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# Spiritual Geographies: mobility of Pentecostal ministers and migratory “miracles” between Africa or Latin America and Europe

*Géographies spirituelles : mobilité des pasteurs pentecôtistes et « miracles » migratoires entre l’Afrique, l’Amérique Latine et l’Europe*

*Spirituele geografie: mobiliteit van de predikanten van de Pinksterbeweging en migratiemirakels tussen Afrika/Latijns-Amerika en Europa*

**Maité Maskens**

Translator: Jane Corrigan

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## Spiritual Geographies: mobility of Pentecostal ministers and migratory 'miracles' between Africa or Latin America and Europe

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By taking into account spatiality and identity in the movements of transnational religious stakeholders, this article intends to investigate the link between migratory and religious experiences as expressed by the ministers of four different Brussels-based Pentecostal congregations. The analysis of the ministers' narratives – reassessing the circumstances which led them from Sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America to Belgium – reveals an interwoven process of geographical shifts and 'divine' actions, offering an opportunity to consider a twofold process involving mobility and religion. On the one hand, we can see how Pentecostalism transforms and subverts the migratory experience by allowing an alternative narrative of this experience. On the other hand, we are able to analyse the effect of this experience on the discourses and religious practices within the new environment, in particular through the identification process of the 'Children of God'.

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## Introduction

1. In Brussels, the question of the Pentecostal religious experience is closely linked to that of migration [Maskens, 2008, 2010; Fancello, 2010 ; Demart, 2008]. This intermingling of experiences may be put into perspective through the analysis of the migration narratives of Pentecostal ministers, offers a particularly relevant opportunity to question the tensions between endogenous identification processes (missionaries chosen by God) and exogenous assignment (repeated associations with otherness and strangeness, as well as the stigmas associated with the pejorative characterisation of the 'migrant').

2. The way in which ministers – as religious leaders who act as models for believers – give new substance to past events and in particular – in what concerns us here – the way in which they give the migratory event a present meaning, affects the religious system as a whole and gives their churches a special importance. The discourse of these religious specialists is considered here; a category of stakeholders who – in the evangelical world – are recognised as having a certain capacity to redefine the contents of experience in religious terms. In this respect, the autobiographical narratives of ministers are very sophisticated and more detailed than those of ordinary members of the congregation. Susan Friend Harding observes the specific circulation of the religious language, the process of 'speaking in believing': 'Preachers convert the ancient recorded speech of the Bible once again into spoken language, translating it into local theological and cultural idioms and placing present events inside the sequence of Biblical stories. Church people, in their turn, borrow, customize, and reproduce the Bible-based speech of their preachers and other leaders in their daily life' [2000: 12].

3. For thirty years, Pentecostal<sup>1</sup> churches attended by migrant communities or communities resulting from migratory movements have ap-

peared in the European capital. They have experienced considerable expansion on the Belgian religious scene. As I have already discussed in a previous article [Maskens, 2008], the growing number and success of these congregations go hand in hand with the increase in migrations from Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America these past three decades. These migrations have not been organised in a systematic manner by the countries concerned, and 1974 marked the official end of quota immigration in Belgium. Several believers are in a situation of irregularity in Belgium – or have been in the past – and almost all of them – or their antecedents – have had a migratory experience. These problems therefore play a central role within the Pentecostal religion.

4. The link between Pentecostalism and the migratory phenomenon constitutes the starting point of my reflection. The interweaving of these two phenomena is not characteristic of Pentecostalism as practised by migrant communities in Europe as – in the countries in the south where most of the believers are from – the Pentecostal congregations in cities are often composed of migrants from villages [Robbins, 2004: 123]. But the migration experience constitutes a 'privileged moment for conversion' [Pédrón-Colombani, 1998: 149]. Why do these churches often lie within a context of migration? In what way does the religious factor give meaning to the migratory experience in Brussels? What forms of 'integration' in the host country are encouraged or established by religion? What special shape will these religious movements – which are highly popular in southern countries – take [Corten and Mary, 2001: 12 ; Corten, Dozon and Pedro Oro, 2003: 17] in a very different European religious context, as each group makes use of its own referents within Pentecostalism [Corten, Marshall-Fratani, 2001: 11]?

