Salvation in a Wounded World:

Towards a Spectral Theology of Mission

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The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

(Ez 37, 1-3)

Ezekiel's vision in the valley of dry bones – this oldest of the biblical imaginations of resurrection – offers a powerful image for a wounded world in deep transformation. It gives a stark portrait of the pervasive power of death, and yet, it also speaks to an abiding desire for life, in the midst of annihilation. In Ez 37, it is through the prophetic proclamation of the Word of God that the bodily remains are brought back to life. New life emerges from the debris of death through prophetic speech, commissioned by the word of God. Today, theological reflection is faced with a growing awareness that the proclamation of God's word is not only, and not self-evidently, life-giving. Not least a critical review of modern mission history has revealed that it can also bear death. An exposure of the entanglements between mission and colonization has shown how deeply Christian God-talk is implicated in the necropolitics of empire whose power, as Achille Mbembe observes, rests on the sovereignty to kill (cf. Mbembe 2003b:11), with the colony as the location par excellence of the exercise of such power over life and death (cf. Mbembe 2003b:22). Entangled into empire, Christian mission has taken place under its necropolitical conditions, and the proclamation of the gospel has been moulded into both, strategies of resistance to and complicity with the lethal ways by which the empire promises peace and prosperity.

A theological reflection of mission in the wake of colonial trauma[1] has to account for these entanglements that give shape to theological knowledge production. In reckoning with its constitutive entanglements into the necropolitics of colonialism, the question for theological reflection is not simply what analysis and solution a theological approach can offer in view of the complex legacies of mission in a wounded world. Rather, the first question to ask is what kind of theological approach is able to fully grasp the theological complexities of these legacies. In this contribution, I will suggest that a spectral theology of mission offers a framework for addressing the profound ambiguities with which theology emerges from the necropolitics of empire. Spectrality, I will argue, provides a compelling lens for conceptualizing the ambivalent legacies of Christian God-talk in the wake of colonial trauma. I will develop my argument in three steps: a first section points to a growing discrepancy between theological and critical approaches to mission: while critical mission studies have abandoned teleological frameworks for mission history, theological teleologies are still influential in theological conceptualizations of mission. As I aim to show, however, they do not allow to account theologically for the complex legacy of mission in a wounded world. In order to develop a fully fledged theological response to the complicities of mission with colonialism, section 2 will present a case study of two possible memory discourses in the wake of colonization: interrogating how the Africa Museum in Tervuren (Belgium) presents imaginations of decolonization, I will show that postcolonial historiographies can either be written in terms of 'healing' or 'haunting'. After showing that the historiography of the cure has potentially recolonizing effects that reinscribe the necropower of the white gaze, section 3 will further develop building blocks for a spectral theology of mission.

1. Writing mission history – between critical and theological perspectives

1.1 Missionary Encounters as Part of Modern Global Knowledge Regime

Since its origins in the late 19th century, the discipline of mission history has gone through significant methodological shifts. As Andreas Nehring has shown (Nehring 2010), early mission history followed the methods and epistemology of 19th century historicism, and this historicist approach allowed to align mission history and salvation theology within a teleological framework. Mission history was written as a history of

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[1] Colonial Trauma is a concept that has emerged from the intersection of postcolonial studies and trauma theory. Mapping the psychological effects of trauma on to the cultures that undergo colonization, it offers a lense to look at colonization and its aftermath in terms of psychopolitical affects and effects, focusing on collective and individual suffering in ways that disrupt narratives of temporal linearity and instead trigger a critical investigation of the epistemologies and politics of historiography. Cf. Lloyd (2000); Nikro (2014).

progress in which the essence of Christianity was imagined to unfold historically and to expand geographically, and this expansion was interpreted theologically as the progressive unfolding of salvation history.

More recent, interdisciplinary approaches to mission historiography have departed from such historicist forms of knowledge and complicate their teleological alignment of history and theology. Missionary activity is now studied as an aspect of global knowledge production under asymmetrical power relations. Linda Ratschiller and Karolin Wetjen describe the state of the art in interdisciplinary mission history succinctly: "While interest in the question in which ways mission and colonialism were connected has waned, more recent research highlights the crucial impact of mission societies in the dissemination of imaginations about 'the other' and in the formation of identities in Europe. These colonial bodies of knowledge were a decisive factor in constructing images of the non-European and the European, and extended their influence into the most remote corners of rural European countrysides." (Ratschiller and Wetjen 2018:12. Here and below: my translation) Current interdisciplinary research thus investigates how missionary encounters gave rise to disputes about religious values, cultural identities and social questions and informed the formation of modern conceptualizations of religion, culture and race.

