Dreaming, Temporality in Diasporic Space, and Religious Reflections among Kabyle Immigrant Converts in France

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ABSTRACT   This article explores diasporic experiences and reflections on religious conversion through analyzing visitational, predictive/generative, and inspirational dreams recalled and related by Kabyle immigrant converts in France, which prompted their earlier conversion from Islam in their home region of Kabylie in Algeria, North Africa, prior to their migration to France. There is an approach to dreaming as both self-psychoanalysis and social practice in which visions in visitational dreams illuminate complex cultural identity and belonging in contexts of believed soul travel in dream time and transcultural migration over space. Useful in this analysis is Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, referring to how configurations of time and space are represented in language—in the present case, dreams—analyzed here in terms of how converts' dreaming, cultural theories of dreams, and dream-sharing construct ambiguous, changing, and ambivalent meanings of conversion in bringing together, but also highlighting contrasts between, cultural and religious distances over time and space. Pre- and post-conversion disruptions emerge in dreams that reveal both religious change and cultural continuity in ways these diasporic converts forge new meanings of identity and belonging as they cope with remembered political violence in Algeria and ongoing economic precarity, political discrimination, and social ambiguity in France. More broadly, an approach inspired by a Bakhtinian (1981) "chronotopic" metaphor hopefully opens up rich perspectives in the study of diasporic spaces and entangled religions in contexts of both conjunctions and disjunctions between dreaming and waking lifeworlds of contradictions and dilemmas over time.

KEYWORDS   Dreams, Temporality, Religious Conversion, Amazigh/Berber, African Diaspora

Introduction

What insights do dreams and visions yield into conversion experiences of time and space, in particular disruption, but also non-binary and non-linear religious transformation? This article

[1]

explores reflections on religion as expressed through visitational, predictive/generative, and inspirational dreams prompting conversion from Islam to Christianity by Kabyle immigrant converts, an Amazigh/Berber-speaking group who migrated to France from Algeria over the past decade. Data are drawn primarily from this anthropologist's field research in and around Paris and its suburbs among this Amazigh/Berber-speaking diasporic community, and also some relevant data from my long-term field research among the Tamajaq-speaking Saharan Tuareg, who are culturally and linguistically related to Kabyles, and among whom dreams have similar cultural meanings and uses. The data reveal complexities of belonging and identity in contexts of conversion and migration as converts/immigrants enter new, entangled, yet also distinct religious, geographic, and psycho-social spaces. (1) In diasporic converts' accounts, I argue, intersecting forms of religiosity may lead individuals in different directions, although the ways in which elements of different religious traditions—local forms of Islam, orthodox Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism—can be creatively interconnected do not replicate neat syncretism exactly. What is occurring here is religious innovation (Edgar 2011; Gaskin 2005; Stephen 1979; Tuzin 1989) as well as unsettled ambivalence and critique. Prevalent themes include visitations, sharing, and witnessing, but also subsequently rejected religious views reappearing in dreams. More broadly, this essay addresses the ambiguities and contradictions of religion in cultural and political systems dispersed over time and space as well as in creative imaginations (Mittermaier 2011) in complex, entangled contexts of both conversion and immigration, when there is, I show, an intertwining of both religious disruption and continuity over time and space.

Theoretical Framework, Methods, Findings, and Argument

Dreamers and Converts

Religious and cultural encounters and transformations bring change, but also contradictions. [2] This article does not deny change in conversion, but neither does it assume neat linear transformations or binary identities. Diasporic Kabyle converts' accounts of dreams are illuminating because they reveal how pre-and post-conversion memories together shape the forging of new meanings from past and current experiences: of tensions with colonial and post-colonial state oppression and political violence in Algeria, on the one hand, and economic precarity and social discrimination in France, on the other. Thus temporality is central here. Specifically, this article analyzes immigrant converts' visitational dreams through the lens of the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope (Bakhtin 1981). Such an approach hopefully builds on efforts in anthropology to integrate psychic, cultural, and political aspects of dreaming (Mageo and Sheriff 2019, 2021; Mittermaier 2011; Lohmann 2021a, 2021b) as well as efforts to understand religious change in cultural encounters (Coleman 2015; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Keane 2007; Lohmann 2009, 2021a, 2021b; Robbins 2007). Throughout individual dream accounts and their wider social contexts, I show how pre-conversion religion, politics, and time/space re-emerge, indeed converge, in interior battles over interpretation.

I am not arguing here for "continuity thinking" (Robbins 2007, 5–38) that Robbins insight- [3] fully critiques in some anthropological studies of religion, in particular of Christianity and conversion. Too great an emphasis on continuity can indeed be problematic where conversion to Christianity is concerned, since there is expectation that converts undergo radical change. Yet I contend that "official" dogma and expectation are different from subjective ex-

perience and unintended consequences. The Kabyle immigrant converts' situation is complicated by their diasporic experience in multi-directional migrations—some, for example, travel back and forth between their "home" and diasporic cultures at intervals, some have family members who remain Muslim, and most continue to powerfully identify with their past and current cultural connections to their home region of Kabylie in Algeria. Many are critical of their marginalization by the Algerian state, however, and also worry about their precarious and uncertain predicament in France. In testimonies/witnessings (Fr. *les temoignages*) during church services, structured interviews, informal guided conversations, as well as during sociality beyond the immediate religious institutional setting, immigrant converts made sense of their complex historical, cultural and religious backgrounds through narrating dreams and visions they had back in Algeria that inspired them to convert. To make sense of their continuing limbo and waiting in France, they reflected on past and present popular Islamic and Amazigh/Berber cultural and Christian spiritual figures in dreams and visions situated in their trans-political and trans-religious lifeworlds.

