than the average "Swede" (*Svensken*) to give their life to Christ because "they already believe in the existence of another world."

In this urban context, an environment affected by the so-called "migrant crisis" widely reported in the Swedish media since the early 2010s, new religious subjectivities have emerged, together with new "moral geographies". The concept, developed by the anthropologist Kristin Krause, raises questions of hierarchy and power and is a useful tool for analysing representations of mis-

20 In a Swedish context, the category "suburb" (*förorten*) refers to areas located at the periphery of major urban centres and thought to be populated by migrants or descendants of migrants. The category is associated with districts built in the 1970s as part of the "million programme" (*miljonprogrammet*), which, as its name suggests, resulted in the construction of a million new homes within just a few years.

sionary spaces.²¹ Moral geographies are constructed at the intersection of knowledge of physical space and subjectivities metaphorically articulated with socio-economic topographies, while also involving media representations of place and historical information. Many charismatics and Pentecostals cling to the romantic ideal of the Christian conceived as a spiritual soldiers of Jesus fighting for social justice in the shadows of tower blocks, serving in the city's most stigmatised neighbourhoods.²² In doing so, by climbing down the ladder of the socioeconomic topography and moving away from city centres, Pentecostal activists, known as "concrete missionaries" (*betongmissionärer*)—just as we speak of missionaries in the jungle—elevate themselves spiritually by moving closer to the suburbs. They also invert urban hierarchies: spaces located at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder become the highest in the spiritual order.

Young Swedish Christians such as those described above are not alone in living under the seductive power of marginalised urban suburbs, areas often associated with a degree of charisma and inspiring fascination as the site of the Other, a space invested with exoticism.²³ As noted by the Swedish geographer Irene Molina, the city's suburbs operate as "counter-sites" for the construction of "Swedishness", making them key spaces in the definition of the Swedish national character. In other words, they stand as the negative polarity against which normality is defined. Here, the suburb becomes a symbolically charged space for Pentecostals, a space for cultivating one's Christian qualities while engaging in an exercise of subjectivation—in the form of helping the Other and showing hospitality beyond difference. In short, as the "Orient of the interior", the suburbs are *the* site of difference in Sweden.²⁴

21 Kristin Krause, "Orientations. Moral Geographies in Transnational Ghanaian Pentecostal Networks," in *The Anthropology of Global Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism*, ed. S. Coleman & R. Hackett (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 82–85.

22 Although it is common knowledge to many, it is important to remind that, contrary to a surprisingly still widely held belief, not all evangelicals and Pentecostals preach prosperity as a salutary force, conceived as the religious equivalent of neoliberal conservatism. Many different currents preach social justice, can be highly critical of capitalism, with some even claiming to adhere to a theology of liberation. Mae Elise Cannon and Andrea Smith, *Evangelical Theologies of Liberation and Justice* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019.).

23 Per-Markku Ristilampi, *Rosengård och den svarta poesin. En studie av modern annorlunda-het* (Stockholm: Symposion, 1994).

24 Émir Mahieddin, "Latin American Pentecostals in Sweden. Belief and Mistrust in Stockholm's Urban Space," in *Migration, Religion and Existential Well-being*, ed. O. Larsson, M. Kindström Dahlin and A. Winell (London: Routledge, 2020), 175–176.

For example, Rinkeby is a highly stigmatised neighbourhood nationally and is often regarded as the prime example of Sweden's failure to integrate immigrant populations because of the catastrophic impact of 1970s urban architecture.²⁵ An Arabic-speaking evangelical church consisting mostly of Egyptians has been established there since the 1980s, with a pastor seeing the church as an outpost on the missionary front operating at the heart of "Muslim territory".²⁶ In his eyes, the heart of missionary work lies at the heart of the margins, in a neighbourhood with one of the worst reputations in the city. Most of the members of the congregation no longer live in the area, having grown tired with, and, in some cases, fearful of, the increasingly "Islamised" atmosphere and the "moral pressure from Islamists".²⁷ Many of them left the area after climbing the social ladder just as the neighbourhood's attractiveness was starting to decline, opting instead to meet in a university chapel several kilometres away from Rinkeby, with the only remaining link to the area being the church's name (except for a few occasional appearances put in by members to evangelise and a Christian creche run by Swedish volunteers belonging to the church). However, the fact that the church chose to keep its name is a symbolically im-

25 The suburban dialect, characterised by a working-class accent associated with the various marginalised layers of population from immigrant backgrounds, is known as "*Rinkebysvenska*" (Swedish from Rinkeby).