Such a reading of modern mission history as an integral part of the production of distinctly Western forms of knowledge and identity draws on a growing body of literature that exposes an exclusionary logic at the heart of European modernity. Continuing the tradition of (self-)critique of enlightenment, it argues that modern ideals such as universal reason have been maintained through the violent establishment of cultural, religious and racial differences. In *A Critique of Black Reason*, for example, Achille Mbembe puts forth a genealogy of the co-constitution of the modern project of knowledge and government and its conceptualization of race (Mbembe 2017): For Mbembe, the invention of blackness is the unacknowledged core of modernity that has sponsored the modern autofiction of European superiority and has funded the concomitant emergence of global capitalism. Both are rooted in the production and rationalization of the black as a thing that use the signifier Black to transform people of African origin into "a kind of life that can be wasted and spent without limit" (Mbembe 2017:34). Such 'black reasoning', Mbembe argues, shapes the material and symbolic

constitution of the modern world. Willie Jennings and others[2] have posited that theological knowledge production has been profoundly implicated in the invention of race as/at the heart of modernity. Seeking to expose the "racial calculus deeply embedded in the theological vision of the Western world" (Jennings 2010:275), Jennings argues that racial categories originated also to disclose "people's salvific possibilities" (Jennings 2010:35). As part of the the mission enterprise, along colonial divides of Christian vs. Native and white vs. black, salvation was conflated with whiteness. In "nothing less than a theological operation" (Jennings 2010:31), the whiteness of the colonizers became both, a benchmark of "progress" (Jennings 2010) and an icon of salvation. The Christian imagination, as it was forged during colonial modernity, has thus been central to the origins and maintenance of racialization embedded in the European project of Enlightenment. It did this by conflating gradations in skin pigmentation with religious, geographical and cultural divisions that segment the world into colonizers and the colonized and by determining Christian salvation and white existence as the intersecting teloi for religious and racial others.

Critiques such as this are not limited to an investigation into the deep-running political complicities of modern mission enterprises with European colonialism. Instead, they call for epistemological reconfigurations in how we understand theological knowledge production. Crucial is the growing insight how constitutively Christian imaginations are tied into global political, economic and cultural flows. Such critique replaces the imaginations of a progressive unfolding of salvation (in) history, that were typical of early mission history, with insights into the messy and ambiguous character of Christian theologizing. And the exposure of this foundational messiness calls for new frameworks of how we can understand the relation between mission history and salvation theology. They can no longer be alligned in teleological frameworks with which we could hold on to the idea that of a given, unambivalent deposit of salvific truth unfolds through the contingencies of history.

1.2. Persistant Teleological Imaginations in Mission Theology

In missiology, however, teleological imaginations continue to provide a powerful framework for how mission is understood theologically. While mission history is no longer written within teleological frameworks, salvation theology often continues to be framed in teleological terms. Such teleological

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[2] Cameron Carter traces the theological production of race back into premodern times, arguing that "modernity's racial imagination has its genesis in the theological problem of Crhistianity's quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots … [by casting] Jews as a race group in contrast to Western Christians … [and deeming] them as inferior. Hence, the racial imagination … proved as well to be a racist imagination of white supremacy … . Within the gulf enacted between Christianity and the Jews, the *racial*, which proves to be a *racist*, imagination was forged." Carter (2008, 4)

missiologies acknowledge the complexities of mission history but hold on to the idea that there is an underlying Christian continuum that is free from contingency and ambiguity. Asking whether "missiological investigations add anything distinctive to [the interdisciplinary study of mission history]" (Skreslet 2007:59), Stanley Skreslet, for example, argues that the characteristic of a missiological approach is "the decision to introduce the factor of faith into [the] scholarly discussion of mission history." (Skreslet 2007:62) His definition posits that the theological perspective of faith is isolatable from 'secular' approaches and thus relies on binary conceptualizations of 'religious' vs. 'secular' and 'faith' vs. 'sight' (i.e. reason) (cf. Skreslet 2007:52). This contrasts with recent studies in mission history which show how these binary categorizations have been forged from encounters in global modern power/knowledge regimes, not least in missionary contact zones. Skreslet's definition of the theological in mission history reinscribes, rather than deconstructs, essentialist conceptualizations of faith and religion and as a result, it can perpetuate a notion of Christian imagination as ultimately unaffected by the complex ambiguities of (mission) history. This becomes clear in his metaphorization of mission history as a river that imagines mission as the progressive unfolding of "a great flow of ideas, events, personalities, and human encounters taking place over time" (Skreslet 2007:64), rushing from its theological origin in the sending "nature of God" and its historical beginnings in the "ministry of Jesus" towards a given telos of "cosmic consummation described in the book of Revelation" that as of yet "lies beyond the power of physical sight" (Skreslet 2007:64). The metaphor of the river allows Skreslet to acknowledge historical variation and change[3], but the prevaling images are confluence and progression. He highlights the life-giving qualities of the river[4], but remains quiet about the destructive, lethal potential of water. His riverine imagination of salvation history subjects the complexities of mission history to the idea of an underlying Christian continuum that is freed from contingency and ambiguity.