Across Muslim Amazigh/Berber and Arabic communities of Maghrebian Algeria, Morocco, [4] and the Saharan regions of Niger and Mali, dreams have very similar meanings and uses. What one dreams is what the soul has witnessed, since the soul leaves the body and travels in dreams, and one's character may change (Casajus 1995; Crapanzano 1973, 1992; Ouitis 2017; Rasmussen 2006, 2015, 2020; Ziani 2018). Hence the power of the local cultural theory also noted elsewhere (Wogan 2017) that dreams can cause things to happen in the waking world. Despite real and perceived "turning points" in the diasporic Kabyle converts' visitational dreams and visions, nonetheless I show that there is time-space convergence (Bakhtin 1981) in which dreams, like stories (Basso 1996), constitute moral reflections on the construction and reconstruction of entangled selves and religions, thereby revealing neither static continuity nor linear transformation of person, but rather a process I call "wavering"—the temporal counterpart that I propose to the spatial "zigzagging" described by Masquelier among migrant youth in urban Niger (Masquelier 2019). The converts' dream motifs and their wider diasporic contexts analyzed here reveal a time-space configuration which echoes, but also slightly revises, what Bakhtin (1981) terms a discursive chronotope: That is, in converts' testimonies of dreams, references to time evoke or remind convert/dreamers of place in not solely literal, but also extended senses of geographic migration and "soul" travel, evoking broad historical and recent individual experiences in Kabylie, Algeria, and France.

Visitational and other dream motifs and their spiritual themes help immigrants cope with [5] both continuity and disruption, or what Amit terms disjuncture (2018) in self-psycho-analysis, rather than an absolute "end point" in identity and belonging. Yet culture here is more than a useful fiction. Viewed through the lens of the Bakhtinian chronotope, dreams reveal the intersubjectivity of cultural and social practices surrounding religious conversion entangled with migration and diasporic lifeworlds that make for ambivalence and ambiguity, recalling also what Sahlins (1981, 1976) termed structures of conjuncture, the foregrounding of internal and external conflicts and dilemmas. This is a form of cultural encounter—between non-Arab Maghrebian migrants to France and their local host populations—Catholic and Protestant— that lays bare, often in dreaming, both the incompatibilities and the convergences between their pre-existing beliefs and those they are considering adopting or have already adopted. The entanglements under discussion constitute shifting grounds for self-realization and orientation to a difficult and sometimes hostile host country.

Valuable studies (Crapanzano 1973, 1992; Mageo 2013; Mageo and Sheriff 2021; Obeye- [6]

sekere 1981) have critiqued, but also drawn on some earlier analyses of, dreaming in terms of western psychoanalysis, for example, as expression of repressed desires. Yet dreams are indeed also psychological phenomena, and when situated in social practice, history, and cultural theories of person and dreaming can offer much insight into the predicament of the dreamer, particularly in religious contexts (Lohmann 2003, 2021a, 2021b; Mittermaier 2011; Stewart 2017).

Many Kabyle converts' dreams featured spiritual presences who sometimes sequenced and [7] sometimes merged together popular Islamic and Christian imagery (for example, while morphing from *djinn* spirits into Jesus Christ and/or the Holy Spirit, also characterized by symbolic imagery and social practices from popular Islam and Kabyle culture at "home"). These processes of merging and morphing are possible in local dream consciousness that associates dreams with travel and sacred sites. Back in Algeria, however, the Kabyle dreamers could not seek customary dream interpretation by expert Islamic scholar/marabout specialists in their then-tense Kabylie region. Rather, missionaries, pastors, and other converts (often during testimonies at churches, and in some instances, at cemeteries, the latter space paralleling North African and Saharan mediumship near tombs) contributed to dreamer-converts' consciously remembered meanings of their dreams' messages: namely, as instructions to convert to Christianity. On the one hand, their dreams/visions constituted a symbolic pilgrimage in both physical migration travel (to a new country) and spiritual soul travel (to a new religion) in time-space. These themes have also been noted in Australian Aborigines' "dreaming" or "dream time" (Stephen 1979; Tonkinson 2013). On the other hand, also occurring here in the Kabyle converts' dreaming was some critical reflection on entangled beliefs, in a conjunction but also a disjunction. Dream time, in other words, memorialized reviewing, as well as transformation of religious consciousness and social predicament.

Ethnographic and Historical Background

The Kabyle and the Amazigh/Berbers in Pre-colonial, Colonial, and Post-Colonial North Africa and in Diaspora in France

Fundamental to understanding the research participants' perspectives is the complexity of [8] their history and culture. Kabyle speak a language (often called by the same term) that belongs to the Amazigh/Berber group (Brett and Fentress 1996; Goodman 2005), which also includes languages such as Tamajaq, Chlegh, and Chaoui, spoken among several recognized Amazigh clans or lineages believed to have originated in several mountain masses of North Africa and the Central Sahara. The term "Berber," though prevalent in much historical and ethnographic literature, is a gloss is of external origin, increasingly replaced by the term Tamazight, which refers to the language group, or Imazighen (pl. of Amazigh, sing.), which refers to the people who use its languages and dialects (Brett and Fentress 1996, 5). Yet there remain challenges here, since even this local terminology is not used by all Kabyles or all by other Imazighen. For example, although Kel Tamajaq (denoting "people who speak Tamajaq," their language) is sometimes used to refer to the Tuareg, the latter term is still widely used in the literature and by some local Tamajaq speakers, and is not considered pejorative by most in Niger and Mali.