26 Although Egyptians are a very small minority among the people coming from Arabic-speaking countries lately established in Sweden (about 8,000 Egyptians for a total of around 400,000 people who have a citizenship from the Arab world in 2019, 2,000 of whom declare themselves to be affiliated to the Coptic church of Sweden), they constitute a majority in the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in the Stockholm region (about 1,000 people according to a rough estimation from fieldwork visits in the dozen Arabic-speaking congregations of the Swedish capital in 2020). *Rinkeby Internationella Församling* (the International Assembly of Rinkeby) was founded in 1989 by a couple of Swedish missionaries returning from a long-term mission in Egypt, Lars and Margareta Mörling. It was the first autonomous Arabic-speaking Evangelical church in Stockholm and is affiliated to a Swedish Evangelical federation of churches called *Evangeliska frikyrkan*. Since January 2020, it has been led by a Swedish Egyptian pastor, Basem Mekhail, who used to be a missionary in Tunisia. See Émir Mahieddin, "Arabiska församlingen," in *Internationell Pentekostalism i Storstockholm. Tre församlingar i ett förändrat landskap*, ed. Katarina Westerlund (Uppsala: CRS Work Series, 2021), 90–98.

27 According to the census of 2014, 90,7% of Rinkeby's population are categorised as having a "foreign background", which implies, according to the central statistical office in Sweden, individuals who were born abroad or whose parents were born abroad. 43,6% of the neighbourhood's residents have their roots in Africa and 36,6% in Asia, the most important group being from Somalia, the vast majority of whom are Muslims. Source: Archives online—Website: "Statistik om Stockholm"—Data on "Rinkeby": <https://web.archive.org/web/20160420085949/http://www.statistikomstockholm.se/index.php/omradesfaktax>. Last viewed on October 8th, 2021.

portant act, highlighting its presence in an area perceived as having been all but abandoned by the authorities.

Moral geographies go hand-in-hand with a logic of spiritual mapping, a point well made by Harvey Cox and Nadège Mézié.²⁸ Beyond the scale of the city, some spaces come to be identified as pertaining to, or associated with, Good or Evil, while others, such as Rinkeby in Stockholm, represent key strategic points to be reconquered as part of a spiritual war. The Arab Muslim world is thus positioned in what is commonly termed the “10/40 window”, understood by Evangelical missionaries as a priority area of evangelisation.²⁹ However, spiritual mapping assumes different forms at the local level: Merzek Botros, a well-known Swedish Egyptian televangelist and a pastor at an Arab Pentecostal church in Stockholm, sees the city of Malmö as a point of entry into Sweden, dominated by Islam on account of its significant immigrant population and where the missionary presence needs bolstering: as he himself put it, “this is the gateway to Europe”. In 2019, he set about creating an evangelisation program in Arabic targeting Muslim migrants recently arrived from the Middle East, but also Christians belonging to historic denominations.

Of course, regeneration from the margins or at the frontier remains an ambivalent process, providing enrichment and enhancement but also posing a risk of weakening, or even of a loss of the self in the Other.³⁰ For example, while Merzek Botros is positive about the fact that the future of Christianity in general and of Arab Christianity in particular rests on the shoulders of missionaries and pastors with first names such as Mohamed, he strongly opposes any form of “syncretism” between Christianity and Islam, as illustrated by the notions of “Muslim disciples of Jesus”³¹ and Chrislam,³² which appear to hold a certain fas-

28 Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven. The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, ma: Da Capo Press, 1994); Nadège Mézié, “Les évangéliques cartographient le monde. Le *spiritual mapping*,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 142 (2008), 63–85.

29 The area corresponds to an area located between the twentieth and fortieth parallels that includes regions and countries where Christianity is not a majority religion, such as North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, India, and China.

30 Pelkmans, “Frontier Dynamics”?, 239.

31 See the work of the Episcopalian theologian Paul-Gordon Chandler on the formation of this doctrine around Mazhar Mallouhi of Syria. Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path Between Two Faiths* (Lanham: Cowley Publications, 2007).

32 The term “syncretism” is in quotation marks because we view the concept as a discrediting label that has more to do with expressing an opinion about the legitimacy of a religious practice than with actually examining it for what it is. André Mary, *Le défi du syncrétisme. Le travail symbolique de la religion Eboga* (Gabon) (Paris: EHESS, 1999). For more detailed

cination for some Swedish Pentecostal pastors in Stockholm, who view them as viable alternative channels through which to convert Muslims. The challenge, in other words, is to remain vigilant so as not to lose oneself spiritually in the margins by allowing oneself to be absorbed by them rather than transforming them—although it is worth noting that some missionaries defend the opposite view by promoting the idea of falling in love with alterity (see *infra*). Missionaries thus seek to guard against the risk of missionary work being reversed, or, more generally, the vulnerability to which mobility is liable to expose individuals, however limited such a risk may be in spatial terms when carrying out missionary work in the popular suburbs of one's own city or on a larger scale, as in cases where missionary work goes hand in hand with international migration.