Such teleological imaginations of a salvific continuum underneath the powerful contingencies of history are also at work in theological approaches that denounce the collusion between Christian imaginations and racism as a deformation of authentic Christianity. Shawn Copeland describes the work of Robert Beckford to this effect: Investigating "Britain's slave trade, the African Caribbean experience of enslavement and

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[3] "En route one can begin to appreciate how various features of the natural world may have shaped the river's course through time, while also giving thought to the human engineering project that eihter succeeded or failed to widen the water's reach." Skreslet (2007, 64)

[4] "Finally, in our mind's eye, it is impossible to ignore the lush vegetation and diverse wildlife that crowd the riverbank, with each species finding both strength and vitality in the refreshing water. Evidence of life so abundant cannot fail but to remind one one of the fundamental significance of this history, not only for the rest of missiology but also for the present and future of the Christian tradition as a whole." Skreslet (2007, 64)

colonialism, the church's complicity in slavery and imperialism as a corruption of … Christianity [, …] Beckford denotes the church's complicity … as 'bewitchment,' which renders the church … in need of exorcism." (Copeland, 273. Copeland quotes Beckford 2014:192). Such an approach allows for a strong critique of theological complicities in systems of oppressions, but it locates theology 'proper' outside, rather than inextricably interwoven into ongoing negotiations of knowledge and power. Ultimately, therefore, it cannot make theological sense of the constitutive 'messiness' of the Christian tradition that results from its irresolvable alignments with social forces that have been exposed by interdisciplinary studies of mission histories. Instead, it immunizes a theological understanding of mission from the powerful contingencies of mission history. In order to develop a fully fledged *theological* response to the complex legacies of mission in a wounded world, it is necessary, therefore, to part with teleological soteriologies and instead search for theological frameworks that can imagine salvation without teleological theologies of history and soteriological unambivalence.

2. Decolonizing the Museum

I will set out for this search for soteriological reimaginations from a perhaps unexpected place: the Africa Museum in Tervuren, near Brussels in Belgium.[5] Founded in 1897 by King Leopold II to promote his colonial efforts in Central Africa, the former 'Royal Museum of Central Africa' has been a powerful instrument for colonial knowledge production that told the history of the Belgian-African encounter from the perspective of the colonizers, producing sanitized memories of Belgium's colonial past that remained silent on the violence of this colonial project (Hoenig 2014:344 and 346). For the last few years, the museum was closed for renovation and aimed to divest itself of its colonial gaze that had served to legitimize the colonial exploitation of the Congo. It would indeed be interesting to use the Africa Museum as a site to investigate the intersections between colonial projects and mission enterprises in Belgian Congo, but for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on an analysis of the narratives through which the museum imagines its project of decolonization..

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[5] Scholars of critical museum studies have highlighted that museums engage in contestations about (historical) truth, knowledge and memory that leak into wider discourses; they "engage with and are embedded within the societies and histories of which they are a part, and in doing so they are not only influenced by, but also impact upon, wider social and cultural patterns." Dudley and Message (2013, 1). Such a critical approach allows us to study museums as discursive sites of knowledge production which intersect aesthetics and politics to give shape to imaginations of history. An analysis of political-aesthetic regimes of representation in the Afrika Museum, I therefore aim to show in the following section, can yield conceptual resources in the search for alternatives to teleological imaginations of history.

2.1. Soteriological Imaginations of Decolonization

The debates about a decolonization of European museums are often couched in soteriological metaphors. Decolonization is imagined in terms of debt and reparation, of wounding and healing, of guilt and atonement.[6] Christian imaginations have been profoundly implicated in the political-aesthetic regimes of colonialism, and they continue to remain operative in discourses of decolonization. An investigation of the narratives that shape the project of decolonization in the museum can therefore open trajectories for a revaluation of theological imaginations of salvation. I aim to do this by analzying an artistic intervention in the renovated Africa Museum through the lens of postcolonial trauma studies.

The former entrance hall of the museum is a particularly rich site for such an investigation[7]. Here, visitors are greeted with statues of white men and women in gilded robes cradling naked African children, above plaques that extol Belgium for bringing 'civilisation' and 'religion' to the Congo. They represent the colonial discourse through the gaze of the colonizer. The renovation committee has decided to reshape this space through an artistic intervention: it commissioned a new statue by a sculptor from the Congo, Aimé Mpane, entitled 'Congo Nouveau Souffle' (Congo New Breath) and placed near the centre of the hall, in addition to the older statues, which could not be removed since they are part of the architectonic structure that has been placed under a preservation order.[ee] Which histories of decolonization can this statue tell, and which imaginations of salvation do each of these histories endorse?

2.1.1. Decolonization as Healing

I encountered a first possible reading of the museum's decolonization project during a tour through the museum before it reopened in December 2018. The renovations were still in full swing, and Mpane's statue had not yet been installed, so I got my first impression of the new arrangements through our guide's description. In his account, I could detect a clear desire to construct an unambivalent story from wounding to healing. For him, the new statue would provide a sharp contrast to the colonial representation of the older statues. Based on his account, I imagined the statue to represent an unblemished black body, adorned with traditional African embellishments, telling a story about the beauty and resilience of African life that has left

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[6] Cf., e.g., Albert Gouaffo in an interview for the Deutsche Presse Agentur: "All experts agree that it is of highest importance that the countries of origin are invited to contribute [to the debate about the decolonization of European museums]. 'We need a dialogue of equal partners', says Prof. Albert Gouaffo from Cameroon …, 'Only if we learn to talk about our shared past without the established prejudices about perpetrators and victims, can wounds begin to heal, and can a shared future begin'." dpa (2017)

[7] The following sections are taken and revised from XXX and XXX

the colonial past behind. Our guide saw in the future arrangements of the rotunda a vision of complete restoration, telling a story of wounds fully healed, leaving no scars. In the wake of empire, he imagined a shift in the telos that orients the history of encounter between black and white. No longer is it seen in redemption through whiteness. Rather, it is found in an arch of redemption coming full circle to a restoration of original, unblemished blackness that is freed from all traces of the colonial encounter with whiteness.

