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# The relationship between conversion narratives to the self and to the community: a case study of a born again group in the Philippines

Jérémy Ianni 

Education Sciences, University of Paris VIII Vincennes Saint-Denis, Saint Denis, France

## ABSTRACT

Religious conversion from Catholicism to a Born Again denomination is an increasingly common phenomenon in the Philippines. Such conversions inspire personal narratives. Using various forms of testimony, new converts use autobiographical methods to narrate both an individual and universal story. The probative and transmissive dimensions of testimony are also affected by power figures, as these narrative forms are produced before the pastors in the new religion. What then of the reflexivity of the author of the testimony? Even if the conversion narrative contributes to the plausibility of the new social structure joined by the conversion, the latter can also be a source of reflexivity since it contains an internal dialogue with oneself.

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In the Philippines, Born Again Christian groups are increasingly visible. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2018), 10% of the population today is converted to these new denominations, up from 4% 15 years ago. New Christians contribute to discursive changes, producing testimonies both in places of worship and in the public space to evangelise and share the Good News.

Jayeel Cornelio, a Filipino sociologist of religion, identifies religious narrative production as an expression of activism. He argues that evangelical Protestants are activists as they share a vision of society based on the interpretation of texts. They advocate the idea that their church is the only way to truly live the faith, declare that Jesus is the only Lord, and follow what their leader tells them to do (Cornelio 2017, 23). Discursive production is only one facet of this activism, if not a political expression.

As part of an Education Sciences field survey conducted since 2019 on new Christian conservativisms, I have been meeting with members of two Philippine Born Again churches. In the Philippines, the Born Again Christian denomination is a group of nonhomogeneous small local churches. Some of them are part of larger networks, such as the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches.<sup>1</sup> This movement emerged in the late 1930s in the Philippines and gained popularity in the 1970s. Since the 2000s, Born Again churches grew mainly by targeting young people in schools (Tan 2015).

What these churches have in common is a doctrine based on conversion: one's salvation no longer depends on good deeds or predestination, but on accepting Christ as one's personal Saviour and confessing one's sins directly to Him (Cottret 2015, 29). Confession reconfigures faith in very individual ways and can foster the emergence of narratives that are part of the collected data: Since 2020, I have been conducting non-structured interviews with a dozen members of this group, carried in Tagalog or in English, in person (where possible) or by video conference. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, with the Tagalog translated to English by me. To analyse them, I relied on a qualitative and structural content analysis method that is based on the search for disjunctions, the identification of pivotal moments and the study of temporalities (Bourgeois, Nizet, and Piret 1996).

These narratives, which allow people to share their own experience, have autobiographical features, simultaneously showing a transcended Self who has taken control of one's life in moving from darkness to light,<sup>2</sup> that is, the conversion to a Born Again denomination. Conversion immediately brings tension to the analysis of these narratives since the passage from 'darkness to light' is likely phrased according to the demands of people exercising power. So to what extent do these accounts reflect a personal experience? What is the place of reflexivity in the wording of these experiences of religious conversion?

This paper discusses the narrative dimension of conversion, using both a sociological and philosophical perspective. First, based on examples from my data corpus, I stress the autobiographical, transmissive, and evidential dimensions of these accounts. Second, I discuss the narrative dimension in relation to power relations. Third, I discuss the shift from a *communitarian* to a *societal* identity (Dubar 2000, 213) to show how the new conversion accounts can also allow the *Narrative-Self* and the *Reflexive-Self* to emerge.

## **Narratives with autobiographical, transmissive, and evidential dimensions**

In this first part, I propose to analyse two narratives: a testimony collected in the form of research interviews and a musical form of testimony collected during a religious celebration. These narratives involve autobiographical, transmissive, and evidential dimensions, as well as related to a form of individual performance.

### **Testimony**

The first life story collected from July to September 2020 is that of a respondent whose alias is Mark.