Many diasporic Kabyles among whom I conducted field research, predominantly in a church [9] in a municipality outside Paris, spoke both Kabyle and French, and referred to themselves

and each other alternately as Kabyles, *Leqbayel,* Berberes, or Amazigh, and called their home region in Algeria Kabylie. Historically, this and other regions across the Maghreb and the Central Sahara have experienced invasions and resistance, in waves of Phoenician, Roman, Arab, and French rulers and settlers.

French colonial administrators in what is now Algeria interpreted village assemblies in   [10]
Kabylie as a kind of "primitive" democracy, looked for parallels with Roman law and the French state (Ageron 1960), and promoted what they perceived as "secular" tendencies. In the French colonial imagination, there was a "primordial battle between Christians and Muslims, the Mediterranean and the Sahara," and French administrators labelled Kabyle villages as "primitive democracies," as "secular," or as filled with "lax Muslims" in order to divide and subjugate the colonized (Silverstein 2004, 52). Despite a diverse populace, Arab and Berber became the primary ethnic categories through which French classified the population of Algeria (Lorcin 1995, 2). Although aware that most Kabyles were Muslim, there were some attempts to convert them to Christianity. Following Algerian independence, conversions increased (Kaoues 2013; Graham 2008; Guion 2014). Protestant missionaries inherited colonial attitudes and policies to divide Arabic and Kabyle speakers and other Amazigh/Berbers (Hannoum 2001; Rasmussen 2019).

In the Kabylie region of Algeria, most Amazigh/Berber nationalists have opposed both   [11]
Salafi/Wahabi militant Islamist reformist influence and state Arabization policies. Militant Islamists have opposed both the state and Amazigh/Berber nationalism. Kabyle activists there have led efforts to standardize Tamazight alongside Modern Standard Arabic and to promote the notion of Amazigh identity (Goodman 2005). After protests, clashes with the state, and massacres by the army in 1980 and 1988, the central state government promised democratic reforms and amended the constitution to permit new citizen associations and political parties, which included the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique de Salut,* FIS), legalized in September 1989. After cancellation of the democratically elected victory of Islamist-reformists, civil war erupted in Algeria, lasting through the 1990s, with recurring armed violence between state military rulers and more militant jihadist factions, propelling many into refugee flight.

Yet even prior to the 1990s, France was the destination for many residents of former African   [12]
colonies, especially from Algeria. Kabyle immigrant experiences in France have varied by age-based generation and historically, according to waves of migrating cohorts. Silverstein (2004) has described the first three generations of the Franco-Maghrebi transnational community. Those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to recreate their village social structure in France for cultural continuity. The second generation became cultural brokers between their parents and social institutions while also fighting for immigrant political rights. Children and younger siblings of the second generation, along with new immigrant students and activists fleeing the Algerian civil war of the 1990s, form a third, and most recently, I would add, a fourth, 21st century "wave," cohort, or generation.

The focus here is on a community of recent converts near Paris whose predominantly Kabyle   [13]
congregation referred to their church as being "like a village," alluding to their feelings of mutual support and cultural, political, and linguistic connections there. Most interlocutors and participants in the present study belonged to the latest two waves or cohorts, straddling the third and fourth generations of Kabyle immigrants. Many were refugees fleeing violence who arrived within the last ten to fifteen years. The previous older cohort of converts arrived earlier, around 2001 when their church was founded by Evangelical Protestant American missionaries, and were still present during my earlier research, but by 2016 the older cohort

had returned to Algeria, as younger converts and church members remaining in France explained, "…because the civil war had (hopefully) ended, and they missed their homes there." Yet the remaining immigrants, who tended to be younger, acknowledged that political conditions there remained uncertain, even dangerous; at a church social event following a service, during informal conversations on this topic, several converts lamented that "conversion in Algeria has been stigmatized as apostasy and punished or persecuted not solely by militant jihadists, but also by secular repressive state regimes." The regime of Boutflika, who resigned in 2019 after twenty years in office, was characterized by rampant political repression, financial problems, and unemployment. Most recently, in June 2021, there have been widespread local protest movements in Algeria opposing all kinds of repression and advocating transitional periods before parliamentary elections. There has been burning of churches in Algeria, much feared by converts and their families back home and in the diaspora, but there have also been Islamophobic and anti-Semitic attacks on mosques and synagogues in France. Most converts expressed strong opposition to all these forms of hate-motivated violence.

The immigrant converts in France who participated in this study were in their twenties and thirties, predominantly single, and like many other immigrant converts elsewhere, for example Ethiopian Falashmura in Israel (Seeman 2003), in political "limbo" and not fully established economically. A few were middle-class and married, reflecting the importance of economic stability in cultural gender constructs as a criterion for male adult status in order to marry (Goodman 2005; Rasmussen 2019). Even converts with professional job certificates or academic degrees from Algeria faced difficulties obtaining work and residence documents since their certifications were not recognized in France. Most were marginally employed, and initially resided in subsidized housing. They also faced difficulties bringing relatives and marriage partners to France. Although most of these converts, in contrast to some other immigrant groups there (Selby 2012), were not abjectly impoverished, they, like other immigrants in France, faced economic difficulties, housing discrimination, bureaucratic delays, and political harassment. Most did not suffer racism to the same extent as did Africans from south of the Sahara. In the case of the Kabyle converts, tensions were primarily based on religious conflicts between Christian converts and Muslims within their own diasporic Algerian community who frequently traveled back and forth between these countries and still had strong village ties in Algeria—including gossip networks powerful in controlling one's reputation. There was also fear of more generalized religious and racist violence across Paris and its suburbs, which occurred frequently during this anthropologist's field research there: xenophobic, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic violence. Also feared were the French state's draconian security measures, which tended to scapegoat immigrants from Africa and the Middle East. [14]