Yet, is this the only way we can see the these statues? Gayatri Spivak has warned of the pitfalls of such a "historiography of the cure" (Spivak 1999:206f.) that constructs a linear narrative from wounding to healing. The cure, produces "predictable chronologies … that seduce the subject into pure repetition … [by] repeating the colonial practice of constructing the self by constructing the other." (Rivera 2011:123). The cure, Spivak says, perpetuates the colonial gaze. Here, the white gaze, that now wants to leave colonialism behind, remains the organizing principle in the telling of colonial history. It uses imaginations of seemingly unblemished black flesh to absolve the colonizers from their historical guilt, and thus continues to instrumentalize black bodies for the self-definition of the colonial masters. With Spivak, we can therefore argue that the redemptive arch of the cure re-establishes white sovereignty over the interpretation of the colonial past and repeats the violent exclusions on which colonialism builds. Forcing wounding and healing into a teleology of sequential progression, the cure does not bring transformation. Instead, it continues to conceal the lethal ways by which the empire has promised peace, prosperity and redemption, and remains silent over the ongoing psychopolitical affects and effects of colonial rule today.

2.1.2. Decolonization as Haunting

But is there a different way of imagining the colonial past and how it figures in the present? Spivak suggests ghost stories as an alternative: "I pray instead to be haunted, bypassing the arrogance of the cure." (Spivak 1999:207). Suggesting haunting as a critical alternative to the teleological historiography of the cure, she builds on an interdisciplinary body of literature that uses spectrality as a lens for conceptualizing history, memory, trauma and justice (Blanco and Peeren 2013b). Gregor Hoff summarizes the field well when he describes ghosts as "figures of social memory" (Hoff 2017:18. Here and below: my translations) that open "a perspective on the suppressed shares of death in life, especially in societal processes of marginalization. … Ghosts are narrative symbols of the "unredeemed and perhaps the irredeemable" (Hoff 2017:17) in our visions of peace and reconciliation. According to Avery Gordon, ghosts are figures of the unresolved, often

repressed violence of the past appearing in the present. Interested in tracing the ways in which violent histories live on in and constitute our social realities, she describes ghosts as "haunting reminders of lingering troubles" (Gordon 2004). They mark the "seething absences and muted presence of our historical realities. … If you let it, the ghost can lead you toward what has been missing" (Gordon 1996:21 and 58). Hoff, therefore, points out that the metaphor of haunting, crucially, "signifies a problem of observation." (Hoff 2017:48). It revolves around the question of "How can we perceive absence?" (Hoff 2017:48)

Ghost stories, then, give a different account of history. Haunting, too, like the cure, is concerned with death and life, suffering and redemption. Yet, it strikes a different, more complex, balance between a history of suffering and a hopeful future. Haunting engages in a redescription of time through wounds that registers the desire for a time without suffering but does not subject wounding and healing to the violence of a linear narrative that reiterates exclusion by silencing the shameful shares of death in histories. Haunting, instead, is the occupation with a troubled past that opens the imagination for a fragile future, knowing that the experience of suffering, but also the hope for healing, disarrays time. Ghosts represent life and death in ways that disrupt the self-evidence of a linear sequence, and instead embody healing, justice, reparation by way of a fleeting absence, a painful incompleteness, a hopeful yearning. Representing trauma (i.e., literally, a wound) and its aftermath of struggle and survival, ghosts manifest as figures of rupture in linear imaginations of (salvation) history.

Sam Durrant suggests that such a ghostly historiography will take the form of "critical … recalcitrant … anti-therapeutic mourning" (Durrant 2014:94) that "comes to be transformative … [by] foreground[ing] ruptured temporalities, …, as an integral aspect of the redemption of history." (Nikro 2014:9). With David Lloyd we can argue that such "a non-therapeutic relation to the past, structured around the notion of survival … rather than recovery, … [can] ground a different mode of historicization" (Lloyd 2000:219f) that will disrupt the teleological temporality of healing by "making *other* sense of the event and the narratives that congregate around it" (Lloyd 2000:215). As Shelly Rambo puts it, "Engagement with ghosts transforms our present, not by a traumatic repetition of the past but by confronting us with the limitations of the ways we structure reality." (Rambo 2010:939). With Michel Foucault we can argue that such a critique of epistemopolitical conditions effects "kinds of virtual fracture which open up a space of concrete freedom, i.e., of possible transformation." (Foucault 1983). Figuring ruptures, haunting points to "something [that] remains to be seen" (Baloy 2016:210), it produces a "something-to-be-done" (Gordon 1996:xvi). In ghost

stories, therefore, melancholia is underpinned with political agency: they express a "refusal to be cured" (Lloyd 2000:219) that has transformative potential.[8]