In the first interview, Mark explained that before his conversion to Born Again his faith was not genuine. He questioned the existence of God because of the difficulties he had in life. He recounted that in 2010, during a drinking session, he got very drunk and at that moment he felt the presence of God in his body: this was when he felt his faith became real. From then on, his whole narrative revolved around his pre – and post-conversion conditions. Prior to the conversion he did not understand the characteristics of God, but now he does. He began to study the Bible in a school and a Bible study group. According to him, he realised that even though God can punish, He can also forgive, provided that we surrender to God completely. It was not religion that transformed him, but his belief in God. For him, this transformation is a rebirth, he is *born again* because he has accepted Christ.

The main difficulty in the analysis of this interview is that Mark details his life, his profession, the place where he lived, his family, but also his beliefs, especially about the conditions that ensure salvation for all people. To support the idea of surrendering totally to God for salvation, he relies both on his own experience and on a verse from the New Testament: Romans 6:23 (Bible, 1978). For a researcher collecting empirical data, this is a methodological difficulty, since the testimony is also a description used to establish truth.

Throughout the next interviews, Mark focused on his experience by targeting certain moments that refer to the actual experience and not the ones prescribed by the evangelical religious discourse. Mark described his conversion to Born Again as a pivotal moment in his life. He explained that he was 21 years old at the time, living sometimes at his girlfriend's house and sometimes in a dormitory, and that he had stopped his studies in the university. He was unemployed and had a purposeless life. He went out frequently at night with his friends and took drugs. Because of the drugs, he lacked rest and he started to hallucinate. He would think he was being followed in the street. One night, he said, he was feeling particularly nervous and went to a shop to buy alcohol with his two cousins and took a high dose of methamphetamines [locally called *shabu*]. He then took a taxi and when he arrived home, he thought he immediately fell asleep and did not remember how the evening had ended. The next day, he said he felt bad, both physically and mentally, as he got paranoid that something would happen to him. Gradually his anxiety subsided, and he started praying for a return to normal life and for God to put him back on the right track. His mind became more peaceful, and Mark explained that the anguish and phobia of going out was taken away by God.

This testimony contains three distinct and at the same time related dimensions: autobiographical, transmissive, and evidential. The autobiographical dimension is strong: Mark gives details about his life, speaks using the 'I' pronoun, and situates the social and family environment of this experience. However, many issues are conveyed by the collection of autobiographical data linked to transformative moments: the interviewee must say what they did, not what they think they did. The speech must be embodied. Access to recollection must be encouraged so that the respondent can talk about a specific moment, with vivid perception, and not about a certain sort of general moment. This also allows the interviewee to obtain a sufficient level of detail and to explain the micro actions carried out around the moment of a turning point (Lesourd 2006, 143–146). This autobiographical dimension was spontaneously present in Mark's speech elaboration, who did not hesitate to describe details, places, attitudes, etc.

This dimension can also be transmissive, particularly during stages of life that are marked by ruptures (Cuyinet et Cuyinet 2020, 179), such as the conversion to a Born Again denomination. By verbalising his experience, Mark also offers a space in which his experience has greater collective significance. He explains that he plays basketball with young people, which is a way for him to offer them an activity they like and to share his experience with them. He tries to transmit positive values so that these young people can find a purpose in their lives and become good citizens. According to him, community services aim to make people aware that Christ is part of their lives and that he preaches the love of God based on his experience.

Mark's main communication tools are his experience and his testimony, thus stressing a transmissive and an educational dimension whose primary purpose is conversion. Conversion, which is different from affiliation or membership in a religious group, is

also a stage in which one can publicly declare that one adheres to a new value system (Orfali 2011, 65). Thus, Mark's testimony also contains an evidential dimension. First, he proves his conversion by declaring it publicly. Second, this testimony also aims to prove that rescue and salvation in the temporal existence are possible through divine intervention and personal relationship with Jesus.