That said, Kabyles have also experienced a somewhat distinctive, ambivalent, and anomalous relationship with France. Many immigrants of earlier generations succeeded in establishing small businesses (cafes, hotels) in France, and over the long term have integrated socially into their new country somewhat more than other immigrant groups. Thus converts' dreaming must be situated in this intersectional but also ambiguous and precarious predicament over time and space. Converts' dream time reflects ambivalent and contradictory past, present, and future cultural worlds. [15]

Dream Time: Meanings and Uses

Dreams, Visions, and Divination/Mediumship

Thus it is instructive to briefly review the roles of dreaming, dreams, and dreamers, and attitudes and practices relating to them in North African and the Saharan regions of Africa. Of course, there are some differences across these communities, but many ethnographies show their cultural similarities spanning across these regions from longstanding trading and religious connections. In local religions, including orthodox, popular/cultural, and reformist variants of Islam, all have very precise ideas about dreams.   [16]

There are both widely shared and debated meanings and uses of dreams in Maghrebian and Saharan Arabic and Amazigh/Berber communities. In these settings, most people take dreams very seriously, but there is also some skepticism and disagreement concerning their "truth" value. More broadly, there are recurrent "battles" between Sufi orders and Salafist/Wahabi Islamist reformists in these regions. In Sufi-influenced popular Islam, dreams are highly significant in divination, and often take place while sleeping at tombs and shrines of Islamic scholars or holy men popularly called "marabouts" in North and West Africa, followed by consultations with these specialists for interpretation (Casajus 1995; Crapanzano 1973; Gellner 1969; Rasmussen 2001, 2006). For example, in northern Niger and Mali, Tuareg women and men widely reported receiving dreams and visions—both human and spirit-themed (Nicolaisen 1961; Rasmussen 2015). Crapanzano reported that in Morocco, many feel tied to a (deceased) holy man who serves as an intermediary with God (Crapanzano 1973). Often a pilgrim, sleeping near a holy man's tomb, he or she hopes to have a dream in which the spirit of the tomb appears and gives *al baraka* blessing and advice for dealing with a problem (1973, 170).   [17]

These practices are still widespread and vital, though sometimes hidden since they are challenged by the more militant Salafist/Wahhabi Islamist reformist religious authorities, who oppose them and other non-orthodox practices as supposedly not "true" Islam. Despite this, dreams continue to guide much personal conduct among the "lay" population (propitious days to travel, whom to wed, and when to hold a commemoration following death) and continue to be used in some medico-ritual healing by religious specialists (Rasmussen 2020).   [18]

Even beyond Africa, in diaspora it is still widely believed that dreaming of someone can also predict or reflect a social bond, recalling the important role of dreams in mediumship in North Africa and the Sahara (Rasmussen 2015, 2020). This occurred in several dreams related to this anthropologist in France. On my return visit to a church where I had conducted research over several years, for example, a female soloist in the praise group was delighted to greet me and insisted that a dream she had about me foretold my return. On another occasion, on my visit to an Amazigh/Berber cultural association in a suburb of Paris, a staff member there indicated that he had dreamed the previous night that he would meet and have a conversation with me.   [19]

Jnun (*Djinn or Djnoun*) (spirits mentioned in the Qur'an) appear in many dreams. Women and men in trauma who are angry or frightened are particularly liable to be attacked by the spirits, as are people in liminal periods associated with change in social status, uncertainty, or crisis. Spirits also gravitate to places once filled with people but now empty, near blood after sacrifice, streams, thresholds of doors, crossroads, caves, cars, unfamiliar places, or isolated paths with ambiguous destinations, as mentioned in dreams by several Kabyle converts—as for example, seeing a branching fork in the road—or while simply feeling the presence of a   [20]

djinn/ jnun who sometimes morphed into the Holy Spirit or St. Augustine (revered by converts as allegedly the first Amazigh/Berber Christian) in a vision, as in the following case.

Kareem's Dream

Following a delicious couscous lunch at the home of a converted married couple in a middle-class suburb northwest of Paris, the husband, whom I'll call Kareem, related to me a detailed narrative of his life story and his "double" religious conversions, from Islam to Catholicism to Protestantism, intertwining his "entangled" religious narrative with his interpretation of the history of Algeria and Kabylie politics between French, Arabs, and Kabyles. While in Algeria, he had worked as what he termed a "*petit fonctionnaire*" (civil servant) in a ministry in Algiers, the capital. He elaborated: [21]

> "There, I saw a lot going on that I did not like: corruption, injustice, dictatorship. One night, Saint Augustine appeared to me in a dream, and this inspired me to convert to Catholicism." [Many converts considered St. Augustine as the first Amazigh Christian convert from North Africa.]   [22]

> "Meanwhile, I felt that both French and Arab Algerians betrayed (us) Kabyles. For example, my father was a soldier in the French army during World War II. He went out and found food for French soldiers in his unit, and fought for France. The French promised us Kabyles independence, since many had fought for France, but later, they allowed Arabs to dominate the Algerian state." [Here, colonial policies sought to divide and subjugate, and to prevent collective resistance by "pitting" colonized groups against each other, as in some other colonized African regions (Hannoum 2001).]   [23]

> "After I converted to Catholicism, I went to France… I had a restaurant in Paris' ninth arrondissement (district). I met a priest there whom I considered kind, despite some others' considering him a colonialist. But the (remaining) problem (for me) in converting was, in my (then) viewpoint, the Catholic dogma of the Trinity, which seemed to separate God into three forces; I prefer one united force."   [24]