3 Mission, Migration, Suspicion

Several contributions illustrate the recurring question of mobility in missionary work and the common triptych migration-mission-conversion, which can assume a different order according to local configurations. For example, conversion can lead to emigration and, conversely, emigration can lead to conversion (or reconversion in the case of Ethiopian Falashas migrating to Israel, see Emanuela Trevisan Semi's chapter in this volume), while migration can sometimes be conceived as a mission, as can be seen in many places across Europe. So-called "migrant churches" are thought of as "inverted missions" serving to bring Christianity back to Europe from the continents to which it had been exported by European missionaries from the sixteenth century onwards.³³ We may even argue that the international division of missionary work is intimately connected to the international capitalist division of labour: after all, migrants and their descendants, who are now turning major European cities into centres of religious diversity, were pushed into exile by economic and political crises affecting their countries of origin. It is precisely these people that Marx described as the "supernumeraries",³⁴ operating today as missionar-

discussions of Chrislam, see the works of Marloes Janson and Corey Williams and their case studies in Nigeria, which offer analyses in terms of assemblage and bricolage respectively. Marloes Janson, "Unity Through Diversity: A Case Study of Chrislam in Lagos," *Africa*, 86, no. 4 (2016): 646–672, Corey Williams, "Chrislam, Accommodation and the Politics of Religious *Bricolage* in Nigeria," *Studies in World Christianity*, 25, no. 1 (2019): 5–28.

33 Sandra Fancello & André Mary (eds.), *Chrétiens africains en Europe* (Paris: Karthala, 2010).

34 Marx used the term "supernumeraries" to refer to working-age populations excluded from

ies intent on spreading the word in Europe and on repopulating its churches. Indeed, circulations are incessant, and migrants' life stories are indicative of the extent to which their experiences are shaped by the circulation of the economic crisis throughout the world. For example, in Sweden, many migrants have prior experience of migration, whether through direct personal experience or experience within the family. To cite just a few examples, some families have their roots in present-day Turkey and made a home for themselves in Syria and/or Lebanon, where they lived for several years before moving to Scandinavia during the civil war years (1975–1990). Others, following more individual trajectories, were able to find work in Sweden after leaving Egypt to live for a while in Italy or Kuwait. In other words, the itinerary of missions often follows what might be described as the job rush. The result is that immigration admission and migration policies, as well as the succession of capitalist crises—and the wars that often arise as a result of such crises—contribute to directing the circulation and establishment of religious bodies (i.e., words, signs, and values) in certain places.

If migrants do not bring their faith with them, Church representatives often come to them and, in some cases, come to their rescue at key transit points. Many European Christians are placing their hopes in the waves of migrants coming from Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East to stem the decline of Christianity in Europe. They often view such migrants as forces come to reassert their rank in the “spiritual battle” being led in Europe, a sort of “reserve army of missionaries” in the war against secularisation. Some place their missionary posts along their routes and wait for them at the “entrance” to the continent, whether in Greece or Turkey. Likewise, we find missionary posts along the routes of sub-Saharan migrants in the Maghreb, where local churches have been able to rebuild their flocks, particularly students (after having been all but deserted for decades after independence), a process that has also had the effect of producing local reconfigurations of Catholicism and Protestantism.³⁵ Africa

employment and even from the economic circuit altogether. They constitute a “surplus” population, albeit relative to the requirements and opportunities of capitalist accumulation. For example, when there is an increase in productivity, a requirement related to the goal of capital accumulation, the amount of work required decreases, as does the relative proportion of the population in work. Marx views the supernumeraries as an “industrial reserve army” from which to draw during periods of production growth. Karl Marx, *Le Capital. Livre I—Sections V à VIII* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985 [1867]), 101; translation ours. One of its modes of existence is the maintenance of what Marx terms a “nomadic population”, or migrant population, described as the “light infantry of capital”, “discarded according to the needs of the moment”, Marx, *Le Capital*, 126 (translation ours).

- 35 Katia Boissevain, “Des conversions au christianisme à Tunis: vers quel protestantisme?” *Histoire, monde et cultures religieuses*, 4, no. 28 (2013): 47–62. Sophie Bava and Katia Bois-

is thus not to be outdone in the vast network of global missionary movements associated with economic and political migrations. We might paraphrase the well-known formula of chaos theory by citing a documented case from 2004: when a branch of the African Development Bank closes in Abidjan, churches open or find themselves revitalised in Tunis, and Muslims in the city become evangelical Christians. Meanwhile, in the wake of the wars in Afghanistan and the economic crisis in Iran, what we see in Europe is the emergence of figures of Christian martyrology around asylum seekers from majority Muslim countries, especially those of Afghan and Iranian origin. Having practiced Islam prior to converting to Christianity in Sweden, the rejection of their application by the immigration authorities engenders a risk of persecution or even death if they are sent back to their country of origin, where they would be viewed as Muslim apostates. Many evangelical Christians have been promoting their cause in recent years.