The practice of faith here has a deeply individual characteristic, having roots in Arminianism and the Great Awakenings of the 19th century. Arminianism challenges the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and asserts that every believer can be freely saved by God. However, this access to salvation is conditioned by the believers' personal adherence to salvation (Cottret 2015, 29), which Mark verbalises by insisting that one must accept Jesus as one's personal Saviour. Evangelical movements, founded on Arminianism and reaffirmed during the Great Awakening, are clothed with an individualistic tendency, declaring that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life (Marin-Lamellet 2014, 107). However, as Yannick Fer, a French sociologist points out, the discourse that inscribes 'evangelicals' groups in a grand narrative about the modern individual, emancipated from obligatory membership and free to make his or her own choices' (Fer 2021, 34) may tend to limit the interpretation of religious facts, to the detriment of taking their social dimensions into account.

Before looking at how the narration of the autobiographical dimension is influenced by a new social framework, I suggest examining a second form of testimony: one that involves music.

### **Musical testimony**

Members of Born Again Christian groups may also use other media, such as music. The song I analyse here was sung in June 2022, in a Born Again community church located in the suburbs of Metro Manila, in Quezon City. This church organises activities in the nearby city jail, such as free Bible study classes. Paulo, an alias given to the singer, met members of this church when he was imprisoned.

During a religious service in June 2022, the pastor called Paulo in front of the audience of about 30 people. The pastor introduced Paulo, explaining that the latter had written this song while in prison for a song contest organised by the church there. Paulo then started playing the guitar and sang; the lyrics of the song was shown on a projector screen. While Paulo was singing his own composition, titled '*Tulongan mo ako Panginoon*' [Help me God], the pastor recorded him with his mobile phone and went live on Facebook, indicating that he was with Paulo, who had just been released from prison. Paulo's musical expression is therefore destined to be public.

This autobiographical dimension can also be found in the lyrics. Paulo invokes elements of his personal experience. He sings that '*Dito raw ay wala raw Diyos/ang sarili lamang kaya ang hirap harapin, itong aking pankukulungan*' [It is said there is no God here/Only the self, so it's difficult to face this prison life]. He narrates his discomfort when he sings: '*Tulongan mo ako Panginoon na maintindihan kung ba't ako naririto sa aking kinalalagyan*' [Help me Lord to understand why I am here in this situation]. We can understand from listening to Paulo that before he accepted God, he felt lost.

The change of regime from darkness to light is also reflected in the lyrics, when he sings '*Dahil ang buhay ko o Diyos sa 'yo ko na pinagtitiwala*' [My life oh God, I entrust to

you] or ‘*Gamitin mo ang buhay ko, buhay ko na hiram lamang*’ [Use my life, this merely borrowed life]. Paulo also produces a discourse in which his life is intertwined with a transmissive dimension, by appealing to the audience: the song is intended to be listened to.

As Paulo publicly declares his commitment to a new value system, this song conveys an evidential dimension. In contrast to the testimony, this song proposes a sensory and bodily experience of devotion.

In both examples, the autobiographical, transmissive, and evidential dimensions are present in different ways and developed to different degrees. Whether this narrative engages the work of the mind through listening and understanding, or the body through an openness to the devotional experience, it remains as personal as it is transcendent. This experience is no longer merely singular or even particular to a given religious group: it is likely to reverberate in a wider community than that of a well-defined and restricted religious group. It seems important to ask: To what extent do these narratives reflect a singular or institutional power-driven experience?

### **What [auto]biographical singularities are to be found in these experiences?**

Throughout the data collection, I observed that the entirety of these narratives includes a temporal sequence that contains a rupture. A first situation characterised by vice ends because of a radical change, the encounter with God, to make way for a second situation characterised by light. Thus, the concept of *alternation* or total social world change is relevant to the study of religious conversions (Berger et Luckmann [1986] 2018, 250).