This critique was not atypical; like some others I heard, Kareem's initial hesitation to convert derived from the Islamic emphasis on a monotheistic Allah. Kareem also opposed Catholicism's hierarchical church organization: "So, (then) I converted to Evangelical Protestantism because I preferred less hierarchy and greater participation by church members and services, and emphasis on the great unity of God, Jesus (as son), and Holy Spirit in the Trinity."   [25]

Thus, despite the certainty of conversion and its ensuing, sometimes radical, life changes, some converts experienced struggles over clear-cut resolution. A few converts related that they had dreamed, and still dream (post-conversions), of named spirits in North African religious orders such as the prominent 'Aisha Qandisha, who in the Maghreb and the Sahara manifests in visions and/or dreams (Crapanzano 1973; Rasmussen 2015), a tempter and (ultimately) enslaver of the man who yields to her charms, for such a man must make perpetual sacrifices to her. Among converts, dreaming about her is considered a "bad dream," however. But this sometimes recurs over long-term pre- and post-conversion. Consider the following case: [26]

Yacouba's Dream

Yacouba, another male convert, related to me over coffee how he had converted to Christianity in Algeria after years of physical and mental suffering from nightmares and possession by what he at first termed, in French, generalized *diables* and in his first language, *djinn*. These spirits, he soon specified, also included Aicha Qandisha, the female *djinniya* spirit, who is also powerful in Morocco, Algeria, and northern Mali and Niger. He confirmed that "if a man sleeps with Aicha Qandisha, he becomes her slave, and must follow her commands and give her sacrificial offerings. Her followers may acquire divination powers, but at a price: They must make periodic sacrificial offerings to her, which often interferes with human marital relationships and household budgets," which worried Yacouba greatly. This spirit motif in dreams expresses Yacouba's ambivalent sentiments, economic uncertainty, and cultural contradictions at that time. Christian conversion temporarily cured Yacouba, but he still suffered occasional visits from this spirit in France. Subsequently, he began a successful career in photography and digital technology there, which along with his church membership helped to distract him somewhat.

[27]

Dreams with visitational spiritual presences can be purposeful, prophetic, can indicate what to do in personal dilemmas, how to resolve specific problems, give advice and intercession to achieve goals, and are often prompted by a crisis (Ouitis 2017). Several other converts, for example, suffered loss of a parent shortly before their dream/vision, and one convert's father had been allegedly murdered during the political violence back in Algeria. In Yacouba's dream, notably, there is reappearance of a spirit figure from popular Islam, but whether or not he subsequently rejected her decisively is left ambiguous, since these visitations recurred occasionally. There are hints, however, that Yacouba felt free to pursue a successful career once he became converted.

[28]

Dreams and Temporality

Yet there are blurred boundaries between dreams, visions, and past, present, and future waking time-space experience. Immigrant Kabyle converts' testimonies and witnessings—shared in public contexts of church rituals and group praise/prayer discussions and in one-on-one interviews and conversations–reveal neither uncomplicated static continuity nor complete "about-face" or binaries in religious identity, but rather intertwined religious transformations, historical legacies, and personal ambivalence.

[29]

Many conversion testimonies presented at the church altar featured visitational dreams with visions of encounters with Jesus Christ while the dreamer was standing or pausing at a crossroads. For example, one woman, approximately in her thirties, related: "First, I dreamed of a Bible verse, and then I dreamed that I arrived at a fork in a road, where I asked for either the Prophet Mohammed or Jesus Christ to direct (guide) me. Jesus guided me, so I converted to Christianity." Notwithstanding some variations in symbolic details across cultures, the crossroads is a widespread symbol of in-betweenness in many African rituals (Stoller and Coombe 1994). Alongside this person's decision to convert, also suggested here was a dilemma and some hesitation. Others in the church guided her interpretation and ultimate decision by giving a more decisive Christian meaning to this dream: church missionaries/founders and early converts often argued, for example, that visitation dreams featuring the Prophet were actually dreams about evil spirits or the Devil. Other early converts whom I heard discussing this earlier in my field research, many of whom were refugees from the Algerian civil war

[30]

prior to the end of that conflict, considered evil spirits to be Moslems, discussed with great fear at some prayer/praise meetings. But this interpretation later became much less frequent in church leaders' and converts' more recent efforts at peace and reconciliation between the converts and other immigrants, including Arabic speakers and Muslims. This ambivalence recalls some findings by McIntosh (2009) among non-Muslim Giriama in their encounters with Muslim Swahili in Kenya, suggesting similar though not identical tensions. The non-Muslim Giriama were being pressured to convert to Islam, whereas these Kabyles were converted from Islam to Christianity. The crossroads motif, as a symbol of both hesitation and ultimate decisiveness, continues in the next case.

Celine's Dream

Another woman, whom I'll call Celine, born in Sicily around 1950, also stood at a crossroads in her dream/vision. Her father conducted Catholic missionary work in Kabylie. She indicated, however, that "…for many years, I was not happy, I had especially bad dreams. I adhered to Catholicism until my mother died. Then, following her death, my dreams featured left and right roads. I met some members of this (Protestant) church who inspired me by identifying these roads and helping me to interpret my dream.. (So) I had another dream. In my next dream, God showed me the way by an arrow sign (pointing to) the right road." [31]

Featured in this woman's account are two important forms of mobility: geographic migration and soul travel. There was also the daughter's crisis—namely, her mother's death, which in prevalent local belief made her soul vulnerable to "travel" in dreaming (Rasmussen 2020), thereby re-shaping the dream's message and offering a clearer interpretation of these signs toward more dichotomous/binary Evangelistic meanings of a "right road." With her intersectional and cosmopolitan background, however, this female convert experienced protracted dilemmas between not Islam and Christianity but rather between Catholicism and Protestantism, as did Kareem, reflecting the contesting influences of different missionary presences in Algeria: Catholic missionaries tended to dominate during the French colonial period there and had much more limited success in the long term, whereas Protestant missionaries arrived later and in effect had the "last word" in this chronotopic conjunction of time/space meanings. Also illustrative of personal crisis and religious response to it is the following: [32]

