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Theological migration periods

This entry is related to the context of Mediterranean Africa. The circulation of individuals and the associated religious dynamics are central in the ongoing debates regarding mobility in Mediterranean Africa. The context of the research is related to religious issues resulting from the mobility that, during the course of history, has affected North Africa and made it an interface between Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa and even the Middle East.

Mediterranean Africa has been a major point of encounter between the three main religions. The early development of Christianity in Africa, the origins of which we still know little about, benefited from a continuous circulation of believers who linked the African and Mediterranean pastoral communities together. The new mobility that emerged from the Islamization of the Maghreb in the Middle Ages, and the political and religious battles that it caused, deeply altered the societies in North Africa.

The anthropological and sociological studies carried out from the Maghreb to Egypt also underline how mobility itself can generate religious encounters and even religious conversions. By bridging the paradigms of religion and mobility, we can evaluate the influence of religion on the renewing of migratory issues, and also the importance of migration in the contemporary religious reshaping in sub-Saharan and Mediterranean Africa. Within migration, religion builds identities, sometimes modifies routes, revives cult places, accompanies and welcomes foreigners, invests and redefines urban territories. It can even formulate new political questions in the societies it encounters. Within religion, mobility questions certainty, permits new encounters, sometimes even creates conflicts, but it is also a resource for rethinking contemporary theologies.

In the constructions that have been observed in fieldwork (African migration in Morocco), the religious aspect of migration unfolds across three distinct temporal dimensions. Thus, the following can be delineated: theologies of passage, anchoring and settlement. However, these phases often occur simultaneously, without adhering to a strict chron-

ological order, aligning with the migrants' experiences of mobility.

During the phase referred to as the time of passage, the migrant individual is assumed to have reached Morocco in order to proceed more effectively on their journey towards Europe. This phase also embodies mobility, immobility and invisibility intertwined with clandestinity. However, paradoxically, even while these protagonists are still in a state of departure, they are already contemplating the permanent establishment of their churches, thereby forming a religious community that, as has been observed, becomes the foundation enabling them to formulate a theological understanding of their presence in Morocco. The themes addressed in sermons draw upon passages from the Bible, and biblical figures grappling with mobility and trials such as Abraham, Jacob and Moses. These references to exodus, the departure from Egypt or the desert crossing metamorphose into metaphors for their lives.

The time of anchoring is linked to the regularization phase for foreigners initiated in Morocco in 2013. This phase is accompanied by the structural evolution of Christianity and the historic churches through the involvement of Protestant and Catholic stakeholders who are cognizant of the evolving evangelical landscape of home-based churches in Morocco. This phase is also underscored by the desire to provide guidance beyond spiritual accompaniment for the pastors of these home-based churches. During these temporal stages, while there is an observed easing of tensions in migrant neighbourhoods between Moroccan and African Christian populations, there concurrently arises the idea among the pastors of these home-based churches to unite, spiritually support departures, and confront daily challenges while highlighting Morocco's role in shaping contemporary Christian narratives. The pastors thus proclaim to the migrants, 'You are not here by chance', implying that 'You are also here to re-establish Christianity in Morocco'. Moreover, the King is perceived as a benefactor and the guarantor of their legitimacy. Between the two phases of passage and anchoring, a theology of psychological, spiritual and material support remains operative, as witnessed in the daily life of the churches.

The third phase, corresponding to that of settlement, represents a time when migrants of Christian faith increasingly render their

presence in Morocco visible, conceiving it as a land where they can both live and cultivate their faith. This phase witnesses the convergence of prophetic visions with plans for settling in Morocco, concurrently strengthening ties with the country of origin. It is a period where theological training provides a framework for and structures home-based churches in Morocco, where such churches endeavour to unify, and where pastors come together in communion, particularly in the face of death within their community, as exemplified by a funeral in the Christian cemetery of Rabat.

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Further reading

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