5. The two most detailed monographs on the establishment of African Christians in Europe are by Hermione Harris [2006] concerning the setting up of the 'Cherubims and Seraphims' Aladura church in Lon-

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<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps worthwhile to go over a few well-known facts, i.e. that Pentecostalism is a charismatic form of Protestantism resulting from the American revivals of the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its emergence is generally linked to the *Azuza Street Revival* which began in Los Angeles in 1906, motivating a movement of latent revival in the United States at the time. But certain people also feel that Pentecostalism has a dual origin. Minister Charles Parham, who worked on the east coast of the United States (and in Chicago in particular) at the time of the *Azuza Street Revival*, was also considered to be a founder of the movement. Since the beginning, Pentecostalism has been an example of globalisation, as Pentecostal missionaries were already present in west and south Africa as well as in other regions around the world from the end of 1906.

don, and by Gerrie Ter Haar [1998] regarding a church led by Ghanaian migrants called the 'True Teachings of Christ's Temple' located in Bijlmeer, a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Amsterdam. These two analyses – the fruit of extensive field work – provide contrasting views of the same phenomenon involving the emergence of a special type of Christianity supported by Nigerian and Ghanaian migrants respectively, established in cosmopolitan European capitals. While the two anthropologists' ideas are closely akin regarding the description of the African condition in Europe – a special condition which gives form to religious content and practices – the methods of integrating religious stakeholders in the host society appear to take different directions. The need for recognition and the search for legitimacy is expressed in contrasting terms. In the English case, Hermione Harris shows how the religious space constitutes a place for refreshing one's ideas, where believers can be with others from their community and increase their capacity to have an impact on the world around them, as well as their spiritual power. The London branch of the 'Cherubims and Seraphims' church therefore does not have the calling to transform the local practices or landscape. This positioning contrasts strongly with that described by Gerrie Ter Haar regarding the 'True Teachings of Christ's Temple' church which, during its establishment in the Netherlands, was able to gather enough social and political resources to offer its members of diverse African origins a certain visibility on the religious scene. This specific integration into the local landscape provides weight and strengthens the Christian discourse of a universal calling.

6. In the wake of the theoretical views discussed in these two monographs and the different problems resulting from the various anthropological interpretations of a particular phenomenon, this article is centred on the practical and discursive link between the migratory experience of the different speakers and the form of their religious commitment in Brussels. The mobility of ministers before their establishment in Belgium is the starting point. A minority of them migrate for specifically religious

reasons: their narratives of this dynamic experience therefore follow precise outlines and are carefully set in a rhetoric which is aimed above all at proving that they have been chosen by God.

7. The narratives presented below concern five ministers, i.e. a quarter of the ministers whom I was able to speak with during this study of a religious nature. Currently,<sup>2</sup> they work for the 'deed of God' in three congregations in Brussels<sup>3</sup>. I have chosen to present their narratives because they allow the description of what I refer to as the channels of 'divine' migration. The term 'channels' is used in the plural form as there are various ways of reinterpreting the migratory experience in this religious landscape.

8. By describing the torments of an in-between situation which confines them to the status of foreigner here and elsewhere, we shall attempt to understand how the religious scene provides these speakers with an incomparable opportunity for a positive self-definition compared with the possibilities offered by the other scenes frequented by the same believers (professional, citizen). In these spaces, they participate in the world in another way and become the prestigious subjects of a story which they were excluded from until now: the expressions 'chosen people', 'chosen race' and 'God's children' are related to the construction of a group in the register of transcendence.

## 1. Migration and religious commitment

9. Most of the African ministers whom I met in Brussels were converted to Pentecostalism in their country of origin. As regards their vocation, they 'received a calling' – to use an expression which is common in these religious circles – in the host country or directly in the country of origin, yet it is not possible to make out a general trend in this instance. For those who were already ministers in their country of

<sup>2</sup> 'Currently' has meaning in this religious world in which the religious experiences of ministers are marked by great internal mobility between different churches, countries and charismatic organisations.