Fatima's Dream

Another Kabyle convert, Fatima, also converted following a crisis: this occurred in conjunction with family tension, loss, a dream prophecy, and a miracle. While a hospital employee in Algeria, she felt rejected by her mother but loved by her father. When her father died, she insisted, "I felt this loss like an orphan (i.e., as though both parents had died)." Feeling like an orphan (*golama*) is also an image used in possession in the Sahara to refer to the person in trance who seeks approval and social support from audiences. This goal is also important during the converts' testimonies at church altars in France, in seeking the congregation's love and support, expressed in prayers and sometimes also in others' walking up the aisle to join hands with the person giving testimony. Later, Fatima's mother also died. Fatima then converted to Christianity for social support. Around that time, in a dream her mother (notably, not her father) appeared to her to reconcile and warned her of an upcoming earthquake (which came to pass in Algeria). She asserted, "I ran away, and was saved." At a praise/prayer meeting, other converts insisted that she was also "protected by a wall of light." [33]

Striking in Fatima's case is the early rejection of the daughter by her mother, followed   [34]
by later reconciliation. The crisis here was an initial thwarting of ideal maternal kinship,
among Kabyle and other Amazigh groups an important affective tie of closeness and love
(as opposed to paternal kinship, with its more "official" property concerns) (Goodman 2005;
Rasmussen 2019). This alienation from maternal kinship later became re-vitalized with the
dreamed mother-daughter reconciliation (notably, taken as seriously as waking life) evoking
a memory of broader matrilineal ties submerged in Kabyle patrilineal legal village councils,
though kept vital in grandmothers' important roles and in mythico-histories of ancient pre-
Islamic mother and female warrior figures such as Kahena and Tin Hinan (Rasmussen 2019).
Most converts still visited their villages back in Kabylie frequently; one woman, for example,
visited her grandmother, who was ill and hospitalized there; others went home for important
events, such as weddings. A mother should be nurturing and honored, but Fatima, while
estranged from her mother, had turned to conversion for comfort.

Merged in Fatima's visitational dream, therefore, is the protective value of conversion and   [35]
the foretelling of future catastrophe with a warning by her mother to run away from the earth-
quake (both as a literal geological event and more abstractly as political and religious turmoil
in Algeria). The earthquake, moreover, emerged from the earth—also the resting-place of the
convert's deceased mother and of more famous religious figures, whose tombs faced dan-
gers from the earthquake but also actively mediate communication with living relatives who
dream, pray, and divine there.

Salma's Niece's Dream

In another case, one afternoon during a church service (*culte*) I attended, Salma, a young   [36]
woman in her twenties, came to the church alter and related: "My niece had a dream/vision:
of rocks falling near her. The rocks soon began to avoid her, however, and instead fell on
Jesus Christ, who took on those rocks as (her) sins." Both Salma and her niece experienced
lingering doubt about Christianity and, uncertain, resisted completely converting (though
they attended church). Even after this dream/vision, they indicated that they both still felt
"spiritually cold." Salma requested others to pray for her, joining hands with the pastor and
praise musicians in a small circle.

In Algeria, bad dreams are often told to rocks to neutralize their effect, or to marabouts   [37]
who give the Muslim dreamer special prayers to recite and amulets to ward off spirits who
cause the bad dream; these, recall, morphed into the niece's sins of hesitation to convert—still
a dilemma in "spiritual coldness"—which were taken on by Jesus Christ. In effect, then, in
Salma's dream about rocks being taken on by Jesus Christ, Christ took on her bad dreams
and possibly also (if interpreted "correctly" in the church's viewpoint) her indecision and/or
guilt over her persisting feeling of being "spiritually cold." Salma's experience in France had
been stressful: she had difficulty learning the language, disliked the food, and worked long
hours in a bakery. The problem aired here was articulated in the dream symbolically with
a trope of rocks, falling like a burden on the person, but Christ had taken them on as sins.
Her socioeconomic predicament in France had not, however, changed, but moral support
was offered through prayers. The church pastor exhorted others to pray in order to guide her
interpretation of her dream and offer moral support. Yet contradictions remained unresolved,
expressed through her dream "centering" in Algeria.

Analysis: Dreams, Culture, and Religion

Social Contexts of Practice, Conversion, and Timespace

Hence the paradox. For pilgrims and migrants, dreams can instruct on what to do to pilgrims and migrants, since a prevalent Amazigh/Berber cultural viewpoint is that the dreaming soul travels. Paths and destinations are indicated, but previous lifeworlds also reverberate in re-interpretations, questionings, and continually revised narratives of spiritual presences. The point is that the results of dreams can be inconsistent, ambiguous, and leave open interpretation in terms of the social and political context and personal predicament of the dreamer/convert beyond the dream text. Although fellow converts did not contradict this convert's or others' visionary dreams, church leaders exhorted them to pray for those suffering from such predicaments, and they offered prayers, hoping to guide meanings.   [38]

The foregoing dreams show ambivalence, fear, and struggle, recalling Charles Stewart's   [39]
(2012) point that altered states can contain powerful imagery of the past, but not in a strictly linear sense. Rather, past imagery may "barge into consciousness and create affective tensions and identifications between the past and the present" (2012, 7). Therein reside dreams' ambiguous meanings, illuminated by the Bakhtinian metaphor of the chronotope.