Through the lens of haunting and mourning, we begin to see that Mpane's statue can tell a more complex story of postcolonial African life that disrupts the memory politics of the cure. In such a ghostly reading, the statue does reclaim Africa for black bodies. It is shaped in form of the African continent that bears the facial features of a black person – and yet, its colour is white. Here, black and white are inextricably entangled, for better or for worse. Black agency does not replace the white invasion of the continent, but is at work within it, telling a story about resilience in which chronologies of death and life appear convoluted. Mpane's statue presents us with a wounded resurrection body that is (irredeemably?) marked by the lethal violence of empire, and yet reinterprets signs of death for the purpose of life: a hesitant plant is sprouting from what looks like a barren landmass that has been systematically mined by the violent mapping of the colonial scramble for Africa. This sign of new life is tied to a colonial history: it mirrors the crown of palms that surrounds the portrait of Leopold II which has dominated the Rotunda before the renovation. What was a spectacle of colonial sovereignty becomes a spectral presence of postcolonial living-on in the wake of lethal violence, while the wounds, from which this new life hesitantly grows, remain visible and continue to haunt Africa. The statue represents new life not by relegating colonial wounds to the past, but by reappropriating the tools of colonial subjugation thatresists the fetishization of native resources and thus disrupts the power of the colonial gaze: "Traces of the past live on, but without classical references." (Coirier 2018). In this ghostly reading, Mpane' statue takes a non-therapeutic relation to the past, structured around the notion of living on rather than recovery. It disrupts the teleological temporality of healing by "making *other* sense of the event and the narratives that congregate around it" (Lloyd 2000:215). Not by concealing the suppressed shares of colonial death, but by ad/dressing the festering wounds on a traumatized body, truly transformed life can, hesitantly, take place.

3. Towards a spectral theology of mission

Our visit to the Afrika Museum in Tervuren thus allows us to differentiate between two historiographical paradigms in the wake of empire. Both include conceptualizations of decolonization in soteriological terms and thus constellate a narration of post/colonial history with political-aesthetic imaginations of salvation,

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[8] For the transformative power of lament, and a political theology building on lamentation, cf. also Katongole (2017a)

albeit in different ways. The historiography of the cure unfolds within a teleological framework that pictures decolonization by subjecting the violent legacies of colonialism to a linear arch of redemption. Here, salvation can only be imagined as an absence of wounds; redemption appears as an absolution from a history of colonial violence that continues to privilege the white gaze. Haunting, in contrast, engages in a hermeneutics of wounds and tears that performs transformation by rupturing established imaginations of post/colonial history. Salvation is not imagined as an absence of wounds, but emerges – by way of ruptures that point to fleeting absences and hopeful yearnings – in the midst of the legacies of violent histories. It does not envisage redemption from suffering, but offers resources for conceptualizing redemption in the midst of suffering. The historiography of haunting, therefore, may provide methodological tools for crafting theological soteriologies without relying on teleological imaginations, and could thus open trajectories for developing a fully fledged theological response to the complex legacies of mission in a wounded world.

3.1. Cross and Resurrection as a Ghost Story

Studying the gospel of John with the tools of postcolonial trauma studies, Benny Liew gives an example of such a re-reading of Christian soteriological concepts through the lens of spectrality (Liew 2016). He argues that in John's narration of the passion, the cross simultaneously appears as a spectacle of Roman imperial power that demonstrates its sovereignty by disposing of killable people, and a spectre of death that hauntingly reveals that Pax Romana builds on lethal violence. Jesus died as an instrument for the demonstration of colonial sovereignty, and his traumatized resurrection body continues to tell a story about the might of his masters. The wounds that remain on Jesus' resurrection body, therefore, present us, first and foremost, with a spectacle of imperial power. Yet, at the very same time, these wounds have the power to destabilize the hegemonic narrative of the empire about itself. They expose the unacknowledged shares of death on which it rests and make the spectacle of colonial power also a spectre of death. A spectral hermeneutics of critical mourning can thus reveal a moment of undecidability in the significance of the cross which then can pave the way for re/signing death and life. A scrutiny of wounds develops a narrative in the mode of yearning which believes that "something remains to be seen" beyond the spectacular regime of colonialism, that relies on suppressing the shares of death on which it is built. Resurrection, in these haunting relectures, is therefore not a self-evident triumph of life over death. Instead, it emerges from such semantic

undecidabilities and is confirmed only through a hermeneutics of wounds and tears. In the gospel of John, too, it is a "refusal to be cured" that carries seeds for salvation: Thomas has to touch gaping wounds in order to believe (Rambo 2017:9). It is through Mary's mourning at the empty tomb that a vision for new life emerges (Rambo 2005). A relecture of cross and resurrection as a story of haunting and mourning thus breaks with a triumphant narrative from death to life, but does open our eyes to life that emerges from the midst of suffering that remains. It turns to wounds and tears as the organizing principles of Christian soteriology and wrests hope for resurrection from the lethal logic of colonial politics by assigning a different significance to the spectacle of political death. In a haunting relecture that resists the powerful temptations of the cure, Jesus' wounded resurrection body epitomizes a convoluted chronology of death and life that reveals afterlife in the mode of mourning and yearning.