Although some sociological attempts to study religion may be considered as reductionist (Desroche 1967, 3) or not considering what is specifically religious about religion, the sociological approach is also an effort to make more explicit the social mechanisms that support the moment of conversion to another religious denomination. It does not address the question of whether the theory is true or not, but it is still very useful in clarifying the social frameworks of memory on which conversion narratives are based.

While focusing on the temporalities of these narratives, we can distinguish three moments that recur: before (the shadow), during (the conversion), and after (the light). These moments are articulated in a linear way. However, I argue that this does not mean that the believers’ story is always progressive.

In Mark’s story, the first period corresponds to a life socially situated by autobiographical elements: he was unemployed, lived in a dormitory, and used drugs. Financially, it was his girlfriend who supported him. The lexicon for talking about drugs is marked with evasiveness: “I was not a good person. I did a lot of mistakes [...] stupid moments [...] you lost your track [...] different life, night life [...]” (Mark, personal communication, July 2020).

This situation finally ended, as Mark mentions a transformative moment that allowed him to leave this dark world. He explains that he felt ‘relieved at that time, there were a peace and then faith grows [sic] until the time I accepted Christ as my Lord. [...] My faith transformed my life’,<sup>3</sup> using the word ‘transformation’ 11 times during the interview. After this transformation, Mark explains that he now possesses greater self-knowledge, and has recreated a path that keeps him out of danger. He now knows that he will go to Heaven because he has accepted Christ as his personal Saviour. Here Mark shows that he



now re-socialises in a different way: this is a rebirth, the life of before is no longer there. The characteristics of this transformative moment are therefore those of alternation, which constitutes a conversion to another life (Vulbeau 2006, 63).

This alternation is present in all the conversion stories I collected, as can be seen for example in this interview with a 61-year-old participant who lives in a public cemetery:

They say that once you take drugs, you can't get off them, but that's not true. I prayed to stop and to have a better life, "Lord I don't want to go through this anymore, help me get out of the vice, only You can help me get out of the vice" and one day you get up and you don't have the vice for good, and that's what happened to me.<sup>4</sup>

Another participant, a 46-year-old Born Again pastor, started the interview by mentioning his rebirth story:

[In the] year 1998, I have this encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ because way back then I used to be into a lot of vices, and I am [sic] a former drug user. There was a time that I almost lost my mind, and I was planning to go to a rehabilitation, a drug rehabilitation centre. Then my girlfriend told me that before I go [sic.] to the drug rehabilitation centre, she would bring me to someone, a pastor who will share to me the word of God from the Bible. He simply shares to me John 3:16 and that's the word that I heard on this pastor and eventually there is this inner conviction in my heart that this is what I need. I embraced what the word of God says about me, I had this supernatural experience and that was the turning point of my life.<sup>5</sup>

These accounts of life-changing stories are fostered by pastors who motivate converts to verbalise their rebirths during church services preaching to inspire church attendees. For instance, one pastor shares in his preaching: 'Haidy [alias] used to drink and God gave her the chance to change. This does not mean that she hates her friends, she remains friends with people who drink'.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, even during the daily devotional practice, the pastors instruct the converts to focus on the changes they need to make:

You read one chapter a day and choose two or three verses and write a diary. You choose and write directly on the diary, you rewrite the verse and read it repeatedly. How many times? It depends on you. what does writing teach you? Then you observe: what are my observations? What do I need to change in my life? Then you apply: on a strictly personal level, I must change things. You have to start doing it even if it's difficult. It is a practical application. And then you pray. It's difficult to apply so you have to pray. You write the prayer as a love letter to God.<sup>7</sup>

Transformation towards light is also stressed by the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches whose mission is to 'seek the transformation of individuals and communities through the propagation of applied Biblical spirituality',<sup>8</sup> founded 'on the belief that genuine believers in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit are called to be "salt" and "light" in this world, thus serving as catalysts for positive change in the lives of peoples [...].'<sup>9</sup>