It is worth noting that Afghan and Iranian converts are a particular target of suspicion for the Swedish Migration Agency (*Migrationsverket*). There is a tendency to view them as fake converts intent on increasing their chances of being granted political asylum. A test has even been introduced to assess the “authenticity” of conversions and the “sincerity” of their supposed faith, a practice that has not been without controversy, not least as a result of the influence of networks of “pro-migrant” evangelical Christian activists.³⁶ On the one hand, the questions put to migrants are regarded as being either too difficult (for example, migrants have been asked to supply specific details of certain passages in the Bible and to provide a clear explanation of the Holy Trinity, which is no easy task) or downright absurd (with converts being asked, for example, to recite their favourite page from the Bible). It is even said that a Swedish Lutheran bishop failed to demonstrate the authenticity of his faith after taking the test. On the other hand, it seems strange that a secular state should suddenly claim to be able to objectify an individual’s faith through administrative procedures alone.³⁷ We saw that the question of the sincerity of faith in an

sevain, “Dieu, les migrants et les États. Nouvelles productions religieuses de la migration,” *L’Année du Maghreb*, 11(2014): 7–15; Sophie Bava and Katia Boissevain, “Migrations africaines et variations religieuses: les églises chrétiennes du Maroc et de Tunisie,” *Migrations Société*, 179 (2020): 115–129.

36 Émir Mahieddin, “Le migrant et le militant religieux. Le renouveau du labyrinthe théologico-politique en Suède,” *Bulletin de l’Observatoire international du religieux* 23 (2018), URL: <https://www.sciencespo.fr/enjeumondial/fr/odr/le-migrant-et-le-militant-religieux-le-re-nouveau-du-labyrinthe-theologi/co-politique-en-suede>.

37 On the evaluation of sincerity and authenticity in asylum application processes in Sweden, the reader is referred to Rebecca Stern and Hanna Wikström, *Migrationsrätt: sky-*

immigration context also arises in the context of the authenticity of the conversion of Falashas to Protestantism and the veracity of the maintenance of their Jewishness through the generations in Emanuela Trevisan Semi's contribution.

Suspicion around the sincerity of conversion is not the sole prerogative of state agents seeking to assess the validity of an asylum application or the benefits attached to being a convert to a particular religion. Indeed, suspicion is found in many other contexts, especially where conversion is thought of as resulting from a free choice made in the individual's innermost being. The question of the sincerity of individual engagement in faith is a central notion among both evangelicals and pietistic movements of Islamic renewal.³⁸ According to the anthropologist Matthew Carey,³⁹ such representations, which assume behaviours based solely on the freedom of the subject, create a sense of unpredictability: a "free subject" can surprise, simulate, and change entirely without warning. Consider the figure of the Marrano so dear to Derrida, or of the Morisco, a Muslim forced into being baptised as a Catholic after 1492,⁴⁰ a conceptually similar figure but less commonly deployed in philosophy, with converts seeking to conceal the truth of their being and experiencing within themselves a never-ending process of multiple identifications, sometimes over several generations. It is precisely a Catholic version of this figure that the main character in *Silence*, Father Rodrigues, ends up embodying, having become a Buddhist socially marked as being "lost to God" and duping those around him until his dying day, preserving the secret of his Catholic loyalty only for his wife and a divine, invisible, and silent supernatural being, without anything explicit ever being said about it in the film.

A convert, a subject conceived as free, is thus forever a stranger. It is near impossible to ever know a convert: as a free subject, a convert is, by definition, an uncontrollable being.⁴¹ According to Carey, this provides a potentially fertile breeding ground for distrust and suspicion, regardless of the degree of proximity or familiarity among actors. If individuals are represented as subjects who are fundamentally free to choose their own path, including the path

ddsbehov och trovärdighet—bedömning i asylärenden (Stockholm: Liber, 2016). On asylum applications in France, see the work of the sociologist Smäin Laacher, *Croire à l'incroyable. Un sociologue à la cour nationale du droit d'asile* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018).

38 Pelkmans, "Fontier Dynamics", 214.

39 Matthew Carey, *Mistrust. An Ethnographic Theory* (Chicago: Hau Books, 2017).

40 For a more detailed discussion of the history of the Moriscos, the reader is referred to the work of Isabelle Poutrin, *Convertir les musulmans. Espagne, 1491–1609* (Paris: PUF, 2012).