<sup>3</sup> Two of them are missionary bridgeheads of large American and transnational denominations (the 'Assemblées de Dieu' and the 'Church of God') and the third is the result of the will of a Congolese minister trained by the French-speaking African branch of the 'Campus pour Christ International' movement.

origin, some – an African minority – travelled for religious reasons, having been sent on a mission to western Europe by large Pentecostal denominations; I shall focus on this category of stakeholders in particular. The position of minister – generally recognised by most believers as being a religious expert – prefigures their identity positioning. The religious discourse accompanies them during their journey from Africa to Europe and gives meaning to their experience. The experience of this category of stakeholders contrasts with that of the believers who were converted in Belgium, for the most part following their migratory experience. The religious commitment of the migrant therefore often takes another turn in this new local context. And those who were ordinary believers in their country of origin often become 'migrant missionaries' in Europe [Fancello, 2006]. Migration therefore constitutes an important factor in religious expansion [Hock, 2008: 235]. Other believers who have already been converted become ministers in this new context. According to one of them – a minister from Kinshasa and teacher of religion in Brussels – this is due to the following:

'Religious faith is so widespread in Congo that many people are very strong believers, without being ministers or having positions of authority. When they arrive here, they find the spiritual level to be so low that they end up being leaders, while they were not yet leaders in Congo.'

10. This behaviour – a sort of 'desecularising compensation', to use Danièle Hervieu-Léger's [2004] expression – must be understood as a reaction to the religiosity differential between the original context and the European context. These individuals experience the distance from God in the world they live in. The relative effacing of the religious figure in the public space reinforces or revives the affiliations which are affected by this.

11. Whether they were converted before or after migration, or whether they became ministers in their country of origin or after settling in Europe, in most of the narratives about conversion, migration to Bel-

gium appears to be part of God's 'plan' for them, regardless of whether or not it involves a retrospective interpretation of the event. While this migration was not yet understood to be a consequence of God's will, the religious message delivered during services prompts believers to see their presence in foreign lands as a miracle. This way of perceiving or presenting migration constitutes a common denominator in the different narratives about conversion.

## 2. The channels of 'divine' migration

12. In congregations in which the majority of believers are also migrants, it is not surprising that migration is the subject of a more general reflection on God's means of manifesting himself in the life of believers.

13. In this context, the migratory event is an occasion for Pentecostals to see how God continues to intervene in their lives by 'choosing' candidates for emigration and by helping them in the administrative process.<sup>4</sup>

14. The analysis of migration narratives is important in order to understand the cogs in a religious group for whom conversion and learning the rhetoric of transformation are fundamental. Believers are expected to bear witness to their faith regularly in religious contexts among others, thus taking part in the collective effort to make the ups and downs of daily life correspond to the divine scenario. As with the narratives about conversion, one may wonder what constitutes the true founding event in the transformation process, between the original conversion and its narrative. As shown admirably by Peter Stromberg in his works on evangelical converts in the United States [1993], the transformative effectiveness of the conversion experience is not limited to the original event. The act of telling and retelling the story of one's conversion has an effect on the narrator and allows him or her to actualise, put into perspective, express, reconfigure, build or make the transformations palpable in the present.

<sup>4</sup> It is true that given the cumbersomeness or absurdity of certain procedures which precede authorised and legal movements, their successful completion is sometimes something of a 'miracle'.

15. The first two experiences of ministers correspond to the first scenario presented above. They are missionary narratives because they received their calling to become ministers in their country of origin, i.e. Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of Congo respectively, and because their journey to Belgium was based on religious motives. In these ministers' narratives – as with the narratives about conversion – many events coexist under the aegis of a unique story and a meaningful plot [Ricoeur, 1990]. In this context, geographic movements and divine actions intermingle, testifying to the chosen character of the speaker.

16. In these narratives, the speakers endeavour to describe a movement and give it meaning, and thus say who they are and how they view themselves. In the case of missionary narratives, Jeffrey Swanson showed the extent to which narration contributes to defining the status or the identity of the narrator: 'Personal identity emerges as a tale to be told. [...] The story of one's life is always being rewritten in the life of new associations and new experiences' [1995: 109]. In this sense, the Pentecostal ministers centre their narrative on a founding differentiation: they distance themselves from other categories of migrants. In the dominant western discourse, there are two terms which designate people in movement: 'migrants' and 'expatriates'. According to Nathalie Friedman's typology concerning the evolution of migrants' narratives in the United States [2004], these two terms may be used to designate mutually exclusive social categories. Claudia Währisch-Oblau uses this terminology in her study on 'migrant' churches in Germany, and showed how these two terms have different connotations. On the one hand, 'migrants' or 'immigrants' are defined according to their shortcomings: they are victims from the south in search of an improvement in their condition, which is why they come to settle in the north. Contingency therefore motivates movement: 'Migrants come from the South to the North, they are usually dark-skinned, they tend to work in low-skilled jobs, they usually have a lower financial status than the indigenous population, and they are expected to adapt and integrate