The concept of alternation raises the question of the maintenance of reality since the latter can radically change. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman have described several elements that enable the new reality to be maintained and, above all, to be made plausible. First, the *conversational apparatus*, can be defined as what is said and what can be said, including the ways of saying it, in each reality. The set of people who use the same conversational apparatus thus confirms to each other the existence of the reality in which they live, there is a form of collaboration in maintaining it. Alternation thus implies a



change in this conversational apparatus. Second, reality must be shared by enough people to have *plausibility structures*. These structures are built on beliefs, and if a significant number of people adhere to those beliefs, they become plausible and can therefore be integrated into reality. This does not mean that the belief is true or false, but that it is plausible, regardless of its veracity. Third, the *significant others* are central, primary agents that help maintain reality. In the process of new socialisation, especially during institutionalisation, certain people will become significant, such as the pastor of the new church, or the religious leaders (Berger et Luckmann [1986] 2018, 253–264).

In narratives of conversion to Born Again denominations, it is easy to identify alternation (moving from darkness to light), which underlies a change in the conversational apparatus (communicating with people who are in the dark and then to converts), in the plausibility structures (a sufficient number of converted people who use the same conversational apparatus and patronise the same institutionalised venues who make beliefs a reality), or even in the significant others (the pastor and religious leaders).

From this perspective, conversion refers to a change of social reality. In the case of conversion to a Born Again denomination, we may wonder if the new reality contains a progressive dimension. This is again the study of a corpus of transformation life-stories, the pastors' discourses, and the vision developed by the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches that may orient this reflection. What characterises the new reality for Born Again converts is the fact of having surrendered their lives to God to obtain salvation. This light that characterises the aftermath of conversion corresponds well to Salvation, made possible by the death of Jesus on the Cross who sacrificed himself to allow them access to eternal life. From a historical point of view, it seems then that there is no significant event after Jesus' death on the Cross. Conversion to Born Again removes the progressive dimension and significance of history: truth is revealed once and for all, and there can be no new or novelty after the birth and death of Jesus.

As Filipina philosopher Tracy Llanera points out, religious language, which she describes as authoritarian, is based on transcendence and redemption. The transcendental dimension takes precedence over the other dimensions, and religion conveys a language that carries with it a notion of redemptive truth: truth is at the centre of the system and completes the reflective process. Language takes over the Self and authority is defended to the death (Llanera 2019, 49).

We can therefore see that even if the stories contain autobiographical elements, the phrasing of the new identity of the saved person is constructed from a revealed and redemptive truth. I therefore contend that the new identity has characteristics that are given and irreducible, because it depends on a historical fact, that is, the death of Jesus on the Cross.

From a narrative point of view, alternation implies a fictional character of the reconstruction of history or narrative reconstruction. As Francis Lesourd (2009), researcher in Education Sciences at the University of Paris 8, points out in *L'Homme en transition* [*The Man in Transition*]:

Since it is, they say, relatively easier to invent things that never existed than to forget things that happened, the individual can fabricate and insert events wherever the need arises so as to harmonize memory and the reinterpreted past. Since it is the new reality rather than the old one that now seems plausible to him or her, he/she can be perfectly sincere in such a procedure (218) [translated by us].

Reinterpretation thus constitutes a rupture in the biography of the newly converted person. In other words, memory has a social framework that can influence the wording of a Born Again conversion experience. This does not mean that the production of this type of narrative precludes all reflexivity, but it does show that power relations are considered in the narrative reconstruction process, voluntarily or not.

Since the narrative process is likely to be influenced by the need to respond to the demands of power (Moreau 2018, 11), I will now analyse these narratives through the lens of identification for the self and for others (Dubar 2000, 4) by capturing the reflexive and identity-building dimensions.

### **Identity crisis: towards a project of oneself through narration**

The choice of autobiographical singularities used in Born Again denomination conversion narratives is oriented by the figures of power. What then of the narrator's identity dimension?