41 As regards the figure of the Marrano, the Algerian psychoanalyst Alice Cherki has argued that multiple identifications represent a form of freedom for the subject. Alice Cherki, *Mémoire anachronique* (Alger: Barzakh, 2016).

of simulation or reversibility of choice,⁴² the gap between exteriority and interiority, between self-presentation and the reality of the self, inevitably widens. This goes against the grain of the key social conditions needed to ensure trust, according to the sociologist Georg Simmel—in other words, conditions rooted in a belief in the unity and harmony of the idea that one has of a being and the being him- or herself.⁴³ In a sense, because it assumes the capacity to pull people away from their membership group through choice, missionary work is invariably a space that is conducive to suspicion. The question is to establish where the loyalty of actors lies: are they loyal to their new group and their new god, or are they loyal to their original group or pantheon? It is precisely within this context that Tunisian converts are regularly invited by those closest to them, and even by the authorities, to demonstrate their attachment to their homeland, to the nation. In *Silence*, Rodrigues is betrayed on several occasions by the convert Kichijiro, seemingly through weakness as much as through duplicity, torn as the latter is between his newfound faith in Christ and his loyalty toward the Japanese authorities.

Mistrust and suspicion are no doubt reinforced in migration situations where individuals are often socially unknown and in which their membership group or identification can give them material benefits on account of specific asylum policies.

Suspicion can even arise among believers within the same congregation. A good example of this is the attention given by Arab evangelical Christians to the use of the pronoun “We” by their coreligionists converted from Islam. “What is this ‘we’ you keep talking about?”, was the question put by Tamara, a formerly Catholic Iraqi convert, to Habib, a Moroccan convert from Islam, during a conversation about the historical responsibility of each religion for the “decline of the Arab world”. Having converted since moving to Sweden in 1973 aged just 18 (the anecdote refers to a conversation that took place in 2020), Habib remained an “ex-Muslim”.⁴⁴ It is in this capacity that he was regularly invited to appear on

42 The reversibility of conversion is a reality. For example, Pelkmans has reported cases of temporary conversions to evangelical Christianity among Muslims in Kyrgyzstan. Here, converts often return to their initial religion after promises made by churches about the power of Jesus fail to materialise. Pelkmans, “Transparency”, 158.

43 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge, 1990 [1907]).

44 Fatiha Kaouès emphasises the tendency of formerly Muslim converts to constantly refer back to their previous religious affiliation in a Lebanese context. However, her hypothesis of the “ethnisation” or “racialisation” of identification or affiliation with Islam seems debatable. See Fatiha Kaouès, *Convertir le monde arabe*, 117–119. Why would evangelicals waste their time seeking to convert inconvertible people? There are other referents from which to ethnicise in these contexts, such as the notion of “Arab”, which many evangelical

a local evangelical channel to persuade other Muslims to follow in his footsteps on his journey to Christ. Paradoxically, the effect was a constant reenactment of his belonging to Islam, causing Habib to relive his conversion away from this religion at every appearance. This is also, ultimately, what is expected of Afghan and Iranian asylum seekers who have converted to Christianity during investigations aimed at assessing the authenticity of their account. In other words, converts are constantly seeking to mould and merge their past into a whole that is forever being reshaped to place it at a distance, with Christian subjectivity thus being constructed through a process of repetition.⁴⁵

In short, converts are forever haunted by the ghost of their former denominational affiliations and identities. In a missionary context, it is not uncommon for actors to wonder where their debts end.

4 Missionary Work as a Gift and Debt Economy: A Maussian Approach

From a relatively common perspective, missionary work can be viewed as a form of predation from which a relation of subordination is assumed to result. Consistent with a relatively traditional critique of the missionary relationship, a Chilean man encountered in Sweden, who was a far-left political activist, expressed reservations about missionary work in urban peripheries: he viewed the representation of the suburbs and migrants found within evangelical Churches as an unhealthy continuation of postcolonial ties.⁴⁶ During

Christians from historic churches often invoke. Rather, what we see is suspicion around the affective bonds tying individuals to their relatives or traditions: in short, what is the object of their affection? To whom are they indebted?

45 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la subjectivité?* (Paris: Les Prairies ordinaires, 2013), 63.