Liew's postcolonial interpretation of John's passion thus demonstrates that spectrality offers a fruitful lens to re-imagine central soteriological concepts of the Christian tradition beyond a teleological framework. When we tell it as a ghost story, cross and resurrection disrupt a triumphalist teleology from death to life and instead trace signs of living-on in the midst of lethal histories of colonial oppression. Through the lens of haunting, cross and resurrection can become a theological resource to address the complex legacy of mission in our contemporary world that continues to bear the marks of global colonial histories.

3.2 Haunting Theology

Yet, Liew's spectral re-reading also points to the reconfigurations that such a ghostly practice of theology entails. Ghost stories reveal the *irresolvable* ambiguity of salvation (cf. Liew 2016:157–62). They derange linear accounts of (salvation) history and blur clear soteriological fronts. No longer here a history of suffering and death, there a history of healing and life. Instead, ghost stories are performances of reinterpretation which reveal a moment of undecidability in the meaning of discourses that may – *perhaps* (cf. Caputo 2013) – make space for possible transformations in the midst of entangled histories. In ghost stories, salvation thus takes places as an interpretation of irreducibly ambiguous events and narratives. „Haunting", Spivak says, „is a way of reading" (Spivak 2011:141), it is a radically hermeneutical practice. Ghosts emerge by way of a critical practice of interpretation that makes "*other* sense of the event and the narratives that congregate around it" (Lloyd 2000:215). Ghost stories, therefore, are always supplementary and remain inconclusive, emerging from and remaining inextricably entangled into the contingencies of

(salvation) history. Thinking of salvation as a ghostly activity thus deprives us of imaginations of self-evidence in encountering God's salutary presence. Instead, salvation emerges from undecidabilities that can be read as manifestations of God's presence by way of a fleeting absence, through unfulfilled desire, in hopeful yearning..

A spectral theology does propose that we can read the ambiguities of history as manifestations of God's salvific presence in the mode of hopeful yearning, but it does not consolidate these semantic undecidabilities into a clearly definable proprium that we could own as a treasure, safeguard from change and increase through appropriation of other signs of salvation. Instead, thinking of salvation as a ghostly event that is dispersed into and dependent upon the worlds from which it emerges, a spectral theology refrains from such a unifying and stabilizing narration of (salvation) history. Striving to give a theological account of the *constitutive* ambivalences of God's salutary presence, it abandons the idea that there is an absolute origin to Christian tradition, and it does not conceive of tradition as a progressive development towards ever greater truth. But which other organizing frameworks are there to give a theological account of mission history?

3.3 Haunting as Work in the Archives

In its search for alternatives, a spectral theology of mission can follow the lead of other disciplines that have abandoned teleological frameworks in the narration of mission history, and instead turned to mission archives as a resource for patterning missionary historiography. As David Arnold and Robert A. Bickers put it: "Christian endeavour and church history may no longer provide unifying schema for approaching missions, but the bureaucratic competence of the missionary societies has supplied a unifying resource: the mission archive." (Arnold and Bickers 1996:1). Ratschiller and Wetjen explain why the archive has become the focus for an interdisciplinary study of mission that seeks to trace global epistemic flows: "[In order to avoid ahistorical and normative perspectives,] it is the fundamental concern of a new mission history to critically historicize the missionary encounter through sources. … The sources are the products of long-term intercultural collaboration; in this regard, they differ starkly from the sources that were written by colonial officers, traders or scholars. Mission archives are therefore particularly suited to trace processes of transfer, entanglements and exchanges … . The comprehensive reporting system and the continuous communication of the missionaries with the missions institutes in Europe, as well as their integration into academic and popular colonial discourses generally produced rich sources in both Catholic and Protestant mission

societies." (Ratschiller and Wetjen 2018:17). Contemporary interdisciplinary mission studies approaches take a critical approach that zooms in on a destabilization of the available collections of sources; it approaches the archives as monuments to particular configurations of power and knowledge (cf. Foucault 1972:79–134)[9], in which "sovereignty of interpretation has been distributed in uneven ways [. T]he discourse has been structured in hegemonic ways … but does not preclude critical knowledge." (Ratschiller and Wetjen 2018:17–19).

Achille Mbembe offers resources to understand, in more detail, these ambivalent knowledges that have inscribed themselves in asymmetrical ways into the mission archives, and to use them as a constructive starting point for conceptualizing a spectral theology of mission. Mbembe's reading of the archives dovetails with his critique of black reason, and is tied to his conceptualization of blackness as haunting. As we have seen above, he argues that the invention of blackness is the unacknowledged core of modernity. Black reason sponsors the commodification of human bodies by distributing life and death along neo/colonial lines of racialized capitalism, in which the "Black Man is in effect the ghost of modernity." (Mbembe 2017:129). Mbembe thus draws attention to the pervasiveness of such 'black reasoning' that shapes the constitution of the modern world. And yet, in the midst of it, he also traces black responses to the abjection of being human that can be reconstructed from the survival strategies of the enslaved.