because they have moved from an "old home" to a new one' [2009: 137]. The agency<sup>5</sup> of migrants is denied and their power to have an impact on the world is not considered; they are perceived as being too busy trying to 'survive' and find a place. On the other hand, the figure of the 'expatriate' calls to mind the themes of power and economic prosperity: 'Expatriates move as an act of personal agency. They go to a foreign country [...] with a sense of purpose, to do a certain job, or to live out an ideal. They move freely and go back home [...] if they chose to do so. [...] Expatriates are expected to show some "cultural sensibility" and local language skills, but they are not supposed to "go native", but rather to keep some distance from the local population' [2009: 137-138]. These categories constitute precious tools in the analysis of the migration narratives of ministers in a city such as Brussels. The figure of the 'expatriate' is particularly visible in the Belgian capital, which is home to the main European institutions as well as many international organisations (NATO). The establishment of a transnational elite (Cailleux, 2004; Beaverstock, 2002) plays a vital role in the collective and ordinary understanding of the 'quality' of the migratory flow.

### 2.1. *The 'conditions' of minister Aristide*

17. Aristide is a minister from Burkina Faso. He currently preaches in a large Pentecostal congregation in Brussels. He arrived in Belgium in 1998, sent by the *Assemblées de Dieu* as a missionary to 'save' a congregation in difficulty located in Mons, in the province of Hainaut. During our discussion, I asked him if he made this movement with his family. He answered:

'Yes, I told God that that was my condition. I said two things to him – because I talk to him just like I'm talking to you. Isn't that funny? When I had to come here, I said to him: "Listen. If you really want me to go to Belgium, I've got two conditions. First, I must have a proper visa because I can't go to a country to preach the truth and use roundabout ways to get in there. I can't go to Belgium with a tourist visa and fiddle around." At the time [in 1998], it was complicated even

<sup>5</sup> The meaning of the term 'agency' refers to the theoretical framework of 'capabilities' developed by Amartya Sen [1999] as well as the capacity of individuals to be social stakeholders (their capacity to act, be independent, make choices and be heard).



to have just a tourist visa. And I had never even heard of or seen a settlement visa. So I think it was really an excuse on my behalf not to come to Belgium. And I added a second condition: "If I get a visa, I also want one for my wife and our four children." And that is what happened.'

18. The scenario in this sequence is centred on the conditions which Aristide asks God to fulfil for him. Aristide's will is clear: he does not want to go to Europe and he is looking for 'excuses' not to have to travel. The conditions he lays down are in keeping with this initial reluctance. But he is compelled by the will of God – a will which is expressed when his requirements are met (this scenario involving human will hindered by divine will is found in many ministers' narratives about their calling). Divine agency is therefore always first in the hierarchy of actions of the entities involved in international mobility. The communication between Aristide and God is efficient: the latter answers his requests. The hand of God is at work in obtaining settlement visas for Aristide and his family. The fact that his conditions – which seem to be so complicated that it was a miracle he got one – were met, reinforces the idea of divine choice and of the minister's importance. This scenario calls to mind the model of mobility considered in terms of expatriation. As he told me later, God 'wanted' him to be in Belgium. This form of religious missionary mobility whose objective is to go and 'preach the truth' in Europe, must be accompanied with a corresponding migration which is equal to these ambitions. Aristide cannot enter a country in 'roundabout ways' when it is his calling to lead it back to the ways of God. Religious truth and legality go hand in hand in this case. By underlining the ease with which he obtained a visa, the narrator sees himself as an expatriate, different from other migrants. The minister therefore alludes to a parallel and alternative migration: the migration of God. This is at odds with the dominant discourse regarding immigration. As I demonstrated earlier, while there is a God of refugees who is capable of solving the problems of irregularity which affect many believers [Maskens, 2008] (and here, religious logic and illegality are associated and not placed in opposition), there appears to be a 'migration of God'

as well, which differs from the other type due to the channels and networks it favours.