46 The point may seem surprising when applied to Sweden, which was never a major colonial power. However, the country is not immune from interpretation in these terms, with local neighbourhood-based forms of activism found among descendants of immigrants, not unlike that seen in France and Britain. Sernhede Ove, René Leon Rosales, and Jonas Söderman, *"När betongen rätar sin rygg". Ortrörelsen och folkbildningens renässans* (Göteborg: Daidalos, 2019). The country had colonies in Africa (the Swedish Gold Coast in the Gulf of Guinea), the Caribbean (Saint Barthélémy) and North America (New Sweden). Although the Swedish empire was comparatively small and short-lived (1638–1655 and 1785–1878), the country played a long-lasting role in the slave trade and had a good understanding of the colonial system. In other words, like other European societies, Sweden illustrates the dynamics of colonialism examined here and their reverberations in the present. Pernille Ipsen and Gunlög Für, "Introduction: Scandinavian Colonialisms," *Itinerario*, 23 (2009), 7–16; Johan Johan Höglund and Linda Andersson Burnett,

discussions prompted by the Rome conference, Séverine Gabry-Thienpont suggested approaching missionary work and preaching as activities inherently linked to giving. Though contradictory in appearance, the two conceptions are not in any way incompatible, and indeed are probably relatively accurate, conferring upon missionary work a deeply ambivalent character, as both sincerely generous and deeply belligerent.

To use the terminology of Jean and John Comaroff, we may view missionary work as a long-term *conversation* between actors, punctuated by exchanges of gifts, meetings in cafes, shared meals, gifts of money (exchanges of goods), questions, admonitions, intimate discussions, words of comfort, and biblical or koranic verses (exchanges of signs) and concluding with conversion, and sometimes even alliance with an actor in the new religious membership group (exchange of people).⁴⁷ In addition, the missionary conversation may be seen as a tripartite system of exchange mediated by an invisible non-human operator, i.e., God.⁴⁸ In other words, missionary work can be approached through the prism of exchange and debt, a dynamic conceived as the result of a system of asymmetric exchange with a supernatural entity. The French sociologists Alain Caillé, Camille Tarot and Jean-Paul Willaime, along with the anthropologist David Graeber, have all insisted on this dimension of Christianity in particular and of religion in general. These arguments help to shed light on the workings of missionary relationships.⁴⁹

A congregation such as Vineyard, which only travels small distances (remaining as it does within the boundaries of its own city), is able to make “home”

“Introduction: Nordic Colonialisms and Scandinavian Studies,” *Scandinavian Studies*, 91 (2019): 1–12.

47 In their work on missionary encounters among the Tswana in South Africa, Jean and John Comaroff conceive missionary work as a “conversation”. The concept provides a means of considering verbal interactions just as much as gestures, objects of exchange, and other acts of communication. It assumes a space-time of negotiation and domestication on all sides and at several levels. The notion implies a principle of symmetry and reciprocity in the circulation of symbolic forms and goes against the grain of the idea of an uncompromising ideological conflict, in a spiritual war against the truth of God and the “pagan” world. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

48 Christophe Pons (ed.), *Jésus, moi et les autres. La construction collective d'une relation personnelle à Jésus dans les Églises évangéliques: Europe, Océanie, Maghreb* (Paris: CNRS, 2013).

49 Alain Caillé, *Don, intérêt et désintéressement. Bourdieu, Mauss, Platon quelques autres* (Paris: Bord de l'Eau, 2005 [1994]); Camille Tarot, “Don et grâce, une famille à recomposer,” *Revue du M.A.U.S.S.*, 32 (2000), 469–494; Jean-Paul Willaime, “La religion: un lien social articulé au don,” in *Qu'est-ce que le religieux?* Ed. A. Caillé (Paris: La Découverte, 2012), 243–263; David Graeber, *Dettes: 5000 ans d'histoire* (Paris: Les Liens qui Libèrent, 2013).

a field or terrain of missionary work by re-deploying and embedding its relational anchors within its territory and by becoming involved in networks of free services in the local neighbourhood (e.g., volunteering with the local authority, distributing food, assisting homeless people and migrants, etc.). This system of exchange of goods and signs (for example, the gift of a bible, an archetypal case in evangelisation, combines both) results in the production of relationships that involve reciprocal obligations associated with psycho-affective logics between those involved. These links stem from the reiteration of moments of sociability in which subjects find themselves exposed to the work of God through the actors and behaviours of His human mediators engaged in a chain of services and counter-services. Missionary work thus emerges as a process of production and reproduction of a social body and transformation of matter, in which any sign, object or human is capable of being converted into a “thing” of God.

It is worth noting that the idea of a gift economy is not in any way inconsistent with the idea of an economy of spiritual warfare referred to above. Marcel Mauss made the point that giving can carry a profoundly agonistic meaning.⁵⁰ When they are not nominally waging war to spread their faith through violence, a belligerent form of missionary work that should not be overlooked, propagators of religion can use gifts as a weapon for conquering the world, submitting the latter to their god through a chain of asymmetric gifts. There is, in short, an element of *potlatch* in missionary work.