Ghosts take a central place in his articulation of such recalcitrant Blackness, which, for Mbembe, is a name for "specular experiences … [that] are, essentially, extreme forms … of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life that confer upon them the status of living dead (ghosts)." (Mbembe 2003a:1). Existing under the constant threat of annihiliation, the ghost has no self-mastery, but is forced into a continuous re-making of the self through the profoundly ambiguous "work for life" that "consists in capturing death and exchanging it for something else." (Mbembe 2003a, 16). For ghosts, the "currency of life is death." (Mbembe 2003a:16). Wrestling precarious survival from death is continuous labour "under the conditions of necropower" [where] the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are blurred" (Mbembe 2003b:40). Mbembe's hauntology offers a lens for imagining Black life as a constant, precarious re-imagination in which the reparation of world and self through practices of black living-on do not overcome a history of racialization, but are, precariously, at work

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[9] Cf. also Mbembe (2002, 20): "The archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged 'unarchivable'. The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status."

within it. Beyond serving as a corrective counterweight to a stable sense of self or an interruption of the linear imaginations of history, his ghosts embody a pervasive lack of permanence that was never otherwise: for Mbembe, this work for life through the profoundly fraught dimensions of imagination and remembrance is best captured through "the principle of compositional logics" (Mbembe 2018:226). Lacking self-mastery, work for life on the verge of death is "about the capacity to assemble and to compose, including things that at first do not appear to be compatible." (Mbembe 2018:226).[10] Such composition does not aim for fullness and closure, but is "a kind of radical openness … and the disposition towards the encounter with the unknown." (Mbembe 2018:226). The ghost "produces himself in the unknown, by means of a chain of effects that have been calculated beforehand, but never materialize exactly in the terms foreseen. It is thus in the uenxpected and radical instability that he creates and invents himself. There is thus no sovereignity of the subject or life as such." (Mbembe 2003a:23). From this, a profoundly ambiguous notion of black reason emerges. By revealing Black survival as ghostly life *from the midst of and irreducibly entangled into* the necropolitical histories of racialized capitalism, Mbembe argues that the world shaped by black reason is an irreducibly polyvalent and ambiguous world.

In the *Critique of Black Reason*, Mbembe aims to analytically disentangle these interwoven practices of reasoning about Blacks and the reasoning of Blacks in response.[11] He pursues this critique as archival work that aims to historicize the necropolitical conjunctures of racialized capitalism[12] and to simultaneously trace the permanent reparation of black life under lethal conditions. He points out that "the archive one is dealing with is, to a large extent, an incomplete archive" (Mbembe 2018) that mirrors the ambiguity of black reason in the ambivalent spaces between death and life, oppression and redemption: It has "at [its] heart … the question of unfreedom, …, of the longing for redemption" (Mbembe 2018). In the archives of Black Reason, the practices of black life appear in the midst of oppression, in the ghostly mode of longing.

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[10] Mbembe cites examples from literature: "For instance, in Tutuola's novel, you can be given the head of somebody else and you have to live with it. Or you can borrow a leg from another, for a time. Its compositional logic is much more important than anything else"

[11] "[T]he first chapters pay attention to the historical processes by which 'blackness' was invented as a presumably 'ontological' category, … as a legal category, as a social status, and more importantly as the hole into which the distinction between the human and the non-human vanishes. … And then there is a set of chapters that pay attention to the discourse of refutation, a kind of apologetics that is produced by black thinkers themselves in the attempt at making sense of this name not at all of their own making, with which they nevertheless have to contend, whether they like it or not." Mbembe (2018)

[12] "I wanted to explore this genealogy of modernity that places racial capitalism at its heart as the cauldron in which the idea of Black, of blackness, was produced. I wanted to take seriously the idea that Black, or blackness, is not so much a matter of ontology as it is a matter of historicity or even contingency. I also wanted to contest those lineages of blackness that use memories of trauma to develop discourses of blackness as ontology." Mbembe (2018)

The incompleteness of the archives of survival at the verge of death requires a specific historiographical approach: "For an incomplete, partial and fragmented archive to speak with the fullness of a voice, a supplement is necessary." (Mbembe 2018). But re/presenting the ghostly modes of work for life from death is not an operation that creates new life by reversing annihilation, by re-introducing the voices of the silenced. In the midst of a world wounded by pervasive racism, the longing for redemption is not answered by a creation ex nihilo. Rather, this supplement "has to be created, not out of nothing but out of the debris of information, on the very site of the ruins, the remains and traces left behind by those who passed away." (Mbembe 2018) Tracing the fleeting modes of ghostly survival that lacks self-mastery, "the voice [of the historian working in the archives] shifts because it must now confront something not so much unique as soiled. It must shift because it is dealing with wasted lives, the lives of people constrained to do things they might not have chosen to do themselves …; but they have to produce meaning, something that can eventually sustain some kind of life out of the …life negating conditions in which they find themselves." (Mbembe 2018).