French sociologist Claude Dubar describes identity as both unique and shared, including two linguistic operations: differentiation, i.e. seeking singularity, and generalisation, i.e. seeking commonalities with a class of elements (Dubar 2000, 3). This paradox is linked to the fact that identity is linked to identifications for oneself and for others. While we have seen that identifications for others can emerge through the analysis of Born Again conversion narratives, what about identifications claimed by oneself? Dubar shows that there are forms of communitarian identity, which correspond to systems already in place and to what can be reproduced from one generation to another. In the case of this survey, membership in a monotheistic religious denomination, such as Catholicism, gives a communitarian identity. Furthermore, there are forms of societal identifications, which can be related to collective, multiple, and variable forms, and 'in this perspective, each person possesses multiple belongings that can change over the course of a lifetime' (5). According to Dubar, the societal forms are insufficiently discussed in modern sociology or too often reduced to a consequence of capitalism, liberalism, and individualism.

This reduction can be enticing. By examining the Born Again conversion narratives, it is obvious that there is also a subjectivity, that of the personal relationship to God. This religious feeling, described and publicly claimed as a vehicle of personal transformation to pass from darkness to light is indeed in line with the principles of liberalism and its individualistic side. The conversion narrative also becomes a vehicle for personal performance, in which the figure of the role model is visible. The often-decried return of the role-model figure (at least in France) can be seen as part of the spirit of capitalism, and thus as a transaction. As Max Weber pointed out, at the dawn of the 20th century, there is a continuity between the spirit of capitalism and Protestant ethics. The demonstration reaches a paroxysm if we focus on the concept of *Beruf*, which Weber shows to be a cornerstone (Weber 1904, 28). The *Beruf* or vocation to accomplish one's work as formulated by Martin Luther allows for the legitimisation of work within the capitalist organisation and at the same time for the believer to accomplish their work in the name of God. Religion and the exercise of vocation, are thus clothed with the idea of individual performance, which links the narrative of religious conversion to the exercise of a vocation in the name of God. In this sense, it is possible to reduce the religious narrative

or testimony to an economic task, to act in God's name and to be used by Him by giving Him one's life. Does this mean then that all the identifications produced by the testimony are made for others? The answer is yes if we accept this reduction. However, I don't.

It is important to understand conversion as a passage from a *communitarian identity*, in this case membership in Catholicism, to a *societal identity*, in this case membership in a Born Again denomination, which is part of a much more local, new, and moving dynamic. For Claude Dubar, this identity transformation does not always mean a submission to the development of liberalism, but is also the marker of an existential crisis, of a change in value system. This crisis obliges the individual to rewrite and re-narrate their affiliations: they are no longer a member of a so-called natural community that would be self-evident, such as an inherited religion, but must redefine themselves to find their representation, which contains both identifications for others and for themselves (Dubar 2000, 161).

In this identarian crisis there is also a dimension of self-construction, a projecting of the self through narrativity. Dubar calls this the Narrative Self (Dubar 2000, 197), which is also based on subjectively assumed autobiographical processes. Thus, the conversion accounts detail the previous social life, admittedly reinterpreted by a new social framework. The narrative identity thus highlighted during the transition from *communitarian* to *societal* identity-based affiliations also corresponds to a new identification: to narrate the Self and become a project of oneself.

This narrative identity implies a new identity of the Self, and religious discursive production, whether in the form of testimony or song, reinforces the emergence of this *Narrative-Self*. It also implies reflexivity, for 'subjectivity is expressed, already through temporalities, because history does not only recount the chronogenesis, nor is it the ordering of a time of memory, it is the trace of the inner dialogue between Self and "I"' (Dubar 2000, 207–211). Naming a new personal identity thus obliges us to distinguish the 'I' from the Self, and to consider the trace of this inner dialogue in the stories.