I am not arguing here that converts' dreams reveal the conversions as "fake"; nor am   [40]
I arguing that the cultural or religious "ideal" is continuity, though the Evangelical ideal is to become consistent. Several persons insisted emphatically to me, "One must believe!", which contrasted with the more embodied action/practice-oriented emphasis in some Islamist piety groups reported by Mahmoud (2003). The converts' foregoing dreams reveal rough-and-tumble personal struggles with religious belief and competing cultural models, recalling Lohmann's findings of cultural ambivalence regarding dialogues between dreaming and culture in Papua New Guinea (2009). The dreamers here are not, of course, microcosms of their entire community experience, but nor are they atypical. Dream time and diasporic space brought together in analysis reveal several different and competing religious and cultural models over time and space in multiple communities which impact the diasporic dreamers/converts in multiple ways: religious, political, and cultural models with internal contradictions between Amazigh/Berber, French, Arabic, and pre-Islamic and Islamic waves of influence on Kabylie.

Although as noted, French colonial powers assumed that Kabyles were "more lax" about   [41]
Islam or even "more secular" than Arabic-speaking Algerians, some converts' comments in interviews and conversations contradicted their assumptions, though their dreams are ambiguous on this point. Popular Islam as a cultural system, if not a dogma, re-emerges in dreams as well. Religious conversion bares "consubstantial fragility of all human grammars of infinity" (Leone 2020, 317). Such fragility is mostly invisible from the local point of view, carefully concealed by a "thick armor" of signs and hierarchies. Evangelical missionaries who founded these converts' church originally held that believers should ideally have certainty, that no alternative to their own pattern of meaning could better grasp one's relation to infinity. Yet, these coded and socially shared patterns are constantly open to, to use Leone's term (2020, 318), micro-variations, and can be shaken by, and can shake, the "earthquake" of conversion. In converting, it is often assumed by those who welcomed the new converts that believers implicitly state that their former system of beliefs was, contrary to their own previous belief, "artificial" (2020, 318). Although some converts did comment on how converting to Christianity changed their lives (Rasmussen 2019), at the same time, in the same conversations and

interviews, these individuals also expressed some critical reactions to dogma that initially caused them to hesitate, if not doubt, conversion.

The diasporic converts' broader social predicaments and practices in France also suggest nuanced complexity, paralleling some dreams' imagery of pondering over alternatives and nuances of belief. A number of converts considered it possible for a single family to include adherents to several different religions; for example, a few women indicated that they had cousins who were Muslim, Jewish, and Christian. One convert related that he converted after he was introduced to Christians in Germany by a Muslim friend there. Most converts retain their Qur'anic names, for reasons of cultural identity, which, many insisted, "stays the same, even after conversion to this new religion," thereby hinting of Islam as a culture and Christianity as a religion in some contexts. A few use pre-Islamic names identified as "ancient Berber" names; for example, a boy named Augustine after St. Augustine, the latter who, his father explained, "was from North Africa, and initially *paen* (pagan) (before he converted), but is still important in our religion to us Kabyles." A guitarist who performed during church praise songs had a daughter named Tin Hinan, she explained, "after an ancient Berber queen, though she also has a French name for school registration purposes." Some converts explained the reason why some of their relatives remained Muslims as "because that is part of their culture." [42]

The leader of a Bible discussion group asserted to me that "conversion is not necessarily a one-time *faite-accomplie*", not finished… this sometimes recurs as interior experience." Yet participants in that discussion group also acknowledged that conversion could be a guide to coping with life in a new culture, or with changed conditions in the country where one is from. Indeed, many rich studies suggest how the contexts of conversion vary and change (Barker 1990; Coleman 2015; Keane 2007). There could also be what some of the Bible discussion converts called "shallow conversion"—for example, one woman at the discussion mentioned a man who was happy all the time since he converted, but was insensitive to others' current suffering. Another participant described someone who was prosperous and successful and who said this was his "testimony" of his faith (recalling the Prosperity Gospel and/or Weber's Elect) (Weber [1945] 1958). The group agreed this was not sufficient for "deep conversion." In one tense incident, a man visiting a church suddenly stormed down the aisle and "thundered" at the congregation criticizing their emphasis on believing when "there are many suffering (in some Paris suburbs and subsidized housing projects) from poverty." The pastor retained composure and replied, "Thank you" (for the suggestion). No further contentiousness occurred, though the following week at a praise/prayer meeting, the outside gate was locked. [43]

Relevant throughout these dream motifs and social and religious viewpoints and practices are disruptions, or to borrow Amit's (2018) term "disjuncture," and also Sahlins's (1981, 1976) concept of structures of conjuncture, that is, conjunctures that make for ambivalences and ambiguities as well as internal and external conflicts. The diasporic dream time chronotopes bring to the surface a kind of time/space soul travel, as well as more literal travel. Even after conversion, naturalization of newly-adopted religious habits is often difficult; for example, many Kabyle converts, despite some personal transformations, did not "remove" their culture like a hat which they kept apart from their nearly unanimous political opposition to Arabization policies of the Algerian state and support for the Berber Spring (Amazigh activism in Kabylie) prior to and following their conversion and emigration from Algeria. Although some expressed a fervent desire to convert others, this was not the majority pattern among most converts I knew. This predicament is not surprising and indeed has been noted in studies of converts (Coleman 2015; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997) focusing on how missionaries forced [44]

some religious tenets on colonized peoples as part of wider hegemonic projects. Yet converts were not passive; they often questioned and conducted a critique of imported religions and contradictions between mission ideals and colonial policies.