Viewing the missionary dynamic as a dynamic of exchange helps to resituate the role of *obligation* or debt at work in religious trajectories, which are far from being a mere matter of abstract philosophical “options”. Exchanging primarily means becoming indebted and creating bonds of reciprocal obligation. Very quickly, circulating signs are pooled, giving rise to the elaboration of a shared symbolic system in which God is viewed as an active agent of exchange and as the ultimate creditor of any transaction, toward whom debt is “infinite”. Tokens must be offered to God, notably by enriching and enhancing Him with souls, by directing humans toward Him, with the counter-gift to God being to perpetuate the chain of giving.

The debt dimension of missionary work is also central to Christian theology in particular, with Jesus being viewed as having “died for the sins” of all people, thereby eternally indebting all humans to a “God made man” turned into a sacrificial figure, sacrifice being the height of giving. The height of giving is indeed self-sacrifice—in other words, giving one’s life for the lives of others. The revers-

50 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (Chicago: Hau Books/Chicago University Press, 2016 [1925]).

ibility of missionary work, conceived by others as a risk, as we have seen, can thus become the height of missionary hospitality. It involves allowing oneself to be absorbed by the other to take their place in suffering.

In *Silence*, Father Rodrigues hands himself in as a prisoner and goes as far as to become a Buddhist to end the cycle of suffering and repression brought about by his presence as a missionary. This act of faith is not, however, the sole preserve of a fictional character such as Rodrigues. In a recent article, the anthropologist Manoël Pénicaud retraced the trajectory of Father Paolo dall'Oglio, a practitioner of *badaliyya* ("substitution" in Arabic)⁵¹ and one of the founders of the ecumenical monastery of Mar Mūsa in Syria dedicated to Abrahamic hospitality. Pénicaud showed how Father Paolo dall'Oglio voluntarily "offered" himself as hostage to Daesh in July 2013, no doubt adhering to his desire to substitute himself for Muslim victims in order to suffer for them or in their stead.⁵² In a similar vein, in 2019, a young missionary aged just 27 named John Chau became famous for being killed as soon as he set foot on North Sentinel Island. The gift of signs having been rejected by the inhabitants of the archipelago, known for their hostility to strangers, he was made to pay for his missionary engagement by giving his life, making him a martyr and a hero in the eyes of many evangelicals throughout the world.

Missionaries may thus be seen as small "brokers" of the big divine debt, tasked with increasing the mass of "indebted" people to meet the obligations binding them to God. In a similar fashion, a missionary who gives without receiving anything from his or her human debtor counts on the fact that "God will give back", understood as a guarantee against the uncertainty of the reciprocity characterising giving. Note that this Maussian interpretation of missionary work emphasises the possibility of an underlying logic of power relation. In this respect, it is worth recalling the anthropological principle defined by Pierre Clastres, according to which the debt relationship pertains to the exercise of power, and reciprocally: "Power is inseparable from debt and [...] conversely the presence of debt signifies the presence of power. Debt is thus

51 The idea corresponds to a practice of "mystical substitution" as put forward by Louis Massignon. Massignon derived the idea from the theologian Karl-Joris Huysmans and his conception of the reversibility of the virtues and merits of restorative suffering: in short, the pain and suffering experienced by a human being can contribute to another being's salvation. A similarly mystical view of voluntary expiatory sacrifice can be found in both Christianity and Islam. Manoël Pénicaud, "Le père Paolo dall'Oglio: otage volontaire par amour de l'islam," *Ethnologie française*, 3, no. 63 (2016): 452–453.

52 Pénicaud, "Le père Paolo dall'Oglio," 447–458.

the sign and truth of power".⁵³ It is perhaps this dimension that explains why *mission* is seen by some actors as an attempt at *submission*.

Missionary work and preaching thus ultimately emerge as activities involving a process of familiarisation with a particular language through reiterations of interactions, services and counter-services with other human beings, mediators of non-human entities, and brokers of debt on behalf of the latter. This may take the form of a material or symbolic debt in a system of exchange that is both asynchronous and reciprocal, where reciprocity can be ensured in another temporality, the value sacrificed on earth being capable, for example, of ensuring salvation in Eternity, giving it the appearance of a disinterested gift economy. In this sense, missionary work can be seen as a process of accumulation of "riches" for a god within a process of repetition of actions involving receiving and giving, a process that can easily be envisaged as a *system of total service*.

Conclusion

Let us conclude with a final Tunisian African example that illustrates almost all the aspects of missionary work described by the various contributors to this volume and at the conference. The ethnographic case in question will serve to re-emphasise the interconnectedness of situations painstakingly distinguished, dissociated, and isolated to achieve a clearer understanding. Having "unfolded" reality, we now need to reconsider how it can best be observed: as a concentrated, dense, condensed, and complex phenomenon permeated by individual engagements closely entangled with the international division of missionary work, filled with friendly and/or antagonistic gifts and counter-gifts and fed by all sorts of suspicions around supposed interests of a material or spiritual nature.