To leave the Catholic Church in the Philippines is to take a huge risk of being stigmatised and cast out by family and friends. The *Reflexive-Self* can act as a mediator: one needs someone to talk to, that is, oneself in the first place. We have emphasised that identity is linked to intersubjectivity, and so the *Narrative-Self*, which consists in telling oneself in terms of otherness, complements the *Reflexive-Self* to bring out this new personal identity. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur provides a condition to this definition of personal identity. He states that the *Reflective-Self* and the *Narrative-Self* must cohabit within fair institutions (Dubar 2000, 213). These narratives of religious experience can allow the *Narrative-Self* to emerge, provided that they belong to a fair institution, and thus be a place of reflexivity, self-construction, and resolution of an existential crisis, brought about by a total change in social framework and value system.

## Conclusion

There are several dimensions to religious conversion narratives. Their autobiographical dimensions can be grasped by finding elements from the personal life of the narrator. As these stories are intended to be listened to, they also have a transmissive dimension, whether through the narrator's message or a bodily experience like in a musical medium. Finally, they contain an evidential dimension, as the narrator declares their new religious

affiliation and new identity, while contributing to a structure of greater plausibility, which maintains a new truth.

As we have seen, this structure is built around the conversational apparatus (narrative and discursive dimension), enough adherents (group or even institutional dimension), and significant others (organisational dimension). These significant others, who are figures of power in the case of Born Again conversions, can influence the arrangement of the elements making up the testimony, so that the latter can serve as proof and legitimise a new social framework. As Cornelio points out, this discourse of experience can find translation into the political field with the emergence of a form of Christian activism (Cornelio 2017, 23), an activism supported using redemption-based authoritarian language (Llanera 2019, 51).

However, if the institution is fair, the narration of the self through testimony can allow the *Reflexive-Self* to emerge. The new convert must be able to justify by their choice, characterised by the passage from a communitarian to a societal identity. The narrative is thus not only a performance of personal self-aggrandisement, or the emergence of a role-model rooted in liberalism, but also a site of inner dialogue between an 'I' and a Self.

This therefore requires the researcher to consider the relationships of power that are exercised in the new religious institution in cases of conversion and therefore to take into account a greater multi-referentiality in analysis: the sciences of language and education and the social sciences are thus relevant in analysing religious narratives.

## Notes

1. Website: <https://pcec.org.ph>.
2. This phrase, often used by the pastors, is surely drawn from the gospel of St John.
3. Mark, interview, July 2020.
4. Excerpt from an interview conducted on 16 February 2021 in Manila, in Tagalog, translated by us.
5. Excerpt from an interview conducted on 20 April 2022 February 2021 in Iligan City, via Zoom, in English.
6. Excerpt from a preacher given on 12 October 2021 in Quezon City, Philippines, in Tagalog, translated by us.
7. Excerpt from a preach given on 7 December 2022, in Quezon City, Philippines, in Tagalog, translated by us.
8. Source: <https://pcec.org.ph/leadership-development-2/>.
9. Ibid.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

*Jérémy Ianni* have been a contractual doctoral student since September 2022. He had previously studied online at the University of Paris 8. He worked for six years in a people's education organization in France and in the Philippines, after which he had obtained a diploma of socio-cultural animator in 2017. He had been member of the editorial board of the journal *Pratiques de Formation/Analyses* [PFA] and currently co-coordinating a publication on lifelong sentimental

education for an upcoming issue. He works on manifestations of evangelical power in the Philippines with a multi-referential approach, giving central importance to empirical experience. He study the transformations of self- including ethical orientation - that arise from conversion to a new Christian conservatism. He is interested in phenomenology, and the investment of the body by power-knowledge relations. He is interested in the theme of cross-cultural translation and so-called Southern epistemologies as he conduct his research in Tagalog, with a background in English and French. His field of scientific activities are ethnography and participant observation, intercultural translation, conversion and self-education, and alienation.

## ORCID

Jérémy Ianni  <http://orcid.org/0009-0000-1184-9657>

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