## 2.2. *Célestin and the voice of God in the bus*

19. The movement of another minister named Célestin also follows the windings of this divine migration. This Congolese minister who is at the head of a large congregation in Brussels arrived in Belgium in 1984. After having been an evangelist for *Campus pour Christ*<sup>6</sup> for four years in the Democratic Republic of Congo, he went to study theology at the *Institut biblique belge*, with the help of a few 'circumstances', as he recounts:

'In 1983, Billy Graham organised a conference for international evangelists in Amsterdam. In Kinshasa, evangelists were being recruited – those who had brought at least 100 people [to be converted]. I was chosen immediately. Billy Graham paid for my flight and everything else. I was sent to Amsterdam to undergo training for about ten days. When I arrived in Zaventem I got lost because I didn't see the little paper for Amsterdam. I got lost and was not the only one. All of the lost Africans were put on another bus (laughter). And we were sent to Amsterdam. And when we went through Antwerp, I thought of my friend who lived there, and then a few metres further someone spoke to me from outside the bus. I felt that it was coming from outside, but the voice was not held back by the window. It spoke to me openly: "The people from your country who live here cannot get used to the way people pray here. If you wish, I will bring you back here to do this work." When he said "I will bring you back here" I understood who it was. I answered, "You know that I am poor, and now that I have come here I'll never return." "If you wish, then so be it!" he replied. "Sorry?" Silence. Anyway, God never responds to foolish remarks. I went to the conference and afterwards I was not part of the generation of those who are capable of jumping out of the plane and vanishing into thin air. And then people become "political exiles" and everything – I've got nothing against that, but I couldn't do it. I had enough of a conscience and very clear projects, which stopped me from doing that. Therefore, after the conference I returned to my country. So I

<sup>6</sup> Christian missionary organisation founded in 1951 at the University of California, Los Angeles, by Bill Bright, whose main target is university and students.

went back to Zaire at the time, and I felt that I had to obey the voice that I had heard. I went to my director and told him, "I think that I have to study theology and that I have to do it in Belgium." He replied, "We can't send you." "Why not?" I asked. And he answered, "You are very important to me, but if you really want to go you have to pay for it yourself." He knew that I would never be able to come up with the money. I said, "OK." Three months went by. I was sitting in my little livingroom and someone knocked at the door. It was an American missionary whom I had met a long time ago. He asked, "Can I sit down?" And he sat down next to me with his bag. He said, "I have come to tell you that you are going to Belgium. Tomorrow we'll go to the Belgian embassy to get your visa and afterwards we'll book your flight with Sabena. You will go there to study theology. This is God's command and I think I should obey him." I said, "Yes. That is what he said to me." That is how I ended up on a Sabena flight for Belgium two weeks later, in September 1984. That is how I got here.'

20. In the case of Célestin, the voice of God which he heard in Belgium triggers his missionary objective in Europe, i.e. to help the Congolese to pray like they should do. Divine action also takes the form of financial and administrative help provided by an American missionary. I met Célestin for the first time in 2006, and his missionary project was at a major turning point: after helping the Congolese from the diaspora to 'pray like they should do', he explained that 'Caucasians'<sup>7</sup> were his new targets for evangelisation. Two temporalities seem to stand out in the act of coming to Belgium for religious reasons.

21. The way in which these two migration narratives are expressed has the effect of legitimising the presence of these speakers in Belgium. In the same way as the ministers who tell of their migration to Germany – studied by Claudia Währisch-Oblau – the international mobility narrative of Eurafrikan ministers who settled in Belgium is in keeping with the paradigm of 'expatriation': 'The speakers, who are clearly aware of the strongly sedentarist dominant discourse in Germany construct their narratives as a conscious alternative conversation: they do not describe themselves as uprooted, or trying to negotiate different cultural pat-

terns' [2009: 141]. Listeners are supposed to understand that the presence of these ministers in Belgium has nothing to do with that of other migrants, and that it is of a different nature. The narratives feature divine action in the form of an orienting of migratory paths. They insist on the fact that they are very different from other migration candidates, i.e. the generation of those who are 'capable' of jumping out of the plane, or those who 'fiddle around' and use 'roundabout ways' to get in there. Everything sets them apart: the motives for migration, the ways of migrating and, of course, the ways of integrating into the host society (integrationist discourse). Due to their missionary motivations, these ministers distance themselves from the logic of dependency which is often associated with the establishment of people from the south in Europe: they are bearers of a message which they feel is decisive for the future of Europeans [Swanson, 1995: 29].