What is interesting in the present findings is that Kabyle converts' dreams suggest the added temporal nuances of mutability and malleability of religious and cultural identity and belonging in practice, if not in dogmatic or doctrinal belief, an insight hopefully contributing to Robbins' (2007) calls to focus on diverse cultural traditions within the religious gloss of Christianity. [45]

Ethnographically, the foregoing diasporic Kabyle accounts of dreams and conversions also reveal somewhat greater religious and social complexity, nuances, and contradictions than portrayed in either extreme, of colonial tracts on the one hand, of the colonial-influenced "Kabyle Myth" of purportedly "lax" Berber Islam (Ageron 1960; Graham 2008; Ziani 2018) or its post-colonial academic critiques on the other (Hannoum 2001; Goodman 2005; Silverstein 2004). As noted, earlier church officials emphasized inward belief over embodied practice, conforming to Protestant evangelical dogma, rather than Islamic emphasis on embodied agency (Mahmoud 2003). But recently, this may be changing under increasingly Franco-Kabyle leadership toward more charismatic acceptance, even encouragement, of some altered states of consciousness such as trance, women's ululating, and public mediumistic dream interpretation revitalization (Rasmussen 2019). [46]

Concluding Discussion

Diasporic Dreamtime: Sum-up, Broader Significance, and Issues Raised

In the converts' visitational, predictive/generative, and witnessing dreams and visions, temporal movement is more complex that simple transition or change in status, recalling Crapanzano's "rites of return," a critique of van Gennep (Crapanzano 1992; van Gennep [1908] 1960). There are transferences and counter-transferences, similar to what Crapanzano terms "a drama of self-constitution" (Crapanzano 1992, 130). Conversions do not always offer security or resolution. For converts, the dream is what the soul witnesses; this is the basis of testimonies, but the dream is also a memory of the "other" religion as a cultural system, if not as a strict dogma. Cultural models expressed in a dream reflect the dreamer's personal predicament and mixed feelings in contexts of the religious conflicts and political rivalries from which converts fled in Algeria and the challenges they face in France. [47]

There were internal debates and social disputes enacted in dreamers' narratives over "truth" and "good" in visions that, in fact, instructed them to leave Islam and convert to Christianity. As shown, some converts hesitated (though ultimately making a choice) at "crossroads." Others' dream interpretations were questioned and scorned by non-converts, but later reinterpreted in guidance and counselling by converts. [48]

Or alternatively, dreams may resolve conflicts not clearly articulated by the dreamer, as in cemetery dreaming; such dreams/visions may sanction a decision that goes counter to widely-held social conventions in the dreamer's home community. Responsibility for the decision, however, can shift from the dreamer to the spiritual being visiting in their dream/vision, who is external to the dreamer and whose authority cannot be challenged. Hence the internally diverse, rather than monolithic, narratives in conversion dream/visions. Analysis of dreams [49]

in terms of chronotopic time/space convergences and divergences provide times and spaces for converts to reflect critically on religious and cultural belonging in diaspora.

Bakhtin's chronotope concept (1981) hopefully enriches understandings of visitational dreams, diasporas, conversion, and disjunctures. The past is not left "behind" by the present, and there is a parallel world in dreaming. In a sense, these converts remained culturally Kabyle and culturally Muslim, as well as French and American Protestants, at the interstices of transcultural experience. Yet transcultural experience did not translate into neat past versus present religious or cultural identity and belonging. In dreams, converts brought key themes and figures of their own histories into dialogue (and sometimes, argument) with themselves and each other, and interwove past, present, and future.   [50]

In both Algeria and France, converts live in politically and economically uncertain and precarious environments. Many resign themselves to prolonged waiting for spouses or siblings to arrive or for residency papers, certification of degrees and other educational and job-related permits in France. Unpredictable social outcomes can disrupt and contradict the spiritual instructions in dream/visions. Converts can critique the realities on the shifting grounds beneath their "feet," which nonetheless involve uncertainty and waiting. Waiting, in fact, can also serve "to exhibit agency as much as it can reflect oppression and resignation" (Herzfeld 2016, 150). In some ways, time stands still; in other ways, it does not. Conversion, narrated in dreams recalled in converts' testimonies, becomes a kind of 'time-space travel' through chronotopic evocation and reminders of the "home culture" space—geographically remote, but politically and spiritually close by, even merging psychically. Christianity the religion transports migrants in time and space, but Islam the culture extends across time and space, reverberating through precisely those dreams that prompted conversion.   [51]

The social and spiritual dynamics reflected in the foregoing dreams and visions of converts remind anthropologists that the interface of cultural encounters can carry ambivalent, even undecided meanings. Many converts draw on remembered longstanding images, practices, mores, and transgressions surrounding religion, history, and politics, and re-employ them critically in conversion and diaspora, situating their new country as a new Kabylie in both its internal contradictions and its cohesive distinctiveness.   [52]

More broadly, the foregoing analysis suggests the need, in the study of religious conversion, to recognize that life experiences are filtered through overlapping possibilities for conversion. There is a range of options, none of which is predictably the sole possible solution for the kinds of existential difficulties migrants face. These insights also suggest the need, in the study of diasporic converts' dreams, to make analytical distinctions among different interpretations in terms of fluid, overlapping, and ambiguous identities and belonging. Dreams in which subsequently rejected views reappear reveal greater epistemological and creative complexity than syncretism or intersectionality in a diasporic convert community. In studies of temporality, dreaming reveals both disjuncture and continuity—a wavering—in timespace relationships.   [53]

Notes

Data for the present analysis are based primarily on this anthropologist's qualitative ethnographic field research among diasporic African converts, predominantly Kabyles, in France in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2019, with some added insights from my more long-term, longitudinal field research between 1983 and 2017 (for approximately thirty-five years) in rural and urban Tuareg communities in Niger and Mali. All studies were conducted with IRB approval,   [54]

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