Mbembe's description of his work in the archives bears methodological resemblance to the critical work in the mission archives envisioned by Ratschiller and Wetjen.[13] Yet, while they explicitly frame the deconstructive destabilization of the archives as an abstention from normative approaches, Mbembe argues that a "mere historical account is not enough" (Mbembe 2018). Rather, his work in the archives has soteriological undertones that express hope for transformation. For Mbembe, writing a history of ghosts by way of composition from the debris in the archives of death is a practice of resurrection: "Indeed, [such writing] is to try to repair something that has been broken … so that the subject might … find a possibility to recreate meaning where meaninglessness prevails. … [It is to] mourn what is lost in a way that does not dwell in the trauma, to escape the curse of repetition, to put together once again the debris … of that which has been broken and try … to return to life the harvest of bones that have been subjected to the forces of dessication [sic], to render the world habitable for all, again." (Mbembe 2018)

3.4. Haunting the Archives – Spectral Missiology

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[13] Ratschiller and Wetjen (2018, 17): "[In order to avoid ahistorical and normative perspectives,] it is the fundamental concern of a new mission history to critically historicize the missionary encounter through sources."

Mbembe's suggestions for reading the archives can serve as an explication of the methodological approaches that propelled the ghostly readings of Mpane's statue and John's narrative of cross and resurrection above. Echoing Ezekiel's prophecy of resurrection in the valley of dry bones, it allows to elucidate the hermeneutical strategies with which Mpane and Liew speak to life in the aftermath of colonial violence by pursuing a compositional approach that "makes other sense of the events and the narratives that congregate around it" (Lloyd 2000:215). Composing texts in which "traces of the past live on, but without classical references" (Coirier 2018), they work with the debris of colonial death to give a vision of life in which "death is the currency of life" (Mbembe 2003a:16). Read as ghostly supplements that rise from the remnants of colonial violence, both Mpane's 'Congo – New Breath', and the gospel of resurrection become part of the spectral archive of survival in the midst of a wounded world under the necropolitical conditions of empire.

Such work in the incomplete archives of ghostly desire for redemption translates into building blocks for a spectral theology of mission. Such a missiology does not conceive of salvation as the absence of wounds, yet is not without hope for transformation. It does not consolidate hope for salvation into an arch of redemption, but traces signs of salvific presence that are revealed as supplements in the ghostly modes of mourning and yearning. These spectres of colonial death transcend the established order of things, not by overcoming its arrangements of power and knowledge, but by being critically at work within them. They have thus revelatory effects that blur the boundaries between the religious and the secular (cf. Rambo 2010). In the mode of spectrality, transcendence is no longer the realm of the purely theological, but bleeds from the struggles that wrestle life from death in the midst of a wounded world (Taylor 2011:115–59). In search for signs of God's salutary presence, theologians therefore join historians in their work in the archives of death, tracing ghostly practices of living-on as signs and instruments of redemption. For them, the spectral work for life under the conditions of death becomes a sacrament of divine salvation. For a spectral missiology, it is the clamor of ghostly life that proclaims the gospel of resurrection.

In the mode of spectrality, therefore, theology is practiced as *missio ad vulnera*. Yet, sent into a world of wounds, the task of the witnesses for God's promise of salvation is not to give a sovereign proclamation of a certain cure.[14] In contrast to teleologically oriented missiologies, a spectral mission to the wounds does not

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[14] Emmanuel Katongole, quoting Douglas John Hall, makes a similar point: "Only as the Christian community permits itself to undergo a continuous crucifixion to the world can it be in the world as the fiend [sic] of those who are crucified. Appart from that, it always ends in a theology and an ethnic of glory. For it imagines that is has something to bring, soemthing to give, soemthing that will enable it to master the situation." Katongole (2017b, 230)

speak from a position of epistemic privilege. Rather, it proceeds by ways of re/membering that discern and compose signs of redemption from the ghostly work for life in the midst of death. Proceeding by the logics of composition, it is not oriented towards closure and fulfilment, proceeding towards ever-greater knowledge of God. Rather, it remains indebted to spectral practices of living-on from which it borrows the signs and instruments to speak to the hope for resurrection by way of fleeting absences, in hopeful yearning. A spectral theology thus does not ground hope for redemption in retrotopian or utopian warrants, but traces its rising from the midst of the messiness of violent histories, marked by the forces of empire. Through the lens of spectrality, salvation history remains inextricably entangled into the wounds of the world. It is not the proprium of a purely theological discourse, but remains dispersed into the worlds from which it emerges. No longer here a history of wounds, there a history of salvation. A spectral theology thus foregoes the self-evidence and unambivalence with which teleological missiologies proclaim the promise of redemption – and therefore, it can speak to the inextricable entanglement of theological knowledge production into hegemonic discourses and can account for deep-running complicities of theology with empire.

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