22. This need for distinction which is presented here with respect to migration – experienced by people who are all more or less marked by a lack of legitimacy – gives food for thought about the central theme of being chosen. This is far from the salvationist concerns of Calvin, who said that it was through trust – or in other words faith – that a person can be sure that they have been chosen. There is therefore nothing for the protestant theologian to distinguish the chosen ones from the reprobates from the outside – not even their behaviour [Weber, 1964: 131]. In the Pentecostal world in Brussels, it appears in the migration narratives of ministers that the means of action and – in this context – the ways of migrating, testify to, confirm and strengthen their character of being chosen. Compared to the pejorative and mortifying definitions of the migrant (who is often associated with difference and sometimes with unsociability, accused of stealing work, criminality and other stereotypes), the proof of their being chosen, as illustrated here in migration narratives, gives ministers a 'challenge and desire' [Belin, 2002: 155], motivating integration and upward social mobility which characterise their religious life.

### 2.3. *The religious interpretation of migratory mobility by Roger, François and Diego*

<sup>7</sup> This term used in medical classifications refers more generally to 'whites' or 'Europeans' according to the speakers.



23. The cases of Aristide and Célestin are nevertheless atypical in the sample of the twenty or so ministers whom I met. In the vast majority of cases, the migratory motives are not religious. The calling to become a minister appears much later in their migration. Their new living conditions (with their share of changes and hostility) explain these decisions and turning points in their lives. Many of them are students who come to Europe to study, especially in the case of Congolese nationals. The others come for economic and political reasons. But even if the movement itself does not have a divine basis at first, it is invariably the object of a religious interpretation. During a 'cell group'<sup>8</sup> gathering in June 2007, Congolese guest minister, Roger, spoke at length about the importance of leading an ascetic life, giving his life a Biblical foundation:

'In the palace of the pharaoh, Moses refused all forms of pleasure and comfort, and based himself on God to succeed. When I was waiting for my visa to study in Europe, I had the opportunity to use a false one, but I refused and began the procedure from Kisangani. That is when the servant stole my passport and changed the photo. But this is how God rewarded me: the passport was refused everywhere.'

24. The moral of this story inspired by Biblical characters is that in order to succeed, one must not choose the easy route by cheating or lying. One must remain 'firm' in one's convictions – to use an adjective which is common in these circles – and the Lord will therefore reward his most deserving children. Once the foundations of this divine meritocracy have been laid, mediocrity becomes the number one enemy: a 'child of God' must climb the social ladder and show the world his or her success.

25. Similarly, the migration narrative of another minister from one of the biggest Pentecostal congregations, whose pastorate is mainly Congolese (DRC), is a biographical reconstruction at work with the 'miracle' of migration being attributed to divine will. The minister François is from central Africa. Having been a diplomatic staff member, he is used to travelling from one country to another. In 2001, war broke out in his country – a failed coup d'état during which his so-called

'tribe' attempted to 'regain' power. He was 'overwhelmed' and lost his diplomatic functions. He was on a mission in Belgium at the time:

'The coup d'état failed and there was a very bloody retaliation. They sacked me. I couldn't risk going back due to the carnage. Many people from our tribe were killed. I couldn't ask for asylum. But the government here knew how things went; they therefore gave me and my family political asylum the same day. God did not even allow me to ask for asylum, yet the country offered it to me. God is there for those who serve him. Now I am here, and it was God who planned this for me.'

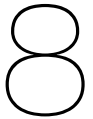
26. In the case of François, God guarantees his importance by anticipating his request for asylum and by obtaining a favourable decision from the local authorities. In other words, God did not allow his 'child' to act as a 'beggar' with respect to the host country, which invites the minister to stay on its territory.

27. As regards the South American religious authorities, the migration narrative of Diego, a Peruvian minister in a Hispanic congregation located near the South Station in Brussels, contrasts with the narratives of his African colleagues. The minister Diego mentions economic reasons as the basis of his migration narrative. He left in pursuit of a better life:

'I arrived in Belgium with the intention of changing my life and above all my economic situation. In my country, there is no possibility to progress and there is no work. We came here to find a better future for our children. We came with the whole family.'