In a residential suburb of Tunis, Pentecostal pastors/missionaries/migrants are engaged in a spiritual reconquest of a region depicted as an ancient centre of Christianity. In their eyes, the Maghreb, which they still call "North Africa", is originally, and even intrinsically, a Christian land. The rest is purely anecdotal, with the introduction of Islam being seen as a merely temporary phenomenon unable to resist the work of the "soldiers of Christ" and the divine plan that brought them to Tunisia in the first decade of the twenty-first century.⁵⁴

53 Pierre Clastres, *Recherches d'anthropologie politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 140–141. Translation ours.

54 In 2004, the African Development Bank decided to move its headquarters from Abidjan to Tunis because of the civil war that lasted from 2002 to 2007.

What we see here is an “inverted” form of missionary work committed to returning the Gospels to one of their original homelands. West African Pentecostals and evangelists having settled more or less permanently in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, as well as in Libya, know that they form a network of churches from which a fruitful spiritual web can be woven that covers the entire territory, thus welcoming, in the Truth of God, Muslims who, one after the other, will convert to Christianity. Such is, at least, their hope and their project. It is a network that must be densified and strengthened by spreading the word and the good news of the Gospel to regenerate territories that were once a Christian heartland.

The spatial logics described here apply just as much at a macro-regional level as they do at a city level. As noted above, the setting is a suburban church. However, unlike the Stockholm example, the church is situated in an upmarket neighbourhood where Evangelical and Pentecostal churches have established a presence to provide a spiritual home to the local faithful. Further afield, downtown churches built in the late nineteenth century are attended by African believers or Tunisian converts in separate services. Here, spatial hierarchies are reflected at the level of the congregation itself. Within this Pentecostal “migrant church”, the spatial distribution between, on the one hand, the Tunisian members of the congregation and their Ivorian, Senegalese, and Nigerian counterparts (both men and women) is striking. The two pastors and the small choir stand facing the congregation of young Africans, most of whom are students.⁵⁵ To the left of the pastors is a section occupied by the small number of mostly female Tunisian worshippers. At first glance, the fact that they are sitting apart appears to be down to purely logistical and linguistic (interpreting) reasons. However, it soon becomes apparent that the position of the small Tunisian congregation (sometimes numbering just six people, and seldom more than ten) is, in fact, a matter of clever staging. Often standing at the margins of society and their family group (as a result, for example, of having committed a “wrong”, such as having had a child out of wedlock or some other dishonourable act), they are frequently singled out as a group and praised by the pastor as examples of worthy individuals who heard God’s calling and had the courage, heart and intelligence to respond to Him. In short, they accepted the gift. They stand as witnesses in a spiritual war. Indeed, they are taken as witnesses. They are taken, and presented, as prime “catches”. While it is indeed a battle (and the sermons leave no doubt about that), giving and waging war go hand in hand. Sitting to

55 The two pastors—an Ivorian and a Nigerian—share a microphone, with the former translating the latter’s English preaching into French (since the congregation consists of both English and French speakers).

the left of the pastors, the Tunisian converts occupy a position at the heart of which the tensions between guest and outsider, between debtor and creditor, can be seen to compete and intertwine. By highlighting them in this way, the effect is to underline the worth of ordinary individuals relegated to the margins of their society, pointing to a new variation on the inversion of social hierarchies and the ambition to regenerate Christianity through them.

Here, the question of the motivations that drive converts to remove themselves further from their social environment arises even more acutely, particularly for women and their relationship to the rest of society: not only have they converted to Christianity (an act seen as the height of betrayal), but they have also chosen to ignore the Tunisian church, an institution primarily focused on oriental Christians, or “western” (evangelical) Protestantism. Their preference is for “black churches”, a term that captures all manner of condescension. Its implied meanings are numerous, from racist hierarchies and sexual fantasies to, at another level, the suspicion that worshippers are purely looking for material benefits in the form, for instance, of domestic work among people who happen to be more fortunate than them.

While they are invariably shaped by differing local circumstances (which we have tried to illustrate through reference to observations in Stockholm and Tunis), the issues highlighted in these pages, applying as they do across all sites of missionary work, can be seen as promising avenues for comparative research on missionary work and preaching across different religions. Central to this research are the different variations on the equation between moral geographies, symbolic construction practices from the margins or boundaries, an agonistic gift economy and theories of mind involving questions around the exteriority or interiority of individuals and the symbolic efficacy of the semi-otic systems through which religious phenomena are manifested, at the heart of the question of the sincerity, or insincerity, of conversion.

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