28. He chose Belgium because friends of his had already settled here and his wife had worked here for a year. But when he arrived in 1993, the cool reception of these 'so-called' friends upset him. He was very disappointed and his family felt quite alone. This is why, today in his church, he insists on the importance of solidarity when welcoming newcomers:

<sup>8</sup> The domestic space where weekly prayer gatherings are held for all of the believers in a neighbourhood.



'Since the Lord called me, I have started to look out for strangers – those arriving in this country from Latin America. They arrive with the hope that they will find work and that they will be able to send money to their family back home. But when they arrive, they are faced with the surprise that things are different and not so easy. The friendships they had change here. In addition to their pain and suffering, the fact that they cannot find work causes them to change. They are surprised to hear their friends say to them: "It costs such and such an amount" or "You owe me such and such an amount". Problems and difficulties arise. But those of us in the spiritual domain try to help them. They often come without their family, young children and wives, and are therefore distressed, but we try to reassure them. Despite the fact that they are unhappy and alone, there is a God who is looking out for them. A God who gives them rest and peace if they open themselves up to him and have faith in him. And this is how many people have met God and have been able to overcome this stage: find a good job, good employers and help their family. And when they return, they are able to provide a future for their family.'

29. The way in which he carries out his functions as minister is therefore closely related to the bad experience he had when he arrived in Belgium. His movement from Latin America to Belgium is not interpreted as having a divine cause. Contrary to his African counterparts, Diego does not appear to have taken the route of 'divine' migration (which does not allow us to draw general conclusions based on a single Latin American case). In the same respect, he told me that he is surprised to be a minister today. His calling took shape through encounters and prophecies which other 'men and women of God' made regarding his life. A few years ago, he could not have imagined himself as a religious messenger in a foreign country. However, his presence in Belgium today is clearly considered to be God's will. His importance and the proof that he was chosen are illustrated in a biographical event which he talks about on different religious occasions. When he lived in Peru he delivered bread. One day, he was attacked by Shining Path revolutionaries who threatened to kill him. There were four of them and they were armed. He was able to escape that day because 'God had a plan for [him] and wanted [him] to be in this country.' This story was

part of the 'miracles' which contributed to his important role in founding his church.

### **Conclusion: migratory theology**

30. For the four ministers from African countries, their migration from Africa to Europe followed a divine path. This specific mobility contributed to giving their decision to settle in Belgium and in Brussels a special value. Their presence in this country is not due to their will: it is of a higher order and is part of a plan which is beyond their control. Their usefulness in the country is therefore justified. For the Latin American minister, even if his migration did not take divine channels, his religious project in Belgium has definitely been moulded by his migratory experience.

31. In this article, I have attempted to show how these individual narratives – which have been shaped by a collective influence – come within the scope of a grand narrative about migrants in Brussels. Group identity therefore becomes the discursive focus of sermons and other messages delivered in these religious spaces: 'not surprisingly, pentecostals and charismatics recount their life stories in the horizon of the "sacred narratives" of the Bible' [Währisch-Oblau, 2009: 32]. In this metanarrative, the Old Testament serves as a model for the scenario about contemporary religious mobility: the image of Europe sparkles like the mirage of the Promised Land given by God to the Israelites.

32. In the context of Brussels, movements, mobility and the migratory project are reinterpreted in the light of the fulfilment of 'God's plan': the channels of 'divine migration' lead certain ministers from the south to settle in Belgium and prompt certain believers who live in Brussels to reconsider their plans to return to their country of origin. Divine agency, capacity for individual action and crossing borders are expressed in original ways in this process of rewriting one's story. In this sense, the concept of 'enacted destiny' proposed by Boris Nieswand in his analysis of the establishment of west African Christians in Berlin is particularly appropriate in describing the religious mobility of ministers in Brussels. Two processes prevail in the actions of ministers as they are men-

tioned in their migration narrative: 'First, enacted destiny refers to an idea of divine empowerment, which enables believers to deal with risk and contingency. Second, it refers to a scheme of interpretation in which a correspondence between God's agency and human agency is ascribed retrospectively' [2010, 25]. This proclaimed correspondence has the power to connect the human narrator's destiny with stakes of a divine nature and thus, in a sense, to go beyond the disparaging views concerning the players in the migratory movements which unite the southern and northern hemispheres.

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